

SUNDAY BASEBALL TIDBITS MAY 2021

MAY 2, 2021

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

Good morning baseball fans. Sorry to be a little late today—a 14 hour drive like yesterday's will do that to you. (but I did get to listen to a Yankees win on the radio on the drive from NC to Maine).

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

[Shohei Ohtani](#) made more history on Monday night, becoming the first player in nearly 100 years to start a game on the mound while also entering the day leading the Majors in home runs. Ohtani entered his start as a pitcher as the MLB co-leader in home runs as a hitter with seven, which was something unseen in nearly a century. You can probably guess who the last player was: Babe Ruth. The Bambino was the Yankees' starting pitcher on June 13, 1921, against the Tigers, while also leading MLB with 19 home runs. That was the last time the feat took place,

Hisashi Iwakuma (with Seattle in 2015) and Hideo Nomo (with Red Sox in 2001 and Dodgers in 1996) only Japanese born pitchers to throw no-hitters.

Cubs manager David Ross sent three position players in to pitch last week against Atlanta. Only third time that's ever happened. Freddie Freeman (last year's MVP) strikeout against Anthony Rizzo—Freeman was 4 for 4 before the whiff. Only third time ever a 4 for 4 hitter then whiffed against a position player. More position players pitching than pitchers pitching in a game? First time ever.

A's had a 14 game winning streak and first place in the AL west. But their stats are all over the place. hitting .221 as a team but they rank second in home runs *and* first in stolen bases (18 of 21). they are 12th in the league in ERA, they have also thrown four team shutouts. We shall see how this plays over 162 games.

Four players with 200+ HRs as a Yankee also played for the Indians. Roger Maris, Dave Winfield, Jason Giambi and Graig Nettles.

When was the last season an AL pitcher homered before any NL pitcher?

Before Ohtani did it for the Angels On April 8, 1971, Sonny Siebert homered for the Indians, and Andy Messersmith homered the same day for the Angels. It then took another four days before an NL pitcher (Jim McGlothin) went deep (I had all their baseball cards).

Rich Hill tallied 10 K's on Monday, and at 41 years and 46 days it makes him the oldest pitcher to have double-digit strikeouts in a game since Randy Johnson (struck out 13 on Aug. 22, 2008). List of all the left-handed pitchers since 1901 who have racked up a game with 10 or more strikeouts at his age 41 (or older)?

Steve Carlton, 1986-87
Randy Johnson, 2004-08
Rich Hill, 2021

Only Twins player to collect 6 hits in a game--Kirby Puckett (8/30/1987 vs. Brewers and 5/23/1991 vs. Rangers)

Vlad Guerrero Jr hit 3 HRs in a game this week. Something his HOF dad never did. Carlos Delgado holds the Toronto record with five 3 HR games.

One reader wrote in and asked about stolen bases for members of the 500 HR club.

	HRs	Stolen Bases
Bonds	762	514
Aaron	755	240
Ruth	714	123
ARod	696	329
Mays	660	338
Pujols	656	115
Griffey, Jr	630	184
Thome	612	19
Sosa	609	234
F.Robinson	586	204
McGwire	583	12
Killebrew	573	19
Palmeiro	569	97
Jackson	563	228
Ramirez	555	38
Schmidt	548	174
Ortiz	541	17

Mantle	536	153
Foxx	534	87
Thomas	521	32
McCovey	521	26
Williams	521	24
Banks	512	50
Matthews	512	68
Ott	511	89
Sheffield	509	253
Murray	504	110

Or the slow group, the middle group and the top 11 with more than 150 career SBs: (and another argument for Gary Sheffield to be in the HOF).

0-50 (9) Banks, Ted Williams, Frank Thomas, Manny Ramirez, Killbrew, McGwire, Thome, Ortiz, McCovey

51-150 (7) Ott, Eddie Matthews, Jimmie Foxx, Palmiero, Pujols, Ruth, Eddie Murray

Mantle	153
Schmidt	174
Griffey, Jr.	184
F. Robinson	204
Jackson	228
Sosa	234
Aaron	240

Sheffield	253
ARod	329
Mays	338
Bonds	514

Brando Belt and Brandon Crawford homered last week in the same game for the Giants.

Most times homering in the same game, by teammates with the same first name.

Willie McCovey and Willie Mays	68
Joe Gordon and Joe DiMaggio	25
Carlos Delgado and Carlos Beltrán	20
Tim Lincecum and Tim Lincecum	17
Matt Olson and Matt Chapman	16
Jeff Bagwell and Jeff Kent	14
Willie Kirkland and Willie Mays	14
Pete O'Brien and Pete Incaviglia	13
Brandon Belt and Brandon Crawford	13

Reds left fielder Jesse Winker did Monday night at Dodger Stadium: Hit a game-winning extra-inning home run.

Then here's what Jesse Winker did Tuesday at Dodger Stadium: Hit a leadoff home run on the *first pitch* of the next game.

(Honorable mention, because we care: April 19-20, 2019. Charlie Blackmon hits a 12th-inning walk-off homer one day, then a first-pitch leadoff homer in the *bottom* of the first the next day.)

Willie Mays spent 12 seasons of his life visiting Dodger Stadium every year. Never once, in any of those 12 years, did he hit five home runs at Chavez Ravine in the same season. But Padres thrill factory Fernando Tatis Jr. just hit five home runs at Dodger Stadium in the same weekend.

To put Tatis' astounding series last weekend in its proper perspective here is a list of just some of the noted NL West sluggers who never hit as many Dodger Stadium homers in any season as Tatis hit in 48 hours.

Willie Mays
Willie McCovey
Hank Aaron
Dave Winfield
Will Clark
Matt Williams
Johnny Bench
Joe Morgan
Tony Perez
Nolan Arenado

Jacob deGrom Items of the Week

At this point, whenever [Jacob deGrom](#) pitches, everything else stops. The guy has been the best pitcher in baseball for three years now, but [somehow he's better than ever](#). Friday, he [threw a two-hit shutout](#) without a walk and he struck out 15, and there are so many impossible deGrom season stats to choose from that it's hard to pick one.

- He now has 50 strikeouts, the most ever for a pitcher in his first four starts.
- He is one of only three pitchers in baseball history to strike out at least 14 in three consecutive games. The other two are [Gerrit Cole](#) in 2019, when he led the league in ERA and finished second to his teammate [Justin Verlander](#) in the Cy Young voting, and Pedro Martínez in 1999, when Pedro was the greatest pitcher any of us had ever seen.
- He has allowed one earned run in his four starts, making his ERA a lovely looking 0.31. His ERA+ at the moment is 1,245, which is the highest I've ever seen, and he's also hitting .545. He has allowed 13 hits all year and he's had six hits himself — or even more to the point, he has allowed five singles and he has hit five singles.

- He became just the seventh pitcher in baseball history to throw a complete-game shutout, allow two hits or less, strike out 15 or more and not walk anybody. Three of these games are very famous. You have [Kerry Wood's 20-strikeout, no-walk one-hitter](#). And there are the no-hitters thrown by [Max Scherzer](#) and [Clayton Kershaw](#).

The other four are fun because they're all exactly the same — nine innings, two hits, 0 runs, 0 walks, 15 strikeouts.

Van Lingle Mungo did it against Philadelphia on Sept. 29, 1935. Mungo — in addition to having that wonderful name that jazz pianist [Dave Frishberg composed into song](#) — was one of the hardest throwers of his time and a player who seemed to have everything necessary to become one of the game's great stars. At the end of 1935, he had back-to-back shutouts — this was the second one — and it looked like he just might come into his own. But he was wild on and off the mound and though he had a fine career, he never was quite as great as the hopes.

Pedro Martínez did it May 12, 2000.

Erik Bedard did it July 7, 2007, against Texas. That year, Bedard finished fifth in the Cy Young voting and seemed ready to jump into the elite pitching group. The Mariners certainly thought so; the next offseason they traded four players to get him, including Adam Jones, George Sherrill and Chris Tilman, all of who would become All-Stars for the Orioles.

The fourth is deGrom.

- How about this one: He has already thrown 127 pitches this year that were at least 99 mph. No other starter is even close. Next on the list are relievers Emmanuel Clase, Jordan Hicks, Jose Alverado and Aroldis Chapman. Only then do you get to another starter, Dustin May, who has thrown 26 pitches at 99 mph or faster.

Fully one-third of deGrom's pitches go at least 99 mph. It boggles the mind. In 2017, deGrom's average velocity on his four-seam fastball was 95 mph. Do you know how many pitches he threw at 99 mph? Two. All season.

DeGrom pitches at 99 mph+:

2017: 2 (0.1 percent)

2018: 5 (0.2 percent)

2019: 25 (1.1 percent)

2020: 192 (16.9 percent)

The big jump in 2020 was incredible enough. Now understand that he's throwing one-third of his pitches at 99 mph, this for a guy who is 32 years old and had Tommy John surgery before his big-league career even started. It is inconceivable, and I *do* know what the word means.

OK, before we move on from deGrom, there's one other point to make. Tom Tango asks a wonderful trivia question — how many years older than Jacob deGrom is Clayton Kershaw?

And it's a trick question because Kershaw and deGrom are the same age. Kershaw is exactly three months older than deGrom. How is this even possible? Well, it's actually a fascinating answer, I think. So here goes.

1. Kershaw was 17 years old most of his senior year in high school. He turned 18 in March and less than three months later he was taken by the Dodgers with the seventh pick in the draft because he was a pitching phenom. DeGrom, meanwhile, was held back a year so he actually turned 19 his senior year in high school. He also was mostly a position player and not a pitcher, and he was not drafted. Instead, he went to Stetson.
2. Kershaw blew through the minor leagues in less than two years and was up with the Dodgers at age 20. DeGrom, meanwhile, [played as a shortstop at Stetson and really had no interest at all in pitching](#). The Hatters put him in a game as a reliever when he was a sophomore, and he showed enough that some scouts immediately became interested in him — particularly when he matched up against super-prospect Chris Sale and pitched well plus hit a home run. He really didn't pitch all that well overall, but [he showed enough stuff that the Mets took a flyer on him in the ninth round of the 2010 draft](#).

Almost immediately after that, the Mets discovered that he had a torn UCL and he had to have Tommy John surgery. DeGrom missed the entire 2011 minor-league season, which also happened to be the first year that Kershaw won the pitcher's triple crown and the Cy Young Award.

3. In 2012, deGrom — now 24 years old — played his first full minor-league season in A ball and pitched well enough to almost get into the Mets Top 10 prospect list. Kershaw meanwhile won his second consecutive ERA title. The next year, with both of them 25, deGrom moved from Class A up to Triple A while Kershaw won his second Cy Young award.
4. In 2014, deGrom made his big-league debut at age 26 and pitched well enough to win the Rookie of the Year award. Kershaw won his third Cy Young award.

So then you go from there, Kershaw was already a legend, deGrom was an up-and-coming talent, and when they both turned 30 in 2018, the script flipped. Kershaw suddenly began showing his age when he got hurt for the third consecutive year. He was still terrific but no longer the clear-cut best pitcher in baseball. And deGrom had liftoff, winning his first Cy Young with a 1.70 ERA, then winning his second Cy Young when he led the league in strikeouts, then

coming close to his third Cy Young in the 2020 “season,” and [now taking his game to an even higher level](#).

Anyway, you’ll win a lot of bar bets with the deGrom-Kershaw age question. Do people still have sports trivia bar bets?

Stealing Catcher Signs

Trevor Bauer’s accusation seemed straightforward enough: Fernando Tatis Jr. detected a sign by peeking back at Dodgers catcher Will Smith, using the information to tag Bauer for a home run and violating one of baseball’s unwritten rules in the process.

Three former major-league catchers, however, described the sequence as more nuanced than Bauer portrayed in a [video he posted](#) on Sunday, the day after he allowed two homers by Tatis while pitching six strong innings to help the Dodgers to a 5-4 victory over the Padres. The catchers also said that if Tatis was peeking, Smith should have taken measures to stop him.

Tatis hit his fifth home run in three games on Sunday in the Padres’ 8-7 triumph over the Dodgers in 11 innings. Earlier in the day, he [countered Bauer’s charge](#) with a tweet showing a picture of him holding a small child with Bauer’s head, adorned by a Dodgers cap, superimposed on the body. The tweet said, *tranquilo hijo* – “calm down, son.”

The public exchange between two of the game’s biggest stars obscured the stunning physical aspect of Tatis’ second home run off Bauer, which came on a pitch that was so far outside, it crossed the plane of the left-handed batter’s box. A similar event occurred last season, when the [debate over Tatis swinging on 3-0 in a blowout](#) of the Rangers overshadowed his grand slam with an exit velocity of 109.8 mph, the highest for a Padres opposite-field homer in the Statcast era, which began in 2015.

Erik Kratz, who recently retired after 11 seasons in the majors, said Tatis “definitely” peeked back at Smith, but too late to pick up the sign. In Kratz’s view, Tatis might have determined that Bauer wanted the pitch to be outside from looking at Smith’s positioning. Bauer, though, had worked Tatis away almost the entire at-bat, making it easier for Tatis to anticipate the location.

After throwing a low fastball over the middle of the plate that Tatis fouled off for strike one, Bauer came back three consecutive sliders away, then a fastball away, running the count to 3-2. His next pitch was a fastball down the middle that Tatis fouled back. He then threw the fateful cutter that Tatis hit into the left-field seats for his second home run of the game.

“He threw him like six pitches away the entire at-bat,” said Kratz, who watched Bauer’s video as well as video of the at-bat. “And Bauer is never going to run a ball in 3-2 unless you’ve got a

base open or something. He's going to stay away. I think Bauer overreacted (with his comments)...

"(Tatis) has got to be already thinking he's going away. In my opinion, Tatis does his work to be ready – and even if you don't do your work, if you throw me six pitches away, my inclination is, my body is going to be going away. That's the point of mixing up locations. You don't let a guy constantly get in a rhythm, especially a dude like Tatis."

Kratz and the two other former catchers who spoke with *The Athletic*, Chris Iannetta and Jamie Quirk, said a catcher bears responsibility for taking control if he thinks a hitter is peeking. Jerry Hairston, a former major-league infielder who is now a member of the Dodgers' pre-and post-game broadcasting crew, posted a [video on Twitter demonstrating the same point](#).

"Guys have done it for years," said Quirk, who was a major-league catcher from 1975 to '92 and is also a former major-league coach, minor-league manager and catching instructor. "As a catcher, you need to look up and watch the hitter. Will Smith moved way too early. So yes Tatis peeked, but Smith in my opinion did a poor job of not looking up and moving too early."

Said Iannetta, who retired in August 2020 after playing 14 seasons in the majors, "It's up to the catcher to identify it. If you see it, simply make the hitter aware. I usually said, 'Listen, please don't even give me the idea you are peeking. 'Cause if I possibly see it again, you're getting drilled.' That usually cleaned it up pretty quick."

Bauer essentially issued such a warning on Sunday, saying he had no problem with Tatis' home-run celebrations – he spent the first eight minutes of the 13-minute video lightheartedly rating and analyzing them – but indicating that Tatis crossed a line by looking back at Smith, calling it, "bush-league stuff."

"There's no real remedy for the catcher and the pitcher to use to counteract someone looking back at the signs," Bauer said. "So the remedy is if you look back at the signs, that's fine, there's no rule that says I can't stick a fastball in your ribs. And that's kind of how it's been handled traditionally in baseball up until this point."

"Now, flip the bat and do all that stuff, fine. If you're going to look at the signs, not OK, and if you do it again, the team that you're playing probably ain't going to take too kindly to it and there might have to be some on-field stuff. Now I'm not saying that that's the case here because I don't mind it. I'm going to send my message here and tell him that's not OK."

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, speaking to reporters on Zoom before Sunday night's game, said he was not aware of Bauer's comments, but added, "...when you talk about 'peeking,' that's just not the way you play baseball. So I don't know. I haven't really vetted it or seen it. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Fernando as a ballplayer, the way he plays the game. But if that is the case, which I don't know, that will be noted."

Asked if that meant Dodgers catchers would make an adjustment or look for Tatis peeking, Roberts said, “No, that’s not what I’m talking about,” seemingly indicating that his team would seek to address the matter in some other way.

That is, if Roberts agrees with Bauer’s assessment that Tatis was peeking at Smith’s signs. Padres first baseman Eric Hosmer, speaking to reporters after Sunday night’s game, said, “I think that was maybe a little bit of confusion on (the Dodgers’) part. I don’t think Tati was really looking at signs. I’ve never really seen him do that. I certainly didn’t see it last night during the game.”

Kratz agreed with Hosmer, saying Smith flashed three fingers, the sign for a cutter, before Tatis put his head down and looked back. He added that savvy teams spot hitters peeking through video advance scouting and inform their catchers of that tendency.

“You see that (peeking). You’re aware of that,” Kratz said. “Peeking at signs... Eh, signs are tough to get. But there are guys who peek location, for sure. Location is the biggest thing, especially if a guy moves too much. That’s totally on the catcher. I don’t know who else would stop it.

“You’re within their peripheral vision. If they’re looking location, you move early to show it to them, and then you move back. If a guy is a really, really habitual peeker, then you tell your pitcher, ‘I’m going to move early away. And we’re going heater in. So just trust what the sign is.’”

The Dodgers and Padres, after seven thrilling games to open their season series, do not play again until June 21-23 in San Diego. Presuming both Bauer and Tatis stay healthy, their next showdown will prompt a level of visual scrutiny more normally associated with criminal investigations. No peeking allowed. The entire baseball world will be watching.

What do you Call a 7 Inning “No Hitter”?

So [Madison Bumgarner](#) sort of threw a no-hitter on Sunday, sort of didn’t throw a no-hitter on Sunday, and people are going to argue about it, fight about it, rant about it, but it’s a good reminder that these weird seven-inning doubleheaders don’t really fit into the grand structure of baseball.

Last year? Sure. Why not? As [I wrote in an earlier entry](#), last year everything was fine. It was like that season of “Dallas” that turned out to be a dream. We were just so happy to have something, *anything* resembling baseball while a pandemic raged that many of us would have accepted any new rule, any odd gimmick, any goofy novelty.

But this year is different. It's a 162-game season, there are some fans in the stands again (with hopes of more), this is much more familiar baseball ... and these seven-inning doubleheader games feel a bit like an old high school haircut that we'd all rather just forget ever happened. But they're still going and so naturally it led to Sunday's Arizona-Atlanta game with Bumgarner throwing a face-the-minimum near-perfect-game no-hitter [that nobody has any idea what to do with](#).

New York Times headline: "Madison Bumgarner throws a no-hitter. Kind of."

According to MLB, it's not a no-hitter — or not an official no-hitter. How could it be a no-hitter? It's only seven innings long. Bumgarner threw 98 pitches in those seven innings; he would have had numerous obstacles to throwing a nine-inning no-no. How can you put Bumgarner's fun-size no-hitter up there with the full-size Hershey bar no-hitters out there?

On the other hand, how can it *not* be a no-hitter? Do these seven-inning games count or don't they? Or to put it another way, one of the thrills of going to a baseball game — at least for some of us — is hoping that we might see a no-hitter. I've seen one in my life; I saw Jon Lester's no-hitter in Boston. If Bumgarner's game is not a no-hitter then MLB is taking away that possibility from the fans. It's not quite a real game then, is it?

Other team sports generally don't face such issues because other sports generally don't tie so much of their appeal to history and numerical achievements like no-hitters or four-homer games or 20-strikeout performances or hitting for the cycle. Sure it might be cool to see a basketball player score 50 or see a football player run for 200 yards or pass for 500 yards, but it doesn't echo and resonate the way baseball magic does. I would guess that in football, in basketball, nobody would care if it's an official no-hitter or a non-official no-hitter or whatever.

Baseball fans do care about stuff like that. And MLB knows it.

So what are these seven-inning games? Are they 77.778 percent bonafide games? Are they actual games but without the possibility of no-hitters? Who even knows? I think you have to put Bumgarner's no-hitter in the books even if you put a (7) next to it. But even more, I think that they should ditch these seven-inning games as soon as possible.

One of the best things about editing this newsletter is the contributions from subscribers. This AP piece forwarded early this morning.

Season of the Slump: Baseball keeps swinging and missing

NEW YORK (AP) — Don Mattingly starred in the action-packed 1980s.

Now the Miami Marlins manager, Donnie Baseball worries about a record lack of hits -- and not just from his team's bats.

"I don't think it's cyclical at this point," he said. "There's so much swing and miss, it's kind of off the charts. I think it's something that we have to address."

It's the Season of the Slump, even for All-Stars like Marcell Ozuna (.202), Charlie Blackmon (.184) and Francisco Lindor (.189). Miguel Cabrera, the only Triple Crown winner in a half-century, is batting .140.

Major league batters are hitting just .232 overall through April, down from .252 two years ago and under the record low of .237 set in the infamous 1968 season that resulted in a lower pitcher's mound.

The Mendoza line may not mean what it used to.

Strikeouts have averaged 9.06 per team per game, on pace to set a record for the 13th consecutive full season — up from 8.81 two years ago and nearly double the 4.77 in 1979. Strikeouts already are 1,092 ahead of hits, just three years after exceeding hits for the first time over a full season.

Hits are averaging a record-low 7.63 after fluctuating from 8 to 10 from 1937 through last year, excepting 1968's dip to a then-alarming 7.91.

While it's a bear market for batters, pitchers are on bull runs.

Joe Musgrove of San Diego and Carlos Rodón of the Chicago White Sox became the second pair of pitchers in a half-century to throw April no-hitters, the first since Atlanta's Kent Mercker and Minnesota's Scott Erickson in 1994. Arizona's Madison Bumgarner pitched another, but the shortened seven-inning gem in a doubleheader was not recognized by MLB.

Mattingly, a six-time All-Star, never struck out more than 43 times in a season during a career from 1982-92.

Texas slugger Joey Gallo already has whiffed 40 times, as has Cincinnati's Eugenio Suárez.

"Pitching has always been further ahead in the analytical world, and applying information to the competition has been much faster on the run- prevention side than the run-production side," said Detroit Tigers manager A.J. Hinch, a former big league catcher.

"I have great concern that our sport has turned into a lack of offense and the strikeout-homer-walk Three True Outcomes is not our best entertainment product. ... We're trending in the wrong direction. It doesn't mean we can just snap our fingers and make a rule change or do one simple thing and all of a sudden we're going to turn into a more balanced sport."

Detroit finished April with a .199 batting average, on track to shatter the low of .211 set by the 1910 Chicago White Sox.

Just 16.6% of pitches have been put in play this season through midweek, according to MLB Statcast, matching last year and down from 18.6% in 2015.

Perhaps it's the Rawlings baseballs, which were slightly deadened this year in a change MLB said an independent lab found would cause balls to fly 1 to 2 feet shorter when hit over 375 feet. Or maybe it's the five teams that added humidors to their stadiums, raising the total to 10 of 30 with humidity-controlled storage spaces.

Home runs have dropped from a record 1.39 per team per game in 2019 to 1.28 in 2020's shortened season to 1.14 this year, the lowest since 2015.

Data shows pitchers are throwing harder in the analytic age, where many big leaguers have had their mechanics analyzed at Driveline Baseball, Cressey Sports Performance or the American Sports Medicine Institute in an effort to gain velocity, efficiency and durability.

The average four-seam fastball velocity was 93.5 mph, according to Statcast, up from 93.4 mph last year and 92.9 mph in 2015.

"I have great concern that our sport has turned into a lack of offense and the strikeout-homer-walk Three True Outcomes is not our best entertainment product. ... We're trending in the wrong direction. It doesn't mean we can just snap our fingers and make a rule change or do one simple thing and all of a sudden we're going to turn into a more balanced sport."

Detroit finished April with a .199 batting average, on track to shatter the low of .211 set by the 1910 Chicago White Sox.

Just 16.6% of pitches have been put in play this season through midweek, according to MLB Statcast, matching last year and down from 18.6% in 2015.

Perhaps it's the Rawlings baseballs, which were slightly deadened this year in a change MLB said an independent lab found would cause balls to fly 1 to 2 feet shorter when hit over 375 feet. Or maybe it's the five teams that added humidors to their stadiums, raising the total to 10 of 30 with humidity-controlled storage spaces.

Home runs have dropped from a record 1.39 per team per game in 2019 to 1.28 in 2020's shortened season to 1.14 this year, the lowest since 2015.

Data shows pitchers are throwing harder in the analytic age, where many big leaguers have had their mechanics analyzed at Driveline Baseball, Cressey Sports Performance or the American Sports Medicine Institute in an effort to gain velocity, efficiency and durability.

The average four-seam fastball velocity was 93.5 mph, according to Statcast, up from 93.4 mph last year and 92.9 mph in 2015.

"I would say pitching now is as good as it's been and as specific as it been? I think people really know better than ever what makes a pitcher really good and what their true strengths are other than what you think their strengths are and how you can target different matchups."

Jacob deGrom of the Mets has a 0.51 ERA, on track to break the post dead-ball era record of 1.12 set by the St. Louis Cardinals' Bob Gibson in 1968.

"You see deGrom -- you can see guys go out and punch out 14, 15, you're like, OK, it's not like not that big of a deal anymore," Mattingly said. "It seems like teams are striking out 12, 15 times a night, and that's just normal."

MLB instituted a new rule in 2020 requiring a pitcher to face three batters or complete a half-inning. Among the experiments in the minor leagues that start Tuesday are requiring Double-A infielders to keep both feet in the infield at the start of every play; expanding bases from 15-by-15 inches to 18-by-18 at Triple-A. In the independent Atlantic League starting Aug. 3, the pitching rubber will be moved back 12 inches to 61 feet, 6 inches.

In a sign of pitching dominance, there have been 69 team shutouts this season, a pace that would total 439 and smash the record of 359 in 1915. Even accounting for additional games caused by expansion, the percentage of games in which a team failed to score would trail only 1972 and 1968 since the end of the dead-ball era in 1919.

"I think the big thing nobody talks about is the proliferation of the breaking ball," Los Angeles Angels manager Joe Maddon said. "Everybody's worried about velocity. It's about the breaking ball to me. That's where a lot of the numbers have gone to. Hitters normally could catch up to the velocity, if that's all they're going to see."

Maddon is against rules changes to boost batters.

"I don't like legislating hardly anything," Maddon said. "I'm much more that things change based on people making adaptations and adjustments based on what they're seeing."

Timeline of World Series Game 7's (and one game 8) from Baseballleg.com, a free web site worth checking out. (I've added a few additional details).

Behind Babe, Bucs Beat Tigers in '09 Series

October 16, 1909 at Bennett Park, Detroit
Pittsburgh Pirates vs. Detroit Tigers

The Bucs' Babe Adams shut down the Tigers and the Pirates battered Detroit pitching for an easy 8-0 win. The Tigers lost their third straight Fall Classic.

Muffed Fly Ball Sinks Giants in Extra Innings of World Series Deciding Game

October 16, 1912 at Fenway Park, Boston
Boston Red Sox vs. New York Giants
World Series, Game Eight

In one of the most exciting ultimate games ever, the Sox won in the bottom of the 10th when Giants outfielder Fred Snodgrass muffed a fly ball, allowing the winning run to score. The final score was 3-2, with the exciting game played in new Fenway Park (opened earlier that season).

Johnson Emerges from Bullpen to Lead Senators to Only Title In Game Seven

October 10, 1924 at Griffith's Stadium, Washington D.C.
Washington Senators vs. New York Giants

In an epic game, Walter Johnson relieved for the Senators and shut down the Giants, allowing Washington to win in the 12th inning. Muddy Ruel delivered the key hit and scored the Series-winning run.

Two Errors Cost Senators in Game Seven Against the Pirates

October 15, 1925 at Forbes Field, Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh Pirates vs. Washington Senators

The Pirates benefited from two costly errors by Senators' shortstop Roger Peckinpaugh, winning 9-7, and denying Washington a second straight title.

Ol' Pete Shuts Down Yanks in Relief to Lead Cardinals to First Championship

October 10, 1926 at Yankee Stadium, New York
St. Louis Cardinals vs. New York Yankees

The Cards eked out the win when Pete Alexander entered the game and struck out Tony Lazzeri with the bases full. Ahead 3-2 in the ninth, the Cards threw out Babe Ruth trying to steal, ending the series.

Cardinals Clip A's, Stopping a Three-Peat

October 10, 1931 at Sportsman's Park, St. Louis
St. Louis Cardinals vs. Philadelphia Athletics

In a pitching matchup pitting the A's George Earnshaw against the Cards' Burleigh Grimes, St. Louis won a tight 4-2 contest, thus denying Philadelphia their third straight World Championship.

Cardinals Win Rout in Game Seven in Detroit

October 9, 1934 at Navin Field, Detroit
St. Louis Cardinals vs. Detroit Tigers

In a laughter, the Cardinals throttled Detroit 11-0 as Dizzy Dean handcuffed the Tigers. Midway through the contest, commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis removed Cardinals' left fielder Joe Medwick from the game after irate Detroit fans pelted him with fruit and garbage in response to a hard slide the previous frame.

Reds Squeak past Tigers in thrilling Game Seven

October 8, 1940 at Crosley Field, Cincinnati
Cincinnati Reds vs. Detroit Tigers

Behind the hitting of Frank McCormick and the pitching of Paul Derringer, the Reds nipped Detroit 2-1 and won their second World Title.

Tigers celebrate their second title by defeating the Cubs in Wrigley Field

October 10, 1945 at Wrigley Field, Chicago
Detroit Tigers vs. Chicago Cubs

The Detroit Tigers battered the underdog Chicago Cubs, winning 9-3 behind ace lefty Hal Newhouser. The victory finished off an exciting season where the Tigers scratched out the pennant and welcomed back slugger Hank Greenberg from service in World War II.

Slaughter's "Mad Dash" leads to winning run for Redbirds

October 15, 1946 at Sportsman's Park, St. Louis
St. Louis Cardinals vs. Boston Red Sox

Late in the game Harry Walker drove a double (not a single as is often misreported) into the gap that scored hustling Enos Slaughter from first with the winning run. Red Sox shortstop Johnny Pesky is fitted for goats horns when he holds the ball a little too long on the relay. Final score: 4-3.

Blevens Unlikely Hero for Yankees

October 6, 1947 at Yankee Stadium, New York
New York Yankees vs. Brooklyn Dodgers

The Yankees won their first Game Seven, defeating the Brooklyn Dodgers behind Floyd Bevens and reliever Joe Page, 5-2.

Mantle Homers to Help Beat Rival Dodgers

October 7, 1952 at Ebbets Field, Brooklyn
New York Yankees vs. Brooklyn Dodgers

The Yankees again defeated the Dodgers in the 7th game, 4-2, as young Mickey Mantle went deep in the deciding game at Ebbets Field.

Bums No More: Podres

Leads Dodgers to First Title and Redemption Against the Yanks

October 4, 1955 at Yankee Stadium, New York
New York Yankees vs. Brooklyn Dodgers

The Dodgers won their first Series, beating the Yanks in Yankee Stadium behind the tremendous pitching of Johnny Podres, 2-0. Gil Hodges drove in both of the game's runs.

Yankees Beat Dodgers in Rematch

October 10, 1956 at Ebbets Field, Brooklyn
New York Yankees vs. Brooklyn Dodgers

The Yankees get back at Brooklyn, whipping the Dodgers on their home field and wresting away the World Title, 9-0. Yogi Berra belts two homers and Johnny Kucks allows just three hits.

Burdette Shuts Out Yanks to Deliver Title to Milwaukee

October 10, 1957 at Yankee Stadium

New York Yankees vs. Milwaukee Braves

Lew Burdette throws a 7 hitter for his third win of the series. Del Crandall homers for the Braves, Aaron, Matthews and Frank Torre drive in runs in 5-0 Milwaukee win.

Yankees Rally from 3-1 Hole to Defeat Braves in Rematch of '57 Series

October 9, 1958 at County Stadium, Milwaukee

New York Yankees vs. Milwaukee Braves

Moose Skowron homers twice and drives in 4 in Yankees 6-2 win. Bob Turley gets the win in relief of Don Larsen as Yankees get revenge on Burdette, beating him for second time in the series.

Mazeroski Belts Homer to Walkoff 1960 Series for Pirates

October 7, 1960 at Forbes Field.

New York Yankees vs. Pittsburgh Pirates

The Yankees won three blowouts (16–3, 10–0, and 12–0), while the Pirates won four close games (6–4, 3–2, 5–2, and 10–9) to win the **series**. Mazeroski's 9th inning HR off Ralph Terry helped the Pirates overcome HRs by Moose Skowron and Yogi Berra.

Yankees Edge Giants When McCovey Liner is Caught to End Series

October 16, 1962 at Candlestick Park

New York Yankees vs. San Francisco Giants

Yankees win a 1-0 thriller for 20th series title. Giants were in their first series since moving west. They defeated the Dodgers in a 3 game playoff and then had a higher average, lower ERA and more hits and homers than the Yankees. The dramatic game 7 ended with Willie McCovey lining out to Bobby Richardson for the final out.

Gibson is Too Much for Yankees in 7th Game Masterpiece

October 15, 1964 at Busch Stadium.

New York Yankees vs. St. Louis Cardinals

Mantle, Linz and Boyer homer but Bob Gibson throws a complete game for the 7-5 win.

Sandy Shuts Down Twins in Game Seven

October 14, 1965 at Metropolitan Stadium

Minnesota Twins vs. Los Angeles Dodgers

Lou Johnson homers and Wes Parker drives in a run off Jim Kaat to lead Dodgers to 2-0 win. Sandy Koufax strikes out 10 in 3 hit shutout.

It's Gibson Again in Game 7 Victory for Redbirds

October 12, 1967 at Fenway Park

Boston Red Sox vs. St. Louis Cardinals

Gibson strikes out 10 to beat Jim Lonborg and the Red Sox 7-2. Gibson helped himself to win his third game of the series by hitting an HR. Julian Javier also homered off Lonborg.

Lolich's Third Victory Gives Tigers Comeback Title in '68

October 10, 1968 at Busch Stadium
Detroit Tigers vs. St. Louis Cardinals

Lolich wins his third outdueling Gibson in 4-1 win. Mickey picked off both Lou Brock and Curt Flood. The Tigers came back from a three-games-to-one deficit to win three consecutive games. Gibson was defeated by series MVP Lolich, allowing three runs on four straight hits in the seventh inning, although the key play was a Northrup [triple](#) that was seemingly misplayed by center fielder [Curt Flood](#) and could have been the third out with no runs scoring. This was the sixth World Series of the 1960s to go to a full seven games, the most of any decade. The Tigers were the third team to come back from a three-games-to-one deficit to win a best-of-seven World Series, the first two being the 1925 Pirates and the 1958 Yankees; since then, the 1979 Pirates, the 1985 Royals, and the 2016 Cubs have also accomplished this feat.

Blass Tosses 4-Hitter to Win Title for Bucs

October 17, 1971 at Memorial Stadium
Pittsburgh Pirates vs. Baltimore Orioles

Roberto Clemente homered off Mike Cuellar in the 4th to lead the Pirates to a 2-1 win.

Reds Comeback Hopes Fall Short in Game 7 When Fingers Slams the Door

October 22, 1972 at Riverfront Stadium.

This was Cincinnati's second trip to the World Series in three years, previously falling to [Baltimore](#) in five games in [1970](#). It was Oakland's first-ever trip to the Series, and the first for the franchise since [1931](#), when the team was located in [Philadelphia](#). Oakland played the Series

without its star outfielder [Reggie Jackson](#), who was injured (pulled [hamstring](#)) stealing home in the second inning of the final game of the ALCS at Detroit.

[Gene Tenace](#) capped a spectacular World Series with two hits, two RBI and he also scored the game-winning run in the sixth inning on [Sal Bando](#)'s double.

Catfish Hunter took the 3-2 win in relief of Blue Moon Odom. Rollie Fingers got the save.

A's Pitching Too Much for Mets

1973 World Series

Oakland A's over the New York Mets

Down 3-2 coming back to Oakland, the defending champion A's sent Catfish Hunter out to win Game 6, and the next afternoon, Ken Holtzman finished off the Mets in a 5-2 victory.

Reds Beat Red Sox in Thrilling Series at Fenway

1975 World Series

Cincinnati Reds vs Boston Red Sox

After a crushing defeat in Game Six, the Reds rallied to win the seventh game when Tony Perez's clutch homer knotted the contest. Joe Morgan's RBI-single was the winning margin as the Reds won their first title in 35 years.

Pirates "Family" Completes Comeback from Down 3 games to 1 to defeat O's

1979 World Series

With ancient "Pops" Stargell leading the offense and a stifling bullpen, the Pirates rebounded from losing three of the first four to win in seven in Baltimore.

Redbirds Beat Brewers in Suds Series

1982 World Series

Willie McGee made several highlight-reel plays and sparked the Cardinals to their first World Series title since 1967. The Brewers made their first appearance in the Fall Classic.

Royals finally taste champagne

1985 World Series

After five losses in the playoffs and one in the World Series in nine years, the Royals finally won their title. The Cards led 3-1, but led by pitcher Bret Saberhagen and leader George Brett, the Royals won the final three games.

Twins outlast Cardinals to win first title

1987 World Series

For the third time in six years, the Cardinals played a seven-game World Series, and for the second time they lost. The pesky Twins were underdogs in both the LCS and Fall Classic, but pitching and timely hitting proved crucial.

Gem by Morris delivers title for Twins

1991 World Series

Twins vs Braves

Jack Morris pitched a 10-inning shutout to defeat the Braves 1-0 in Game Seven at the Metrodome. The victory ran his postseason record to 7-1.

Renteria's single is walk off winner in 11th inning for Fish

1997 World Series

Marlins vs Indians

An error by Tony Fernandez opened the door for Florida, and Edgar Renteria's single up the middle capped an 11th inning Game 7 rally to win the Marlins first championship.

Rivera blows save and Diamondbacks prevail in nail-biting finish

2001 World Series

Diamondbacks vs Yankees

Closer Mariano Rivera blew a ninth inning lead in Arizona when Luis Gonzalez dropped a single over the drawn-in infield in Game Seven. The Diamondbacks were outscored and outslugged in the series, but found a way to win behind their two great pitchers, Johnson and Schilling.

SoCal over NoCal: Angels Lift Trophy for First Time

2002 World Series
Angels vs Giants

The Angels bullpen pitched four scoreless innings and made a 4-1 lead hold up to finish off the Giants in Anaheim.

Carpenter leads Cardinals to Triumph over Rangers

2011 World Series
Cardinals vs Rangers

Chris Carpenter handled the Texas offense, and his teammates put up enough support to capture a 6-2 win in Game 7.

MadBum's gem out of the Pen carries Giants to title

2014 World Series
Giants vs Royals

Pitching in relief on two days rest, lefty Madison Bumgarner fired five shutout innings in Kansas City.

Curses! The Cubs finally win the World Series after 108 years

2016 World Series
Cubs vs Indians

In possibly the most exciting Game 7 in history, the Cubs built a lead, squandered it in heartbreaking fashion, and saw rain delay the contest after nine innings. But in the 10th a clutch double by Ben Zobrist scored the eventual winning run. It was the first championship for the Cubs since 1908.

Astros Batter Darvish Early

2017 World Series
Astros vs Dodgers

Old National League West rivals met in the World Series, and it proved to be a doozy. The Astros scored five runs in the first two innings off Dodgers pitcher Yu Darvish and coasted to a clinching win in Los Angeles.

Nationals rally late to best the Astros

2019 World Series
Nationals vs Astros

The Astros bullpen failed them, and Washington scored six runs in the final three innings to prevail 6-2. The road team won every game in the series.

The Baseball Egg weekly email newsletter contains news, facts, trivia, photos, and new baseball articles you can't find anywhere else.

So they might move the mound back. What's the best (and worst) that could happen?

By [Eno Sarris](#) The Athletic

The steady march of the strikeout has baseball considering more drastic rules to augment contact, and so in the second half of this year, the Atlantic League will [feature some rule changes](#) that include a mound that's a foot further back than the traditional 60 feet, six inches; the Atlantic League's experiment is viewed as a test to see if something similar would work in the major leagues. Baseball has changed the dimensions of the field before, but it also hasn't made a change this big in over fifty years. The bigger the change, the bigger the consequences, and while we're facing strikeouts in nearly a quarter of all at-bats this year and the game may

need a large re-correct, there are also the unintended consequences to consider. Which could be far bigger than expected.

There are a couple of seminal studies that have been used to argue for the mound move, but in both cases they contain additional information that run counter to some of the analysis so far. There are different ways to read what's out there, in other words. So let's set up a best-case and worst-case scenario for moving the mound back. As tempting as the best-case is ... well we'll get to the worst-case in a minute.

The Best Case Scenario

In a controlled experiment set up for an article Ben Lindbergh [did on the subject](#), Driveline Baseball moved the mound back two feet and had a pitching machine throw 426 pitches, a mix of fastballs and curveballs, to their hitters. The results look great for those advocating moving the mound back.

Change the mound, change the stats

Mound distance 55 feet

Contact 92%

Swing 81.7%

Whiff 6.7%

Exit Velo 87.38 mph

Mound Distance 57 feet

Contact 96.8%

Swing 84.8%

Whiff 2.7%

Exit Velo 85.62 mph

Contact rate goes up, swing rate goes up; are we done here? Those with sharp eyes may already spot some interesting counter-intuitive numbers on here, but we'll get to those in a bit.

Generally, if you want contact, this is good empirical data that suggests the move will result in more contact.

That's mostly because the batter gets more reaction time. According to analyst Andrew Perpetua, a 95 mph fastball would take about .01 to .02 seconds longer to reach the plate, which would reduce the effective average velocity of the pitch by 1.8 mph, and also give the batter that much more time to get the bat head out in front of the plate, where the most powerful contact lies. Last year, batters swung and missed on 12.1 percent of fastballs between 95 and 96 mph, and only 10.2 percent of the time on fastballs between 93 and 94 mph.

Oh and what about injuries? Jayson Stark linked to a [piece of research](#) conducted by Dr. James Andrews, Glenn Fleisig and the American Sports Medicine Institute suggesting that moving the mound back wouldn't necessarily lead to more injury. Let's reproduce their concluding paragraph here, though, because once again, there's an asterisk.

Increasing pitching distance may not alter upper extremity kinetics, full-body kinematics, ball velocity or strike percentage in adult pitchers. However, as pitching distance increases the duration of ball flight and amount of horizontal and vertical break also increase. Increased ball flight duration could be an advantage for the hitter while increased ball break could help the pitcher. In conclusion, it is unlikely that moving the mound backwards would significantly affect pitching biomechanics and injury risk; however, the effects on pitching and hitting performance are unknown.

But the best case is clear. Roughly the same number of injuries, more contact at the plate, nobody notices the change on the field, and life pretty much goes on as usual with fewer strikeouts — exactly what baseball is looking for.

What could go wrong?

The Worst Case Scenario

“There's a big difference between things that test well in the cage or on the practice mound and what happens on the field,” said a major league hitter to me as we were discussing some of the technology he was surveying for his craft, before our discussion quickly turned to the mound. “Yeah, I'm out on the mound change. I do think baseball needs more contact but I'm not sold on this being great for hitters.”

That might be surprising to hear from a hitter who would supposedly benefit from the change, but it points to a possible disconnect in the injury study. Just as pitchers will admit to a big difference in the adrenaline factor between spring training and the regular season — and research shows that pitchers have velocity surges in their debuts, and [in the postseason](#), when adrenaline is at its highest — they may not be throwing at full bore in the research environment.

Fleisig himself has a study out that shows that the stress on an elbow increases [when a pitcher throws closer to their maximum](#). Won't pitchers try to max out even more when the radar gun shows a smaller number, the plate is a foot further away, and the game is on the line? Wouldn't that, in practice, lead to more stress on the pitcher? Perhaps the radar gun could be adjusted to the new distance to help incentivize normal behavior from pitchers, but the link between the lab and the field isn't always a clean one.

While that's more speculative, there *are* factors that we can model through our understanding of physics. Move the mound farther back, and the ball will be at a different point of its flight at the plate. The injury study made reference to the fact that the ball seemed to move differently to hitters. And right now, we have an understanding of the Vertical Approach Angle of pitches — the angle at which they cross the plate — so we do have a model that can be adjusted for a theoretical mound move.

Generally, extreme VAAs are the best for a pitcher. Really flat and really steep make for the best outcomes, which might make sense when you think about the way the game has trended towards high, riding four-seamers, and breaking balls at the bottom of the zone.

So, what will happen to the angle at which pitches cross the plate if the mound is moved back a foot? Exactly what you're thinking. Alex Chamberlain modeled the change to VAA with mound moving back for us.

The way to read this is that the steeper pitches (low VAA on the x-axis) will be even steeper (more negative change in VAA on the y-axis) relative to the less steep pitches. In other words, breaking balls will come in even more steeply and fastballs will be relatively unchanged. One of the facets currently leading to the boom in strikeout rates — the highest breaking ball percentages of all time — may actually be *worse* with the mound moved back.

Now look back at the Driveline study. Exit velocity was down? Smash Factor, which is a bit like Barrel Rate, was down? Why were those things down if batters had more time to react? Here's another graphic from Chamberlain which tries to show what will happen when the VAA gets steeper on pitches.

With the mound move, pitch characteristics would change, generally, from the red circle (red means good outcomes for the batter) to the blue circle (better outcomes for the pitcher). So the added distance would help the batters make more contact in some regards, but the added angle will mean some added whiffs (and poor contact) for the hitters, too.

What's the easy secondary effect here? What would pitchers do when faced with this information?

"I'd have my pitchers all throw 80-percent breaking balls," said one pitching coordinator. "Moving the mound back will improve contact rate some and just spike walks. Hitters will be better off but the game will be worse by three true outcomes. If you reduce the incentive to throw strikes, then you never guess what pitchers will do next. Swing rates and contact rates go up, but launch angle went down. Because, surprise surprise, the plane on the pitches changed. The hitters' internal calculus on what a slider does no longer worked. If you miss you are likely to miss over, not under."

A second pitching development executive agreed about the breaking balls, saying that you can just "watch hitters during BP when they know what's coming, even in slider BP, it's just not as easy as we would conceptualize" to hit those bendy pitches *as is*. One source said that a team they're tracking is already significantly upping their breaking ball percentage at the alternate sites, even among the hard throwers. Who knows what the reasoning there is, but it could be in anticipation of changes to the mound distance, or to the strike zone, which has already [grown from side to side](#) in the leagues that use robotic strike zones.

Uh-oh.

Now we're talking about more of all the things we wanted to try and change: more injuries, more breaking balls, more strikeouts, more walks, more homers ... what sort of dystopia have we walked into?

One analyst pushed back a bit.

"If pitchers all threw 80-90 percent breaking balls they'd be absolutely demolished," the analyst predicted. "They might be overlooking how easy it is for batters to learn to hit breaking balls when they don't need to hit fastballs."

So the hitters could adjust back, and in the end, be better for it. They'd adjust their ability to hit breaking balls on a steeper plane, they'd start using the extra time to their benefit, smash enough breaking balls to make pitchers stay honest with the fastball rate, and in the end the only fact would be they get an extra foot to react. It's a plausible long-term ending to this particular cat and mouse game, but does it ignore the fact that pitchers might be currently more effective at using data and tech to their advantage than hitters, and that making a change like this would favor the side that was more aggressive in using data and tech?

Because of the ball, or because of pitchers using tech and data to shape their pitches better, breaking balls [are dropping more](#) than they have since we started tracking that statistic. Wouldn't they lean in and use that same data and tech to shape pitches that take advantage of the extra foot?

In the light of the fact that we're seeing more strikeouts than hits for the first time in baseball history, this sort of tinkering to the fundamentals of baseball seems laudable, of course. But a deeper dive into the same studies that have been used to promote the benefits of moving the mound themselves contain asterisks that may end up dominating the real-life outcomes.

Will the strikeouts go up or down? Will pitchers throw a ton of breaking balls? Will the injuries soar? Which lab findings will turn out to be more prescient? In this case, that's why you play the games. With a different mound distance.

MAY 9, 2021

good afternoon baseball fans.

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

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

White Sox catcher Yasamni Grandal had the weird stat of the week. He walked 13 times in four games—the only other AL batter to ever do that was Babe Ruth in 1930. Overall, Grandal is having quite the strange season at the plate. After walking four times and hitting a sacrifice fly in Saturday's [9-1 White Sox victory](#) over the Royals in Kansas City, he's hitting .121/.388/.259 with seven hits and 26 walks over his first 21 games in 2021.

You might recall last year's playoffs and all the hubbub about Yordan Alvarez of the Rays. His offensive numbers were crazy. While he just became the fastest player to 100 RBIs since 1961 w—114 career games. Faster than guys like Pujols, Frank Thomas, Trout and Griffey Jr.

Ted Williams holds the record for the most RBI in a player's first season with 145 RBI in 1939. He reached 100 RBI in his 430th AB.

Dusty Baker is the first manager to take 5 franchises to the post season. Two managers took four franchises to post season-- Davey Johnson (Mets, Nationals, Orioles, Reds) and Billy Martin (Yankees, A's, Twins and Tigers).

Giancarlo Stanton has been swinging a hot bat for the Yankees. He just had a 12 game hitting streak with 25 hits and 6 HRs. Only other Yankees to reach 12/25/6 are Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio and Mattingly.

DJ LeMahieu needed 225 games to reach 300 hits as a Yankee. He is second in club history to Joe D who did it in 200 games.

Alex Cora's Red Sox, at 17-10. The last six times the Red Sox have started 17-10 or better, they've made the playoffs.

Reds lefty Wade Miley retired 28 straight when a passed ball on a strikeout allowed the only Indians baserunner. The Indians have been no-hit twice already this season—no team in MLB history has been no hit three times in the same season.

Two days between John Means of the Orioles and Miley was shortest span between no hitters since 1990 when Dave Stewart and Fernando Valenzuela did it on the same day.

Before the Indians were no-hit for the second time this season Friday night, the last time a team was no-hit twice in the same season was in 2019, when the Mariners were on the wrong end of combined no-hitters by the Angels (July 12) and the Astros (Aug. 3).

This was the fourth no-hitter on May 7 in MLB history. Mike Fiers no-hit the Reds on May 7, 2019, Justin Verlander no-hit the Blue Jays on that date in 2011, and Jesse Barnes no-hit the Phillies on May 7, 1922.

It was three time Cy Young winner Matt Scherzer for the Nationals against two time Cy Young winner Corey Kluber for the Yankees on Saturday. Scherzer whiffed 14 Yankees (to set a record for a visiting pitcher at the new Yankee Stadium) but the Yankees won the game in extra innings. Scherzer moved up the all-time strikeouts leaderboard to No. 20, passing Mike Mussina (2,832). Kluber got his 100th career win earlier in the week beating Detroit.

Jackie Robinson didn't just break MLB's color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1948 with the Montreal Royals he integrated the International (AAA) League.

MIGGY Keeps on Rolling

Tigers slugger Miguel Cabrera passed Babe Ruth on Major League Baseball's hits list after a week and a half lingering over his shoulder. Cabrera's second-inning single in Friday's [7-3 loss](#) to the Twins was the 2,873rd hit of his career, pulling Miggy even with the Bambino on the all-time list. He added another single in the fourth inning to bring his total to 2,874, and now he stands alone at 45th.

It's a cool milestone on Cabrera's quest for 3,000 hits and 500 home runs. Just six players in MLB history have accomplished both, though never in the same year.

Cabrera and Pujols (before Pujols' release by the Angels) were the only active players in the top 50 in career hits. Pujols sits 14th with 3,253. Cabrera is closing in on greats such as Mel Ott (2,876), Omar Vizquel (2,877) and Rogers Hornsby (2,930).

This is Cabrera's 19th season in the Majors. He's amassed an impressive list of awards during that time, including a Triple Crown, 11 All-Star selections, seven Silver Sluggers, four batting titles, two MVP Awards and has been named MLB's Player of the Year twice.

Cabrera's career achievements have also brought him to within one double of becoming the eighth Tiger in history to hit 400 with the club, and will mark No. 583 in his career, tying him with Hall of Famer Robin Yount for No. 21 on MLB's all-time list.

With 489 career homers, Cabrera sits just four shy of tying Lou Gehrig and Fred McGriff for 28th on that MLB career list. He has the most 4-hit games among active players with 47.

HADER CAN BRING IT

Brewers lefty closer Josh Hader when he retired Marlins outfielder Corey Dickerson on a foul tip Saturday night, he became the fastest pitcher in history to 400 career strikeouts.

Then he became the fastest to 401. And then he became the fastest to 402.

Hader struck out the side in the ninth inning at Loan Depot park to cap the Brewers' [6-2 win](#) by doing what he does best. It took him just 234 2/3 career innings to get to No. 400, breaking the mark previously held by Craig Kimbrel (236), who had set it in 2014.

After Kimbrel, the next-fastest to 400 were Aroldis Chapman (237 2/3 innings) and Edwin Díaz (249).

Hader is off to a fantastic start in 2021. His ERA stands at 0.77 in 12 appearances, and he has seven saves.

Hader's career strikeout rate is an incredible 44.4 percent of batters he's faced. His triple-digit fastball and biting slider have confounded hitters since he made his MLB debut in 2017.

SAY HEY AT 90

Happy 90th to Willie Mays. He hit 660 home runs. He's a member of the 3,000-hit club. He won a batting title, four home run titles and four stolen base titles. He ranks among the all-time leaders in Wins Above Replacement. Perhaps most amazingly, Mays' numbers would have been even more remarkable had he not missed nearly two full seasons in the prime of his career while serving in the military.

The highlights go On and On:

He is one of just 30 players all-time to hit at least 50 homers in a single season and he's one of 86 players to rack up at least 20 triples in a season. Mays, however, is the *only* player who is a member of both clubs.

MLB-leading 51 homers in 1955 before pacing all players with 20 triples in '57. He later teed off for a career-best 52 homers in '65, making him one of just nine players in MLB history with multiple 50-homer seasons.

Mays is one of just 18 players in Major League history to hit [four home runs](#) in a single game. On April 30, 1961, Mays went 4-for-5 with four homers and eight RBIs in a 14-4 win against the Braves at Milwaukee's County Stadium. Mays is the only member of the 600-home run club with a four-homer game.

Mays was the model of consistency from 1954-66, stringing together a 13-season run of pure excellence. He won the National League Most Valuable Player Award twice during that stretch - first in 1954 and again in '65 -- but he was a yearly contender for the honor. In fact, he received a share of MVP votes each season from 1954-66 and he finished in the top 6 in 12 of those 13 years -- and in the top 3 six times.

He had at least 70 extra-base hits in 13 straight seasons from 1954-66. No other player has 13 such seasons, consecutive or otherwise, in Major League history.

Mays went on that 13-season tear immediately after missing nearly two full seasons while serving his country. He played in only 34 games in 1952, then missed the entire '53 season after being drafted into the Army. Mays clearly didn't miss a beat upon returning in '54, leading the Majors with a .345 average and a .667 slugging percentage, while also racking up 41 homers, 110 RBIs and an NL-best 13 triples en- route to earning his first NL MVP Award. (Imagine if he had another 1,000 plate appearances.)

Started 18 All Star games including 14 in a row. He had at least one hit in 15 All-Star Games. Only five other players have even logged a *plate appearance* in that many Midsummer Classics. Needless to say, Mays' 23 overall hits are the most in All-Star Game history.

Mays won 12 Gold Glove Awards (the most by any center fielder).

The two pitchers Mays faced the most (by far) in his career were a pair of Hall of Famers: Warren Spahn (253 plate appearances) and Don Drysdale (243 PAs). Yet neither could find an answer for Mays' prowess at the plate. "The Say Hey Kid" hit better than .300 against each pitcher, combining for a .318/.371/.596 slash line and 59 extra-base hits, including 31 home runs, against the Hall of Fame duo.

Mays faced 14 Hall of Fame pitchers overall, posting a .286 batting average and an .859 OPS over 1,319 plate appearances. He hit 56 of his 660 career homers off Hall of Famers, including 18 against Spahn, 13 against Drysdale, five against Sandy Koufax and four apiece against Robin Roberts and Fergie Jenkins.

Mike Trout has often drawn comparisons to Mays due to the pair's consistency and dominance in center field -- and the two stand alone as the only players in Major League history with multiple seasons of at least a .320 batting average, 25 home runs and 30 stolen bases. Mays accomplished the feat in back-to-back seasons from 1957-58, posting a collective .340 average while averaging 32 homers and 34 stolen bases over those two campaigns.

Mays is one of 32 members of the 3,000-hit club, but he's the only player in MLB history with at least 3,000 hits, a .300 average, 300 home runs and 300 stolen bases. Mays, of course, exceeded some of those plateaus rather easily, finishing with 3,283 hits, 660 homers and 338 steals.

Throughout his career, Mays claimed four home run titles, four stolen base titles and one batting title. He also led the NL five times apiece in OPS and slugging percentage; three times in triples; twice each in runs, extra-base hits and on-base percentage; and once apiece in hits and walks.

In 1955, Mays became the first player in Major League history to hit 50 home runs and steal 20 bases in the same season. It took 41 years for another player to repeat that type of production, and only three others -- Brady Anderson (1996), Ken Griffey Jr. ('98) and Alex Rodriguez (2007) have accomplished it.

Mays is one of just four players -- along with Frank Schulte (1911), Jimmy Rollins (2007) and Curtis Granderson (2007) -- to record at least 20 doubles, triples, home runs and stolen bases in the same season. Mays accomplished the feat in 1957, when he racked up 26 doubles, 20 triples, 35 homers and 38 stolen bases. His .407 on-base percentage and .626 slugging percentage that season.

Of the 27 players in the 500-home run club, none hit as many triples as Mays' 140. Only two other members of the club even topped 100 triples -- Babe Ruth had 136 and Jimmie Foxx had 125. Mays also ranks second within the 500-homer club in stolen bases (338), trailing only Barry Bonds (514).

He finished with 36 home runs and 40 stolen bases in 1956, then followed it up with 35 homers and 38 steals in '57. He was the first player in MLB history with multiple 35-35 seasons, though he's since been joined by Bobby Bonds, Barry Bonds and Alfonso Soriano.

He had a .302 career average with 335 homers while playing at home, and a .301 career mark with 325 home runs on the road. As for opposing pitchers, he was a career .300 hitter with a .917 against righties, and a .305 hitter with a 1.006 OPS vs. lefties. Mays also had at least a .300 average and .925 OPS in every month except July (.280 BA, .870 OPS).

Mays often stepped up in big spots, posting a .966 career OPS in high-leverage situations. That ranks fifth all time, behind only Jimmie Foxx, Barry Bonds, Stan Musial and Henry Aaron. Mays also had 1,928 documented total bases in the seventh inning or later, second-most on record behind only Aaron (1,984).

His career began with the Birmingham Black Barons in 1948, reached exalted heights with the New York Giants in the 1950s and didn't end until 1973. Playing center field for 22 years in Major League Baseball, with a record 7,095 putouts and with 6,066 total bases.

Mays wasn't just durable (2,992 regular-season games). He rarely took a day off.

His first full year was 1954, when the season was 154 games, and he played in more than 150 for eight straight seasons. In 1962, when the National League extended its season to 162 games and the Giants played 165 to break a tie with the Dodgers, he missed only three games. He continued at close to that clip for the next four years.

He won his second M.V.P. Award at 34 and was still one of the game's best players at 40 — his .907 O.P.S. was 225 points above the league average.

At 90 Mays is the oldest living Hall of Famer.

What it means to be in First (or last) Place

Since 1996, the first season with at least one Wild Card, 77 of 144 eventual division champions held at least a share of that division lead entering May 1. That's 53 percent of division winners. Take note, Red Sox, Royals, A's, Phillies, Brewers and Giants fans -- those teams are our current division leaders heading into May.

The last time we played a full season, in 2019, four of the six division leaders on May 1 went on to win their divisions. In the American League, the Twins and Astros won their divisions, while the Rays did not, but still made the playoffs as a Wild Card. In the NL, the Cardinals and Dodgers won their divisions, but the Phillies, who led the NL East on May 1, missed the postseason entirely.

Since 1996, 15 of the 24 World Series winners, excluding 2020, led their divisions entering May. But the 2019 Nationals, who were infamously 19-31 through 50 games in May, did not -- snapping a streak of six straight World Series champs that had led their divisions entering the month. The last World Series winner without a share of first place in its division entering May before the '19 Nationals was the 2012 Giants.

The defending champion Dodgers are not in first place entering May. How rare is that? Not as rare as you might think. Of each of the 23 teams to win the World Series since 1996 and play in April the next year, nine have found themselves in first place through April that subsequent year. The Red Sox were not in first place at this point in 2019 either, after the two prior World Series winners -- the Cubs and Astros -- had been in their respective reigning seasons.

What about the last-place teams? There's plenty of season left, and it's worth keeping up hope. The last teams to be in last place entering May and go on to make the playoffs were the 2015 Blue Jays and Rangers, both of which went on to win their divisions. Overall, 11 teams have had at least a share of last place in a division, then gone on to make the playoffs that season. Of those, six were division winners and five were Wild Cards.

GREAT STATS FROM JAYSON STARK

The batting average of the entire sport in April — an average compiled by the best collection of athletes ever to play baseball — was .232. That's not just the worst it's been since the Bob Gibson 1.12 ERA/Nobody Can Hit days of 1968. That .232 mark would be the worst ever. Heck, the league average in 1968 was an action-packed .237.

Here are other sport-wide offensive numbers from April. If you're squeamish, don't look. It might occur to you that baseball has somehow transformed into a whole sport full of Doug Mirabellis. And you wouldn't be wrong!

On-base %: .309, lowest since 1968

Slugging %: .389, lowest since 2014

OPS: .698, lowest since 1989

Hits per game: 7.63, lowest since *ever*

At least the league OPS is almost 60 points higher than it was in 1968, largely because the home run rate is almost double. So the average team is scoring about one more run per game. But even that's misleading because pretty much all of those additional runs come from home runs. Want to guess how often in baseball history we have seen a runs-per-game rate this low (4.25 per team) paired with home run rate this high (1.14 per team per game)? Never.

Teams in 2021 will hit 6,000 less singles than 2007. Better pitching, elevated launch angles and the shift.

Over 1,000 more strikeouts than hits!

This feels like something I just made up to get your attention, but here comes the stat that sums up baseball in 2021. In the April we just completed, there were nearly 1,100 more strikeouts than hits!

STRIKEOUTS: 6,924

HITS: 5,832

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the single largest strikeouts-to-hits differential in any month ever. And it wasn't even close.

Largest K/H differentials by month

April 2021: 1,096

Sept. 2019: 705

April 2019: 529

Sept. 2020: 496

Now, remember this: Until May 2018, there had never been any month in the history of baseball with more strikeouts than hits. Until last year, there had never been a season with 1,000 more whiffs than hits. But now, if this pace keeps up, we're looking at a season with about 7,000 more strikeouts than hits. Seven thousand!

Byron Buxton: We've been waiting for that Buxton breakout year forever. Does .426/.466/.897 feel like enough of a breakout for you, especially coming from an elite impact defender in center? Ready for the complete list of everyone in the modern era who got at least 60 plate appearances and matched or beat that April slash line? Here it comes: Henry Aaron in 1959, Barry Bonds in 2004, George Brett in 1983, Larry Walker in 1997 ... and Byron Buxton.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr.: When we talk about Vlad's new look, we're not just talking about his physique. He had an outrageous April (.350/.490/.663) that included more walks (20) than strikeouts (16) and a feat his famous father somehow never achieved: a three-homer game that included 1,226 feet worth of home runs.

Corbin Burnes: Is it possible the three greatest Aprils by any starting pitchers in history just happened? Heck, yeah, it is. There was Jacob deGrom — the first starter ever to finish April with a sub-1.00 ERA (0.51), sub-1.00 WHIP (0.57) and 48 percent strikeout rate (minimum: 3 starts.). There was Gerrit Cole, who had a 1.43 ERA, 0.72 WHIP and 44 percent strikeout rate. But right there with them is the emerging Marquis de Milwaukee, Burnes — with his never-before-seen 49-to-zilch strikeout/walk ratio.

AND INSIGHTS FROM JOE POSNANSKI

Think you see a lot of strikeouts?

For baseball history buffs, here's the progression:

- The first time teams averaged four strikeouts per game: 1952
- The first time teams averaged five strikeouts per game: 1959
- The first time teams averaged six strikeouts per game: 1994
- The first time teams averaged seven strikeouts per game: 2010
- The first time teams averaged eight strikeouts per game: 2016
- The first time teams averaged nine strikeouts per game: Right now

Roughly 75 percent of the strikeouts this year are swinging strikeouts. Yes, strikeouts looking are up this year but not significantly. Swings-and-misses, though, are up across the board.

The Heart of the Plate: 16.7 percent swings-and-misses

In 2010, '11 and '12, hitters were swinging and missing at roughly 12 percent of pitches over the heart of the plate. This year, they're swinging and missing almost 17 percent of the time. It's a huge deal — over a full season, that's about 8,000 *more* swings-and-misses on what you would have to call mistake pitches. This just shows you how much harder pitchers are throwing and how much more movement they're getting. Even the best hitters on earth are having significant trouble with pitches right over the middle of the plate.

From 2012 until 2015, Andrew McCutchen was the best player in baseball not named Mike Trout. He was such a joy to watch, a Gold Glove center fielder who, over those four seasons, hit .313/.404/.523 with some home run power and some stolen-base speed. He finished top five in the MVP voting in each of those four years and won the MVP in 2013. He seemed on his way to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Heck, he had 38 wins above replacement before he turned 29.

The 1975 Reds — started the season 20-20. They then won 88 of the 122 games remaining and are considered one of the greatest teams in baseball history, maybe even the greatest.

MAY 16, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Some fun stuff this week. Keep the feedback coming--lots of email contributions and ideas this week--thanks.

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

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Pinch hitters are batting .207 across MLB. That's the lowest average since 1973.

Aroldis Chapman is off to a pretty good start from the Yankees bullpen. He has thrown 14 innings, allowed four hits and struck out 30. You don't need to be a math wizard to see that's more than two strikeouts per inning. Of the 42 outs he has recorded, 30 of them have been by strikeout.

Pitcher Adrian Houser of the Brewers homered twice last week off Marlins pitcher Daniel Castano. o that's two home runs in a week and a half *off the same pitcher* – and they don't even play in the same division? Here's how Weird and Wild that is.

The division-play era is now in its 53rd season. How many other pitchers have launched two homers in one season against a pitcher outside their own division? That, says STATS, would be none! In fact, Houser is the first pitcher to do this twice *in his career* in over 40 years, since the Phillies' Larry Christensen went deep twice off the Astros' Joe Niekro, in 1977 and 1980.

The Royals have had at least a six-game losing streak in the first two months in 16 of their last 18 seasons.

Adam Wainwright never retires. Last Sunday, two starts after going nine innings against the Phillies, he went 8 1/3 against the Rockies. Which got us to wondering:

How many 39-year-olds (or older) have had two starts in the same season in which they got at least one out in the ninth? Here's the whole list from the last 15 seasons:

2013 – Bartolo Colon (the impossible has happened!)

2015 – R.A. Dickey (flutterball king) – 3 times!

2021 – Adam Wainwright (officially ageless!)

Toronto Blue Jay Cavan Biggio homered in Houston this week. First Biggio HR in Houston since his father Craig homered for the Astros August 21, 2007.

May 10: Reds 14, Pirates 1

April 6: Reds 14, Pirates 1

- Last team to win two 14-1 games against the same team in the same year: Zaza Harvey's 1901 White Sox, over Jiggs Donahue's original Milwaukee Brewers.
- All other times in the last 121 seasons the Reds have scored exactly 14 runs twice against the Pirates: That would be none, of course.
- Times in the last 37 seasons the Bengals have scored exactly 14 against the Steelers: Precisely once – in Weeks 7 and 11 of the 2017 season.

Rhys Hoskins of the Phillies went 0-4 with 4 strikeouts in a game last week and scored two runs—walked and scored, reached first on a dropped third strike and scored. First time that has happened since 1947.

Remember Wade Miley's no hitter last week? Pitching for the Astros in September 2019 he went back-to-back starts in which he gave up 12 earned runs and didn't get out of the first inning in either game. Rick Wise and Doc Ellis both threw no-hitters yet had back-to-back starts where they didn't get through the first inning.

- **The longest winning streak of the year**— nine in a row, by the A's – came from a team that had *the worst record in the whole sport* when that streak began.
- **And now the longest losing streak of the year**— 11 in a row (and counting) by the Royals – came from a team that had *the best record in the whole sport* when that streak began.

1924 World Series – a cool video forwarded by a subscriber—check it out

<https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2019/10/rare-film-washington-senators-win-the-1924-world-series/>

HIT BY PITCH

A free (albeit painful) free pass. Career leader (going back to the 1890's) is Hughie Jennings at 287. Names you'd recognize in the top ten career leaders include Craig Biggio (2nd with 285), Don Baylor (4th with 267), Ron Hunt (6th with 243), Chase Utley 8th with 204) and Frank Robinson (9th with 198).

Jennings tops single season leaders (51 in 1896). Hunt (50 in 1971), Baylor (37 in 1986) and Biggio (34 in 1997) are in the top ten.

The hit-by-pitch, as we know it today, predates the American League itself. It was in 1887, a good 14 years before the founding of baseball's Junior Circuit, that the rules of this sport were amended to award a runner first base when hit by a pitcher's usually-errant toss to home plate. (Interestingly enough, though, the statistic of a "hit-by-pitch" has been kept since 1884.)

As the years have gone by, hit-by-pitches have been slowly increasing, and it really hasn't gathered much attention from the greater baseball community. The 2018 season saw an all-time high in hit batsmen with 1,922.

In 1994, baseball saw just a total of 876 hit batsmen, the last year (to date) that the league sat under 1,000. Since that time, the total number of batters hit has increased by 43.6 per year, on average, and no end to this growth appears to be in sight.

We are seeing the highest rate of HBP per AB since 1900. In fact, eight of baseball's 10 top HBP% seasons have come in the last 18 years:

HBP by relievers is up as we might assume as we see more and more innings pitched by bullpens.

The current rate of [0.41 batters hit by a pitch per team game](#) is the highest since 1900, the same year that the [Brooklyn Superbas led by Wee Willie Keeler](#) won the [Chronicle-Telegraph Cup](#). (There was no American League yet and thus no World Series.)

There's one simple explanation: There are more opportunities to hit someone now because hitters are extending counts and pitchers are throwing more pitches. The past two full seasons saw the highest number of total pitches ([721,282 in 2018](#) and [721,279 in 2017](#), according to Baseball-Reference.com) on record.¹ But even though the raw counts are higher, the share of total pitches that hit a batter last season is also going up: 0.266 percent of all pitches in 2018 hit a batter, the second-highest share on record. Through Thursday, this season has seen a share of 0.274 percent — which would be the highest that we've seen.

Some [speculate that pitchers are just wilder than ever](#) because of a focus on throwing hard in lieu of command. [Walks per game \(3.44\)](#) are well above the average since 1900 (3.19), but pitchers are throwing only fractionally more balls as a percentage of pitches this year (36.7) than the 2009-to-2018 average (36.6).

HBP in 2021 is trending to an all time high.

The game is changing - here are stats from two Atlanta Braves superstars.

Ronald Acuna Jr has been hit by a pitch 22 times in 335 games. (Once every 15 games)

Hank Aaron was hit by a pitch 32 times in 3298 games. (Once every 103 games).

Experts blame the 98-100 MPH throwers - pitchers who put more emphasis on how hard they throw and care less about pinpoint location.

PATRICK MAZEIKA

Mets back-up catcher Patrick Mazeika had spent his six years in the New York Mets' farm system. This week against the Diamondbacks he uncorked a wild swing and felt his bat make contact with the ball.

It was not good contact. But it was just enough.

The ball dribbled just a few feet from home plate, bringing home the winning run from third and earning Mazeika the biggest fielder's choice of his career.

Tuesday night Mazeika repeated his miracle against the Baltimore Orioles: a game-winning, softly hit ground ball to first base in the bottom of the ninth.

Mazeika now has two walk-off game winners, making him the only player ever to pull off that feat in his first four plate appearances since baseball started keeping track in 1920. He is the first player in history to have two walk off RBIs before his first hit. The total distance traveled in the air by his two shots was approximately seven feet.

The top five RBI guys in the last 50 years (Bonds, Griffey Jr., Pujols, ARod and Eddie Murray) never had even one walk off fielder's choice.

Mike Piazza, Darryl Strawberry, Keith Hernandez, Howard Johnson and Ed Kranepool never had two walk offs in a season. But Patrick Mazeika already has two ... *in a week ... and didn't even need to get a hit?* You can't make this stuff up.

CORBIN BURNES

Brewers pitcher Corbin Burnes. Two years ago he had a 8.82 ERA. This year he had struck out 49 batters without issuing a walk before missing two starts with an asymptomatic case of the coronavirus, and he started Thursday's game against the St. Louis Cardinals with nine more.

With 58 K's he broke the major league records for most strikeouts to start a season without a walk (51 by Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen in 2017) and most consecutive strikeouts without a walk at any point in a season (56 by Curt Schilling of the Diamondbacks in 2002 and by Gerrit Cole of the Yankees this season). Cardinals' Adam Wainwright at 35, held the all-time record for

a starting pitcher before Burnes broke it April 20 in San Diego. Gerrit Cole's gem against Tampa Bay this week pushed him to 56 without a walk.

Opponents hit only .152 in April off Burnes, whose earned run average is 1.57. He has recorded at least nine strikeouts in all six of his starts, standing out even in a season of extreme power pitching in the majors.

Since the start of the 2020 season, Burnes, 26, had fanned 39.4 percent of opposing hitters entering Thursday, second only the Mets' Jacob deGrom (41.3 percent) among pitchers with at least 80 innings. His 1.92 E.R.A. was also second best to deGrom, at 1.75.

GERRIT COLE

For weeks we have gone on and on about Jacob deGrom. We are lucky to have two crazy good pitching seasons going.

Gerrit Cole. In 2021, he's struck out 78 batters in eight games, racking up 10 or more strikeouts in five of his eight starts. He hasn't walked a batter in a calendar month — just three on the season. He's given up three home runs in nearly 53 innings.

Cole's rate of strikeouts to walks this season is worth repeating: For every walk he has allowed this year, he's struck out 26 batters in response.

Cole beat Tampa bay 1-0 this week in an 8 inning/12 strikeout/0 walk performance. At 1,500 K's in 1,315 1/3 innings Cole is the fourth-fastest MLB pitcher to reach the milestone.

EVAN LONGORIA

Sort of random but impressive nonetheless (lifted from a Peter Gammons column), Evan Longoria hasn't always been a tremendous player. He and Eddie Matthews are the only third basemen to hit 20 or more homers in nine of their first 10 seasons. Longoria has had an impressive run. Consider his career stats: a .266 batting average, .335 on-base percentage, 308 home runs, with home and road splits that are virtually identical — .810 OPS at home, .805 on the road. His best career month? April, with an .838 OPS. Every other month is somewhere between .792 and .813. It's a level of consistency that is rarely seen.

CRAZY TIMES IN THE MINORS

13 WALKS IN AN INNING! This was an actual thing that happened in a Double A Biloxi-Birmingham game last Friday. This was how the top of the sixth inning went, with Biloxi batting:

- The almost-normal portion of the inning went walk, walk, strikeout, walk, walk, two-run single, sac fly.
- Then the totally off-the-rails portion went walk, walk, walk, walk, walk, walk, hit batter, walk, walk, walk.

Whew! That's 10 straight hitters reaching base – on nine walks, one hit batter ... and zero hits. In fact, in the inning, 15 batters reached base – *on one hit!*

FUN FACT: In 2013, Clayton Kershaw faced 544 hitters – and issued 11 walks all season. And the Birmingham Barons just issued 13 walks *in one inning*.

A TEAM SCORED 78 RUNS IN ONE SERIES! And now another thing that happened, in actual life. In what used to be the Florida State League, the Tampa Tarpons and Dunedin Blue Jays opened the season with a six-game series in Tampa. Here come the scores of those games:

Tampa 11, Dunedin 7
Tampa 19, Dunedin 9
Tampa 10, Dunedin 6
Tampa 25, Dunedin 10
Tampa 12, Dunedin 11
Dunedin 4, Tampa 1

So Dunedin scored 43 runs in the first five games, an average of 8.6 runs a game – *and got outscored by 34* – but then scored four times in the sixth game ... *and won*.

And Tampa came to bat in 40 half-innings in those first five games – *and scored in 26 of them*. There are a million more like this, but let's get to the ...

FUN FACT: Yes, *there was a 25-10 game!* Featuring 35 runs, 18 walks, eight wild pitches, two balks, a hit batter *and zero one-run innings by either team*. There was a 25-10 game in the NFL as recently as Week 6, 2007 (Panthers 25, Cardinals 10, with Vinny Testaverde throwing for a score). But there has never been a 25-10 game in Major League Baseball. Closest call: Giants 25, Reds 13, on June 9, 1901. Winning pitcher Bill Phyle twirled an 18-hitter!

STOLEN BASES

Through Wednesday's games, the major-league success rate was an all-time high of 76.9 percent. The single-season stolen base success rate ranged from 59-65 percent in the 1960s, from 62-68 percent in the 1970s, from 65-70 percent in the 1980s, from 66-71 percent in the 1990s and from 68-74 percent over the first 19 seasons of the 2000s.

the two-year acceleration of this trend has been dramatic. Consider this: Among all major-league players since 1951 who have attempted to steal at least a dozen times, the three highest success rates belong to players who have done the bulk of their thievery over the last two seasons. Diamondbacks outfielder [Tim Lincecum](#) is 30 for 31 (96.7 percent) and [broke Tim Lincecum's all-time record](#) for most successful attempts to begin a career. Slater is right behind him at 95.7 percent. Then there's Blue Jays infielder [Cavan Biggio](#) (21 for 22), whose 95.4 percent rate gives him family bragging rights. For now, anyway.

It'll even out, of course, as they attempt to swipe more bases. Among major leaguers who have tried to steal at least 100 times, nobody has a better success rate than Chase Utley's 87.5 percent. Hall of Famer Tim Lincecum was successful 84.7 percent of the time — an astounding rate considering he logged 954 career attempts. Rickey Henderson, the most prolific basestealer of all time, was successful 80.8 percent of the time. Before Cavan Biggio gloats that he's trouncing his Hall of Fame father's 76.9 percent success rate, he might want to remember that Craig Biggio still has a 393-steal lead on him.

A stolen base remains an obviously desired outcome as long as you can get the percentages to work in your favor.

Guess what? We've reached that tipping point. According to [FanGraphs' Run Expectancy Matrix](#), stealing second base with no outs increases a team's expected runs in an inning by 0.237. Getting thrown out reduces them by 0.588. It's only a worthwhile gamble if the baserunner has a success probability of roughly 75 percent. For the first time, league-wide, they do.

More breaking balls? Catchers focused on framing? A couple of pitchers on every staff who don't sacrifice their stuff to slide step? The disappearance of the pitchout? All of these factors are creating more opportunities to steal. But you need the bandwidth to identify those optimal moments.

Major-league coaching staffs have more bandwidth than ever. And with a sea of data to churn, more prep work than ever goes into each major-league game.

Take the Giants, for example. Manager Gabe Kapler hired 13 major-league coaches last year: three on the hitting side, three on the pitching side, a bench coach, two base coaches, a bullpen coach, a quality assurance coach and two assistant coaches. He added a 14th this season when he

hired former Tampa Bay Rays outfielder Fernando Perez as a video coach. The Giants also have a three-person analytics team that travels with the club.

Simply put, the Giants have the bandwidth to perform microsurgery on an opponent prior to every series and every game. They know an opposing pitcher's time to the plate, sure. But they also know his pickoff tendencies and pitch probabilities in each count. They can plug in all the numbers and use objective measures to tell their baserunners when taking off is a good gamble.

It's integers, not intuition.

the days of 100-plus stolen-base attempts probably ended with Ricky Henderson and Vince Coleman in 1988. Nobody has stolen 70 bases since Jacoby Ellsbury in 2009. The 2018-19 seasons marked the first time since 1957-58 that nobody in the league stole 50 bases in consecutive years.

As of Friday Whit Merrifield of the Royals led the majors with 11 stolen bases. Ramon Laureano of Oakland (8), Robbie Grossman of Detroit (7), Isiah Kerner-Falefa of Texas (7) and Trea Turner of Washington (7) trail Merrifield. So with the season coming up on 25% complete Rickey Henderson numbers aren't happening. But increased analytics leading to success rates high enough to offset the risk of running into an out are pushing the stolen base back into the game as an important weapon.

EARLY STRUGGLES

Players mature at different rates. It's a huge job for front offices and scouts to decide who to stick with and who to walk away from.

Jose Ramirez, power hitting 3B for Indians.

2013 3 HRs in 533 plate appearances at AA.

2015 1 HR at AAA in 44 games

2018 37 HRs for the Indians

Jacob de Grom

2013 7-7 with 4.51 ERA at 3 levels in the minors. 44 strikeouts in 60 innings at AA.

2014 22 starts with the Mets, 2.69 ERA and away we go.

Aaron Judge

2015 hit .224 at AAA, struck out 74 times in 228 at bats

Blake Snell

2013 single A. 23 starts, 4.27 ERA, 6.6 walks per 9 innings pitched.

Adam Wainwright

2004 5.37 ERA in 12 starts.

Derek Jeter in his first year in rookie league, 199 at bats, 3 HRs, 2 stolen bases, batted .202.

WAIT, HE PLAYED FOR THEM?

Albert Pujols signing with the Dodgers brought a number of famous pitstops to mind (from mlb.com)

Baltimore Orioles/St. Louis Browns: Dizzy Dean

The 1934 NL MVP for the Cardinals, Dean saw injuries put a premature stop to his career after he threw one inning for the Cubs in '41. Six years later, while working as a Browns broadcaster, Dean claimed he could pitch as well or better than the club's beleaguered staff. With nothing to lose, the Browns [signed him](#) to a one-game contract and started him in the season's final game, on Sept. 28, 1947, against the White Sox at Sportsman's Park. Amazingly, Dean pitched four scoreless innings and also went 1-for-1 at the plate.

Honorable mention: Tim Lincecum

Boston Red Sox: Tom Seaver

The Sox actually had three other Hall of Fame pitchers -- Jack Chesbro, Juan Marichal and John Smoltz -- make fewer appearances for them than Seaver's 16. Seaver, who made his name with the Mets, finished his career with Boston after a June 1986 trade from the White Sox. At age 41, he still managed a 111 [ERA+](#) in 104 1/3 innings but didn't appear in the team's postseason run to the World Series due to a knee injury.

Honorable mention: Chesbro

Chicago White Sox: Ken Griffey Jr.

Two years before his retirement, the Reds sent Griffey to the White Sox at the 2008 Trade Deadline. Over 41 regular-season games, he [hit just three](#) of his 630 career homers, but the Sox took a tiebreaker game from the Twins to claim the AL Central title. In his third and final trip to the playoffs, Junior went 2-for-10 with five strikeouts in an AL Division Series loss to the Rays.

Honorable mention: Chief Bender

Cleveland Indians: Dave Winfield

Over a 22-year career, Winfield collected 3,110 hits and 465 home runs, but by 1995 he was MLB's oldest player by two years, at 43. A full-time DH at this point, he hit .191/.285/.287 and didn't make the AL champions' postseason roster.

Honorable mention: Harold Baines

Detroit Tigers: Larry Doby

A tremendous player in addition to breaking the AL's color barrier in 1947, Doby stayed with the Indians through '55. After a few years with the White Sox, he returned to Cleveland in '58, but a year later, the Indians dealt him to Detroit for Tito Francona, the father of the Tribe's current manager. After a grand total of 18 games and 12 hits with the Tigers, Doby was purchased by the White Sox, for whom he played his final 21 contests.

Honorable mention: Eddie Mathews

Houston Astros: Randy Johnson

This was no swan-song situation. Between his excellent stint with the Mariners and streak of four straight NL Cy Young Awards for the D-backs, Johnson was a 1998 Trade Deadline pickup by a Houston club that won 102 games and the NL Central (its home at the time). In 11 starts down the stretch, Big Unit threw [four shutouts](#), posted a 1.28 ERA and struck out 12.4 batters per nine innings, but he took two hard-luck losses as the Astros fell to the Padres in the NLDS.

Honorable mention: Robin Roberts

Kansas City Royals: Gaylord Perry

The first to win a Cy Young Award in both leagues, Perry pitched for eight teams, including 10 games for the 1980 Yankees. In June '83, a year after he picked up his 300th win, the 44-year-old was released by the Mariners and signed with the Royals, in time to [play a role](#) in the famous George Brett pine tar incident. Perry finished up his career with a 96 ERA+ over 14 starts with K.C.

Honorable mention: Orlando Cepeda

Los Angeles Angels: Rickey Henderson

MLB's all-time stolen-base king played for nine teams, tied for the most among Hall of Famers -- and that doesn't count the repeat stints he had with multiple clubs. In August 1997, the Padres traded the 38-year-old to the Halos, and he hit a mere .183 over 32 games, though he still posted a .343 OBP and swiped 16 bags. That was hardly the end for Henderson, who suited up in six more seasons.

Honorable mention: Eddie Murray

Minnesota Twins/Washington Senators: Lefty Gomez

All 189 of Grove's wins came for the Yankees. New York released him after the 1942 season, and so did the Boston Braves before he threw a pitch for the club. Grove got one more shot, with the Senators, but he lasted a single start, giving up four runs over 4 2/3 innings against the White Sox on May 30, 1943.

Honorable mention: Steve Carlton

New York Yankees: Lee Smith

Smith's 478 career saves rank third on the all-time list, but only three of those came in pinstripes. By that point, Smith was 35 years old and already had starred for the Cubs, Red Sox and Cardinals. With a month left to go before he reached free agency, St. Louis dealt him to the Yankees, who were trailing a tight division race to the Blue Jays. New York couldn't close the gap, but Smith made eight scoreless appearances before signing with Baltimore.

Honorable mention: Iván Rodríguez

Oakland Athletics: Orlando Cepeda

Though he was an NL MVP Award winner with St. Louis and went into the Hall with a San Francisco cap, Cepeda appeared very briefly across the Bay. In June 1972, the Braves traded him to the A's for pitcher Denny McLain. Cepeda, then 34 and battling knee problems, made three appearances as a pinch-hitter, went 0-for-3 and was done for the year. Fortunately for Cepeda, the addition of the DH in '73 gave him one more productive season -- with the Red Sox.

Honorable mention: Willie McCovey

Seattle Mariners: Goose Gossage

Like Henderson, Gossage played for nine teams, and he also had a 28-game stint with the Fukuoka Hawks of Japan's Pacific League in 1990. He returned to the Majors the next year, bouncing from Texas to Oakland to Seattle, where he made 36 appearances before the strike arrived and his career ended. In the very last of those, the 43-year-old tossed three perfect innings for his 310th save.

Honorable mention: Henderson

Tampa Bay Rays: Wade Boggs

Thus far, Boggs is the only Hall of Famer to have played for the then-Devil Rays. His final two seasons coincided with the franchise's first two, and despite being in his 40s, Boggs still managed to bat .289/.360/.391 (94 [OPS+](#)) over 213 games, notching his 3,000th hit with a homer on Aug. 7, 1999.

Honorable mention: none

Texas Rangers: Vladimir Guerrero

After eight seasons in Montreal and six more in Anaheim, Vladdy moved across the AL West to Texas via free agency. Then 35, Guerrero wasn't quite the terrifying force he once was, but still hit .300 with 29 homers and 115 RBIs and made the last of his nine All-Star teams. After going 1-for-14 in the Rangers' World Series loss to the Giants, Guerrero departed for Baltimore, where he played his final season.

Honorable mention: Gossage

Toronto Blue Jays: Phil Niekro

Niekro debuted with 1964 Milwaukee Braves, as a teammate of Warren Spahn and finished with one game for the '87 Atlanta Braves, who had a rookie named Tom Glavine. Over those 24 seasons, the knuckleball artist threw 5,404 innings, more than any other pitcher who started his career after 1907. Twelve of those innings came for the Jays in '87, in between stints with Cleveland and Atlanta. By that time, Niekro was 48. Since then, only Jamie Moyer has pitched at an older age.

Honorable mention: Frank Thomas

Arizona Diamondbacks: Roberto Alomar

The 12-time All-Star second baseman signed with Arizona in 2004, at age 36, and played only 38 games, thanks in large part to an errant pitch that broke his right hand in April. On Aug. 4, Alomar went 4-for-5, lifting his D-backs line to .309/.382/.473 before he was traded back to the White Sox for his final 18 contests.

Honorable mention: none

Atlanta/Milwaukee/Boston Braves: Cy Young

The man for whom the award is named was 44 when the Cleveland Naps released him in August 1911. He quickly signed with Boston, which recently changed its name from Beaneaters to Doves to Rustlers, which lasted just that season before giving way to Braves. The Rustlers went a horrific 44-107, yet Young managed to go 4-5 with a 102 ERA+ over 11 starts, bringing his final win total to an unapproachable 511.

Honorable mention: Babe Ruth

Chicago Cubs: Hoyt Wilhelm

It wasn't until 1952, when he was 29, that Wilhelm debuted with the New York Giants. The knuckleballer made up for lost time, pitching 21 seasons for nine teams. At age 47 in 1970, Wilhelm made his fifth and final All-Star team, but shortly before season's end, the Braves sold him to the Cubs, for whom he made three relief appearances. Chicago traded him back to Atlanta after the season, and Wilhelm finally pitched his last game in July 1972 with the Dodgers, 16 days shy of his 50th birthday.

Honorable mention: Jimmie Foxx

Cincinnati Reds: Christy Mathewson

In July 1916, the Giants traded Mathewson -- beset by age and injury -- to the Reds so he could take over as Cincy's manager. That's what he did, but near the end of a 93-loss campaign, Mathewson stepped to the mound one last time, facing fellow future Hall of Famer Mordecai Brown, who also was making his last start. On a day honoring Brown in Chicago, Mathewson surrendered eight runs on 15 hits in a complete game -- but earned his 373rd victory as Brown gave up 10 runs on 19 hits.

Honorable mention: Al Simmons

Los Angeles Dodgers: Juan Marichal

Yes, the greatest pitcher in San Francisco Giants history was, briefly, a member of the hated Dodgers. Mired in a late-career decline, Marichal was sold to the Red Sox after the 1973 season. He pitched 11 games for them in '74 and was released. He signed with L.A., but lasted

two starts, six innings and nine runs.

Honorable mention: Jim Thome

Miami Marlins: Mike Piazza

It's bizarre that a Hall of Fame catcher, in the thick of his prime at age 29, could be traded twice in an eight-day span, but that's exactly what happened in 1998. Piazza and the Dodgers couldn't work out an extension to keep him in L.A., which [sent him to the Marlins](#) in a blockbuster deal. The defending champs were conducting a fire sale, however, and quickly flipped Piazza to the Mets. His final tally with the Fish: five games, four starts, five hits, no homers and two games in his "home" ballpark.

Honorable mention: Trevor Hoffman

Milwaukee Brewers: Hank Aaron

After the 1974 season, Aaron was traded by the only franchise he had known (the Braves) but returned to the city where he spent his first 12 years in the Majors (Milwaukee). By that point already baseball's all-time home run king, Aaron also passed Babe Ruth for the RBI record in '75. He hit his final 22 homers for the Brew Crew (then an AL club) over two seasons and 222 games, smacking No. 755 on July 20, 1976, at County Stadium.

Honorable mention: Hoffman

New York Mets: Yogi Berra

A three-time MVP catcher for the Yankees, Berra switched to managing the club in 1964. Despite taking it to Game 7 of the World Series, Berra was fired, leading him to to join Casey Stengel's Mets -- then in their fourth season -- as a player-coach. The player half of the equation ultimately consisted of four games and two starts in May 1965. In the last of those, he went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts and hung up his spikes, telling his wife, "I didn't go out there to be embarrassed." Berra stayed with the Mets as a coach, however, and later skippered them to the 1973 World Series.

Honorable mention: Willie Mays

Philadelphia Phillies: Ryne Sandberg

In an eerie coincidence, Sandberg is one of two Hall Famers to begin his career with a short stint in Philadelphia before getting traded to the Cubs. Fergie Jenkins made eight relief appearances with Philly and was dealt in April 1966, 16 years before Sandberg went to Chicago in a disastrous swap. The season before, Sandberg went 1-for-6 for the Phillies. Over 15 years as a Cub, he picked up another 2,385 hits and became a 10-time All-Star second baseman.

Honorable mention: Jenkins

Pittsburgh Pirates: Joe Cronin

From 1900-27, Cronin was one of four men to play in 50 games or fewer with the Pirates prior to the age of 25 before going on to Hall of Fame careers elsewhere, joining High Pockets Kelly, Dazzy Vance and Rube Waddell. In the case of Cronin, Pittsburgh was a strong team in the 1920s and couldn't find room for Cronin, who got into 50 games at ages 19-20. He was sold to an American Association club but soon was purchased again, by the Washington Senators. Cronin then blossomed as a seven-time All-Star shortstop with a career 119 OPS+.

Honorable mention: Hank Greenberg

San Diego Padres: Greg Maddux

Maddux signed with the club as a free agent heading into his age-41 season in 2007 and made 60 starts in a Padres uniform over the next two years, reaching the 350-win mark along the way. He was traded to the Dodgers in August 2008, for the final few months of his career, retiring at age 42.

Honorable mention: Piazza

San Francisco Giants: Steve Carlton

"Lefty" was a four-time Cy Young Award winner when the Phillies released him in June 1986. He soon signed with the Giants, and in his sixth outing for them, whiffed the Reds' Eric Davis to become the second pitcher, after Nolan Ryan, to record 4,000 strikeouts. Afterward, Carlton announced his retirement, but he returned with the White Sox a week later and then pitched parts of two more seasons with the Indians and Twins.

Honorable mention: Duke Snider

St. Louis Cardinals: John Smoltz

The All-Star starter and closer pitched in 708 games for the Braves from 1988-2008, then split 15 games between two other clubs in his final season. Smoltz, recovering from shoulder surgery, initially signed with the Red Sox, debuted in late June and posted an 8.33 ERA over eight starts. After his release, the Cardinals picked him up and got better results (4.26 ERA) over seven outings. Smoltz's final appearance came in Game 3 of the NLDS, when the Cards were eliminated by the Dodgers.

Honorable mention: Dennis Eckersley

Washington Nationals/Montreal Expos: Randy Johnson

Ten years before he was a prize Deadline acquisition by the Astros, the Big Unit was a rookie who made four promising starts with the 1988 Expos. He pitched seven walk-filled games for Montreal the next season, then was traded that May to Seattle in a deal for fellow lefty Mark Langston.

Honorable mention: Smith

GET A GRIP (From WSJ forwarded by a subscriber)

Washington Nationals hitting coach Kevin Long has been playing and coaching baseball for decades. He has to go back much further to think of someone who swung a bat like Josh Harrison.

"Most of the time when I had seen it," Long says, "I had seen it in a black and white photo."

Harrison is a do-it-all infielder and outfielder, and at 33 years old he has reinvented himself and rejuvenated his game by radically changing the most fundamental aspect of his job: how he holds a baseball bat. Unlike practically every other baseball player, from the peewees to the pros, he keeps his hands inches apart.

The split grip might seem like a simple tweak in a world in which athletes spend entire careers adjusting tiny points of mechanics. Most are too subtle for the untrained eye to pick up.

But Harrison's approach is downright jarring in 2021. He is the one baseball player who comes to the plate as if he's wielding a sledgehammer. And even stranger than how it looks is how well it's working: he's fifth among qualified MLB second basemen in on-base plus slugging.

"As for now, I wouldn't change too much with the way he's going," Long says.

Almost everything in baseball lends itself to unique quirks. Pitchers have varying wind-ups. Batters have different stances. The Mets invent hitting coaches and imaginary rodents to cover up tension behind the scenes. But the way hitters hold a bat is near universal. The first lesson in Little League usually involves teaching kids to rest one hand atop the other and swing away.

For most of his career, Harrison was one of those players. Then he had a problem. A broken hand made him a baseball player who could no longer properly hold a baseball bat.

"Physically, I just couldn't do it," he says.

Harrison, who debuted with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 2011, was once among the game's more exciting young talents. He had pop, speed and could play almost anywhere in the field. He finished in the top 10 of MVP voting in 2014 and made the All-Star Game in 2014 and 2017. Every MLB team would have been lucky to have a Josh Harrison.

Harrison was also an unusual magnet for baseballs. When he dug into the batter's box against the Cincinnati Reds for a September game in 2017, he had already been hit by a league-leading 22 pitches that season. Then the 23rd came on a 95 mile per hour fastball that cracked a bone in his left hand.

The injury ended Harrison's year. He returned the next April, only for the problem to bizarrely repeat itself. This time, a 96 mile-per-hour fastball broke the exact same bone.

So Harrison spent an inordinate amount of his recovery time thinking about hands. He had just broken the same one in the same way twice in seven months. He'd also torn a ligament in his left thumb years earlier. In each of those instances, he did one-handed drills just to try to stay ready. But by the time he recovered, something was still troubling him.

"My hands didn't work together the way that they did," he says.

Harrison struggled for the rest of the 2018 season and then turned in a career-worst performance in 2019 for the Detroit Tigers. Realizing he needed to make a change in order to save his career, he had a pretty good sense of where to start. He began tinkering with his grip simply so he could hold the bat comfortably again.

This year, he took it to an extreme, introducing a wider gap between his hands so that timber was clearly visible. His coaches had never seen anything like it. But that's not because Harrison invented it. It's only because they weren't old enough.

"It makes me think of Ty Cobb 100 years ago," said Dr. Glenn Fleisig, the president of the American Baseball Biomechanics Society and research director at the American Sports Medicine Institute.

Players like Cobb once made the split grip a normal sight, but it has fallen out of favor so dramatically that Fleisig never thought it was worth delving into its effects. But one related study he worked on may hold some clues.

In 2010, a team of researchers examined how swings change when batters grip their bats at the bottom and when they choke up, holding it farther from the knob. The findings confirmed what hitters already knew. Choking up reduced swing time by about 10%, explaining why it has long been the recommendation against pitchers who throw faster. But that edge comes at the cost of a reduced linear bat velocity. In other words, choking up favors contact over power.

Harrison is living proof. This year, he has specifically excelled at making contact. He's striking out in just 12% of his plate appearances, his lowest rate since becoming an everyday player and far beneath the league-average, an all-time high 21%. What he notices most is that split allows him to manipulate the bat through the zone as he chases the ball. "It's more of a bat control thing," he says.

Long, his hitting coach, explains that the peculiar style emphasizes the top hand through the swing. And at a time when the modern game places huge emphasis on hitting the ball in the air, Long points out that the split grip helps prevent that swing from becoming too loopy, causing hitters to miss underneath the ball.

That's why Long brings the split grip into some of his drills. As he and his players focus on guiding the bat through the zone, he gives them a special bat where they put their hands up to a foot apart. The sessions look like lumberjack practice. And for most players, that's where the tinkering stops.

"To take it into the game with a couple inches in between is not something that I'm too familiar with," Long says.

AS ALWAYS GREAT STUFF FROM JAYSON STARK

Shohei Ohtani played right field last week – after he'd just pitched seven innings, *striking out 10*

Ten strikeouts – then a trip to the “9” portion of your scorecard (right field)? Was that as incredible as it sounds? Correct answer: Of course it was! Because according to our amigos at STATS Perform, only one other man in modern history had ever piled up double digits on the mound and also played right field in the same game.

But what happened that day – Sept. 28, 1952 – had pretty much nothing in common with what happened this day. In that game, Harvey Haddix started for the Cardinals. And walked the leadoff hitter. And then headed for right field – *with nobody out in the first inning* – so (take a deep breath) *Stan Musial* could come in and pitch *for the only time in his career*.

Hold on. What? Right. It was all because Frank Baumholtz was coming up for the Cubs. And Musial was battling Baumholtz for the batting title. So Musial’s manager, Eddie Stanky, thought it would be cool for Stan the Man to battle him *literally*. We are not making this up.

So Musial pitched to Baumholtz, who got so into the spirit of it, he decided to bat right-handed for the first and last time. Musial threw one pitch. Baumholtz bounced it to third, where third baseman Solly Hemus clanked it for an error. Then back went Musial to the outfield. And Haddix returned to the mound – and struck out 11.

But unlike that sideshow, Ohtani was a pitcher on a mission, emptying the tank for seven innings and then moving to right. So that wasn’t the same thing at all.

A guy named Mark Koenig for the 1930 Tigers got banged for 10 runs and then moved to the outfield after pitching 7 innings. Others who did it?

BABE RUTH! Here’s a shocker. Ruth actually wound up as the winning pitcher in this game against the Tigers on June 13, 1921. Spun five sparkling innings on the mound. Spent the last four innings in center. Also hit two homers and reached base four times. #Legend

CATFISH HUNTER! Apparently, this is a Hall of Famer kind of thing, because Cafish went the first 8 2/3 of a win over the Tigers on June 18, 1967. Then his manager, Alvin Dark, pointed him over to first base and brought in a left-handed reliever (Tony Pierce) to whiff Gates Brown for the final out.

But other than a 1920 Ruth game in which the Babe spent four innings on the mound and five in right field, everyone else who started a game on the mound and finished it somewhere else in the field did it as basically a gimmick. Ohtani, on the other hand, is literally *changing the world*, in a Ruthian kind of way.

He’s now up to 40 strikeouts this season as a pitcher. But he’s also he’s tied for the league lead in homers as a hitter. Well, in the history of baseball, only one man has ever done that (led his league in homers as a hitter, piled up 40+ K’s as a pitcher). Guess who?

Yep. In 1918, that Babe Ruth person tied for the league lead in homers in his part-time hitter job, but also struck out 40 on the mound in his occasional pitcher job. That’s a record that seemed destined never to be broken – until Ohtani caught the Babe in punchouts in Houston. Of course,

now Ohtani has to finish the deal by also leading the league in home runs. But why would we bet against that?

Three HR champs have struck out 10 batters in the season they were HR champ (as many as Ohtani struck out in one game). Ruth in 1918 and 1919 and Jimmy Ryan in 1888.

He's averaging 14.0 K's per 9 innings! That's more than Shane Bieber, Tyler Glasnow, Gerrit Cole, Trevor Bauer or Max Scherzer.

He's gotten 21 extra-base hits! That's more than anyone in the American League. But meanwhile on the mound, he has only allowed two extra-base hits! That's the fewest of any pitcher in baseball who has pitched as many innings as he has. *This is happening. In real life.*

He has a 207 ERA+! That's better than Scherzer, Glasnow or Bauer.

He has a 139 OPS+! That's better than Mookie Betts, Juan Soto or Nolan Arenado.

He's slugging .574! Which is higher than Vladdy Guerrero Jr., Giancarlo Stanton or José Ramírez. And *it's almost 400 points higher* than the hitters who have to face him. Those poor people are slugging .195.

AND FROM THE BRILLIANT JOE POSNANSKI

The [new baseball](#) is having a larger effect on the game than intended.

MLB did warn teams across the league in an internal memo that the changes to the baseball might reduce offense slightly in 2021. But here's the thing about messing with the ball: The tiniest changes can have extreme effects, especially in the early days as the hitters adjust to it.

Devan Fink over at FanGraphs wrote a fascinating piece called "[Where did the homers go?](#)". I would recommend reading the whole thing, but, in short, he does a couple of interesting things. First, he chooses a certain type of hard-hit ball — in this case, he chooses batted balls with an exit velocity of 100 to 104 mph and a launch angle between 20 and 24 degrees — and compares what happened to those balls in April 2021 to April 2019.

In 2019, almost 60 percent of those balls were home runs. In 2021, it was about 25 percent.

That's a huge, huge difference. Now, it's true that many of those hard-hit balls are now doubles, which was probably part of the point of making the ball changes in the first place. But even more of those balls are now outs.

Second, he shows that home runs are down and outs are up on all fly balls with less than a 30-degree angle. At this moment, the batting average on all balls hit with less than a 30-degree

angle is .552, which sounds good but is actually the lowest on record. So batters are not only striking out more often, but they are also less likely to get hits when they do put the ball in play.

Of course, it's possible that hitters just need an adjustment period. Early signals are that while the new baseballs don't carry quite as well, they are bouncier, allowing for higher exit velocity hits. If this is true, you can see the strategy — yes, home runs will be down, but it will be in the hitters' best interest to stop going for home runs and start going for line drives because you can hit the ball harder than before, giving you a better chance of slamming the ball through the infield and/or into gaps. More balls in play should mean a better game.

Maybe that's what happens in the long run. But for now, hitters are putting fewer balls in play and, because defenses are so much better (and better prepared) and because fewer of those balls are becoming home runs, offense is in a frightening place. As of this writing, hitters are batting .233/.310/.391, with the lowest OPS in 20 years. Miley threw a no-hitter on Friday, [Sean Menaea](#) took one into the eighth, [John Means](#) threw [a no-hitter](#) on Wednesday, 14 different pitchers have gone at least seven innings and allowed just one hit, etc.

The Anti-Hit Parade

OK, the lack of hitting around baseball probably has been the most prominent topic of the season so far, and Wednesday was pretty typical. There were 15 games around baseball, and of the 30 teams, 10 scored one or zero runs. Another five teams scored two runs. Seattle got two-hit, which seems to be their default position, the Royals got three-hit (and lost their 10th in a row), the Rays had no chance at all against Cole and Chapman, etc.

But here's the big number: Games — this would include both teams — averaged 15.2 hits, or a lousy 7.6 hits per team.

That is almost exactly what teams are averaging per game *all season*, and if this keeps up, it will mark the fewest hits per game *in baseball history*. Take a look for yourself:

Fewest hits per game in baseball history:

1. 7.74 hits, 2021
2. 7.75 hits, 1908
3. 7.91 hits, 1968
4. 7.92 hits, 1909
5. 8.04 hits, 1906

This, friends, is an emergency. Teams are averaging fewer hits per game than they did in 1968, that crazy Year of the Pitcher, which led to all sorts of major changes to the game. It's actually worse now.

Well, overall offense is not worse — teams are actually scoring almost a full run more per game than they did in '68. But this is almost entirely because players are hitting a lot more home runs than they did then (yet still fewer than they have the last couple of years). But overall hitting is at a frightening low. And it's hard to see how things will change.

My [pal Mike Schur](#) thinks that MLB should ban the shift immediately. He texts about this more or less every day. I am somewhat agnostic on the shift — which is to say I wouldn't miss the shift in the slightest if they banned it — but I'm skeptical that banning the shift (dictating that teams have two fielders on each side of second base) will have much of an effect.

Meanwhile, my pal Brandon McCarthy thinks MLB should do a better job enforcing the strike zone, and that absolutely *could* have a huge impact if you believe what we're seeing early on in the Class-A Southeast League. In that league, most games have automated balls and strikes. They are using the Hawk-Eye system similar to [what they use in tennis](#), so it's not the super-advanced Statcast system, but even so, it is consistently based on the player's height.

And ... things are going kind of haywire. Walks have skyrocketed. And so have home runs. It's very early and low A-ball, so it's hard to make too many judgments about what is happening there. But it seems to me that two things are becoming more and more apparent:

1. The road baseball is on is not tenable. We cannot have games that get longer and longer (games are an average of 3 hours, 9 minutes, the second-longest in baseball history) while we get fewer and fewer hits. It just doesn't work.
2. The most direct avenue to changing what's going on, at least with offense, is to do *something* with the strike zone.

MAY 23, 2021

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

Good morning Baseball Fans. More no hitters, more dominant pitching, and an interesting look at the science of bats. Enjoy.

MISCELANEOUS STUFF

A subscriber emailed to say that last week's item on stolen base success rate being up was misleading. He is correct in that at current pace the total stolen bases this year in the majors will be 1,000 less than ten years ago. Success is up but volume is down. When a runner reaches 1B he attempts a stolen base about 6% of the time—that is the lowest since 1964.

The Twins sitting in last place in the AL central with MLB's worst record has been a surprise. A couple of their problems are in games involving new rules: They are 0-4 in seven-inning doubleheader games. And they are 0-7 in extra-inning games with the runner starting on second base.

Philadelphia's Alec Bohm has somehow grounded into 11 double plays in 44 games this year, which is on pace to smash Jim Rice's legendary 36 double play season of 1984. Overall double plays are down across MLB which makes sense with singles down.

Carlos Rodon of the White Sox opened game at Yankee Stadium on Friday with 5 straight K's. First pitcher to strike out the first five Yankees in NY since Sandy Koufax in 1962 World Series.

Same game, Rodon and Yankee starter Jordan Montgomery each struck out 10 or more with no runs and no walks. To my amazement, first time since 1900 that has been done.

Yankees have been struggling to have big offensive innings. Yankees are 0-11 in games which they allowed 5 or more runs. Yankees 17 of 56 HRs have been with men on base (30%), lowest % in baseball.

Yankees have had 20 runners thrown out on the bases (most in MLB) and 10 thrown out at home (most in MLB).

On the plus side, the Yankees had four straight starts with 7 or more shutout innings, their best stretch since 1932 featuring Red Ruffing and Lefty Gomez.

Braves beat the Pirates this week 20-1, hit seven HRs including a pair of grand slams.

Most three-homer games in Reds history--Joey Votto and Johnny Bench (3 each)

In 2013, 21-year-old Mike Trout became the youngest player in American League history to hit for the cycle. Youngest player ever to achieve the feat--Hall of Famer Mel Ott (in 1929, at the age of 20 years and 75 days old)

How good a hitter was Ruth? He had a lifetime batting average of .342. But wait, his babip (batting average on balls in play, not counting home runs) is .340. So without a single home run, he's still a .340 hitter. In fact, his highest season babip was .423, the highest of anyone since 1920.

Max Scherzer struck out Ian Happ of the Cubs this week to move past Jim Bunning into 19th place on Major League Baseball's all-time strikeout leaderboard as the 2,856th of his career. With his contract up at the end of the year, should the Nationals fall out of contention by the trade deadline, Scherzer would be an interesting hired gun for a contender to trade for.

3 team mates with 40 HRs Each

The first to do so were the Atlanta Braves in 1973 when the trio of Hank Aaron hit 40 HRs, 3B Darrell Evans hit 41, and 2B Davey Johnson hit 43. And the ball wasn't juiced!

The other times the feat has been accomplished have been done by the Colorado Rockies. Rockies teams did it in 1996 (Andres Galarraga 47, Ellis Burks 40, and Vinny Castilla 40) and repeated the feat in 1997 (Larry Walker 49, Galarraga 41, Castilla 40).

BRAVO COREY KLUBER

It was fun to watch. Kluber carved up the Rangers for nine strikeouts on just 101 pitches. His best and most used pitch was the curveball -- which is tight and firm like a slider -- and it generated seven whiffs on 12 swings (58 percent whiff rate).

He joins:

July 18, 1999: David Cone
Yankees 6, Expos 0 (Perfect Game)

Yogi Berra caught Don Larsen's ceremonial first pitch as part of Yogi Berra Day at Yankee Stadium in commemoration of the battery-mates' perfect game in 1956, David Cone was perfect against the Montreal Expos.

In front of a crowd of 41,930, Cone retired 27 straight hitters, recorded 10 strikeouts and never reached a three-ball count. Cone needed just 88 pitches to throw his first interleague perfect game, the 16th in MLB history.

May 17, 1998: David Wells
Yankees 4, Twins 0 (Perfect Game)

Wells went to the same high school in San Diego as Don Larsen.

May 14, 1996: Dwight Gooden
Yankees 2, Mariners 0

241st no-hitter in baseball history and eighth Yankee regular-season no-no in front of 20,786 fans.

The right-hander walked six batters and allowed another baserunner on a Tino Martinez error in the top of the sixth, but he struck out five, including eventual Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. twice. Gooden threw 134 pitches to finish the job.

September 4, 1993: Jim Abbott
Yankees 4, Indians 0

Against a lineup that featured Kenny Lofton, Manny Ramirez and Jim Thome, the Yankees one-handed pitcher threw 119 pitches to stymie the Indians, while allowing five walks and striking out three.

July 4, 1983: Dave Righetti
Yankees 4, Red Sox 0

Righetti pitched his gem against the Red Sox, striking out nine batters and walking four to throw the Yanks' first no-hitter since 1956. In front of 41,077 at Yankee Stadium, Righetti also became the first left-hander to accomplish the feat for New York since '77.

In '86, Righetti now moved to the bullpen had the most saves in the Majors, with 46, to become the first player in history to pitch a no-hitter and lead MLB in saves in his career.

October 8, 1956: Don Larsen
Yankees 2, Dodgers 0 (Perfect Game)

In Game 5 of the 1956 World Series, Larsen struck out seven hitters in front of a packed house of 64,519 in the Bronx to complete the first and only perfect game in the history of the Fall Classic.

The closest that the Brooklyn Dodgers came to picking up a hit was when Jackie Robinson laced a line drive that popped off the glove of third baseman Andy Carey in the second inning, which shortstop Gil McDougald was able to field in time to throw out.

On the 97th pitch of the game, Larsen struck out pinch-hitter Dale Mitchell, who checked his swing but was rung up by home plate umpire Babe Pinelli. Berra ran from behind the plate and leaped into Larsen's arms, creating one of the most iconic moments in baseball history.

September 28, 1951: Allie Reynolds
Yankees 8, Red Sox 0

Just two months after throwing a no-hitter against the Indians, Reynolds completed the feat again against the Red Sox. The right-hander took care of Game 1 of a doubleheader by striking out nine and walking four.

With two outs in the ninth, Reynolds got Ted Williams to pop up to Berra in foul territory, but Berra was unable to make the play, which resulted in an error. Despite prolonging Williams' at-bat, the right-hander forced another popup to Berra that ended the game.

Reynolds became the first AL pitcher to throw two no-hitters in a season, and he was only the second player to do so in MLB history at the time.

July 12, 1951: Allie Reynolds
Yankees 1, Indians 0

Facing his former team, Reynolds threw his first no-hitter of the 1951 season at Cleveland Stadium in front of 39,195. Just four Indians reached base, via three walks and an error by Phil Rizzuto, before Reynolds retired the final 17 hitters.

Reynolds' no-hitter was one of his career-high seven shutouts that he pitched that season, three of which came against the Indians.

August 27, 1938: Monte Pearson
Yankees 13, Indians 0

In the second game of a doubleheader against the Indians -- and on just two days of rest -- Pearson pitched the first Yankee no-hitter on their home turf. Pearson was untouchable, striking out seven hitters and walking just two.

September 4, 1923: Sam Jones
Yankees 2, A's 0

Exactly 70 years before Abbott's no-hitter, Sad Sam Jones was nearly perfect against the Philadelphia A's, allowing just one walk and one other baserunner on an error by Everett Scott at Shibe Park. And he accomplished the feat despite striking out zero batters through the entire nine innings.

April 24, 1917: George Mogridge
Yankees 2, Red Sox 1

Although Mogridge was responsible for the first no-hitter in Yankee history and the first at Fenway Park, it didn't come easily, as the Red Sox were still able to get a run on the board.

Mogridge walked three batters and struck out three, but he had to overcome three Yankee errors in front of a crowd of 3,219 to complete the no-hit game.

ANOTHER WEEK, ANOTHER TWO NO HITTERS

The Tigers Spencer Turnbull against the Mariners and then one night Later Corey Kluber of the Yankees against the Rangers.

This was the eighth time there have been multiple no-hitters thrown in a two-day span or shorter, and the first time since Dave Stewart (A's) and Fernando Valenzuela (Dodgers) each threw one

on June 29, 1990. The last time there was a no-no on consecutive days? April 30-May 1, 1969, when Jim Maloney (Reds) and Don Wilson (Astros) threw them against each other's teams.

There have been six no-hitters this season, the most we've ever seen before June in a single season. Four of them have come this month, tying June 1990 for the most no-hitters in a calendar month in MLB history

The record for most no-hitters in a season is eight (1884), and the modern-era record (since 1900) is seven (1990, 1991, 2012, 2015).

The last four no-hitters have all come in the last 15 days. That's tied for the most no-hitters in any 15-day span in MLB history, with 1917 -- when there were four in a 13-day stretch from April 24 through May 6, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

There has been a definite pattern to the no-hitters this season -- namely, the teams they have come against. Two pitchers have no-hit Cleveland (Carlos Rodón, Wade Miley). Two pitchers have no-hit Seattle (John Means, Turnbull). And now two pitchers have no-hit Texas as well, with the Padres' Joe Musgrove having beaten Kluber to the punch, on April 9, also at Globe Life Field.

This is the first time we've had three teams no-hit twice in a season. Before 2021, there was only one other season in which two teams were no-hit twice. That was 2015, with the Mets and Dodgers. No team has been no-hit three times in a season.

Coming into 2021, only five teams had ever been no-hit twice at home in the same season: the 2015 Mets, 2001 Padres, 1973 Royals, 1971 Reds and 1923 A's. Less than two months into this season, two more teams have joined that list: the Mariners and the Rangers.

Kluber's no-hitter was the 12th in Yankees history, including the postseason, but the team hadn't thrown one since July 18, 1999, when David Cone threw a perfect game against the Expos. That was the eighth longest drought of any team entering the night. In fact, the Yankees had not even come close to a no-no in recent years. According to YES Network, Phil Hughes (April 21, 2010, at Oakland) was the last Yankee to even carry a bid through the seventh inning.

That's not the only connection to Cone. At 35 years and 39 days old, Kluber became the first pitcher to throw his first career no-hitter at age 35 or older since Cone in 1999, according to STATS.

Kluber threw 101 pitches, tied for the third-fewest in any individual no-hitter since 2015. Lucas Giolito also threw 101 pitches in his no-no last season against the Pirates. The only pitchers with fewer pitches in a no-hitter in that span were Edinson Volquez (98 in 2017) and James Paxton (99 in 2018).

Kluber, of course, is one of the most accomplished pitchers of his generation. Despite being a late bloomer -- he debuted at age 25 and didn't pitch his first full season until 27 -- he entered Wednesday with two Cy Young Awards to his credit. Kluber, who won with Cleveland in 2014

and '17 (and finished third two other years) is one of 21 multiple-time Cy winners in history. He's now one of 14 to *also* throw a no-hitter, an illustrious list that includes three other active pitchers: Clayton Kershaw, Max Scherzer and Justin Verlander.

While this was Kluber's first no-hitter, it was hardly his first gem. The righty has 18 career complete games (most in MLB since 2014) and eight shutouts (tied with Kershaw for the most). This was his 11th complete game allowing three hits or fewer, the most in MLB over that span. That includes a one-hitter, when the Twins' Joe Mauer homered to spoil a potential no-no on Aug. 14, 2015.

Kluber actually was with the Rangers in 2020, following a December 2019 trade from Cleveland. But Kluber's tenure in Texas lasted just one inning on July 26 before an injury shelved him for the rest of the season.

Still, Kluber counts as a former Ranger, which makes him only the third pitcher, per Elias, to no-hit a team he pitched for in the previous season (or earlier in that same season). The others were the Phillies' Terry Mulholland against the Giants on Aug. 15, 1990, and Cleveland's Ray Caldwell against the Yankees on Sept. 10, 1919.

AND BRAVO GERRIT COLE

[Yankees](#) right-hander [Gerrit Cole](#) set an MLB record for strikeouts without a walk on Monday, extending his streak to 61 before walking [Joey Gallo](#) in the third inning against the [Rangers](#).

Cole, who had not walked a batter since April 12, broke the record of 58 [set last week](#) by [Brewers](#) starter [Corbin Burnes](#). Burnes had broken Cole's previous record of 56, set when he struck out 12 in his last start.

For the season, Cole has 85 strikeouts and five walks in 57 2/3 innings. Two of those walks came on Monday, as Cole allowed a season-high five runs in five innings pitched. The Rangers defeated the Yankees 5-2, dropping Cole's record to 5-2 and raising his ERA to 2.03.

WHO WAS THIS GUY?

May 1952. Pirates 19 year old minor league pitcher Ron Necciai threw a perfect game and struck out all 27 batters. Only time that has happened in professional baseball. Pitched for Bristol, VA in the Appalachian League. In his first game that year he struck out 20 while walking 4. Next game 19 K's. The 11 of 12 batters faced in relief.

In his very next start, Necciai struck out 24 in nine innings. 51 strikeouts in two games (you may recall Jacob deGrom's recent MLB record of [50 in](#) four games). That's 25 1/2 K's per nine.

After that start (and after striking out 109 hitters in 43 innings), Necciai was called up to the Carolina League, where he continued to decimate batters. He struck out a league-high 176 hitters in just two months.

in August of '52, he was called up to the bigs. The 20-year-old quickly found out the difference between the Major and Minor Leagues. Hitters were much more patient and aware of the strike zone. The rookie went 1-6 with a 7.08 ERA, while putting up 31 strikeouts and 32 walks.

After that summer, Necciai was drafted to fight in the Korean War, but was quickly discharged because of ulcer problems. While trying to get back into baseball shape, he tore his rotator cuff and lost that fireballing bite on his fastball. He pitched another season in the Minors in '55, but the injury was too much to keep going. At age 23 he was done.

HALL OF FAMERS WHO PLAYED FOR THE MOST TEAMS

Brouthers, Dan – 11

Gossage, Goose – 9

Henderson, Rickey – 9

White, Deacon – 9

Wilhelm, Hoyt – 9

O'Rourke, Jim – 8

Perry, Gaylord – 8

Smith, Lee – 8

Alomar, Roberto – 7

Grimes, Burleigh – 7

Hoyt, Waite – 7

Kelly, King – 7

Simmons, Al – 7

HALL OF FAMERS WHO PLAYED FOR ONE TEAM

There are 234 former Major League Baseball players in The Baseball Hall of Fame. But only 54 of them played for only one team in their career. 29 played since I started following baseball. See how many you can think of before scrolling down the list.

Mariano Rivera: New York Yankees (1995-2013)

Kirby Puckett: Minnesota Twins (1984-1995)

Chipper Jones: Atlanta Braves (1993-2012)

Edgar Martinez: Seattle Mariners (1987-2004)

Tony Gwynn: San Diego Padres (1982-2001)

George Brett: Kansas City Royals (1973-1993)

Carl Yastrzemski: Boston Red Sox (1961-1983)

Johnny Bench: Cincinnati Reds (1967-1983)

Barry Larkin: Cincinnati Reds (1986-2004)

Craig Biggio: Houston Astros (1988-2007)

Jeff Bagwell: Houston Astros (1991-2005)

Al Kaline: Detroit Tigers (1953-1974)

Roberto Clemente: Pittsburgh Pirates (1955-1972)

Willie Stargell: Pittsburgh Pirates (1962-1982)

Jim Rice: Boston Red Sox (1974-1989)

Cal Ripken, Jr.: Baltimore Orioles (1981-2001)

Brooks Robinson: Baltimore Orioles (1955-1977)

Jim Palmer: Baltimore Orioles (1965-1984)

Bob Gibson: St. Louis Cardinals (1959-1975)

Derek Jeter: New York Yankees (1995-2014)

Mickey Mantle: New York Yankees (1951-1968)

Ernie Banks: Chicago Cubs (1953-1971)

Mike Schmidt: Philadelphia Phillies (1972-1989)

Robin Yount: Milwaukee Brewers (1974-1993)

Alan Trammell: Detroit Tigers (1977-1996)

Bill Mazeroski: Pittsburgh Pirates (1956-1972)

Whitey Ford: New York Yankees (1950, 1953-67)

Don Drysdale: Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers (1956-1969)

Sandy Koufax: Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers (1955-1966)

Bob Feller: Cleveland Indians (1936-41, 1945-56)

Bob Lemon: Cleveland Indians (1946-1958)

Addie Joss: Cleveland Indians (1902-1910)

Pie Traynor: Pittsburgh Pirates (1920-35, 1937)

Ross Youngs: New York Giants (1917-1926)

Travis Jackson: New York Giants (1922-1936)

Bill Terry: New York Giants (1923-1936)

Bobby Doerr: Boston Red Sox (1937-44, 1946-1951)

Earle Combs: New York Yankees (1924-1935)

Bill Dickey: New York Yankees (1928-43, 1946)

Phil Rizzuto: New York Yankees (1941-42, 1946-56)

Roy Campanella: Brooklyn Dodgers (1948-1957)

Red Faber: Chicago White Sox (1914-1933)

Ted Lyons: Chicago White Sox (1923-42, 1946)

Charlie Gehringer: Detroit Tigers (1924-1942)

Luke Appling: Chicago White Sox (1930-43, 1945-50)

Mel Ott: New York Giants (1926-1947)

Carl Hubbell: New York Giants (1928-1943)

Ted Williams: Boston Red Sox (1939-42, 1946-60)

Stan Musial: St. Louis Cardinals (1941-44, 1946-63)

Lou Gehrig: New York Yankees (1923-1939)

Joe DiMaggio: New York Yankees (1936-42, 1946-51)

Jackie Robinson: Brooklyn Dodgers (1947-1956)

Pee Wee Reese: Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers (1940-42, 1946-58)

Walter Johnson: Washington Senators (1907-1927)

MORE FUN WITH LISTS

The chairman of the SABR Science and Baseball Committee published his top 13 centerfielders of all time (skipping the details of the algorithm:

1. Willie Mays
2. Oscar Charleston
3. Ty Cobb
4. Mickey Mantle
5. Tris Speaker
6. Mike Trout
7. Ken Griffey Jr.
8. Joe DiMaggio
9. Andruw Jones
10. Carlos Beltran
11. Andre Dawson
12. Kenny Lofton
13. Duke Snyder

DIGGING INTO BATS

His last hit in the major leagues should have been a home run. But, since Adam Rosales picked the wrong bat out of his bag, the last clip in his MLB highlight reel will forever be [a double to left field](#).

After his playing career concluded in 2018, Rosales sent all of his leftover bats to Keenan Long at LongBall Labs, where the engineer measured each one in a variety of ways, using experience he'd built up while working at one of the biggest bat manufacturers in baseball. Once he saw the results, Rosales was amazed by how much of a physical difference there was between the best bat in his bag and the worst one — all of them technically listed as the same weight and model. He was even more stunned when he realized that they might have made tangible differences on his stat sheet, like that between a double and a homer on his last ball in play in the big leagues.

More recently, Mitch Haniger and Jed Lowrie were at crossroads in their respective careers. Both had suffered debilitating injuries and had finally gotten the surgeries they needed, done the rehab and the grueling work to get back to big league shape and taken long, hard looks at every part of their games as they tried to come back from nearly two full years away.

That searching eventually led them to examine their bats.

When they did, sending them to Longball's main Chicago lab, both players were startled by the results — learning that they should probably get rid of about half the bats in their bags: The best bats in each one would offer as much as a 2-mph exit velocity difference over the worst in a given shipment.

"I weigh my bats all the time — when I was in High A in Florida, with the humidity there, my bats would soak up the water and get 1.5 ounces heavier — so I keep weighing them. When they get too heavy, I order more," said Haniger, now with the Mariners. "I was intrigued right away. I've always done the eye test and feel, and this went to the next level."

Lowrie hadn't been weighing his bats. But when he, too, was trying to get ready for the season, he had some time on his hands between sessions and thought about his main tool as a hitter.

"Once the idea was introduced it made sense," the A's infielder said. "It's attention to detail that got me to the big leagues, and how I've stayed here."

Players are inundated with product pitches for the new next big thing. The market for body-building supplements, bat-speed-building gadgets and data-collecting technology is bursting as players try to get an edge, and while some might offer an edge, many don't, so most players have a cautionary wall up when they hear about these kinds of new ventures. Individual bats are highly variable, and the concept of being able to measure that variability might easily have been lumped in with all the crazy that's out there. But as a free agent, Lowrie didn't see much downside.

"To be honest I was a little skeptical at first," Lowrie said. "The best way to describe myself as a hitter is as more of a feel hitter than some of the guys now. I was a little skeptical, but I thought I can at least get some exit velocities and use that for teams."

So he sent his bats to LongBall.

There, Long and Koby Close put the bats through a rigorous testing system that creates a one-number score called RIPz. Because Long worked for bat manufacturers for so long, he's aware of some of the mechanical sources of variability — like the fact that bats are usually sanded by hand, for example. But what really creates the variance is simply that the wood going in to create the bat can never be exactly the same, and that leads to big differences from bat to bat.

“No two bats are the same, and not only do they feel differently, they perform differently, and we have gobs and gobs of data on that,” Long says of the process. “Everything we’ve done is built around weaponizing this one discrepancy, that the bats aren’t the same because they’re made of wood, and no two trees are the same.”

Without endangering the company’s patent-pending process, Long was able to generally describe what they measure for each bat:

- Length
- Weight
- Weight distribution
- Relative density
- Consistency
- Cylindricity

“If you ask every single professional hitter who’s ever played, that when you get a dozen bats, really only three or four at most feel the same and feel good,” said the Cubs’ Eric Sogard. “There’s always that variety in wood; as players we just never knew the science, and we just accepted that was the fact. Every bat feels different; as pros we’re going to notice the little differences.”

Bobby Hillerich is a fourth-generation bat maker, fifth-generation woodworker, and part of half of the family that makes up Hillerich & Bradsby, the makers of Louisville Slugger bats. His company follows a strict quality assurance process at its Kentucky factory, aiming to keep the difference to less than a quarter-ounce difference from bat to bat.

The wood itself comes from a very specific place, on the border between two states in the Northeast.

“We do know because of the growing conditions, the weather, the altitude and the soil that there’s an ideal location for the wood: a 50- to 100-square-mile area in north Penn and southern New York,” Hillerich said. “If you go too far south, the density gets too light. If you go too far north, they get too dense. Those trees produce wood that is great structurally, but the grains are too tight and it’s too heavy for a bat.”

Even in that rarified area, some trees will be better than others for making bats.

“There’s all kinds of things you look for in the bark and the twist of the tree,” Hillerich said. “You look from the ground all the way up into the air, 30 feet.”

Once the wood is in hand, they get to work on preparing it.

“Once the wood is brought to the mill, we grade each log, then it’s split or tube-sawed, and then each one of those is graded — it’s going to get graded seven times before it’s finished,” Hillerich said. “The gentleman at the lathe will pick from a group that’s been broken down to half-ounce increments, and then we’ll grade it one more time to make sure it meets the player specs, with notes from what the player wants in terms of weight and grain.”

At Louisville Slugger, more is done by human hands than automation. Once a bat is sanded by a rotary sander, it’s handed to craftspeople for the finish.

“The knobs are cut off by hand, the finish is by hand, the spraying is by hand; it’s very detailed and hands-on,” Hillerich said. “They don’t yet have vision systems that will detect the difference between birch and ash and maple. Each one has different grains and defects, and the program would cost millions and millions of dollars to get right. Plus, it feels right for me to have our craftspeople making those decisions instead of depending on the machine.”

As awesome as that is, some possible human error can be introduced. When they train people at the saw mill to pick out the right pieces of wood, they hope that after the training, they get it right 40 out of 50 times. Despite the wood being graded seven times at the factory, human hands may slip here or there in the finishing process. Between the wood and the process, it’s very hard to get rid of all of the variation from bat to bat.

At the LongBall lab, they’ve seen bats from most of the 35-plus bat companies that are approved to produce bats for the major leagues, and among those was at least one bat that was 1.3 ounces off the listed weight. One major league hitter said off the record that he’d gotten bats that were “labeled wrong in inches, labeled wrong in weight, stamped wrong, and the only thing they got right was the color.”

But those more obvious differences, from bats that may have just slipped through a company’s quality assurance project, or have been stored in a humid environment too long, those differences aren’t really what LongBall is looking for; where this model shines is in its ability to be more refined, to help discern between bats that are all very similar. This complexity, this variability is replaced by a single number, a RIPz score on a label on each bat, that helps the player pick the right one.

“What sticks with me is the chance to get what they earned,” said Long, a former minor leaguer himself. “When you go up to the plate and hit a ball to the wall and the outfielder catches it at the wall, and nobody has looked at your bats, there’s only a 1 in 12 chance that you are swinging the best bat in your bag. Which means that there’s a 91% chance that you just got robbed of a home run by your bat.”

"If all other variables are equal, those ounces matter ... a lot," said one major league hitting coach who noted that one of his hitters tested his bats and ended up going with a lighter bat for more bat speed and is reaping big rewards.

Even if players can feel the difference between bats without help, some of their selection process sounds more like voodoo than science.

"I liked the thick grains when I played," Rosales said. "I thought: These grains are going to be the answer. Turns out, there's a lot more to the bat than the grains."

"I like to see the knots and how far the grains are apart," Haniger agreed. "But in my idea, all the bats that were heavier were going to score better. But certain bats were heavier and weren't grading out as well as the slightly lighter bats."

"We used to do the sound test where you hit the end of the bat with your hand, and it makes a sound, and the higher the pitch the better, like a guitar string, the tighter that pitch the better," said Pete Tucci, a former player who now makes bats.

The bat makers also care about these things and go through that rigorous process for selecting the right wood. Even so, though, the adherents of bat testing believe it goes hand in hand with all of the accumulated knowledge that produces these bats, separating good from great.

"In the first round of testing, they asked me, of the two bats I was testing, which one felt better," Lowrie said. "I took 80 swings and thought it was the same bat. They compiled the data, and it was the one I liked, and I said it felt like it was 1.5 mph to 2 mph better than the other one. They just started laughing. It was 1.4 mph. That was an 'oh shit' moment; what it felt like in my hand was backed up by the data."

Sometimes the extra testing leads to a change in bat, as it did for Sogard.

"We did quite a bit of testing in the offseason," said the Cubs infielder. "I was skeptical of the results at first because they were off the tee. I said I would be surprised if it continued against velocity. But we kept testing, and the lighter bat kept outperforming my older models. Around the game they say swing as big a bat as you can. But you have to create the bat speed — that's really what's creating the exit velocity — and since I can put the barrel to the ball, we went a little lighter to create the bat speed and got swing speeds that were 2 to 3 mph faster with the lighter bat."

Every player has his own ideal RIPz score, a golden bat that will mesh perfectly with his body and his swing to produce the greatest possible exit velocity; the player and the lab work together to figure out which ones of the 12 are in the ideal range, between the lab testing process and the additional field testing with the player. For both Haniger and Lowrie, about half

the shipment was demonstrably better than the other half, with Lowrie — after a few rounds of testing — eventually finding a golden RIPz score that gave him an extra 1.8 mph exit velocity on average (“with an almost zero p-value, like .003!” exclaimed Close, who does most of the data for the lab).

Remember those bats Rosales gave them? LongBall was able to measure and test them all and put them on a relative exit velocity scale. And then they were also able to put them in chronological order. Remember that bat he used to hit that last double? Check out where it sits relative to his other bats, and remember that each one of these bats was supposed to be the same length, weight and turning model.

There was about a 1-mph exit velocity difference between Rosales’ best bat and the one he used that day. Would it have been enough to make it a homer?

“Guys who hit hard would benefit a lot from an extra 1 mph across the board,” said one analyst. “And guys who hit softly might get hurt a bit. But overall, 1 mph of exit velocity should boost homers 3 percent.”

That’s already exciting to a player. Tom Tango, senior data architect at Major League Baseball’s Advance Media wing, which handles in-house player tracking and analytics structure, took it a step further and [modeled what a single mile-per-hour improvement would mean](#) overall for a batter.

What we can see here is that if the launch angle is kept constant, an extra mile per hour of velocity would give the batter .005 points of weighted on-base average, or the difference between the lifetime wOBAs of Mike Trout (.420) and Mark McGwire (.415). How much is that worth in a given season? Close estimated [more than three batting runs](#) on the average player; [using FanGraphs’ style](#), you get just below three runs. In either case, three runs is about a third of a win, and wins are valued on the open market between \$5 million and \$8 million dollars depending on your calculation.

It’s not a stretch to say that picking the right bat, day in and day out, could be a million-dollar decision for a player on a yearly basis.

Not everything about this new practice is settled. Some observers doubt that bat manufacturers would allow bats through the quality assurance process that would lead to this kind of difference in exit velocity produced.

Physics professor and MLB advisor Alan Nathan was uncertain that all of the variables measured by Long — weight distribution, relative density, cylindricality, etc. — make much of a difference and said he thought one variable would be the biggest driving factor in how balls perform off the bat.

“The only variation that could matter to exit velocities, that I imagine, is the weight,” Nathan said. “They go through a drying process, and they can measure the density of the wood. In the finishing process there might be some differences from bat to bat, but I can’t believe the effect would be as great from those things than from the weight variation.

“The weight could be different, but those bats are cut on a lathe, the wood is machined by a programmable lathe, and it’s hard to imagine those things could vary from one bat to another,” he continued. “If you’re creating a bat for a major league ballplayer, you’re not going to let that weight vary that much — it doesn’t seem reasonable that that would be the case. The wood is carefully selected, and there’s a quality control part of it.”

And of course, once players are in an actual game environment, it’s hard to isolate these changes in exit velocity and performance purely to the bat decision because there are so many moving parts, and the right bat wouldn’t make this writer into a major league hitter. Especially with the ball changing from year to year, it’s not wholly possible to simply say that Lowrie and Haniger are both now showing exit velocities at least a mile per hour better than they did in their last full seasons just because they’re being more precise about picking their bats.

“I always thought it was the driver, not the car,” Rosales said, laughing. “But I’m pretty old school. I would just mostly pull out a bat and it would be a flip of a coin — OK, this one has hits in it — I wouldn’t even test it out.”

“It’s not going to hit a curveball or help you recognize pitches better,” Lowrie said. “It’s just going to give you the best possible bat in your hands.”

And it’s also not time to vilify the bat companies for this variability in bats that Longball says it detects. At least a couple companies that make the bats are appreciative of what Long is doing.

“I’ve been swinging Tucci bats for I don’t know how long, and I absolutely love the bats,” Lowrie pointed out. “They’ve helped me refine the model I like. We took a while to develop the model; the quality is great, consistently. It’s just the shipments of wood. That’s just the way it works.”

“This is super cool,” said Tucci, the maker of those bats. “This is what we’re trying to do every day. We’re trying to be as consistent as possible, and make the best product possible, and now someone has come along that can quantify what we’re trying to do. There’s a definite synergy here. There might be ways we can work with them to make our supply even better, work on our supply chain to improve. I loved this the first time I heard about it.”

“Analytics are huge in baseball, because everyone wants that edge, everyone is looking for that edge,” said Hillerich.

Even if many of the bat companies dedicate their engineers to the larger, more lucrative metal bat sector, there’s only so much any bat company can do, anyway.

“What is driving this variability?” said Long. “The variability does not exist in the manufacturing as much as it exists in the raw material. If you are inputting a raw material that is variable, the output is going to be variable no matter what you do. That said, when the bat’s done with the big lathe, it goes on another, and a guy sands it with his hands, and he’s probably not doing the same sanding for each bat. There’s some variability in the process as well. But the biggest factor is the raw material variability that won’t ever go away. No two trees are alike.”

In the context of the growing field of technology and data in baseball, these efforts to tease out the best bats stand out for a couple of reasons. For one, it’s an innovation that benefits the hitter when so much that has come before has aided run prevention; it’s also super simple and doesn’t require players to change anything about their existing process. An enterprising front office could jump on this for all of their hitters. Instead, though, at least two forward-thinking front offices so far have reacted negatively to the testing process, which is strange when so much about baseball is already measured so precisely, and front offices usually use discrepancies like this to gain an advantage.

After asking around, those negative reactions could be seen through two lenses. There are some questionable sites out there that offer “bat hardening” services where they use a “wood hardening agent” to get better results. One team analyst thought that might be the case, which would make a team skeptical.

“LongBall Labs makes sure that our clients understand that our process does not involve altering the bats in any way,” said Long, and multiple clients confirmed that their bats did not look altered when they received them back.

Also, some teams want to do this in house and would prefer to do this sort of testing themselves.

“I’ve talked to one of the analytics guys here; they’re very open to it,” said Sogard of the Cubs. “They’re even trying to study ways to do it on their own, and other ways to help players get the most out of their bats, by studying where the ball is hitting the bat and then working with bat companies to see if they can move the density of the bat to that sweet spot.”

“We are working with a ball team and we’re going through a bunch of MOI (moment of inertia) testing to make sure we can tell the difference,” Hillerich said of the work at Louisville Slugger. “We decided we are going to work with a couple teams and perfect the testing process before we offer it. We started the project in December and it hasn’t borne enough fruit yet to make it part of the process. But in golf they do it all the time; the player comes in to do swing testing,

they fit you with a club. Someday we might be able to scope the wood with an MRI or X-ray machine to make sure that fit between bat and player is perfect. No telling what will happen in the future.”

It looks like there’s still some science left in the bat, and perhaps some bat companies are missing it because the metal bat market is so much larger and more lucrative. Even if they are just adding another layer of quality assurance to the process, LongBall Labs’ kind of precision should have value. Imagine if the difference between a double and a homer could be the bat a hitter took out of the rack. That happened to Rosales, most likely. Does he think his career might have lasted a little longer if it had been a homer?

“I won’t let my mind think like that,” Rosales laughed. “If this was around when I was playing, sure, it’s a layup, I’d be using it, but it wasn’t. There’s nothing I could do about it. There’s too much you can regret about this game.”

NO HITTERS (from Benjamin Hoffman of NYT)

Why Have There Been So Many No-Hitters in 2021?

Pitchers are better than ever. Hitters seem worse than ever. With six no-hitters by May 19, baseball is two away from tying the full-season record, which was set in 1884.

It had been less than 24 hours since Spencer Turnbull of the Detroit Tigers completed baseball’s [fifth no-hitter](#) of the 2021 season when Corey Kluber of the Yankees [threw the sixth](#).

The pitchers have remarkably different pedigrees — Turnbull led the majors in losses two seasons ago and Kluber has won two A.L. Cy Young Awards — but their achievements were celebrated with the same bells and whistles of a typical no-hitter: Wire services sent news alerts, MLB.com gave their box scores special badges, and the players celebrated wildly with teammates — or at least as wildly as Kluber, nicknamed Klubot for his stoicism, is capable of.

Turnbull, though, was obviously elated.

“It is by far the best night of my life, most exciting, and it’s definitely kind of like one of those landmark stamps on my career up to this point,” he said in a postgame video conference from Seattle in the early hours of Wednesday.

Those two no-hitters, and the four before them this season, have raised questions about how baseball could already have so many no-hitters so early in the year, and why they seem to be occurring at such an extraordinary rate.

Who has thrown a no-hitter this season?

Joe Musgrove, San Diego Padres (April 9 vs. Texas Rangers): In throwing [the first no-hitter in his franchise's long history](#), Musgrove allowed only one base runner, on a hit-by-pitch. He threw 112 pitches, but Manager Jayce Tingler was determined to let him see it through. "He was in control," Tingler said. "After the seventh inning, that's when we kind of put all the chips in. For Joe, for the team, for the organization, for the city that hadn't had a no-hitter before, at that point you throw everything out the window and you roll with it." ([Box Score](#))

Carlos Rodon, Chicago White Sox (April 14 vs. Cleveland): Rodon was [two outs from baseball's 24th perfect game](#) when he hit Roberto Perez with a pitch. "It just feels good to finally sit here and tell you I dominated today, and it felt good," Rodon said.

John Means, Baltimore Orioles (May 5 vs. Seattle Mariners): Like Musgrove, Means was [breaking a long streak for his franchise](#): No Baltimore starter had thrown a no-hitter on their own since Jim Palmer did so in 1969. Means had never thrown a complete game and said he was nervous entering the ninth inning. "I got a little bit of the Jell-O legs, started to feel a little wobbly," he said. "But once I threw that first pitch, I was able to lock in again."

Wade Miley, Cincinnati Reds (May 8 vs. Cleveland): Miley had to wait out an 83-minute rain delay before getting started, but he needed only 2 hours 34 minutes to record [baseball's fourth no-hitter of the season](#). "He put on a clinic," Cleveland Manager Terry Francona said.

Spencer Turnbull, Detroit Tigers (May 18 vs. Seattle): He said he did not feel right at all to start the game, but Turnbull, who led the majors in losses in 2019, made quick work of the Mariners, [striking out nine and allowing only two base runners on walks](#). "It got to a point I think the last four innings, I don't know if he shook one time," catcher Eric Haase said. "We were just in really great sync and whatever I was putting down he was throwing and he was executing."

Corey Kluber, Yankees (May 19 vs. Texas): A four-pitch walk to Charlie Culberson in the third inning was all that [stood between Kluber and perfection](#). But Kluber, in his first season in pinstripes after throwing only one inning for Texas last year because of injury, still managed the Yankees' first no-hitter since [David Cone's perfect game](#) in 1999. "There's a lot of things that have to go your way," Kluber said. "It's

definitely cool to do it in this uniform.”

Wait, didn't Madison Bumgarner throw one?

Sort of! Bumgarner, the former ace (and three-time World Series winner) of the San Francisco Giants shut out Atlanta on April 25, [and allowed no hits in the process](#). But because of doubleheader rules developed last season, the game was limited to seven innings. A 1991 ruling intended to eliminate rain-shortened no-hitters and other oddities made throwing at least nine complete innings a requirement for a game to be recognized as a no-hitter. Bumgarner's game will instead be classified as a “notable achievement.”

“I didn't give up any hits today,” Bumgarner said. “I'm not in control of how many innings we're playing.”

What is going on?

A number of factors are in play leading to the surge of no-hitters. Chief among them are an emphasis on power pitching and batters' having shown a willingness to sell out contact in order to increase power. Those factors, plus surgical deployment of high-quality relievers, has resulted in strange numbers across the board.

Teams were averaging 7.82 hits per game through May 19 — the second lowest mark in baseball history behind 1908, [according to Baseball Reference](#) — and were striking out a record 8.98 times a game. As a result, batters were hitting a record-low .236 and scoring was down significantly for a second consecutive season.

Another factor that has to be considered is control. Shutouts are almost entirely a thing of the past — there have been 15 this season, and there have been fewer than 40 in each season since 2015 — but the six pitchers who have thrown a no-hitter this season have kept their pitch counts low by employing remarkable control. Turnbull walked two batters and Miley and Kluber each walked one. The other three pitchers who threw a no-hitter this season didn't issue a single free pass.

Factor in colder weather in April and May, [a new baseball](#), advanced defensive positioning and other changes in the game and it has seemingly become a recipe for no-hitters becoming a common occurrence.

But you can't discount simple variance. While no-hitters come at a fairly predictable rate over long periods of time, they have frequently come in clumps and then gone long stretches without one.

This has to be a record pace, right?

Six no-hitters through May 19 edges 1917 for the fastest start in major league history. That season baseball raced to its fifth no-hitter by May 6 — despite not starting the season until April 11 — but did not get a sixth no-hitter until June 23.

With teams not having reached even 50 games each this season, and the season scheduled to go a full 162, matching the modern record of seven no-hitters (shared by multiple seasons) seems within reach, as does the overall record of eight, which was set in 1884.

But nothing is certain no matter how quickly no-hitters pile up. Baseball raced to five no-hitters in 1917, but finished with just six. That last no-hitter was certainly memorable: Babe Ruth of the Boston Red Sox walked the first batter of the game, got ejected for arguing balls and strikes (and struck the umpire behind the ear in an epic tantrum), only to have reliever Ernie Shore [erase the base runner on a caught stealing before retiring all 26 batters he faced](#).

Fast Start for No-Hitters

This is the 11th major league season with at least six no-hitters, and the sixth was reached earlier than ever. The modern record is seven in a season (1990, 1991, 2012, 2015) and the overall record is eight (1884).

Note: Seasons with six or more no-hitters are shown.

Source: Baseball Reference

By The New York Times

Do only the most dominant pitchers throw no-hitters?

Hardly. While Nolan Ryan was [the most unhittable pitcher](#) in major league history, and threw a record seven no-hitters, other dominant pitchers failed to throw one despite similar credentials — most notably Roger Clemens, Greg Maddux, Pedro Martinez, Steve Carlton and Grover Cleveland Alexander.

Among the current superstars who have yet to throw one: Gerrit Cole of the Yankees, Cleveland's Shane Bieber, Zack Greinke of the Houston Astros, and [Jacob deGrom of the Mets](#).

Meanwhile, Mike Fiers, a fairly uninspiring veteran for the Oakland Athletics, [has thrown two](#).

Where are the perfect games?

With all of these no-hitters it would seem logical that a perfect game would be mixed in, but baseball is in a strangely long stretch without one. Both Carlos Rodon and John Means came

tantalizingly close to perfection this season, but Felix Hernandez of the Seattle Mariners threw [baseball's last perfect game](#) on Aug. 15, 2012. That stretch of nearly nine years is the longest between perfect games since the gap of 13 years 7 days between [Catfish Hunter's masterpiece](#) on May 8, 1968, and [Len Barker's](#) on May 15, 1981.

What is Kyle Seager's secret?

Seattle, Cleveland and Texas have each been no-hit twice already this season, but things are starting to get weird for Kyle Seager, the Mariners' third baseman. As Christopher Kamka noted on Twitter, Seager has now been involved in nine no-hitters in his 11-season career: tied him with Reggie Jackson and Felipe Alou for second-most all-time, behind only Bert Campaneris' 11.

FOR:

Felix Hernandez 2012

Mariners combined 2012

Hisashi Iwakuma 2015

James Paxton 2018

AGAINST:

Phillip Humber 2012

Angels combined 2019

Astros combined 2019

John Means 2021

Spencer Turnbull 2021

Of course, Seager's odds of being involved in no-hitters are helped by the fact that his team was hitting a major league-worst .199 through May 18.

MAY 30, 2021

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

Good morning baseball fans. Some fun stuff this week as we come upon the 1/3 of the season mark.

I saw a terrific trivia question this week—name the two managers who have 1800 hits and 1800 managing wins. Joe Torre and Dusty Baker. I texted with a friend asking who else would be close—the list we kicked around:

Frank Robinson 2943 hits, 1065 wins

Don Mattingly 2153 hits, 777 wins

Alvin Dark 2089 hits, 884 wins

Lou Boudreau 1779 hits, 1162 wins

Lou Piniella 1705 hits, 1835 wins

Leo Durocher 1320 hits, 2008 wins

Davey Johnson 1252 hits, 1372 wins

Joe Girardi 1100 hits, 1007 wins

Billy Martin 777 hits, 1253 wins

Bobby Valentine 441 hits, 1086 wins

Bobby Cox 141 hits, 2504 wins

Umpire Joe West Tuesday night when he worked the 5,376th regular-season game of his illustrious career, eclipsing Bill Klem's record that stood for 80 years.

He began his Major League umpiring career at age 23 in 1976, and 45 years later, he stands alone atop the all-time games umpired list. West has umpired in three All-Star Games and six World Series.

West's record may never be broken. Umpires usually don't reach the Major Leagues before age 30, and once there do not work more than 120 games each season. It would take an umpire who never missed a game 45 years to threaten his mark.

West has appeared in more big-league games than Derek Jeter and Ozzie Smith combined.

He's been part of as many big-league seasons (41) as Cal Ripken Jr. and Bartolo Colon combined.

He's worked games in 51 ballparks, and games involving 67 Hall of Famers.

The only man in history who was part of more games on a big-league field than Joe West is Connie Mack (8,479 — 7,755 as a manager). And you could make the case that Mack almost never appeared on the field!

West has tossed 194 managers and players, 1 every 27.7 games. For contrast Bobby Cox was tossed 165 times in 4501 games—1 per 27.3 games.

Another great trivia question--only two players with gold glove & 35 HR five seasons in a row.

Willie Mays and Nolan Arenado. (I guessed Johnny Bench who had 10 gold gloves in a row but not even back to back 35 HR seasons).

Before Ronald Acuña Jr. and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. this week the last pair of players 23 years old or younger to rank in the top 2 in MLB in home runs (minimum 15 HRs) on the same day--Mike Trout and Bryce Harper (2015)

The only catcher with a season of 20 or more home runs and 20 or more stolen bases--The Rangers' Ivan Rodriguez (35 HR, 25 SB in 1999)

Alek Manoah of the Blue Jays became the fourth starting pitcher to go 6+ scoreless innings as a visitor at Yankee Stadium in their Major League debut. The first to do it--Luis Tiant (9 scoreless innings on July 19, 1964)

As of Friday the Cubs bullpen had gone 38 innings without allowing a run—6th longest run ever.

You might make some money knowing the most wins by batterymates: Mickey Lolich and Bill Freehan of the Tigers with 324.

Interleague play so far. AL leads NL 50-46 but NL has scored more runs, 418 to 403.

147 out of 344 calls appealed to replay have been overturned. 42.7%.

There have been more no hitters (6) this year than non-no hitter one pitcher shutouts (5).

Looking back at Corey Kluber and Joe Musgrove no hitters in Texas:

Times Rangers were no-hit in Arlington Stadium: once in 1,750 games

Times Rangers were no-hit at Globe Life Park: never in 2,081 games

Times Rangers were no-hit at new Globe Life Field: twice in 52 games

Joe Musgrove of the Padres and Wade Miley of the Reds threw two of this year's no hitters against AL clubs—first season ever with two interleague nohitters.

This is also the first season in history in which two teams — the Mariners and Rangers — got no-hit twice in their home park.

You may have read about the White Sox Yermín Mercedes hitting a HR on a 3-0 pitch off position player Willian Astudillo that his own manager Tony LaRusso thought was bush league. The pitch Mercedes hit was a 47 mph pitch. It was the slowest pitch recorded to be hit for a HR. Earlier this season, on April 14, Mercedes also whopped a homer off a pitch from Zach Plesac that was recorded at 92.2 mph. Which means he has hit home runs this season on pitches with a velocity differential of more than 45 miles per hour—biggest differential ever recorded.

From WSJ on Struggling Hitters

With 6 no hitters so far we are on track to break the record of 8 in a season that dates to 1884.

50K plate appearances and over 200K pitches so far this year. .237 collective batting average is second lowest ever.

24.1% of all plate appearances now end in a strikeout.

2014 teams averaged 4.07 runs per game and hit .86 HRs per game. Over 5 years that went up to 4.83 runs per game and 1.39 HRs.

Average fastball speed is 93.8 mph, 14% of all pitches 95 or higher.

Interesting tidbits from the always amazing Peter Gammons

34 players batting below .200 including six who make more than \$10 million.

We are on pace to see 400 uses of the injured list by Memorial Day. 2017-2019 always fewer than 300.

When Bartolo Colon was pitching against the Red Sox the Sox would manipulate the scoreboard pitch velocity down to piss him off.

And Jayson Stark

We had a 20-1 game in Atlanta last Friday: Braves 20, Pirates 1. And here at Weird and Wild, we don't want those 20-1 games to go flying by, because there have only been six others in the last 100 years. The Braves hit seven home runs in this game. And *two* of them were grand slams. So how many other teams in history have ever had a two-slam/seven-homer game? That would be none, according to our friends from STATS Perform.

In 145 years of Braves history they had never hit 7 HRs in a game. But they've now had *two* seven-homer games at Truist Park just since last Sept. 9, a span of 33 games. the Braves didn't just hit seven homers in this game. They hit seven homers *and* seven doubles. And that's more sevens than the Falcons, isn't it? Only four other teams since 1901 have jammed that many homers *and* doubles into the same game.

The Braves used position player Wilmer Difo against the Pirates this week. He gave up 8 runs including a grand slam (note Jacob de Grom hasn't given up 8 runs all season). no true position

player had given up that many runs in any game in almost 80 years. Last to do it was New York Giants outfielder Hank Leiber, on Sept. 25, 1942. But at least Hank spread out his little pitching debacle — since for reasons I can't unearth, *he was allowed to pitch all nine innings that day*. And then Hank Lieber never pitched — or even played — again.

Back to Difo. In the middle of the 8 run inning he managed to strikeout Ronald Acuna Jr. He became the first position player to strike out a player with the sole league lead in HRs in history. By the way, the Pirates scored with 2 outs in the 9th to avoid the first 20—0 loss in 120 years.

A couple of Albert Pujols items as he starts with the Dodgers:

He got his 3,256th hit last weekend. And what's so cool about that? Oh, only that he passed Eddie Murray for most hits by any player in history whose primary position was first base! Seems cool to me.

He also hit his 668th career homer. And what's so cool about that? Oh, only that nobody ever hit a home run numbered that high for the Dodgers before. That's all. The biggest numbers before that one: 554 (by Manny Ramirez) and 522 (by Frank Robinson). The only other member of the 600-Homer Club who ever played for the Dodgers (Jim Thome) never did go deep for them.

Then Saturday with a 2 run HR Pujols tied Babe Ruth for fourth-most extra-base hits in Major League history with 1,356. The homer was also No. 669 in Pujols' career. (Miguel Cabrera of the Tigers is second active player in extra base hits with 1,090).

In his first game with the Dodgers Pujols started and batted cleanup. Turns out he's the oldest player to start in the cleanup slot, in his first game for a new team, in 105 years!

Pujols gave the Dodgers *four* former MVPs (Pujols, Clayton Kershaw, Mookie Betts, Cody Bellinger) and *three* former Cy Youngs (Kershaw, Trevor Bauer, David Price). So how many teams in history could ever say that? That would be none, the great Sarah Langs, of MLB.com, reports.

So I asked STATS how many teams in any of the four major pro sports have ever had four former MVPs. This won't take long. In the NFL, no team has ever had more than two. In the NBA, the record is three, by the 1985-86 76ers (Julius Erving, Moses Malone, Bob McAdoo). The NHL record is also three Hart Trophy winners — most recently for the 2008-09 Capitals (Sergei Fedorov, Alex Ovechkin, Jose Theodore).

In other words, it's only baseball (where it's easier, since they give out two of those MVP awards every year). And the Dodgers are the fourth team with four. The others:

1978 Big Red Machine: Pete Rose, Joe Morgan, George Foster, Johnny Bench

1982 Angels: Rod Carew, Fred Lynn, Don Baylor, Reggie Jackson

1996 Red Sox: Roger Clemens, José Canseco, Kevin Mitchell, Mo Vaughn

The Royals got off to a surprising start but then had an 11 game losing streak. They broke the losing streak with a win against the White Sox but lost the second game of the double header. The last team to stop a losing streak that long (or longer) in the first game of a doubleheader but then go out and lose the second game was none other than Casey Stengel's 1963 Mets. Beat the Houston Colt .45s in Game 1 to pull the plug on a 15-game streak, but got wiped out, 8-0, in Game 2. ... And that got them so inspired, they then lurched into *another* 11-game losing streak three days later.

Rich Hill of the Rays threw 6 2/3 shutout innings against the Yankees last week at age 41. Other 41 or older pitchers who ever threw 6 or more shutout innings against the Yankees: David Wells, Phil Neikro, Tommy John and Cy Young (twice).

Marlins rookie Jazz Chisholm hit his second HRs this season off pitches over 100 mph. First time ever. Giancarlo Stanton. And Aaron Judge. And Nelson Cruz. And Mike Trout. And Bryce Harper. They're among the many, many noted mashers who have *never* hit a home run on a pitch flying at them in triple digits. But Jazz Chisholm has done that twice within the first seven home runs of his career.

Javier Baez of the Cubs hit his 6 career extra inning HR this week. He tied Albert Pujols for most for an active player, ahead of Manny Machado, Mookie Betts and Starlin Marte at 5.

Miguel Sanó headed into Wednesday's Twins-White Sox game with a lower batting average (.141) than 22 *pitchers*. Then he had a 3 HR game. Lowest batting average ever to have a 3 HR game, breaking a record held by Babe Ruth at the end of his career with the Boston Braves.

Braves pitcher Drew Smylie got his first MLB hit this week ending an 0-33 career. Randy Tate holds the record at 0-41.

Tony La Russa managed his first game in the big leagues in 1979. It took him until Monday – 42 years later! – when he managed against the Cardinals, to finally be able to say he'd managed against all 30 teams. So how long did it take him to get from 29 teams to 30? Would you believe 16 years?

He faced team No. 29 on June 17, 2005, when the Cardinals played the Devil Rays at the Trop. The only other man who was in a Cardinals uniform that day and Monday? Yadier Molina, of course. But here's how long ago that was: Yadi was catching just his 107th game in the big leagues that night. He has caught almost 2,000 since!

Taylor Walls got a call up at shortstop by the Rays this week. Walls hit a double right handed and another double left handed in his first game. A guy named George Wright did it for the Rangers in 1982. Only two since 1900.

Some of us are old enough to remember the countdown to Bob Watson scoring baseball's 1 millionth run. This week Josh Donaldson of the Twins scored the 2 millionth. Donaldson scored the historic tally on Nelson Cruz's ground-rule double off Royals right-hander Ervin Santana in the first inning on Saturday.

Gerrit Cole's 95th pitch of the day last Saturday was recorded at 100.8 mph. And you don't see that much! According to Statcast wizard Jason Bernard, only three active pitchers in the pitch-tracking era have thrown pitches that hard that many pitches into a start. And amazingly, not one of them is named Jacob deGrom.

Justin Verlander — 24 times

Nathan Eovaldi — 5 times (all from 2013-15)

Gerrit Cole — one other time (101.1 mph on pitch 110, on July 6, 2019)

Adam Wainwright keeps on rolling. Last Sunday, he weaved eight more innings of one-hit, no-run, seven-whiff baseball against the Cubs — at age 39. And only four other starting pitchers have had a game like that at Wainwright's age or older since 1900. It's quite a group:

Nolan Ryan

Randy Johnson

Roger Clemens

And Cy Young!

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. could do one more thing this year that his Hall of Fame father never did: Lead the league in home runs.

Vlad Sr. did finish fourth twice.

Bobby and Barry Bonds. Barry was a two-time champ. His dad finished second in 1977.

So our winner is ... Cecil and Prince Fielder. Cecil won two home run titles, in 1990 and '91. Then along came Prince to do the same, in 2007.

Last Friday, the Cubs had one of the wildest innings of modern times. They scored eight runs in the eighth inning — but two of the three outs they made were on *hits*. And on every fair ball they hit in the inning, somebody reached base, even though they didn't strike out once. (The third out was a foul ball.)

I'll give you a second to ponder how impossible it is to do something like that. Now let's move on to ask: What's the last team to do anything that Strange But True? STATS' amazing Jacob Jaffe took on that one and finally reported, after way too many hours of his life had whooshed by, that ...

To find the last team to have that big an inning — but make more outs on the bases than in the batter's box — you have to travel all the way back to Sept. 17, 1988, when the Indians did it in Toronto. The two outs the Indians made on the bases in that inning: Julio Franco got thrown out trying to score on a wild pitch. And Brook Jacoby got cut down at second, trying to advance on his own single.

White Sox rookie Andrew Vaughn, in the ninth inning last Friday against Aroldis Chapman — hits into a triple play.

Andrew Vaughn, in the ninth inning last Sunday against Aroldis Chapman — pounds a game-tying pinch homer, for the first run (and homer) against Chapman all year.

The Rays scored 5 runs in the first inning against the Blue Jays this week and didn't score again until they got 9 runs in extra innings. The previous record for most runs in a game without scoring any runs between the first and extras? That would be 12, by Burgess Whitehead's 1940 New York Giants, in a game against Brooklyn. the Rays also became the first team in the modern era to score at least five runs in the first inning *and* at least five more in extra innings of the same game, regardless of what they did in between.

The Rays weird week also included in the ninth inning the day before, they roared from behind to win on *three* consecutive bases-loaded walks. the Rays were within one win of a 10-game

winning streak. They went into the ninth trailing. And then they became the first team since 1901 to extend a winning streak into double digits on game-tying and go-ahead bases-loaded walks with two outs in the ninth inning.

And Joe Posnanski

Dodgers up and down and up-- In their first 15 games, they went 13-2.

Dodgers' next 18 games: 4-13

Dodgers' last 15 games: 13-2

1975 Cincinnati Reds started the year 20-20. They went an absolutely ridiculous 88-34 the rest of the way.