

BASEBALL TIDBITS JUNE 2021

JUNE 27, 2021

Good morning from Maine. Lots of fun updates this week and an interesting piece on Baseball and Gambling. Stay safe out there.

FROM NY Post, forwarded by a subscriber -- Name the seven players who have appeared in a game this season, have at least 5,000 career plate appearances and have a .300 career average or better.

(answer at bottom)

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Rickey Henderson stole more bases in the 1980s than the top two base stealers combined in the 2010s (Billy Hamilton and Trea Turner).

Between the 1970s dynasties of the A's and Reds and the 1990s dominance of the Braves and Yankees, no team made the postseason in three straight years in the '80s.

Whit Merrifield of Royals is 21 for 22 in stolen bases.

Red Sox – Royals this week. Ervin Santana gets Danny Santana to ground out to Carlos Santana.

Adam Wainwright, 39 year old Cardinal pitcher, threw a complete game with 11 strikeouts last week. The only other pitchers 39 or older to throw complete games with at least 11 K's—Nolan Ryan (14 times), Phil Neikro (1 time), Randy Johnson (4 times)—all in the HOF.

Charlie Morton of the Braves beat the Mets this week. His 11 K performance was his 100th career win.

Aaron Nola of the Phillies struck out 10 straight Mets, tying the MLB record set by Tom Seaver in 1970 against the Padres.

Yadier Molina pulls into eighth place on the all-time hits list for catchers, passing Johnny Bench with his 2,049th career hit.

[San Diego Padres](#) shortstop [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) slugged three home runs in his first three at-bats, all in the first four innings, in an 11-5 win against the [Arizona Diamondbacks](#) on Friday night. The three-home run performance is the first of Tatis' career and the only one in Padres' history in the first four innings of a game.

Kyle Schwarber Updates Through the Week

Kyle Swarber of the Cubs. in his last 10 games, he has been absolutely destroying the ball. He hit three home runs today against the [Mets](#) — that makes five home runs in two games because he had a two-homer game against New York on Saturday. He's hitting .361 with nine homers over those 10 games.

Kyle Schwarber walloped three homers in the Nationals' [5-2 win](#) over the Mets on Sunday at Nationals Park, bringing his total to nine in 11 games since being moved into the leadoff spot. Schwarber, who signed with Washington this offseason, became only the third player in team history (2005-present) to record a three-homer game and the first since Anthony Rendon on April 30, 2017, against the Mets. Schwarber is also just the second player in Nationals history with three homers in a single game as a leadoff hitter, joining Alfonso Soriano (April 21, 2006).

Schwarber's power surge made more history than that: His five homers over his past two games tied an MLB record. It's a feat that has been accomplished several times, most recently by White Sox first baseman José Abreu in 2020, but Schwarber is just the second player in Nationals franchise history to do it after Bryce Harper in 2015.

[Kyle Schwarber](#) continued his home run streak by walloping his 22nd of the season and 12th in his last 12 games -- [the most home runs in any 12-game stretch out of the leadoff spot since at least 1901](#). Schwarber also extended his trend of providing Lester, his longtime teammate, with run support dating back to their days with the Cubs. Friday marked the 28th game (regular and postseason) in which Schwarber homered in a Lester start.

LIST OF THE WEEK—ALL TIME SHUTOUTS ALLOWING 3 HITS OR LESS

Nolan Ryan 37

Walter Johnson 34

Christy Mathewson 29

Tom Seaver 27

Jim Palmer 25

Bob Feller 23

Roger Clemens 23

Early Wynn 22

Eddie Plank 22

Ed Walsh 21

Mordecai Brown 21

Sandy Koufax 20

Whitey Ford 20

Steve Carlton 20

Pete Alexander 21

Luis Tiant 19

Addie Joss 19

Warren Spahn 18

Allie Reynolds 18

Jim Maloney 18

Bob Gibson 18

From Jayson Stark of The Athletic

Wander Franco of the Rays--**Older Than Wander Franco:** How about...PayPal, Netflix, SpongeBob, flash drives, South Park and the Play Station 2.

Also Older Than Wander Franco: The Euro, the Blackberry, The Sopranos, the international space station, Family Guy, Google, baseball-reference.com and the youngest team in the American League – that Rays team he plays for!

It also hit me that Wander Franco has never lived in a world in which Tom Brady wasn't an NFL quarterback, Albert Pujols wasn't a major-league baseball player, Phil Mickelson wasn't winning golf tournaments and Roger Federer wasn't winning tennis tournaments.

Just don't ask Wander what he remembers about Dwight Gooden, Darryl Strawberry, John Elway, Warren Moon, Dominique Wilkins, Dennis Rodman, Wayne Gretzky or Seinfeld – because his memory isn't that great of things that happened *before he was born*.

He's the youngest player to reach base at least five times in his first two games in the big leagues since ... (we're not making this up) Danny Ainge – yes, that Danny Ainge – in 1979. (H/t: baseball-reference.com/Stathead)

He's the youngest player to start and bat third within the first two games of his career *in 50 years* ... since Mike Anderson did that for the Phillies on Sept. 2, 1971, also at 20.

He's the youngest to bat third *and also reach base* within the first two games of his career since César Cedeño, for the Astros, on June 20, 1970 (at age 19).

Wander Franco will be 20 years and 113 days old on Tuesday. The only other player to appear in a game for the Rays at that age or younger is B.J. Upton, who debuted in 2004 at 19 years and 347 days old. Franco is the first player born in 2001 to reach the majors.

On May 15 the Diamondbacks were 18-22. From there they went 3-33. 66 pitchers in the big leagues who have as many wins as the Diamondbacks do? Yessir, 66!

Would you also believe that just in the last five weeks, they've had a 13-game losing streak followed (three games later) by a 17-game losing streak? And that makes them only the fourth team since 1900 – and first in almost six decades – to have multiple losing streaks as long as 13 games in the same year.

The last of those teams was Choo Choo Coleman's legendary '62 Mets. The others all played at a time when at least nobody could see them do this stuff on TV: Pinky Whitney's 1935 Braves, Bevo LeBorveau's 1919 Phillies and Big Jeff Pfeffer's 1911 Boston Rustlers.

But the Weirdest and Wildest part is this: Just one other team in history has ever had two losing streaks this long that began this close together. And it was only *the worst team ever assembled* – Ossee Schreckengost's fabled 1899 Cleveland Spiders (23-134). That juggernaut finished that season by going (gulp) *1 and 40!* And here's how that went: 24-game losing streak...one extra-inning miracle win ... 16-game losing streak.

As we've said here at the Weird and Wild Department many times, if you find yourself getting mentioned in the same sentence as those 1899 Cleveland Spiders, *that's not a good sign!*

Ready for some Weird and Wild triple-play facts, since the Yankees now have already turned three of them? Of course you are. And if not, you'll need a restraining order because here they come anyway:

- That madcap 1-3-6-2-5-6 trifecta against the Blue Jays was the first 1-3-6-2-5-6 triple play ever – but it was also only the fifth triple play in the last 50 years to include at least *five* assists, according to [SABR's fantastic triple-play database](#).
- As for that round-the-horn trey last Sunday, that was the first walk-off triple play since Eric Bruntlett's unassisted walk-off triple play for the Phillies on Aug. 23, 2009. But even more cool – courtesy of Jeremy Frank ([@MLBRandomStats](#)) – it was the first walk-off triple play to end a one-run game in over half a century, since the Reds turned a 6-4-3-2 game-ender on May 30, 1967.

- From YES Network's James Smyth: The Yankees are the fourth team – but only the second since 1908 – to turn two triple plays in a span of four days. But they're the first team to crank out three of them in just 31 days. The Blue Jays have turned three in the last 43 seasons!
- A fun note from the ever-resourceful Jessica Brand ([@JessicaDBrand](#)): The Yankees are only the second team ever, believe it or not, to throw a no-hitter and turn three triple plays in the same season. The other: Adonis Terry's 1886 Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers.
- And on a less uplifting note ... the Yankees are just the eighth team since 1900 to fire up three triple plays in the same season. That's the good news. The bad news is, the previous seven played a combined *zero postseason games* in those years. Who knew!

Shoh Time: Here we go. It's the regularly scheduled *Shohei Ohtani Did What?* portion of this column. Last weekend, all the Amazing Ohtani did was have a four-game series against the Tigers that went like this:

Game 1 – Winning pitcher

Game 2 – 2 HR

Game 3 – 1 HR

Game 4 – 1 HR

So here was our question: Was that the greatest series of all time? Seriously. It felt like it. But here was the answer, courtesy of our friends from STATS Perform:

Incredibly, there have actually been three other series in history which a real human won a game as a pitcher and hit at least four homers. And even more incredibly, one of the other three was by someone *not* named Babe Ruth.

Ruth had 5 HRs and a win against the Senators in 1920. In 1921 he had 6 HRs against the Tigers with a pitching win. And Jim Tobin of the 1942 Boston Braves had 4 HRs and a pitching win against the Cubs in 1942.

Tough to top the Babe's *six-homer*, one-win series in 1921 – but it's possible Joltin' Jim Tobin might have done that. Game 1 of that two-game series in 1942: Pinch homer. Game 2: Complete-game victory and *three* homers. Top that, Shohei!

Chasing deGreatness: Now that the Ohtani notefest is out of the way, time for the weekly Jacob deGrom this-is-really-happening update. This man now has a sub-2.00 ERA *over his last*

92 starts! Here's a complete list of all pitchers in the expansion era who have ever submerged their ERA below 2.00 over any span of 92 starts:

Sandy Koufax (1964-66) 1.77

Clayton Kershaw (2013-16) 1.83

Greg Maddux (1992-95) 1.87

Bob Gibson (1967-70) 1.91

Jacob deGrom (2017-21) 1.99

(Source: baseball-reference.com/Stathead)

Surprisingly not pictured: Pedro Martínez! (His best 92-start stretch: 2.03.)

First Class: Aw, let's do one more on deGrom because why the heck not? He has now spun off 11 consecutive first innings in which *nobody* reached base. And that's just mind-warping.

Who does that? Nobody else does that. But when we went looking for other pitchers who have thrown a "first-inning perfect game" (nine consecutive perfect first innings), our amigos at sportsradar.com found seven others since 1974. Funky list!

Yonny Chirinos (Rays) – 9, in 2019

Chris Sale (Red Sox) – 10, in 2017

Matt Garza (Rays) – 10, in 2010

Frank Castillo (Blue Jays) – 9, in 2000

Donovan Osborne (Cardinals) – 9, in 1996

Scott Bankhead (Mariners) – 9, in 1988

Roger Clemens (Red Sox) – 9, in 1986

The Fantastic Four: I'm not sure how this can be possible, but...

Willy Adames in his first month as a Brewer: *three* four-hit games.

Willy Adames in four years as a Ray: *no* four-hit games.

But here comes the Weird And Wild Part. Presenting five Milwaukee icons who never had three (or more) four-hit games in any season for the Brewers: Gorman Thomas, Ted Simmons, Jeromy Burnitz, Ben Ogilvie and...Henry Aaron!

We had two games Wednesday that were so Strange But True, they deserve a category all to themselves.

It's Always Bullpenny in Philadelphia: Other than a certain 15-14 game in the 1993 World Series that still causes many Philadelphians to weep in the middle of the night, the Phillies hadn't lost any home game in the last half-century in which they scored at least a dozen runs. But then came Wednesday: Nationals 13, Phillies 12. How about these three highlights:

- It was the first game in history in which both teams hit a slam and a three-run homer. But that wasn't even the Strange But True part. How many times had either team played a game this year in which they served up both a slam and a three-run homer? That would be none – of course.
- The Phillies got 10 RBIs in this game from their 7-8-9 hitters – *and they lost!* How many times in the live-ball era has any team gotten that many RBIs from their 7-8-9 holes and lost? That, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, would also be none!
- But then there was this. The Nationals needed to manufacture three different comebacks to win this game, and they were all epic. They were five runs down early – and tied it. They got four runs down later – and took the lead *in the next half-inning*. And then they trailed a third time, in the ninth (12-11) – and scored two in the top of the ninth to win.

So how many modern-era teams before the Phillies have managed to lose a game in which they blew a five-run lead (or more) *and* a separate four-run lead (or more) *and* yet another lead in the ninth inning? That answer, according to STATS, is *not one*. In more than a century.

But even if we expand that to the “ninth inning or later,” only one other team in the modern era has lost a game like that. And it was the 1977 edition of the Big Red Machine. On July 28, 1977, they went into Wrigley Field and took a 6-0 lead in the first inning...and a 14-10 lead in the eighth...and a 15-14 lead in the 12th...and finally lost, 16-15, in the 13th, on a rally started by the Cubs' seventh pitcher of the day, Rick Reuschel!

Fallen Angels – But are we sure that was even the Strangest But Truest game of the day? Let's say no – because check out this one: Giants 9, Angels 3, in 13 unfathomable innings.

- Thanks to the *we don't need no stinkin' DH* presence of the inimitable Shohei Ohtani, this was the first game in the DH era – all 49 seasons of it – in which an NL team started a DH in an American League park but the AL team that plays in that park said, “Hey, no thanks!”

And I spent way too much time confirming what I suspected about that:

How many other AL teams in the DH era have ever jammed that many players into any spot in their lineup in a home game? *Of course, that would be none!*

- Now that we've made the point that the Angels were scrambling in this tilt, it should be no surprise that one of their pitchers, Griffin Canning, *spent two innings in the outfield* in this game. And no AL pitcher had played at least one full inning in the outfield, in a game in which he didn't even pitch, in over a quarter-century!

Last to do it: Bill Wegman, for the Brewers, on the last day of the 1995 season. But the last before him, according to Stathead? It was none other than a young Randy Johnson, who patrolled the eighth inning in left field for the Mariners on Oct. 3, 1993...because baseball is awesome.

- Then the Giants, moments after thinking they'd lost this game in 12 innings, only to be saved by a replay review of the winning run "scoring" for the Angels, went out in the 13th and scored seven runs in an extra inning. Hadn't done that in over 80 years – since an eight-run 12th against the Dodgers, at Ebbets Field, on May 30, 1940. But...

- The Giants scored those runs via exactly *two hits*. And one of them was this one.

That's a three-run homer by Mike Tauchman, and it might have been the Strangest But Truest hit of them all, if only because Tauchman was *0 for 5, with five strikeouts*, at the time.

Now it's time to guess how many other players in the modern era have started any game with a Platinum Sombrero and then interrupted that strikeout parade with a homer? Precisely one! Ray Lankford did it – with a game-tyer in the 11th off Rod Beck – for the Cardinals on Aug. 8, 1988. But...

- That's not all! That's because, as my buddy Andy Baggarly noted so eloquently in [his opus on this game](#), Tauchman had also whiffed in his three previous trips to the dish before this game. So he was 0 for his previous 8, with *eight* strikeouts. Meaning he was one empty hack away from becoming the ninth non-pitcher in history to pile up K's in at least nine plate appearances in a row. Until...

He hit that home run! And that allowed him to join this relieved group of people who can relate, because they're the only three other players in the live-ball era who ended a streak of at least eight consecutive strikeouts with a home run:

Skip Pitlock (Giants) – Aug. 8, 1970 (8 straight K's)

Ryan Langerhans (Mariners) – Aug. 6, 2010 (8 straight strikeouts)

Rick Ankiel (Astros) – April 10, 2013 (10 straight strikeouts!)

(Source – STATS Perform)

Only Pitlock was a pitcher at the time. And he put an end to his KKKKKKKK streak with *an inside-the-park homer*. You know how many other home runs he hit in his career? Right. That would be none. But he picked an excellent time for this one!

Strikes are Overrated: Remember that Yankees walk-off triple play we discussed earlier. It led to this – the Strangest But Truest Save of the week, from Aroldis Chapman:

1 IP, 0 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 2 BB, 0 K – 11 pitches, 2 strikes

What's Up With That?: Take another look. How was that possible? He somehow saved a game in which he faced three batters – but still got more outs (three) than he threw strikes (two in 11 pitches)? That seems hard.

In fact, it's so hard that only one other reliever ever did it – some guy named Mariano Rivera, on June 15, 2003. But hold on. Turns out that Mariano's save was a lot smoother than Chapman's 11-pitch, 2-strike special: First-pitch HBP (of Albert Pujols) ... first-pitch DP ... first pitch ground ball. Three pitches. That's a wrap. Drive home safely.

What's Up With That, Part 2?: Of course there's more! Chapman was also just the second pitcher, since the dawn of the modern save rule, to save a game in which he only faced three hitters – but walked two of them. The other: Mike Fetters, for the Brewers, on May 16, 1996. Here's how he did it: Walk...pickoff...out...walk...caught stealing...thanks for playing. Amazing, isn't it? More proof that a triple play really is a closer's BFF. And Chapman should know. He has now been out there for two of them.

No Runs, No Hits, No Glory: A fellow named Zach Thompson started Sunday for the Marlins at Wrigley and did this:

4 IP, 0 HITS, 0 ER – *and he got a loss out of it!*

What's Up With That?: The only run the Cubs scored off him went: Walk, strikeout, strikeout, error, passed ball. So this sure wasn't Thompson's fault. But here's his claim to fame:

He's just the sixth starting pitcher since earned runs became an official stat (1913) to pitch that many innings, allow no hits and no earned runs, and still wind up as the losing pitcher. The names and box-score lines are so epic, how could we not list them all?

Jered Weaver (June 29, 2008) vs. Dodgers: 6-0-1-0-3-6

Andy Hawkins (July 1, 1990) vs. White Sox: 8-0-4-0-5-3

Matt Young (Oct. 1, 1983) vs. White Sox: 4-0-1-0-0-4

Don Wilson (Sept. 4, 1974) vs. Reds: 8-0-2-0-5-3

Ken Johnson (April 23, 1964) vs. Reds: 9-0-1-0-2-9

Feel better now, Zach?

School of Rockies: I'll get into the Rockies' historically lopsided home/road adventures some other time. But here's where those adventures get especially Strange But True:

Rockies road wins this year – 6

Rockies walk-off wins this year – 7!

If you're thinking (as I obviously was) that no team has ever done anything quite like that, hey, good call. How many teams in the modern era have ever made it through a season with more walk-offs than road wins? That would be zero, according to STATS.

- Closest call: Last year's Pirates (four walk-offs, six road wins – but in a 60-game season).
- Last close call in a full season: Ernie Kish's 1945 Philadelphia A's (10 walk-offs, 13 road wins).
- Closest even at the all-star break: Jesse Gonder's 1963 Mets (seven/seven) and Ken Reitz's 1981 Cubs (two/two) at least stayed even for half a season. But over six months, this should be impossible, right?

Immovable Force Moves Immovable Object: So how about this matchup last Saturday in Arizona:

A pitcher who hadn't lost in 22 starts in a row (Walker Buehler) met up with a team that hadn't won in 15 games in a row (your reeling Diamondbacks).

So how rare was that? I fired that question at STATS. And the answer is ... Never before in the modern era had any team on a losing streak that long met up with a pitcher working on an unbeaten streak of 15 games or more, if only because those planets line up even less than Jupiter and Saturn.

Closest anyone ever came? On June 16, 1953, Whitey Ford (22 career starts, no losses) met up with the St. Louis Browns (14 losses in a row). And ... naturally, the Browns beat him – with 46-year-old Satchel Paige closing it out for the Browns – because ... baseball!

More deGrom

Because I continue to shake my head over Jacob deGrom:

Best ERA after 12 appearances all time

deGrom 2021 0.50

Dutch Leonard, 1914 Red Sox 0.72 (ended season at 0.96)

Bob Gibson, 1968 Cardinals 1.52 (ended season at 1.12)

Doc Gooden, 1985 Mets, 1.72 (ended season at 1.53)

YU

[Yu Darvish](#), nine seasons into his big league career, is still punching out opposing hitters at a historic clip.

Darvish recorded his 1,500th career strikeout in the sixth inning of [the Padres' 6-2 victory](#) over the Dodgers on Monday night. In just 197 games, Darvish is by far the fastest pitcher in big league history to reach that milestone, eclipsing Randy Johnson, who needed 206.

Mookie Betts opened the game with a sharp grounder to third base, and Gavin Lux followed with a walk. From there, Darvish was untouchable. Literally.

He struck out the next seven Dodgers hitters he faced -- the first Padres pitcher to do so since Jake Peavy on April 25, 2007. In four career starts against his former team, Darvish owns a 1.33 ERA. Padres landed him in a seven-player blockbuster deal with the Cubs in December. Across 15 starts, he owns a 2.50 ERA and a 0.92 WHIP. The Padres have won 12 of those outings.

OHTANI

Ohtani news just keeps on coming. Looking back to last Sunday--He connected on his sixth homer over his last six games off Tigers right-hander Casey Mize in the fifth inning of an eventual 5-3 loss in 10 innings at Angel Stadium on Sunday. It gave him 23 on the year and moved him into a tie for the Major League lead with Toronto's Vladimir Guerrero Jr. The only game during his current tear in which he didn't go deep came on Thursday, when he limited Detroit to one run over six innings in a win on the mound and went 0-for-1 with two walks at the plate.

Sunday's blast set a new career high in homers for Ohtani, who hit 22 in 2018, when he was the American League Rookie of the Year. But it took him 104 games to hit 22 that season, and he reached 23 in 67 games this year. He's also been able to do it while being dominant on the mound, as he has a 2.70 ERA in 10 starts this year

It was also Ohtani's 70th career blast, and he joined some exclusive company, becoming just the fourth player in AL or NL history to have at least 70 career homers and 100 career strikeouts as a pitcher, joining Hall of Famer Babe Ruth, Rick Ankiel and Johnny Lindell.

Shohei Ohtani became just the second player in AL/NL history to make more than 10 starts on the mound in a season and hit more than 20 home runs. The other is Babe Ruth (in 1919)

MORE YANKEE TRIPLE PLAYS

Second team since 1908 – to turn two triple plays in a span of four days. But they're the first team to crank out three of them in just 31 days. The Blue Jays have turned three in the last 43 seasons! The Yankees are only the second team ever, believe it or not, to throw a no-hitter and turn three triple plays in the same season. The other: Adonis Terry's 1886 Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers.

[Aroldis Chapman](#) had thrown eight balls and only one strike to the first two batters he faced to open the ninth inning of Sunday afternoon's [2-1 win](#) over the A's. Chapman threw a 98.4 mph fastball down and in, and Murphy lined a grounder right to third base. Gio Urshela grabbed it and stepped on the bag for the first out. He threw it to DJ LeMahieu for the second, and LeMahieu relayed it to first baseman Chris Gittens for the third and final out of the ballgame.

The Yankees turned their third triple play of the season to eke out a series victory over the American League West-leading A's.

Unless, of course, you're the Yankees this season. New York's trio of triple plays in 2021 ties an MLB record, as they are the first team to do so since the 2016 White Sox. The [last time a triple play ended a game](#) was Aug. 23, 2009, when the Phillies turned one against the Mets, and it has happened 27 times in MLB history.

Watch Out for the Astros

The Astros, who outscored the Orioles 26-3, have won 14 of their last 16 games and are 39-18 since April 22, having won 14 of 18 series in that span. Houston has opened up a [two-game lead over the A's](#) for first place in the American League West, which is its largest lead of the season.

Here's the Astros' 10-game winning streak by the numbers:

- The Astros have outscored opponents 81-21 during the streak (8.1 runs per game), slugging 22 home runs in that span. They're hitting .330 with a .400 on-base percentage during the winning streak, while their pitching staff has posted a 1.68 ERA, allowing 55 hits in 91 innings while striking out 86 batters.
- Astros starting pitchers have thrown seven quality starts in the last 10 games, including six starts of at least seven innings. Urquidy has thrown seven innings in each of his last three starts, going 2-0 with a 2.14 ERA. He was working Wednesday on five days of rest, as Houston is going with a six-man rotation during a streak of 20 consecutive games without a day off. Urquidy threw 69 of his 84 pitches (82.1 percent) for strikes.

For the season the Astros are batting .277, best in MLB by 16 points. They have baseball's best on-base percentage and best slugging percentage. They have struck out fewer times than any team in baseball and they have scored 35 more runs than any team in baseball. Houston is 29-16 against teams with winning records and has the best run differential in the game.

VLAD

Vlad Guerrero Jr. cracked his 26th home run on Saturday, which moved him back into sole possession of the MLB lead and contributed to the Blue Jays' dominant 12-4 win over the Orioles at Sahlen Field in Buffalo, N.Y.

The Blue Jays' 22-year-old slugger has homered in three straight games and four of his past seven as part of a seven-game hitting streak. His 26th homer marked the second most through 75 games in Blue Jays history, behind only George Bell (27 in 1987). Guerrero has 50 career home runs, and he's second fastest in franchise history to that mark, too (258 games), behind only Fred McGriff (229).

Another player who had 50 homers in 258 games: his Hall of Fame father, Vladimir Guerrero Sr., who hit his 50th in game No. 248 before going homerless his next 10 games.

Rough Times for the Diamondbacks

On April 25, the D-backs swept the Braves in a seven-inning doubleheader at Truist Park. It was a day of celebration as Zac Gallen tossed a one-hitter in the first game and Madison Bumgarner did one better by tossing a seven-inning no-hitter in the second.

The D-backs celebrated on the field after the final out that day. It was the end of a 7-3 road trip, and their record was 11-11. They were hopeful about the future.

Little did they know, it would take 62 days before their next road win.

The D-backs beat the Padres, 10-1, on Saturday night at Petco Park, snapping an MLB-record 24-game road losing streak.

FUN FACTS FROM THE ATHLETIC

Mike Schmidt's 313 home runs were the most in the 1980s. This two-time MVP from the NL West finished second, just five homers behind him.

Dale Murphy's back-to-back MVPs came in 1982 and 1983 for the Braves, then playing in the West. He and Schmidt also tied in RBIs over the decade, with 929.

Which switch-hitter, whose last 100-RBI season came for a 100-loss Mets team in the 1990s, led baseball in RBIs in the 1980s, finishing just four shy of 1,000 in the decade?

Eddie Murray

He won an MVP at two different positions and led all of baseball in hits during the 1980s.

Yount won the MVP as a shortstop in 1982 and a center fielder in 1989. His 1,731 hits in the decade beat out Eddie Murray, Willie Wilson and Boggs.

This pitcher had the most wins in the 1980s, even though his most famous one came in the '90s.

Morris' most famous win was in Game 7 of the 1991 World Series. His 162 wins in the 1980s bested Steib by 22.

His 37 home runs in 1987 are the most ever by a player who also stole 50 bases that same season.

Eric Davis. From 1986 to 1990, Davis averaged 30 homers and 41 stolen bases a season, finishing in the top 13 in MVP voting each year.

This 1979 MVP and future manager finished his career by playing for three straight American League pennant-winners from 1986 to 1988.

Don Baylor won his MVP for the Angels, then won pennants as a member of the Red Sox, Twins and Athletics before managing the Rockies in the 1990s and Cubs in the 2000s.

In 2020, the Denver Nuggets became the first NBA team to win two seven-game series in the same postseason after trailing 3-1. 35 years earlier, which MLB team came back from down 3-1 in the first-ever seven-game LCS and then again in the World Series?

MLB switched to a seven-game LCS in 1985, which denied the Blue Jays a chance to play in their first World Series in just their ninth year of existence. Kansas City came back to top Toronto before memorably beating the Cardinals in the World Series.

Three starters threw complete games in world series clinching games.

Orel Hershiser game 5 for dodgers over a's in 1988, scott mcgregor shut out phillies in 1983 for orioles, brett Saberhagen game 7 shutout for kc over cards in 1985.

Which team actually had baseball's best record in 1981 — but because of the split-season format was not among the four NL teams to qualify for the postseason?

The Reds finished a half-game behind the Dodgers in the season's first half before the strike and 1.5 games behind the Astros in the second half. The Cardinals actually had the best overall record among NL East teams but also didn't make the postseason.

Only 6 teams have ever won a World Series despite owning a road record under .500 during the regular season. But no World Series winner has been as bad on the road as this 1980s champion, which went 29-52 away from its very loud home ballpark.

The 1987 Twins took full advantage of the "Homerdome," going 56-25 at home during the regular season and a perfect 6-0 in the postseason.

Before beating the Royals to claim their first-ever World Series, the 1980 Phillies had to survive a five-game NLCS that included four extra-inning games against which NL West winner?

After the Phillies won Game 1 in regulation, Houston took the next two in 10 and 11 innings, respectively. But Philadelphia claimed back-to-back road wins in 10 innings to take the series.

FROM BASEBALLEGG.COM

How gambling built baseball, and then almost destroyed it

- [Rebecca Edwards](#)



The 1919 Chicago White Sox, champions of the American League.

Imagine if, after watching the thrilling victory of the Chicago Cubs in [Game 7 of the 2016 World Series](#) over the Cleveland Indians – a game in which the Cubs won their first championship in over a century – you learned that the Indians had collaborated with gamblers to intentionally throw the series.

Would you trust the game, its umpires and its players, ever again?

That was the scope of the crisis that enveloped baseball a century ago, when key members of the 1919 Chicago White Sox, including pitchers Eddie Cicotte and Claude “Lefty” Williams, conspired to throw the series to their opponents, the Cincinnati Reds.

What became known as the “Black Sox Scandal” rocked professional baseball. But it wasn’t an aberration in a sport that was otherwise clean.

Baseball became America’s national pastime because of – and not in spite of – gambling.

Gambling fuels baseball’s rise

In his book “Baseball in the Garden of Eden,” historian John Thorn explains how gambling was far from an “impediment to the game’s flowering”; instead, it was “the vital fertilizer.”

In baseball’s infancy, the sport was thought of as a boy’s game. But over the course of the 19th century, gambling deepened adult interest and investment in the sport, attracting cohorts of older fans.

Gambling’s popularity was helped along by the spread of statistics, [that particular lifeblood of baseball that still keeps fans hooked today](#). Developed initially to allow the results of a game to be printed onto the page [in the form of box scores](#), statistics also created a pool of data that gamblers could use to inform their bets – many of which were made from the stands, in the middle of games.

In his history of Fenway Park, Glenn Stout describes how, in the ballpark’s early years, “the best seats were quickly taken over by a rabid contingent of gamblers who bet on absolute everything imaginable, ranging from the eventual winner ... to ball and strike calls” and “even such arcane issues as whether the wind would change direction.” Fans waving dollar bills and barking out bets resembled “brokers on the floor of the stock exchange.”

This kind of gambling was so common in the stands that Ernest Lawrence Thayer’s iconic 1888 poem, “[Casey at the Bat](#),” captured such a moment in one of its stanzas:

“A straggling few got up to go in deep despair.

The rest clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast;

They thought, “If only Casey could but get a whack at that –

We’d put up even money now with Casey at the bat.”

Playing to lose

Some players also sought to get in on the action.

In 1919, [the highest-paid player](#) was Detroit Tigers outfielder Ty Cobb, who earned US\$20,000 – which equates to roughly \$300,000 today, or less than Major League Baseball’s current minimum salary.

Most of Cobb’s peers earned far less than the future Hall of Famer. Working with gamblers was an attractive way to supplement their incomes – and many of them did.

One of the most notorious was first baseman Hal Chase. Dubbed the “Black Prince of Baseball” by baseball historians Donald Dewey and Nicholas Acocella, Chase made a veritable career out of throwing games. Playing mostly with the New York Highlanders, Chase, [as Charles Fountain noted](#), “threw games for money, he threw games for spite, he threw games as a favor for friends, he threw games apparently for no reason at all other than to stay in practice.”

But this wasn’t the kind of gambling that brought baseball to the brink of disaster in 1919. That scandal saw the players themselves – working in tandem with professional gamblers and gangsters – fix the World Series.

The 1919 World Series [was the best-attended Series](#) at that point in the game’s history, but the play of the White Sox turned the games into elaborate theatrical performances.

Those in on it had to play to lose, [and the statistics are telling](#).

Shortstop Swede Risberg hit .080 – not a typo – while committing four fielding errors. Outfielder Happy Felsch didn’t do much better, hitting .192, with just five hits in 26 at-bats. He also committed two errors. Pitcher Claude “Lefty” Williams surrendered 12 runs in 16.1 innings of work.

While the players tried to pull off authentic performances for fans, they weren’t always successful. Felsch [was chided by his fellow cheaters](#) for his blunders in center, which they deemed too obvious.

Fundamentally, however, the games lacked the core drama and appeal of sports: the uncertainty of the outcome.

Sportswriters took notice. Rumors were already flying in the press box before the World Series’ conclusion that something was wrong. Sports journalist Hugh Fullerton had heard these rumors when he arrived to cover the series, though he tried to convince himself – and his readers – that the story couldn’t be true. Still, once the series ended, [Fullerton wrote worriedly](#) in the Chicago Herald and Examiner that “Yesterday’s, in all probability, is the last game that will be played in any World Series.”

Fullerton kept pursuing the story and became the first sportswriter to break the details to the public in December 1919, with an article in the New York World entitled, "[Is Big League Baseball Being Run for Gamblers, with Players In on the Deal?](#)"

As more details emerged, the scandal overwhelmed the sport and threatened to destroy it. If the World Series itself, baseball's premier event, could not be trusted, how would the sport survive?

The new baseball commissioner, [Kenesaw Mountain Landis](#), acted decisively and independently of the courts. Even after the players were acquitted in a trial that ended on Aug. 2, 1921, Landis – a former federal judge – had already made his decision.

"Regardless of the verdict of juries," [he announced, on the morning of Aug. 3, 1921](#), "no player that throws a ball game; no player that undertakes or promises to throw a ball game; no player that sits in a conference ... where the ways and means of throwing games are discussed and does not promptly tell his club about it, will ever play professional baseball."

The stunned White Sox players – including stars like "[Shoeless](#)" [Joe Jackson](#), who had hit .375 in the series but was nonetheless aware of what his teammates were up to – were banned from baseball for life.

[The specter of 1919](#)

Seventy years later, commissioner Bart Giamatti acted in a similarly swift and punitive manner when he banned all-time hits leader Pete Rose from baseball in 1989.

Rose had admitted to gambling on his own games, even as a manager. [Some thought Giamatti overreacted](#), given that Rose never bet against his own team.

That argument, as historian Bruce Kuklick wrote [in a 1999 essay](#), doesn't hold up. Rose, he points out, [didn't bet on every game](#). It's not inconceivable, then, that he would make decisions during games in which he didn't place bets – say, not bringing in his best relief pitcher – to make sure that reliever would be available for the games he did bet on.

Giamatti surely had 1919 on his mind when he meted out Rose's punishment. With the game having barely escaped death once, Giamatti knew that organized baseball couldn't risk skating too close to that edge again.

And yet in August of last year, Major League Baseball made FanDuel – a daily fantasy sports gambling service – [its official gambling partner](#).

It may be that baseball hopes that gambling will bring more adults back to the sport, just as it did in its early days. After all, [attendance at games is down](#). Football, meanwhile, [has become](#)

[the most watched sport on television](#) in the U.S. [Six million viewers](#) even tuned in for the 2019 NFL Draft.

Gambling may fuel more interest in the sport. But throwing on more fuel can result in a fire that burns out of control. In 1919, baseball came close to burning its own house down. One hundred years later, journalist Hugh Fullerton would surely be stunned to know that big league baseball has once again made a contract with gamblers, in full view of both players and fans.

Let's hope the story doesn't end in scandal this time around.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article was written by Rebecca Edwards, Professor of History, *Rochester Institute of Technology*

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TRIVIA ANSWER

Jose Altuve of the Astros is part of the quiz answer. He entered the weekend hitting .310 for his career.

The only active player with 5,000 or more plate appearances and a better average is Miguel Cabrera (.311).

The others in the 5,000/.300 club were Mike Trout (.305), Joey Votto (.303), Charlie Blackmon (.302), Buster Posey (.302) and Michael Brantley (.300), an Astro who reached .300 by leading the majors in hitting this year (.355).

Note the absence of two New York second basemen. Robinson Cano (.303) is not listed because the question read who "appeared in a game this season." Cano is suspended in 2021 after failing a PED test for the second time. And DJ LeMahieu (.302) is not listed because he entered the weekend 12 plate appearances shy of 5,000.

Albert Pujols fell below .300 as an Angel. A few other guesses that fall short:

Bryce Harper 4264 at bats, .276 career average

Andrew McCutchen 6271 at bats, .271 average

J.D. Martinez 4462 at bats, .291 average
Nelson Cruz 6627 at bats, .279 average
Nolan Arenado 4402 at bats, .291 average

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JUNE 18, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Various goodies plus a piece on Negro League stats and an interesting think piece by Jayson Stark on ideas on how to modernize baseball.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Youngest player to homer in 5 straight games--Ronald Acuña Jr. of the Braves (20 years, 239 days in 2018)

Since 2008, two pitchers have touched 104 mph in an MLB game more than once. Who are they--Aroldis Chapman (67 times) and Jordan Hicks (12 times). Chapman found some extra octane in the ninth inning on Saturday, blowing a 103.4 mph fastball past the Athletics' [Matt Chapman](#) for the final out of New York's [7-5 victory](#). It was the fastest pitch recorded in the Majors this season. Chapman reared back to get Strike 1 on a 101.1 mph swinging strike, then pumped a 100.8 mph heater in for Strike 2. The 103.4 mph two-seamer on Strike 3 was Chapman's fastest pitch since July 2, 2018, and the fastest strikeout pitch in the Majors since the Cardinals' Jordan Hicks lit up the gun at 104.2 mph on April 21, 2019.

It was Chapman's fastest strikeout pitch since a 103.7 mph punchout of Jorge Polanco to end the 2017 American League Wild Card Game against the Twins.

Ryan Mountcastle became the second O's rookie to post a three-homer game, joining Nick Markakis, who did so on Aug. 22, 2006.

The record for lowest ERA by a reliever (minimum 50 IP) was set this century--Zack Britton (0.54 ERA with the Orioles in 2016)

How bad has the Yankees offense been? third in the league in least runs allowed, they have been outscored for the season.

Yankees – Blue Jays this week...In one of the weirdest versions you'll ever see, the scorebook read a 1-3-6-2-5-6 triple play -- the first in baseball history, according to the SABR Triple Play Database. It was the first time in franchise history that the Yankees have turned two triple plays in the same season.

The Red Sox gave up 5 home runs Saturday and 8 yesterday to the Blue Jays, having never previously allowed 5-plus homers in consecutive games. The last time Boston allowed 4 home runs in consecutive games was twice in the same week last season (Aug. 12-13 vs. TB and Aug. 17-18 vs. NYY and PHI).

MUDCAT GRANT

Rest in Peace Jim “Mudcat” Grant. As I have said before, all the baseball cards from my childhood are dying. I was into players with nicknames—Catfish Hunter and Blue Moon Odom anyone? Grant died this week. He was the first American League black pitcher to win 20 games when he went 21-7 for the 1965 Twins.

Grant led the American League in victories, winning percentage and shutouts in 1965 and pitched for 14 major league seasons. Grant, a two-time All-Star, was a mainstay in the starting rotation for the Indians and the Twins for much of his career, then became a reliever, most notably with the Oakland A's and Pittsburgh Pirates.

The Indians traded Grant to the Twins in June 1964. His best season came the following year, when he went 21-7, turned in a winning percentage of .750 and threw six shutouts. He pitched two complete-game victories against the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series, losing once, and hit a three-run homer as the Dodgers went on to win the series in seven games.

Cited by Sporting News as the A.L. pitcher of the year, Grant headed a staff that included Jim Kaat, Jim Perry and Camilo Pascual, backed by a lineup featuring Harmon Killebrew, Tony Oliva, Bob Allison and shortstop [Zoilo Versalles](#), the league's most valuable player.

After three-plus seasons with the Twins, Grant pitched mostly in relief — for the Dodgers in 1968, the Montreal Expos and the St. Louis Cardinals in 1969, and the Oakland A's and Pittsburgh Pirates in 1970 and 1971. He retired in 1971 with a record of 145-119 and 54 saves.

TONY C

Boston's Tony C. Conigliaro was a rookie at 19 and at the time the youngest to hit 20 HR's in a season, then at age 20 led the AL in HR's and the youngest to 100 career HR's at age 22 - Tony C.

Tony debuted in the big leagues at just 19, a year after batting .363 with 24 home runs in the New York-Penn League. He crafted a .290/.354/.530 line in 111 games, belting 24 home runs and scoring 69 times in 1964. He took Joe Horlen of the Chicago White Sox deep in his first Fenway Park at-bat and was the only teenager to hit 20 home runs in a season until two Washington Nationals, Bryce Harper and Juan Soto, joined him in the 2010s. A star was born. In 1965, he followed with a .269/.338/.512 line, leading the American League with 32 home runs while scoring and driving in 82 runs. After a 28-home run season in 1966, Tony C made his first All-Star appearance in 1967, reaching 100 home runs younger than any man in AL history (22 years, 197 days).

PUJOLS

Think the Dodgers are happy they took a flier on Albert Pujols (especially with the Angels paying all of his \$30 million salary except MLB minimum)? As of mid-week through 61 at-bats in 21 games, Pujols has already hit five home runs for the Dodgers. It took him 86 at-bats to reach that total for the Angels this season. His OPS with the Dodgers sits at .817, some 200 points higher than what he posted for the Angels. His OPS against right-handed pitching is a paltry .454. But his OPS against lefties is a monstrous 1.047.

ANDY BURNS

Feel Good story of the Week – Andy Burns got 6 at bats without a hit for the Blue Jays in 2016. The 30-year-old infielder played two seasons for the Lotte Giants of the Korean Baseball Organization. He then returned to the United States to play at Triple-A in the Blue Jays'

organization in 2019 and spent the '20 season on Toronto's roster at the alternate training site. Burns even spent a couple of months in Australia, just to get more at-bats.

This offseason, Burns signed with the Dodgers on a Minor League contract. He made the Dodgers notice him by hitting .330 this season at Triple-A Oklahoma City. And when [Max Muncy went down with a right oblique injury](#) during Friday's game, the Dodgers knew they had to make a decision.

On Saturday, all of Burns' hard work and long travels finally paid off. He was added to the Dodgers' 40-man roster and was the starting second baseman in the [12-1 loss](#) to the Rangers on Saturday at Dodger Stadium. In his first at bat he beat out an infield hit, his first hit, five years after his first at bat.

In the ninth, Burns got to make even more memories. With the game out of hand, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts walked out to the mound to make a pitching change. What Burns didn't know was that he was going to be asked to take the ball.

Burns allowed two runs on three hits, but struck out pitcher Josh Sborz to end the inning. He became the first position player in the expansion era to pitch in a game where he recorded his first big league hit.

BREWERS ARMS

There is a lot of baseball to be played but Milwaukee's top three starting pitchers, [Corbin Burnes](#), [Freddie Peralta](#) and [Brandon Woodruff](#), are off to an impressive start.

The Elias Sports Bureau tells us that Milwaukee boasts the sixth trio of pitchers across the last 40 years to boast a 2.25 ERA or lower through their first 10 starts of a season.

Teams feat. 3 SP's w/ 2.25 ERA or lower through first 10 starts

Last 40 seasons

2021 MIL: Woodruff (1.52) | Burnes (2.13) | Peralta (2.25)

'18 HOU: J. Verlander (1.05) | G. Cole (1.86) | C. Morton (2.04)

'14 CHC: J. Samardzija (1.46) | K. Hendricks (2.02) | J. Arrieta (2.05)

1985 CHC: R. Sutcliffe (2.04) | S. Sanderson (2.14) | S. Trout (2.23)

'85 LAD: F. Valenzuela (1.68) | O. Hershiser (1.78) | B. Welch (2.19)

'85 SF: M. Krukow (1.78) | D. LaPoint (1.88) | J. Gott (2.25)

Burnes is second to deGrom in MLB pitcher WAR, all three are in the top 18. All three Crew starters are also among the [top 10 starters](#) in [WHIP](#), largely because they don't allow the luxury

of contact. Burnes, Peralta and Woodruff could be the 12th trio of teammates since the mound was lowered in 1969 to boast strikeout rates at least 25% better than league average across at least 150 innings. all three Milwaukee aces are above average in hard-hit rate allowed. Blend together all those strikeouts and all that weak contact, and you have three of MLB's 10 best starters by Statcast's [expected ERA](#).

Peralta's streak of 11 straight starts with at least seven strikeouts was just snapped Thursday, and Burnes matched that run Saturday with an 11-start streak that's still alive. Both are tied with Max Scherzer (2019) for the [fourth-longest string](#) of seven-punchout starts to begin a season.

Milwaukee's rotation has also put up a combined nine starts of at least five innings with one or fewer runs and one or fewer hits allowed -- almost twice as many as other team. In fact, the 2021 Brewers have [already tied the single-season Modern Era record](#) for most dominant starts with that criteria.

JAYSON STARK OF THE ATHLETIC

Curse of the No Hitter

It was April 25 when [Madison Bumgarner](#) threw his seven-inning no-hit Whatever That Was in Atlanta. That was 54 days ago. The Diamondbacks haven't won a road game since. Maybe they should re-sign Randy Johnson and Curt Schilling for a couple of turns through the rotation.

Baltimore: It was May 5 when [John Means](#) threw a no-hitter in Seattle that actually counted. That was 44 days ago. The Orioles haven't won a road game since, either. Where are Palmer, McNally and Cuellar when you need them anyway?

So that's 23 road losses in a row for the D-Backs, and yes, that would be a record — well, a modern record, anyway. The not-so-modern record is held by Doggie Miller's 1890 Pittsburgh Innocents, a team that lost 41 straight road games on the way to finishing a remarkable 90 games under .500 (23-113). Always special to savor the greatness of those 1890 Innocents.

But the Orioles are up to 19 straight road defeats themselves. And that's the longest streak by any American League team in over 75 years — since Greek George's 1945 Philadelphia A's also dropped 19 in a row away from the hospitable climes of North Philadelphia.

So could this combined 0-42 disaster possibly be coincidence? There has never been a time in modern history when two teams had road losing streaks this long at the same time. You have to go back six decades even to find two overlapping streaks as long as 16 games.

Kids

Two games in a row at Fenway, they got home runs from *three* sons of major leaguers: [Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#), [Bo Bichette](#) and [Cavan Biggio](#) — famed sons of, well, You Know Who.

And that got us to thinking, which is always dangerous. Fenway Park has been around for over a century. So how often, we wondered, has it ever hosted a game in which three different sons of big leaguers hit a home run?

There are only four other “known” instances in which that happened in any game.

4/24/1999 Seattle Mariners—David Bell, Ken Griffey Jr. (2), David Segui

6/9/1999 Seattle Mariners—Bell, Griffey Jr., Segui

9/10/2013 Washington Nationals--Scott Hairston, Adam LaRoche, Jayson Werth

8/12/2020 Toronto Blue Jays--Bo Bichette, Vladimir Guererro Jr., Travis Shaw (2)

6/12/2021 Toronto Blue Jays--Bo Bichette, Cavan Biggio, Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

6/13/2021 Toronto Blue Jays--Bo Bichette, Cavan Biggio, Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

So basically ... four times in 109 seasons of Fenway — and then twice in 24 hours.

Sometimes in baseball, the scripts write themselves. We take you to last Saturday in Philadelphia, when a Phillies-Yankees game came down to Aroldis Chapman versus Jean Segura, with the winning run on third base and two outs in the 10th.

So what was the big deal there? Oh, only that Chapman was coming off a game, Thursday in Minnesota, in which he served up a walk-off homer to Nelson Cruz ... and Segura was coming off a game, Thursday in Philadelphia, in which he delivered a walk-off hit against the Braves.

And what happened next? What else?

That was a walk-off single, all right, which meant ... a hitter just got a walk-off hit for the second game in a row ... off a pitcher who was allowing a walk-off hit for the second game in a row ... *but not both against each other.*

So how rare is that? So rare that, according to STATS, it hadn't happened in over 40 years, regular season or postseason — since Aug. 28, 1978.

- Walk-off hitter back then: Butch Hobson of the Red Sox, fresh off a walk-off single against the Angels the day before.
- Walk-off pitcher back then: Enrique Romo of the Mariners, fresh off allowing a walk-off homer to Eddie Murray in Baltimore the day before.

And ohbytheway, it was the first time either Segura or Chapman had ever gotten mixed up in walk-off hits two games in a row — until they met up with each other.

Vlad Jr. notes 24/7 these days. So here's one more: He just homered in all four games of a four-game series — at Fenway!

And no, his father never did that, but we'll let him slide — if only because *almost nobody has ever done that*.

The only other player who ever went deep in all four games of a four-game series at Fenway, according to Stathead/Baseball-Reference: Would you believe Johnny Grubb, for Frank Robinson's 1978 Indians? Got to trot on April 21, 22 and 23 (both games of a doubleheader) — thanks to home runs off Mike Torrez, Tom Burgmeier, Dick Drago and Dennis Eckersley. Amazing.

Monday in Seattle, the Mariners scored exactly four runs — one on an RBI single, another on an RBI double, another on an RBI triple and the fourth run on an RBI homer (otherwise known as "a solo"). Even cooler still, they cranked out those RBI hits in that exact order.

So the question was: How long had it been since any team scored four runs in a game that way — and in that "natural" order? I know this chewed up way more of the Kernel's time than any theoretically normal human should ever devote to a research project like this. But it was worth it, because the last team to do it was ...

The fabled 1956 Yankees, in a 6-4 loss to Dixie Howell's White Sox on Aug. 23.

- The RBI single — by Billy Martin.

- The RBI double – by Yogi Berra.
- The RBI triple – by Jerry Coleman.
- The RBI homer – by Mickey Mantle.

This Week in Strange But True Box Score Lines

FIRST PRIZE – THE DEEP WEB

How about Ryan Weber's epic box-score line, in relief, for the Red Sox last Sunday:

5 2/3 IP, 13 H, 11 R, 11 ER, 2 BB, 7 K, 4 HR

WHAT'S UP WITH THAT? Oh boy. Where do we start?

- So 11 runs and four homers in one afternoon, huh? In 2008, Mariano Rivera made 64 appearances ... and pitched 70 2/3 innings ... and faced 259 hitters ... and gave up 11 runs and four home runs *all season*. But in other news ...
- Last *relief pitcher* to allow 13 hits, 11 runs and four homers in an outing of any length? Say hello to Sidney Schacht, mop-up man for Snuffy Stirnweiss' 1950 St. Louis Browns: 3 2/3-13-12-9-2-2, with four long balls, in the legendary 29-4 game, also at Fenway!
- Last pitcher to give up 13 hits and 11 earned runs, but still strike out at least seven? That would be Bob Feller! (7-15-15-15-9-7, on Aug. 26, 1938)
- And who was the last *relief pitcher* with a 13-hit, 11-ER, 7-K line (or worse)? Fasten your seat belt. It was Eddie Rommel, in (seriously) a *17-inning relief outing*, in which he faced 87 hitters (10 times through the order!), on July 10, 1932. His all-time Strange But True line that day: 17-29-14-13-9-7!

WEIRD AND WILD RELIEVER OF THE WEEK

The Blue Jays are the latest team to take a run at curing Tyler Chatwood's proclivity for losing home plate on his handy dandy radar screen. Well, he's had his moments. But then came this moment, last Friday in Boston:

0 IP, 0 H, 0 R, 0 ER – but ... 1 BB, 2 WP, 1 HBP

In fact, the entire outing went like this: HBP, BB, WP, HBP — the shower is thataway. But the good news is, he fulfilled the three-batter minimum!

Our friend, Doug (Kernels) Kern, reports Chatwood was the first pitcher to jam all that stuff into an outing of no hits and no outs since ... it could only be ... Mitch (The Original Wild Thing) Williams, for Texas on July 31, 1988. (Extra Strange But True credit for the Wild Thing in that game: Both of his HBPs came with the bases loaded!)

FROM NYT (James Wagner)

Pete comment--I mentioned a while ago that MLB is folding in stats from the Negro Leagues, recognizing those leagues as “major leagues”. (baseballreference.com is noted—if you haven’t checked out the website you should).

On Monday, [Baseball Reference](#), the go-to source on the internet for such matters, would have told you that Stan Musial led the major leagues with a .357 batting average in 1943. It also would have said numerous pitchers took a turn leading the majors in strikeouts per nine innings between 1927 and 1945, and that the top three batters in career adjusted on-base-plus-slugging percentage were Babe Ruth, Ted Williams and Barry Bonds.

A day later, all of that looks much different. Now, [Tetelo Vargas](#) of the New York Cubans (.471) and [Josh Gibson](#) of the Homestead Grays (.466) have both surpassed Musial in 1943. [Satchel Paige](#), a dominant pitcher for more than 20 seasons, has taken over eight of those strikeout titles. And [Oscar Charleston](#), perhaps the finest all-around player in Negro leagues history, has bumped Bonds for the third-best career mark in adjusted O.P.S.

“A lot of new books on baseball trivia will be coming out in the next few years,” Sean Forman, the founder and president of Sports Reference, joked on a video call ahead of his baseball site’s announcement on Tuesday that it had drastically changed and expanded its accounting of the Negro leagues. The move comes ahead of Major League Baseball’s own plans to incorporate the statistics into its historical record, which could happen in the next off-season.

The reason for Baseball Reference’s adjustment dates to August, when Forman said he read an article about how players from the Negro leagues remained uncouncted among the official major leagues and that M.L.B. was considering formally recognizing several of those leagues as on par with its American and National Leagues.

Until 1947, Black players had been excluded from the major leagues. And long after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, the accomplishments of most Black players remained overlooked. A committee of five white men in 1969 granted major league status to four defunct organizations, but chose not to include the Negro leagues, an omission M.L.B. called “clearly an error” [in December when it announced it was finally redressing](#) that past racial wrong and bestowing “long overdue recognition” to more than 3,400 players from seven distinct Negro leagues that operated from 1920 to 1948.

Baseball Reference has long featured statistics from the Negro leagues, but they weren’t comprehensive, the numbers weren’t included in such features as the major league leader boards or advanced search tool, and the players’ pages looked different from those of other major leaguers.

Forman said Sports Reference began talking to the people at [Seamheads](#) last summer about potentially licensing their [extensive Negro leagues database](#). But doing so, and elevating those leagues on his site, didn’t crystallize until after Forman read [Ben Lindbergh’s article in The Ringer](#).

“It just hadn’t occurred to me and I’m somewhat ashamed to say,” Forman said.

Soon, Forman and his team embarked on the largest project Sports Reference had ever undertaken, with half of the company’s staff dedicating the past four months to beefing up its representation of the Negro leagues. The company sought input from the families of Negro leagues players and researchers, and commissioned articles from them and sought interviews for a new podcast.

Although the Elias Sports Bureau is the official keeper of M.L.B.’s statistics and has been researching how best to incorporate Negro leagues statistics given the scattered nature of the various leagues and inconsistent record keeping, Baseball Reference’s efforts, while unofficial, were significant. That is because the site is perhaps [the most accessible and widely used baseball almanac](#), visited by fans, players and front office executives alike.



[Baseball Rights a Wrong by Adding Negro Leagues to Official Records](#)

[More than 3,400 players from seven leagues that operated from 1920 to 1948 will now be considered major leaguers in a move that will shake up the record books.](#)

[Dec. 16, 2020](#)

“As baseball reinvents itself, every fan should welcome this statistical reconstitution towards social reparation,” Larry Lester, a co-founder of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Mo., and the chairman of the Society for American Baseball Research’s Negro Leagues Committee, said in a video call.

“The beauty of these stats is that they now humanize these folk heroes, and they’re no longer mythical figures like Paul Bunyan or the steel-driving John Henry. These stats legitimize their accomplishments.”

Lester said M.L.B.’s announcement in December was bittersweet because it came on the heels of what he called the country’s awakening to social concerns such as police brutality and systemic racism. Adding the accomplishments of Negro league players to Baseball Reference, he said, was an opportunity for America to learn more about its history.

“Many of the websites need to be updated to include the greatness of the Negro league players,” he said. “You’re going to discover great home run hitters besides Josh Gibson.”

The major league leader boards, however, won’t change drastically on Tuesday because of several complicating factors and inherent inequalities. First and foremost, Lester said, the Negro leagues played 50 to 70 games a season — less than half as many as the other major leagues — and thus players from those leagues didn’t have the same opportunities.

That is why, Lester said, rate statistics like at-bats per home run or strikeouts per nine innings are better ways to show the talent of players like Gibson and Paige.

Gibson was a power-hitting catcher whose Hall of Fame plaque says he “hit almost 800 home runs in league and independent baseball,” but, as of Tuesday, only 165 were accounted for on Baseball Reference.

Other obstacles with the Negro leagues statistics: Players often took part in games outside of league play, such as barnstorming exhibitions — some of which were played against players from the American and National Leagues — and there are gaps in the documentation. While Lester estimated that researchers have statistics from at least 90 percent of the Negro leagues games from the 1920s and 1940s, they have approximately 60 percent to 75 percent of the games during the 1930s, with holes caused by the Great Depression.

One frustrating example for Lester is the belief, supported by at least three newspaper accounts, that Gibson achieved the rare feat of hitting [four home runs in a game](#). The game is believed to have been played in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1938, but Lester has been unable to locate a complete box score so that the achievement — and the entire game — can be officially counted.

Game-by-game data from the Negro leagues is not currently available on Baseball Reference, but Forman said he hoped to expand the site’s offerings as more research is completed, including by other organizations such as [Retrosheet](#), a website that has documented the box scores of nearly all of the games in American and National League history.

“We hope that our publication of these initial stats will spark more research, and as the research is done, the accuracy and completeness of what we present on the site will increase,” said Forman, who cautioned that players’ totals might change, such as Gibson’s 1943 batting average, which, barring significant new findings, could eventually unseat Hugh Duffy’s mark of .440 in 1894 as the official major league record. (Vargas’s .471 came in 30 of his team’s 34 games, which may force a re-examination of how players qualify for records.)

When M.L.B. made its Negro league announcement over the winter, Gibson’s great-grandson Sean said there were many unanswered questions about how recognition would take place. He said being included in this way on Baseball Reference was one example of how the change matters. He imagined how excited one of the few living Negro league players, the former

outfielder Ron Teasley, 94, might feel when he sees his page listed among the major leaguers online. Gibson also wondered if the change could bolster the Hall of Fame case for players like Rap Dixon, a star outfielder in the 1920s and 1930s.

For his own family, Sean Gibson said he was excited to see how his great-grandfather's accomplishments rank in major league history. On Tuesday, the top of [Josh Gibson's Baseball Reference page](#) had several new additions: two-time Triple Crown winner, 12-time All-Star, two-time World Series winner and three-time batting champion.

"It used to always be like, 'Was Josh Gibson considered one of the greatest Black baseball players?'" Sean Gibson said in a video call. "Well, now we can say Josh is considered one of the greatest baseball players of all time."

INTERESTING STATS STUFF FROM THE ATHLETIC.

Slugging pct., ground ball rate, swing rate, strikeout rate, barrel rate. Which is the best early season predictor of a player's season?

SWING RATE--The last three rates all stabilize relatively quickly — meaning the current stat is more useful for predicting the rest of season outcomes than just using league average — but Barrel Rate still needs about 50 balls in play, and strikeout rate needs more than 60 plate appearances. It's a batter's propensity to swing that becomes meaningful a paltry 50 plate appearances into the season — only about two weeks into the season we know if a guy is aggressive or patient, at least in broad strokes.

FIP (Fielding Independent Pitching-- *FIP* is similar to ERA, but it focuses solely on the events a pitcher has the most control over -- strikeouts, unintentional walks, hit-by-pitches and home runs), ground ball rate, strikeout rate, swinging strike rate, fastball velocity. Which is the best early season predictor of a pitcher's season?

FASTBALL VELOCITY -- these statistics are actually sorted in ascending order of how quickly they become meaningful. It's strikeout rate's relative power that makes strikeouts-minus-walks one of the best in-season predictors in baseball, if you're looking for some results to power your predictions. Though called strikes and swinging strikes are equally important for predicting future strikeout rates, swinging strike rates are more useful in smaller samples, perhaps because there's less of an umpire or catcher effect. But Jeff Zimmerman found that ONE game of fastball velocity tells us a ton about a pitcher's velo going forward, and three games tells us all we can know.

Barrel Rates become meaningful around the second month of the season, and they are perhaps the best Statcast stat when it comes to putting together the ability to both lift the ball and hit it hard — no other stat correlates better to power outcomes and becomes meaningful quickly.

Maximum Exit Velocity is a powerful stat that describes a player's power potential very quickly, but it's also strange in that the absence of a really hard hit ball early does not tell us a ton.

Rise is the appearance of rise on a fastball, because no pitch truly rises, but these pitches do 'jump' at the hitter by appearing higher at the plate than the batter expects. This feature ended up being one of the most important features when it comes to a pitcher's stuff — outstripping even fastball velocity in our research.

This year features the highest average fastball velocity in the pitch tracking era, and the largest year over year increase in fastball velocity in ten years — so being able to hit the ball hard off of a hard fastball is more important than ever.

Twelve starters are down 200 RPM in spin since baseball announced they would crack down on the use of sticky stuff across the league. There's some debate about how much spin loss is significant, because there are mechanical, velocity, and technological reasons a pitcher could see their RPM vacillate from start to start. But when a pitcher loses RPM in the hundreds, like twelve pitchers have this week, there's less doubt that something else is going on.

Baseball's next challenge will be the battle against velocity: Stark

We interrupt this frenetic conversation about Spider Tack, spin rates and glop on the baseball for this important reminder: If you think this glop crackdown alone will "fix" offense, we need to ship you a radar gun immediately! That's because ...

Today's challenge is rpms. Tomorrow's challenge is mph.

The good news for America's beleaguered hitters is: Spin rates are no doubt about to drop precipitously, as Major League Baseball launches its attack on pitchers' stockpiles of Super Glue. But next up, there's still this:

What can MLB do to counter the relentless climb in pitchers' velocity, which has been rising steadily for the last 15 years? Check out this unmistakable trend.

2006 90.5 mph

2011 91.5 mph

2016 92.3 mph

2021 93.4 mph

(Source: FanGraphs/Sports Info Solutions)

Wait, you say. We're only talking about a couple of miles per hour difference over the last decade. How much does that matter? Oh, really? Just take a look at this breakdown, across the sport, through games of Tuesday.

92 mph .281 .498 .830

94 mph .218 .360 .667

(Source — Sportradar.com)

All right then. Still think that extra two miles per hour is pretty innocuous?

"Everything starts with velocity," said one NL executive — and it's hard to argue.

Maybe reduced spin rates will make those fastballs fly straighter, or make all those 93 mph sliders easier for hitters to track. We're about to find out. But in the meantime, baseball is already contemplating its next step.

Except that one won't be unfolding in places like Fenway or Wrigley. It will be tried out in spots like Gastonia, NC, and Waldorf, Md., starting in a month and a half, when the Atlantic League will move the pitcher's rubber back a foot.

As MLB's resident fix-the-game consultant, Theo Epstein, [explained to me and Doug Glanville](#) this spring on our [Starkville podcast](#), you don't move the mound to make the field look more

picturesque or symmetrical. This is 100 percent about velocity — and baseball's initial experiment with how to counter it. Here's how Epstein described the thinking:

"If you move the mound back a foot," he said, "you would give hitters an extra 100th of a second (to react) ... And that 100th of a second corresponds to basically like a tick and a half of velocity. Which would sort of mean that you're restoring velocity to where it was maybe eight to 10 years ago, when the contract rate was a little bit better, the strikeout rate was a little bit more under control. So it would certainly be a worthwhile experiment."

But suppose that isn't enough? Or it produces so many unintended consequences that nearly everyone hates it? Or, most likely, it's impossible to reach agreement with the players' union, so it's never tried in the big leagues? Then what else might be on the table?

Well, that's where this column comes in. We just surveyed a dozen deep thinkers in the game about what else baseball could do to help neutralize velocity. Not surprisingly, they had a slew of ideas. Here are 10 that are worth thinking about.

Limit shifts (six votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: MLB is already experimenting with shift limits in Double A this year, and the baseball world is watching. For now, it's basically the No Infielders on the Outfield Grass Rule. But it's possible that in the second half, you could see those limits expand, with a rule that would keep two infielders on each side of second base. Think we could someday see either of those shift limits arrive at a big-league park in your area code? Don't be surprised.

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: It was almost shocking to hear the change in front-office tone on this issue, considering that it's coming from the same execs responsible for the quadrupling of shifting over the last four years. Some of these folks are just resigned to the inevitability of a shift-busting rule some day, whether they like it or not. But others now have done the full 180, because they see the ways shifts have altered swings — and the sport itself.

"I have generally been against the idea until recently," said one NL exec. "I have changed my mind. Not only will there be more singles, but the hitters will find greater rewards for hard ground balls ... which might decrease the swing/miss go-for-it style of hitting that is so prevalent."

"Normalize" the baseball (six votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: This is actually a jumble of several different ideas rolled into one category. But the common theme was this: Across the game, everyone wants a more consistent baseball. A baseball that is manufactured the same every year ... that has a better, more natural tackiness, like the ball in Japan, that alleviates pitchers' grip complaints ... and a ball that has

what one exec described as an “appropriate” amount of bounce and carry (as opposed to the 2019 Titleist level of bounce and carry).

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: This is complicated, because a better baseball could provide the solution to multiple problems. But a more standardized, naturally tacky surface would theoretically solve pitchers’ grip challenges in a sunscreen-free (and Spider Tack-free) world. So that needs to happen ASAP. Meanwhile, if everyone agrees we want more balls in play, wouldn’t one potential fix be a less bouncy baseball that makes the checked-swing, opposite-field home run a more improbable dream?

“For years, there’s been talk in tennis about going back to wood rackets or something similar, because the serve has become so overwhelming,” said one exec. “So much of men’s tennis is: You hit a serve. It’s either an ace or a weak return, and the server comes to the net and the point is over. So can we do something with the baseball that affects the way it moves and how it spins? I’m not a physics major. But that’s an area I would like to see explored.”

Bring on the pitch clock (four votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: The upper levels of the minor leagues have been using a 20-second pitch clock for years. But in what used to be the California League (now the Low-A West League), baseball implemented a more radical 15-second pitch clock this year. Pitchers have just 15 seconds to begin their windup or come to a set position from the stretch. If they don’t, it’s an automatic ball. If the pitch clock ever makes it to MLB, there is zero chance it would only be 15 seconds. But support for more aggressive clocks is clearly growing.

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: How much harder can pitchers throw a baseball if they get as much time as they want to recover from that last 101 mph smokeball? That’s not measurable. But it’s not too difficult to connect those dots.

“Before we do any major tinkering, I’d love to see what the game looks like if pitchers pitch with a Mark Buehrle tempo,” said an AL exec. “I think if we can increase tempo, we’ll have a more athletic product, and (velocity) will come down a little bit, and the game has a better rhythm to it. When you have a six-pitch strikeout and there are 30 seconds between every pitch, there’s no cadence to that. But if it’s a five-pitch strikeout and it takes a minute and 10 seconds, you’re engrossed in every pitch.”

Make stolen bases easier (four votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: This is one more area baseball is already [experimenting with in the minor leagues](#) — with huge impact. You have Low-A leagues imposing a two-pickoff-move quota. You have High-A leagues requiring pitchers to step off before throwing to first (or any) base. And you have Triple-A leagues using slightly larger bases that reduce the distance between bases.

In those A-ball leagues, base-stealing attempts have exploded to a level not seen in the big leagues in over a century. So while not everyone loves all these ideas, it's hard to find anybody who wants to see *less* base-stealing.

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: Base-stealing = action. And that's always a fine plan. But we're talking about countering velocity here, and maybe you haven't thought about how more stolen bases could help with that. But you know who has? Theo Epstein has. He's all over the ways base-stealing could have a dramatic impact on both hitters and pitchers.

"They're going to quick-pitch," Epstein said on Starkville. "They're going to slide-step ... and maybe throw more fastballs. And that's good, to create the outcomes fans like to see — triples, doubles and stolen bases."

But Epstein also knows that swings are tailored around the long ball now because teams understand they're *not* going to get three singles in an inning off Jacob deGrom. Suppose, though, that base-stealing becomes so much less of a risk that, with a walk and a steal, you only need *one* single to score in that inning? Who knows what effect that could have on swing planes? Some people in this survey would love to find out.

Pay those contact hitters! (three votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: There are 28 position players in baseball this year whose average annual contract value is \$20 million or more. Exactly three of them have never hit 30 home runs in a season:* Jason Heyward, Salvador Pérez and J.T. Realmuto (who have all hit at least 25). So what gets players paid in the year 2021? It's obvious. Power gets them paid.

So how does baseball incentivize hitters to construct a different kind of swing? Here is what several folks in this survey suggested: Find a way, maybe with changes to the arbitration system, to reward them for contact, for not striking out, for extra-base hits that *aren't* homers, even for stolen bases and sac flies. We can fill in the details later, but you get the idea.

*(*We prorated last year's 60-game stats over 162 games, just to account for Fernando Tatis Jr. You're welcome!)*

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: Money talks, right? So let it talk. Nothing in professional sports incentivizes player behavior like dollars. But as one long-time baseball man said, this sport needs to value contact in *every* way, not just with \$\$\$\$.

"These guys, they're chasing the dollar," he said. "And it's not their fault. They're chasing the dollar. They're striking out 180 times and getting a million-dollar raise. So what would you do? ... (If you want more contact) you've got to compensate it. But more importantly, you've got to value it. And you've got to teach it. Are you telling me you can't make it a priority in your organization? You can. And there are certain teams that do."

Fix the strike zone (three votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: Those robot umps are lurking, you know. You can now find them in the league formerly known as the Florida State League, in addition to the Atlantic League. And an automated strike zone would do more than just bring more consistency to what a strike is and isn't.

It would need to come with tweaks to the rulebook zone, so that balls that just nick the zone, but really aren't strikes, don't wreak havoc. But while we're at it, several execs in this survey think the strike zone could be tweaked in other ways, to give hitters a better chance at dealing with velocity.

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: If there's a clear consensus on how to "fix" the zone, we haven't heard it. Baseball came close to raising the bottom of the strike zone a few years back, when the high-velocity, plummeting two-seamer was more in vogue. Now there's a lot more talk about lowering the top of the zone, as more hitters find themselves chasing 98 mph four-seamers at the letters that are pretty much the definition of unhittable.

The only thing everyone agrees on? It's that the zone won't get wider.

"I'm not sure about this one," said one NL exec. "I really don't love the idea of an automated strike zone ... Maybe we allow each team two ball/strike challenges per game. The replay should be quick, and the manager would only use it if the call was egregious and/or the game situation was high-leverage enough. To the extent we do automate the zone ... I might shrink the zone by about an inch at the top of the zone. The high-spin, high-velocity heater is very difficult to hit."

Outlaw the 14-man pitching staff (two votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: How do you keep teams from parading in one fire-breathing bullpen arm after another for three hours every night? Place a cap on how many fire-breathing relievers those teams can keep on the roster. Shouldn't eight relievers — and 13 pitchers overall — be enough? There was so much consensus that it should that this rule was actually supposed to go into effect in 2020, before it was postponed by the pandemic. But you'll almost certainly see it in 2022 — and beyond.

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: It's just too easy now, and too tempting, for any manager to hook his starter as that third time through the order approaches. And even if those strategies work, they're also taking a toll on the entertainment value and pace of these games. But most relevant for a piece like this, they've made hitting harder than ever. So how do you give hitters more shots against tiring starters and fewer looks at those ferocious bullpen monsters? A limit on the sheer number of relievers would have a definite impact.

“We have to limit the number of pitchers on a roster,” said one NL exec. “I know this is extreme, but what if pitching staffs were limited to 11 pitchers? Then you’d be forced to have starters try to give you more length, and not go max-effort from first pitch to last pitch. You’d see more starters stay out there for the third time through the order. And I think you’d see bullpen guys go on back-to-back days more often. Both of those would give hitters a better chance. I don’t think there’s much doubt about that.”

Two DHs instead of one? (two votes)

HOW IT COULD WORK: Nobody loves chronicling [great moments in sweet-swinging pitchers](#) more than I do. But the slash line of pitchers at the dish, here in 2021, is a gruesome .114/.153/.144, good for an OPS+ of (gulp) minus-15! Also, did you know that the average team’s No. 8 hitter has an OPS+ of just 77 — or 23 percent below league-average? So two execs in this survey tossed out an outside-the-box idea they say has been kicked around behind the scenes:

What if teams could use *two* designated hitters every game — one for the pitcher, one for the next-worst hitter in their lineup? Or, if we don’t want to go that route, what about a lineup where only eight players hit — and you’d zap the pitcher’s spot entirely and substitute a DH for a weak-hitting elite defender?

WHY IT MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: This is undoubtedly way too radical or gimmicky for the baseball-should-never-change purists. But if you’re looking to give the hitters a better shot, why not fiddle with the rules so that you give more at-bats to your good hitters and fewer at-bats to your worst hitters? You should know the details are still murky, but think about it!

“Maybe this puts a carrot in front of more (defense-first) athletes to want to play baseball,” said an AL exec, “because they don’t have to hit. Or if you go to eight hitters instead of nine, you can turn lineups over faster and get your better hitters up there faster. It’s at least an interesting concept, right?”

Two more outside-the-box ideas (one vote each)

HOW THEY COULD WORK: Since both of these brainstormers have the same intent, let’s clump them together. One would limit a team to using four relievers per game — and if it goes over four, the other team gets a free ghost runner on first for every additional reliever. ... The other rule would take the three-batter minimum *and double it* — to a six-batter minimum. They’re just two different ways of achieving the same objective (in theory): The fewer games where 12 pitchers pitch, the better the sport.

WHY THEY MIGHT BE AN ANSWER: Everyone loves a parade — but not a bullpen parade. Yes, these ideas might be over the top. And they might not even be necessary if roster limits do what they’re supposed to do. But once again, these concepts are out there. And they’re being talked about at the GM level and above. So why not at least mull them over?

Even the exec who suggested the five-pitcher ghost-runner rule conceded that “this one is a little crazy.” But he made the case for it — or something like it, anyway:

“This would require some thought,” he said. “Is the fifth pitcher (to trigger the ghost runner) the right threshold? But I think it would slow down the parade of relievers throughout the game and would make late-game strategy interesting if there was a penalty on the team using five or more pitchers.”

So maybe you love this. Maybe you hate this. Maybe you have no interest in seeing any of this. But here’s why it’s now part of the baseball conversation:

For years, the other sports have been using rule changes to try to make their sports more entertaining — and if those changes don’t work, they dump them for better ideas. Baseball has been slow to travel down that road. But that’s about to change. Except now comes the biggest challenge of all, for Theo and friends.

It’s one thing to brainstorm. It’s quite another to turn ideas into meaningful change. Let’s just say that, to accomplish that, it’s going to take a lot more hard work than just wiping the Spider Tack off pitchers’ fingers.

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JUNE 13, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. A lovely day in Maine.

Lefties batted .269 off right-handers in 2009, but with infield shifts now so common, that mark has dropped to .235 this season.

Who was the last pitcher before Shohei Ohtani to have 9+ stolen bases and 60+ strikeouts in a season? Nixey Callahan way back in 1901. Ohtani a week ago Friday struck out 10 and the first inning of the next game hit an HR. Never been done.

Would you have guessed that Pirates 2B Adam Frazier leads MLB in hits (76) and doubles (20), ranks fourth in batting average (.332) and is tied for ninth in on-base percentage (.394)?

Amazingly, Frazier has hit safely in 32 of his past 35 games, racking up 50 knocks in that span. He has the fifth-lowest strikeout rate (10.8%) among qualifying hitters, and only five players have a lower whiff rate (misses / swings).

A 3-0 victory over the Tigers on last Sunday afternoon at Guaranteed Rate Field that gave La Russa win No. 2,764, the 76-year-old passed John McGraw for second on the all time managing wins list. Connie Mack is way in front with 3771 wins. LaRussa has pulled ahead of Bobby Cox 2504 and Joe Torre 2326. Mack also had 3,948 losses, making La Russa the all-time wins leader for a manager with a record above .500.

Jesse Winker's of the Reds had his second three-HR game of 2021 last week. He is the first Red ever to do that. The MLB record is held by Sammy Sosa, three times in 2001

Bryce Harper was the last player 22 or younger to lead a league in home runs, with 42 in 2015. The last right-handed home run champion at that age was the Rangers' Juan Gonzalez (43 home runs in 1993)

How good was Larry Walker?

.313 career average

471 2B

62 3B

383 HR

230 SB,
1,311 RBI

Grand Slams (a reader asked about Frank Robinson which got me to digging)

Players who Hit Two Grand Slams in a Game

Tony Lazzeri, 1936 Yankees. (hit a 3rd HR in the game, had 11 RBIs)
Jim Tabor, 1939 Red Sox
Rudy York, 1946 Red Sox
Jim Gentile, 1962 Orioles
Tony Cloninger, 1966 Braves (only pitcher on the list)
Jim Northrup, 1968 Tigers
Frank Robinson, 1970 Orioles (on consecutive swings)
Robin Ventura, 1995 White Sox
Chris Hoiles, 1998 Orioles
Fernando Tatis, 1999 Cardinals (both grand slams in same inning so 8 RBIs in one inning)
Nomar Garciaparra, 1999 Red Sox (only player on this list to do it at home park)
Bill Mueller, 2003 Red Sox (one from each side of the plate)
Josh Willingham, 2009 Nationals

Ventura leads this group with 18 career grand slams. Ventura is tied for 5th all-time with Willie McCovey, behind ARod (25), Lou Gehrig (23), Manny Ramirez (21) and Eddie Murray (19). Frank Robinson had 8.

Vlad Jr.

Entering play on Saturday, Guerrero led MLB in home runs, RBIs, on-base percentage, slugging percentage, OPS and total bases. His 3.7 WAR is also tied for the best in baseball with the great Jacob deGrom, and it leads all hitters.

At 22 years and 88 days old, Guerrero became the fifth-youngest player with 20 or more homers in his first 62 games of a season. The only players to reach 20 faster:

- Mel Ott, 1929: 20 years, 117 days
- Eddie Mathews, 1953: 21 years, 151 days
- Cody Bellinger, 2017: 21 years, 352 days
- Yordan Alvarez, 2019: 22 years, 63 days

Guerrero also became the third-youngest player in MLB history to be first in the Majors to 20 homers in a season. Only Ott (20 years, 112 days in 1929) and Mathews (21 years, 246 days in 1953) were younger, per Elias.

deGrom Notes of the Week

Nobody in baseball history has been better through the first nine starts of a season than [Jacob deGrom](#).

DeGrom's 0.62 ERA through nine starts bests Juan Marichal's from 1966 — finally, vengeance for the Mets on their long tormentor of the 1960s — after his seven shutout frames against San Diego on Saturday. DeGrom will take on the Padres again this Friday, and to hold the best-ever ERA through 10 starts, he'll have to blank the Friars again: Marichal was at 0.59 through 10 in '66.

Gibson's 1.12 came in the Year of the Pitcher, when the major-league ERA was 2.98 and the average team slugged 100 homers on the season. Six other pitchers had season-long ERAs under 2.00 that season, although only Cleveland's [Luis Tiant](#) came within a half-run of Gibson at 1.60.—to give you an idea of how low 1968 scoring was...in this season of disappointing offense teams are averaging a full run more than 1968.

In 2015, Arrieta beat that mark pretty easily, as his final 17 starts carried a microscopic 0.77 ERA over exactly 123 innings. That same season, Kershaw had a 17-start stretch over 129 innings with a 1.26 ERA, and his teammate Greinke's first 19 starts over 131 1/3 innings came with a 1.30 ERA.

One year earlier, Kershaw had a 16-start stretch over 126 innings at a 1.14 ERA.

DeGrom wouldn't be the first Met to have that stretch: [Tom Seaver](#) posted a 1.10 ERA over 131 innings (his final 15 starts) in 1971.

Other pitchers who did that between 1968 and 2014: Vida Blue (1971), [Steve Carlton](#) (1972), [Gaylord Perry](#) (1974), John Tudor (1985) and [Greg Maddux](#) (1998).

The most interesting aspect of deGrom's success so far this season has been his efficiency. In 2020, deGrom was less efficient than he'd ever been in his career: The average plate appearance took 4.22 pitches, the average inning took 16.7 pitches. And thus, after averaging just about 6 2/3 innings per start over 2018 and 2019, he averaged only 5 2/3 per start last year. It may have cost him a third straight Cy Young.

This year, deGrom is throwing far fewer pitches even as he strikes out way more hitters. He's punching out better than 45 percent of opposing hitters, which is an incredible mark for a one-inning closer to achieve. His strikeout rate is a quarter better than any other starter's in the sport right now.

And yet, he's become one of the game's most efficient pitchers. The average plate appearance against deGrom is a half-pitch shorter than last year, down to 3.70. The average inning takes barely 13 pitches.

Jacob deGrom is one of only two pitchers since 1913 with at least 90 strikeouts and fewer than five earned runs allowed in a nine-start span. The other is Chris Sale (in 2018)

Then Friday against the Padres deGrom delivered 10 strikeouts, which made him the fastest player to fan 100 batters in a season in Major League history. His ERA of 0.56 is the lowest ever through ten appearances. exactly half of Bob Gibson's famous final ERA in 1968 (1.12).

FROM NYT

Of the 74,774 selections made in the various iterations of the M.L.B. draft since it began in 1965, Schmidt has done more for the team that drafted him than any other. No player has accumulated more wins above replacement for the team that picked him than Schmidt, the Philadelphia Phillies' second-round choice, 30th overall, in 1971.

WAR, which accounts for a player's hitting, baserunning and defense, while adjusting for position, era and ballpark, is the closest thing we have to a catchall statistic. Fans of more traditional statistics could instead note that Schmidt hit more home runs for the team that drafted him than any other draft pick, while playing game-changing defense and leading a previously moribund franchise to its first World Series title.

2,404 games in the majors

After leading Ohio to the College World Series in 1970, Schmidt hit .331 with 10 homers in 37 games in 1971.

Schmidt was, indeed, a late bloomer with fierce drive; after hitting .196 as a rookie in 1973, he found his confidence and learned to hit the slider while playing winter ball in Caguas, P.R. Schmidt would lead the majors in homers in each of the next three seasons, guiding the Phillies to their first-ever sustained stretch of winning.

His career would last 18 seasons in which he hit 548 home runs, scored and drove in more than 1,500 runs and won 10 Gold Gloves. He was selected to 12 All-Star teams and won three Most Valuable Player Awards. In 1995, his first year on the ballot, he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame with 96.5 percent of the vote.

JAYSON STARK

ZACK'S ATTACK: Last Friday, in the Blue Jays' first game back in Buffalo this year, Zack Greinke threw one of those rarified nine-inning complete games. Last pitcher to go nine "*in Buffalo?*" According to the great Doug (Kernels) Kern, that would be noted Federal League journeyman Rube Marshall, on Sept. 8, 1915. That was Rube's last career win. But isn't it beautiful that thanks to Greinke, we haven't forgotten?

POUR THE O.J.: I had another friend who texted me last Friday with this: *Houston at Buffalo this weekend. Frank Reich batting cleanup.* Good one! But in truth – since the Bills have played nearly half a century in lovely suburban Orchard Park – even Frank Reich doesn't make this lineup. That's because the last time "Houston" played in the actual city of Buffalo was ...

Dec. 12, 1971 – Oilers 20, Bills 14. O.J. Simpson ran one in for a touchdown that day, because of course he did. But two field goals by a young kicker named Mark Moseley helped lead the Oilers to a balmy victory.

Pirates rookie Ke'Bryan Hayes forgot to touch em all—hit an HR and missed 1B, out on appeal. **LAST TO LOSE A HOME RUN FOR MISSING ANY BASE:** Al Cowens, Mariners, on June 17, 1983. Missed second base during an inside-the-park home run. **LAST TO LOSE A HOME RUN FOR MISSING FIRST BASE:** Jack Dunn of the old New York Giants is the last known hitter to pull this off – in 1904

How did the Rays' Ryan Yarbrough end his 24-start winless streak last weekend? With a complete-game win in Yankee Stadium. That's how. The big news that day was the Rays ending a five-year, 731-game streak with no nine-inning complete games by anybody. But that wasn't the only big news for Yarbrough!

According to STATS, it's the longest winless streak that *any* starting pitcher has ever ended with a complete game at any Yankee Stadium. In fact, only four longer winless streaks since 1901 have been snapped with a complete-game victory by any starting pitcher in any stadium.

Jo Jo Reyes broke a 28 loss streak in 2011, Matt Keough broke a 28 loss streak in 1979, Bob Miller, 27 losses in 1962 and then you have to go back to Cliff Curtis, 28 in 1911.

DeGrom's ERA has started with a zero after each of his first nine starts this year. And here, from STATS, are the only other pitchers who could say that after at least their first nine starts of a season, since earned runs became an official stat in 1913:

2009 Zack Greinke: 10 starts
1981 Fernando Valenzuela: 9
1966 Juan Marichal: 11
1945 Al Benton: 9
1914 Dutch Leonard: 14

Sunday in Atlanta, Pujols got to trot around the bases of Atlanta's Truist Park for the first time ever. And what's so Weird and Wild about that? Oh, only that it was the 40th different park he'd hit a home run in. And just eight other men in history can say that. Fun list!

Sammy Sosa: 45
Ken Griffey Jr.: 44
Fred McGriff: 43
Andruw Jones: 42
Gary Sheffield: 42
Ellis Burks: 41
Mike Piazza: 40
Adrián Beltré: 40

Jackson Kowar's first career big-league start, Monday for the Royals:

Outs: 2

Wild pitches: 3

Well, you don't see that much. Thanks to the miracle of Baseball-Reference/Stathead, we can tell you exactly how many other starting pitchers in the modern era have had more wild pitches than outs in their major-league debut. And that, naturally, would be none.

Nine times a Brewers starter had given up exactly one hit this season, just counting starts of five innings or more. Which means they've already nearly tied the modern record (10, by Yonny Chirinos' 2018 Rays).

The Orioles broke a 14 game losing streak with back to back wins.

Times in the last eight games of that losing streak that the Orioles scored five runs in a game: Zero. Times just in that 18-5 game they scored at least five runs in *an inning*: Three.

Runs they scored in the last eight games of that losing streak combined: 18. Runs they scored just in *eight innings* Sunday: 18.

Diamondbacks haven't won a road game since Madison Baumgarner's 7 inning no hitter.

That's 19 road losses in a row, tied (with Slammin' Sammy Khalifa's '85 Pirates) for the second-longest road losing streak in the expansion era, behind only Larry (The Bear) Bearnarth's 1963 Mets, who lost 22 in a row.

24-year-old Phillies rookie named Luke Williams.

Wednesday night, in the first game he ever started in the major leagues, Williams stepped to the plate with two outs in the ninth in Philadelphia, his team one out away from its first 1-0 loss at home in six years.

No Phillie had hit a lead-flipping walk-off home run, with his team one out away from getting shut out, in three decades.

No player in history, according to STATS, had ever hit a walk-off home run for any team, with his team trailing, *in the first game he'd ever started in the big leagues*.

For comparison, Barry Bonds, Hank Aaron and Babe Ruth. Walk off HRs hit when team is trailing with 2 outs in 9th? Ruth did it once, Aaron and Bonds never did. But Luke Williams did.

Since Aug. 14, 2016, Zack Greinke is first among active pitchers with 3,024 2/3 regular-season innings. Justin Verlander is next at 2,988, followed by Jon Lester at 2,637 1/3. Including postseason, Verlander is at 3,175 2/3, Greinke 3,131 1/3.

YOU MAKE THE CALL

The Athletic's Andrew Baggarly delivered a rules quiz this week. See how you do.

1. Major League Baseball is experimenting with the bases at Triple A, widening them from 15 inches square to 18 inches square. But the regulation width of the plate remains the same. How wide is it?

- A 12 inches
- B 15
- C 17
- D 20

2. The Braves' Ronald Acuña Jr. puts a ball in play and runs down the first-base line. He is allowed to step outside the 3-foot chalked running lane unless:

- A. He is avoiding a tag
- B. He is avoiding a collision with a defensive player
- C. He is making a wide turn to accelerate around 1B
- D. He hit a HR and wants to high five the 1B coach.

3. With Keston Hiura on third base and Christian Yelich on first base, Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo tries to pull the ol' hidden ball trick. He receives a pickoff throw, feigns a throw back to the mound and tucks the ball in his pants pocket. When Yelich takes his lead, Rizzo produces the ball and applies a tag before Yelich can return to the base. What's the result of the play?

- A. First base Ump calls time and issues a warning. Yelich is safe at 1B.
- B. First base ump calls time and awards Yelich 2B
- C. First base ump calls time, advances each runner one base, Hiura scores.
- D. Yelich is out, the inning is over.

4. Yes, there really is a "no fraternization" rule on the books. Which of the following interactions is NOT expressly forbidden under Rule 4.06?

- A. Players in uniform shall not address or mingle with fans in the stands.
- B. Players in uniform shall not sit in the stands before or after the game
- C. Players of opposing teams shall not fraternize at any time while uniform.

D. Players of opposing teams shall not share equipment during a game.

5. With Marcus Semien on third base and one out, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. swings at a pitch and clips the glove of catcher Gary Sánchez. Guerrero proceeds to put the ball in play for a sacrifice fly to center field that plates Semien. What is the result of the play?

- a. Guerrero is awarded 1B and Semien goes back to 3B.
- b. Guerrero is awarded 1B and Semien is allowed to score.
- c. Guerrero is out and Semien is allowed to score.
- d. Toronto manager Charlie Montoyo is allowed to choose between A and C.

6. Mookie Betts, Max Muncy and Cody Bellinger are due up for the Dodgers in the fourth inning. Betts hits a leadoff single and Bellinger absent-mindedly steps to bat next. Betts steals second base on a first-pitch strike and then Bellinger realizes that he is batting out of turn. Bellinger calls time and Muncy attempts to replace him in the batter's box. What happens next?

- a. Muncy is declared the legal batter with a 0-0 count and Betts is sent back to 1B.
- b. Muncy becomes the legal batter with a 0-1 count and Betts is allowed to remain at 2B.
- c. Bellinger is declared out for batting out of proper order and Betts is sent back to 1B.
- d. Muncy is declared out for failing to bat in proper order and Betts is sent back to 1B.

7. Angels manager Joe Maddon is serving a one-game suspension for an altercation with an umpire earlier in the week. On the day he serves the suspension, he is allowed to:

- a. Throw pre-game batting practice.
- b. Watch the game from the press box.
- c. Provide color commentary in the broadcast booth.
- d. Roam the stands as a hot dog vendor in full uniform.

8. The Mets trail the Phillies 2-1 with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning. Pete Alonso steps to the plate with the bases loaded: Jonathan Villar at third base, Francisco Lindor at second base and Brandon Nimmo at first base. Alonso hits a ball

that clears the fence for an apparent grand slam. Villar crosses the plate, but before Lindor touches home, Alonso in his exuberance passes Nimmo on the basepaths. What is the result of the play?

- a. Alonso is credited with a grand slam, Mets win 5-2.
- b. Alonso is credited with a single and called out. Mets lose 2-1.
- c. Alonso is credited with a single and called out but Villar's run is allowed to score. 2-2 game continues into extra innings.
- d. Alonso is credited with a single and called out, but Villar and Lindor are allowed to score because they were not passed on the bases. Mets win 3-2.

9. The Cubs lead the Giants 2-0 in the bottom of the fifth inning at Wrigley Field when a sudden downpour forces umpires to halt play. The Cubs grounds crew struggles to roll out the tarp straight and unintentionally fails to cover a portion of the infield. By the time the storm cell passes, the field is rendered unplayable. When does the game resume?

- a. It doesn't. The game is a regulation game because the home team leads after 4 ½ innings. Cubs win 2-0.
- b. It doesn't. The Giants win by forfeit.
- c. The Cubs grounds crew is allowed two hours to make the field playable or the Giants win by forfeit.
- d. The game is suspended and will resume from the point it was halted at a future date when the field is playable.

10. Under the official scoring rules, most mental mistakes or misjudgments are not scored as errors. Which of the following plays involving Padres first baseman Eric Hosmer is an exception that would be scored an error?

- a. Hosmer fields a groundball with the bases empty and throws to 2B thinking he has a force out there. The batter runner is safe at 1B on an E3.
- b. Hosmer catches a pop out with one out and a runner on 3B. Hosmer thinks his catch is the third out and tosses the ball in the stands and the runner from 3B scores on an E3.
- c. Hosmer allows a foul pop to drop with a runner on 3B to prevent the runner from tagging and scoring. The batter's plate appearance continues after an E3.
- d. Hosmer fields a ground ball. Pitcher Blake Snell fails to cover 1B and the runner is safe on an E1.

ANSWERS

1C. "Home base shall be marked by a five-sided slab of whitened rubber. It shall be a 17-inch square with two of the corners removed so that one edge is 17 inches long, two adjacent sides are 8½ inches and the remaining two sides are 12 inches and set at an angle to make a point. It shall be set in the ground with the point at the intersection of the lines extending from home base to first base and to third base; with the 17-inch edge facing the pitcher's plate, and the two 12-inch edges coinciding with the first and third base lines. The top edges of home base shall be beveled and the base shall be fixed in the ground level with the ground surface."

2A. According to Rule 5.09(b)(1), any runner is out when he runs more than three feet away from his base path to avoid being tagged unless his action is to avoid interference with a fielder fielding a batted ball. A runner's base path is established when the tag attempt occurs and is a straight line from the runner to the base he is attempting to reach safely.

3C. Think of this as a balk rule for position players. Rule 5.06(c)(7) states that if the ball is intentionally placed inside a player's uniform for the purpose of deceiving a baserunner, the umpire will call time and place all runners at least one base — or more, if warranted in the umpire's judgment, in order to nullify the action of the ball being put out of play.

4D. It's hardly enforced today and barely even frowned upon, but according to Rule 4.06, players of opposing teams really are forbidden to fraternize at any time while in uniform. However, there's nothing on the books that forbids the sandlot gesture of leaving your glove in center field for your opponent to use.

5D. According to the comment on Rule 6.01(c): "If catcher's interference is called with a play in progress the umpire will allow the play to continue because the manager may elect to take the play." In most cases, the manager would prefer that the batter be awarded first base on catcher's interference. But not always! In this case, Montoyo might prefer to take the result of the play and trade an out for a run. And here you thought only NFL head coaches got to pick between declining a penalty or taking points off the board!

6B. Rule 6.03(b), which covers batting out of turn, clearly states that the proper batter (Muncy) is called out, but only upon appeal and only after the improper batter has concluded his plate appearance. The Rule 6.03(b)(7) Comment states: "The umpire shall not direct the attention of any person to the presence in the batter's box of an improper batter. This rule is designed to require constant vigilance by the players and managers of both teams." However, Rule 6.03(b)(2) also states that the proper batter may take his place in the batter's box at any time

before the improper batter becomes a runner or is put out, and any balls and strikes shall be counted in the proper batter's time at bat. Rule 6.03(b)(4) states that if a runner advances while the improper batter is at bat, on a stolen base, balk, wild pitch or passed ball, such advance is legal. Thus Muncy is allowed to legally inherit Bellinger's count and Betts is allowed to remain at second base.

7A. Rule 6.04 covers unsportsmanlike conduct and the comment under Rule 6.04(d) states: "If a manager, coach or player is under suspension he may be in uniform and may participate in the regular pre-game routines of the Club. At game time, however, suspended personnel must be out of uniform, may not be in the dugout, and must be away from areas where players are expected to be during a game. Suspended personnel also are not permitted in the press box or any broadcast areas during the course of a game, but are permitted to watch the game from the stands or suite level." So if Maddon wanted to sell hot dogs in a vendor's uniform, presumably, that would be ... uh, kosher.

8C. We can thank another Mets legend, Robin Ventura, for the approved ruling attached to section 7.01: "The batter hits a home run out of the playing field to win the game in the last half of the ninth or an extra inning, but is called out for passing a preceding runner. The game ends immediately when the winning run is scored, unless there are two out and the winning run has not yet reached home plate when the runner passes another, in which case the inning is over and only those runs that scored before the runner passes another shall count." As you might remember, Ventura hit a "grand slam single" to beat the Braves in Game 5 of the 1999 NLCS. It was a tie game when Ventura's shot cleared the fence; the Mets runner on third crossed the plate before Ventura hugged the runner at first base, Todd Pratt, and abandoned his circumnavigation of the basepaths. Ventura was credited with a single and just one RBI, but it was a victory nonetheless.

9D. What do you know? This is exactly what happened on Aug. 19, 2014. After more than a four-hour delay in which one man with one rake performed Sisyphean maintenance of the infield, Crew chief Hunter Wendelstedt ruled at nearly 2 a.m. that the game was official and the Cubs were the winners. Giants GM Bobby Evans filed a protest that was upheld by MLB Executive Vice President Joe Torre — the first protest to be upheld in 28 years — and the two teams resumed play two days later. According to MLB's statement, "there was sufficient cause to believe that there was a 'malfunction of a mechanical field device under control of the home club' within the meaning of Official Baseball Rule 4.12(a)(3). Available video of the incident, and conversations with representatives of the Cubs, demonstrate that the Cubs' inability to deploy the tarp appropriately was caused by the failure to properly wrap and spool the tarp after its last use. As a result, the groundskeeping crew was unable to properly deploy the tarp after the

rain worsened. In accordance with Rule 4.12(a)(3), the game should be considered a suspended game that must be completed at a future date.” If Wendelstedt had concluded that the grounds crew intentionally failed to cover the field, there would be a basis to forfeit the game to the Giants pursuant to Rule 4.16. But Wendelstedt reached no such conclusion. The Cubs supported the Giants' protest, which isn't as strange as it might seem, because they were tanking that season and any loss could potentially enhance their draft position. (They still won the game, 2-1.)

10B. While most mental mistakes are not scored as errors, Rule 9.12 provides an exception: "A fielder's mental mistake that leads to a physical misplay — such as throwing the ball into the stands or rolling the ball to the pitcher's mound, mistakenly believing there to be three outs, and thereby allowing a runner or runners to advance — shall not be considered a mental mistake for purposes of this rule and the Official Scorer shall charge a fielder committing such a mistake with an error." It might be an embarrassing play, but hey, it didn't keep Larry Walker out of the Hall of Fame.

In our effort to touch on all things baseball (from The Athletic), musings on best walk up music

I. The Hall of Fame

- 1. Mariano Rivera, “Enter Sandman” by Metallica**
- 2. Trevor Hoffman, “Hells Bells” by AC/DC**
- 3. Dick Allen, “Superstar” from “Jesus Christ Superstar”**

If anyone gets credit for inventing individualized walk-up music for hitters, it might be Nancy Faust, a legendary White Sox stadium organist who pushed the use of a ballpark organ into the future, [utilizing contemporary pop music](#) during the game. In 1972, Allen joined the Chicago White Sox and won the American League MVP, posting a league-leading 37 homers and 1.023 OPS. During that summer, Faust began playing the title track from the 1970 rock opera “Jesus Christ Superstar.” The tradition caught on.

- 4. Ken Griffey Jr., “Hip Hop Hooray” by Naughty by Nature**

II. Perfect anthems

5. Jeurys Familia, “Danza Kuduro” by Don Omar and Lucenzo
6. Jonathan Papelbon, “I’m Shipping Up to Boston” by the Dropkick Murphys
7. Kenley Jansen, “California Love” by 2Pac, Roger and Dr. Dre
8. Tim Lincecum, “Electric Feel” by MGMT

III. Historically significant

9. Sparky Lyle, “Pomp and Circumstance” by Edward Elgar
10. Chipper Jones, “Crazy Train” by Ozzy Osbourne
11. Chase Utley, “Kashmir” by Led Zeppelin
12. Eric Gagne, “Welcome to the Jungle” by Guns N’ Roses
13. Ricky Vaughn, “Wild Thing” by X

IV. Forever memorable

14. Joe Mauer, “What You Know” by T.I.
15. Paul O’Neill, “Baba O’Riley” by The Who
16. Lorenzo Cain, “Trap Queen” by Fetty Wap
17. Anthony Rizzo, “Intoxicated” by Martin Solveig and GTA
18. CC Sabathia, “Big Poppa” by The Notorious B.I.G.

V. Sportswriter favorites

19. Charlie Morton, “Palmetto Rose” by Jason Isbell
20. Wilson Betemit, “Better Man” by Pearl Jam
21. Todd Frazier, “Fly Me to the Moon” by Frank Sinatra
22. Paul Molitor, “Better Days” by Bruce Springsteen
23. Lance Berkman, “God’s Gonna Cut You Down” by Johnny Cash
24. Ronald Acuña Jr., “La Romana” by Bad Bunny (Feat. El Alfa)

VI. Yes, they really used that song

25. Kendrys Morales, “In the Summertime” by Mungo Jerry

26. Shin-Soo Choo, “Regulate” by Warren G and Nate Dogg

27. Yoenis Céspedes, “Circle of Life” from “The Lion King”

28. Joey Votto, “Humble” by Kendrick Lamar

29. Koji Uehara, “Sandstorm” by Darude

30. Francisco Lindor, “The Humpty Dance” by the Digital Underground

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JUNE 6, 2021

Good afternoon baseball fans. Some fun stuff this week (though Yankee performance is far from fun). Enjoy.

What a cool stat-- Jeter and Gehrig are the only position players 500 games over .500 in career.

Last brothers to be in same All-Star game.
Brett and Aaron Boone 2003

Bobby and Barry Bonds hit 1,094 HRs

Three pairs of father-son pitchers have pitched in the WS. Mel and Todd Stottlemire, Pedro Bourbon and Pedro Bourbon, Jr., Jim Bagby and Jim Bagby Jr.

In 2021 we have had 14 Garcia's, 13 Smiths, 9 Anderson's and 9 Hernandez's.

Ken Griffey and Ken Griffey jr. we're Seattle teammates in 2001. Buddy Bell and David Bell were the next father-son to be teammates.

An astute reader sent this along:

Dave Kingman vs. MLB current average

Kingman career average .236 MLB current average .237

Kingman career K% 24.4%, MLB current average 24.1%

Kingman career walk % 8.2%, MLB current average 8.9%

Kingman HR/walk/strikeout % (TTO-three true outcomes) 38.6%, MLB current average 36.1%

MLB moved away from using reporters as official scorers in the interest of independence. Jillian Geib, an elementary school teacher in Denver is one of the Rockies official scorers, just the 4th woman in history. Eliza Green became the first woman to work as a scorekeeper in 1882 for the Chicago White Stockings. Baseball is an idiosyncratic game with a 173-page rulebook. Even after more than 150 years, unique plays still happen and they are all translated subjectively. The scorekeeper is the final authority. First, she had to pass a test. MLB administers a difficult and timed exam for new scorers, filled with scoring quirks about sacrifice outs and pitching decisions, fielding positions and earned versus unearned runs. Geib aced the test. She's now in the regular scorekeeper rotation. The Hall of Fame [credits Henry Chadwick](#) as the inventor of the box score. A native of England, he covered cricket for The New York Times in the mid-19th century before writing about baseball for the New York Clipper and Sunday Mercury. Because there was no photography, Chadwick needed a way to illustrate the details of a game in a snapshot. The "K" notation for a strikeout came from him.

Mike Marshall, who became the first relief pitcher to win the Cy Young Award when he appeared in a major league season-record 106 games for the 1974 Los Angeles Dodgers, died this week. He earned a doctorate in exercise physiology from Michigan State University in 1978, when he was pitching for the Minnesota Twins, and later taught there.

In addition to his single-season record for most games pitched, Marshall, a right-hander, pitched in 13 consecutive games in 1974, threw 208½ relief innings and finished 83 games — major league records as well.

Appearing solely in relief in 1974, his sideburns curling toward his mouth, Marshall was an all too familiar figure to batters in the late innings. He had a 15-12 record in 1974 with a 2.42 earned run average and 21 saves. In his only postseason appearances, Marshall pitched in two National League Championship Series games against the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1974 and in every game of the World Series, when the Dodgers lost to the Oakland A's, 4 games to 1.

Marshall was an All-Star with the Dodgers in 1974 and 1975. He holds the still-standing American League record for games pitched in a season with 90 for the 1979 Twins. Marshall pitched in 724 games, all but 24 in relief, in his 14 major league seasons. He had a 97-112 record with 188 saves and an earned run average of 3.14.

Other relievers who won the Cy Young—Eric Gagne with the Dodgers in 2003, Mark Davis with San Diego in 1989, Steve Bedrosian with Philadelphia in 1987, Bruce Sutter with the Cubs in 1979, Dennis Eckersley with Oakland in 1992, Willie Hernandez with Detroit in 1984, Rollie Fingers with Milwaukee in 1981, Sparky Lyle with the Yankees in 1977,

With his 17th HR, Fernando Tatis Jr. has the most homers in the first 40 games of a season for any player age 22 or younger (since at least 1901). Next on the list is Bryce Harper (15 HRs in 2015)

In 2021, hitters with two strikes are hitting all of .159/.236/.256. It's the [lowest two-strike mark](#) on record. If you haven't put the ball in play with zero or one strikes, you might just want to walk back to the dugout. So batters are swinging at first pitches in the strike zone at a record rate.

From 2008-16, for example, hitters went after 38% of first-pitch strikes in the zone. Ever since, it's been 42.1%, with this year's 43.3% a record high.

You can see why in the production that happens [on the first pitch](#).

On 0-0

.336/.348/.564 -- .912 OPS

After 1-0

.247/.375/.427 -- .803 OPS

After 0-1

.207/.254/.335 -- .588 OPS

[52%](#) of 0-0 pitches are in the zone, as compared to [45%](#) on 0-1 (which is where you get if that hittable first pitch goes by) or the [43%](#) with two strikes.

OPS on [0-0 counts](#).

1988-94: .792

1995-2001: .875

2002-08: .891

2009-15: .882

2015-21: .946

As another way of looking at it, the hard-hit rate on batted balls on 0-0 counts in 2020-'21 is [40.5%](#). On all other counts, it's [38%](#), but with two strikes, it's only [35%](#).

Fernando Tatis Jr. had the highest slugging percentage (.800) and highest OPS (1.238) of anyone in May.

Rangers rookie Adolis García leads the Majors with 11 May homers. Overall mark for most home runs in May--Barry Bonds (17 in May 2001)

JAYSON STARK

Cool Jacob deGrom stats of the week.

In his start this week against Arizona the first 10 pitches he threw clocked faster than 100 mph.

deGrom the hitter: 9 hits this season

deGrom the pitcher: 7 runs allowed this season

He is hitting .450. If the Mets *did* make deGrom a full-time hitter, he could go 0 for his next 54 *and still have a higher batting average than the hitters he's faced this year!*

What's the closest any Cy Young Award-winning starter has come to getting more hits as a hitter than runs allowed as a pitcher the year he won? I had to know! And that answer is ... not

very! Greg Maddux in 1995 was the closest: 11 hits at the dish, 28 runs allowed during the season. Would you put this past deGrom in 2021? Why would you?

But deGrom could also take a shot at this:

Cy Youngs who batted .400: None!

Cy Youngs who batted .300: Just Bob Gibson (.303) in 1970.

Major League Baseball's modern, single-season ERA record belongs to Dutch Leonard, who produced a 0.96 mark in 1914. Over the past century, no pitcher has managed to top Bob Gibson, whose 1.12 ERA highlighted a 1968 campaign so thoroughly dominated by pitchers that the league responded by lowering the mound from 15 to 10 inches.

In delivering seven more shutout innings Saturday night in a 4-0 win over the Padres, [Jacob deGrom](#) sliced his own ERA to 0.62 -- the lowest by a pitcher through his first nine starts since earned runs became an official statistic in both leagues in 1913.

Lower than Leonard, in other words, at the same point in 1914 (a season that fell during the "dead ball" era). Lower than Gibson through nine starts in 1968. Lower than Pedro Martínez in 2000, Dwight Gooden in 1985.

deGrom, who is under contract through his age-36 season, wants to pitch into his 40s.

And there's evidence to believe he can do it. At age 32, deGrom has never been better. He's throwing harder, setting a record on Saturday with 33 triple-digit pitches in a game. (While pitch-tracking data goes back only to 2008, it's unlikely any previous pitcher had delivered more 100 mph fastballs on a single day.

No leadoff hitter has led his league in HRs or hit 40 HRs in a season. Ronald Acuna Jr. of the Braves has 15 HRs and is tied for the NL lead.

White Sox catcher Yasmani Grandal leads the league with 42 walks and is hitting just .131. The lowest batting average ever, by a guy who led his league in walks, was .204, by the legendary Adam Dunn in 2012. He beats Grandal's average *by 73 points!* The last walk champ with more walks than hits was Jack Clark in 1989. He had 22 more walks (132) than hits (110). Grandal is on pace to have *87 more walks than hits* (126-39).

Are the Rockies the worst road team ever? They have a shot at it. They're 4-22 on the road this season. *Four and twenty-two!* That's a .154 winning percentage. We've never seen anything like it.

- **Post-1900 record holder:** Pinky Whitney's 1935 Boston Braves (13-65, .167)
- **Worst in the expansion era:** Sherten Apostel's 2020 Rangers (6-24, .200, in that 60-game season).
- **Worst in a 162-game season:** Choo Choo Coleman's 1963 Mets and Lasting Milledge's 2010 Pirates (both 17-64, .210).

So yeah, I'm saying there's a chance.

THE DODGERS — I'm not sure why we haven't paid more attention to this, but the Dodgers' collection of aces has a chance to go down as one of the most dominating rotations of all time, at least if you measure that this way:

- They could be the first rotation in the live-ball era with a sub-1.00 WHIP! Their WHIP through May: 0.92.
- They could be the first rotation ever with 1,000 more strikeouts than walks! Their pace through May: 1,068 K's, 195 BBs.
- They could be the first rotation ever with a 5-to-1 K/BB ratio! That ratio was over 6-to-1 heading into San Francisco last weekend. It was still at 5.48 through May.

THE MARINERS — The Mariners got no-hit twice in May. At home. Which was helpful if they were trying to submerge below the Mendoza line for the month (which they did, at .199). They weren't, obviously. But what they're also not trying to do is compile *the lowest team batting average of modern times!* Still, they're on their way. They flipped the calendar to June with a .205 team average. Lowest of all time.

The Mariners and Brewers of 2021 both appear on it — and *they both had winning records* through May! If we toss out the 60-game stats of last year, the lowest average of all time by any team with a winning record is .214, by that 1968 Yankees juggernaut. Once again, I'm saying there's a chance.

THE RAYS — They can jettison two of their three elite starters over the winter. They can place 18 different players on the IL. They can trade their energizer shortstop *in the middle of an 11-game winning streak*. And for those Tampa Bay Rays, none of it matters. Nothing changes. They just keep on chugging. And keep on winning.

So for their latest, greatest impossible feat, here's what they did in May: They entered the month with a losing record (13-14). They finished the month *15 games over .500* (35-20). And who does that?

Last team to start *any* calendar month with a losing record and finish that month at least 15 games north of .500? According to STATS, it was Huck Betts' 1933 Boston Braves 48-49 through July, 22-6 that August).

Buster Posey homers in Las Angeles this week against the Dodgers. His first HR in LA was 11 years ago. Giants have ever homered at least 11 seasons apart at Chavez Ravine? Exactly two: Bonds (1993-2007) and Willie McCovey (1963-67). But not pictured: Willie Mays. He was "only" nine years apart (1962-71).

Yankees were swept last week in New York by the Tigers. Worst winning pct. Of a team to sweep the Yankees in New York in history. And first time the Tigers swept the Yankees in 21 years.

Between the 7 inning double header rule and one rain shortened game the Blue Jays played 5 straight 7 inning games last week. First time since the 1886 Chicago White Stockings which was due to lack of day light savings time.

To beat the Astros this week the Padres had to score in the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th innings. First time a team has scored five straight innings from the 8th inning on. Th night before they scored a run in the 10th and 7 runs in the 11th. 13 extra inning runs in back to back games—first time since the 1920 White Sox.

Padres Joe Musgrove pitched a no hitter earlier this season. This week he threw five innings of no hit relief. Only three other pitchers in history have done that—Cy Young in 1904, Dusty Rhodes in 1908 and Ed Cicotte in 1917.

When Nolan Ryan retired in 1993, he was viewed — for good reason — as the most unhittable pitcher who ever lived. Now here we are, 28 years later, and we're approaching a time when the *average* pitcher in this sport is Nolan Ryan. Take a look.

Ryan career K%: 25.3
MLB K% thru May: 24.2

Ryan career K/9 IP: 9.55
MLB K/9 IP thru May: 9.24

MLB overall batting average was .232 which would make for the lowest season of all time. May pushed that up to .239, which would tie for the second worst. The current 9.6 strikeouts per 9 innings is an all-time high.

A few other per 9 innings stats about the low offensive output:

.68 GIDP is lowest since 1968

.46 SB is lowest since 1971

1.53 doubles lowest since 1989

4.98 singles lowest ever

Here's a little more context. The only time in recorded history when hitters grounded into this few double plays was 1968, a year *when pretty much nobody was on base*. ... The rate of stolen bases is at a 50-year low, but the rate of stolen-base *attempts* is now the lowest since 1964. ... We're on pace for *over 1,100 fewer doubles* just since the last full season, in 2019. ... And the average team is no longer even managing to hit *five singles* per game, for the first time in history. That means that by year's end, we'll have seen *more than 4,000 singles* disappear just over the last decade.

Having real fans in the stands hasn't helped home teams. Home team winning pct. Is down since fans were allowed back.

JOE POSNANSKI

Because of injuries Fernando Tatis Jr. has played in just 36 games. He has 15 HRs and 12 stolen bases. Rarely does "pace of performance stretch for an entire season but it is worth noting at that rate, over 162 games, he would hit 68 home runs and steal 54 bases.

Or we can put it another way. Over his last 162 games, Tatis has hit 49 home runs and he has stolen 38 bases while being caught only 10 times. He has scored 138 runs and driven in 123 RBIs.

Has [Jacob deGrom](#) left Earth behind?

In 1968, you probably know, Bob Gibson finished the season with a 1.12 ERA. Such a thing staggers the mind, even knowing that 1968 was the famous Year of the Pitcher when hitters barely stood a chance, when only one player in the American League hit .300 (Carl Yastrzemski),

when only one player in the National League drove in 100 runs (Willie McCovey) and when seven starters across baseball have sub-2.00 ERAs.

Even in that company, though, a 1.12 ERA is mind-blowing. I mean, you can think about it this way: Gibson basically gave up one run per nine innings. That means every time he gave up three runs (which he did five times), he needed to have two shutouts to get his ERA back down. Every time he gave up four runs (which he did twice), he had to have *three* shutouts to get his ERA back down.

And yet, he did it. From June 6 to July 30 (11 starts), he threw eight shutouts and allowed a total of three runs. From Aug. 9 to Sept. 2, he had four shutouts in six starts. There have been many great seasons from many great pitchers since then — Steve Carlton in 1972, Ron Guidry in '78, Dwight Gooden in '85, Greg Maddux in 1994 and '95, Pedro Martínez in 1999 and 2000, all the Clayton Kershaw and Tom Seaver and Roger Clemens and Randy Johnson years — nobody has really threatened 1.12.

[Jacob deGrom just might do it.](#)

He had another impossible performance on Monday, his second start back [after returning from injury](#). He is on a pretty extreme pitch count — he threw only 70 pitches against Arizona. But more than half of them (36 to be exact) were 99.5 mph or faster. Only 19 of them were balls; he didn't walk anybody and only got to a three-ball count on one batter. He got 14 swings-and-misses, allowed only two singles, and let's just say that the Diamondbacks did not stand a chance.

Almost nobody has stood a chance against deGrom this year. He has allowed four earned runs in eight starts ... and he has allowed three home runs, which suggests your best shot against him is to close your eyes and swing as hard as you can. He has an 82-7 strikeout-to-walk ratio and the league is hitting .129 against him.

And it all adds up to an 0.71 ERA.

Could this be the year deGrom out-Gibsons Bob Gibson?

I'd say he has a real shot. Of course, his challenge is different from Gibson's because he will throw far fewer innings. In 1968, Gibson completed 28 games (!), including a 10-inning game, two 11-inning games and a 12-inning game. He could make up for games when he was slightly off. DeGrom will not have that same opportunity. Should he be off next game and, just for example, give up four runs in five innings, his ERA would "balloon" up to 1.28. And he would need to throw nine shutout innings just to get it below Gibson again.

Or, to put it another way, in his last four starts, he has allowed only three runs, which is amazing. But his ERA over those games is 1.23, which is not quite good enough. Even one run

allowed when you're pitching five or six innings will not get you to Bob Gibson Land. DeGrom can only get there by throwing zeroes time after time after time.

But the other side is that batters are putting fewer balls in play against deGrom than they did against Gibson. Yes, Gibby led the National League in strikeouts in 1968, but he struck out less than 25 percent of the batters he faced. It was a different game. DeGrom is striking out 46 percent of the batters he faces. He's also walking fewer batters than Gibson (even though Gibson walked only 5 percent of the batters he faced).

It's not really an exaggeration to say that pretty much the only way to score off deGrom these days is to hit the ball out. Gibson allowed only 11 homers in more than 300 innings. If deGrom can keep the few fly balls he allows in the ballpark, yes, this could be the year.

We all know just how offensively challenged the Seattle Mariners are, right? They've been no-hit twice this year. They're hitting .205 as a team with a .282 on-base percentage. They have the lowest OPS in the American League.

The Seattle Mariners have scored more runs this year than the New York Yankees.

The Giants continue to impress led by old guys power—34 year old Brandon Crawford 11 HRs, 35 year old Evan Longoria 9 HRs, 33 year old Brandon Belt 8 HRs and 34 year old Buster Posey 10 HRs.

Salvatore Perez is a great catcher many of us seldom see. He missed the entire 2019 season with Tommy John surgery. In 91 games since then-- hitting .305/.329/.576 with 23 doubles and 25 home runs. He also has 5 Gold Gloves.

FROM MLB.COM

Last week was Lou Gehrig Day. What a freakin' amazing career.

Lou Gehrig Day is on June 2, in part because that is the day that Gehrig replaced Yankees starter Wally Pipp (suffering from his famous headache) in 1925 and set in motion his mammoth streak

of 2,130 consecutive games played. That stood as baseball's all-time record until Cal Ripken Jr. finally surpassed it on Sept. 6, 1995.

Between the final day of Gehrig's streak on April 30, 1939, and that 1995 day when his record was broken by Ripken, Gehrig's Yankees played 8,898 games. That means that, as long as Gehrig's streak lasted -- and remember, it spanned 15 years -- he could have done the whole thing four more times over in the time that his record stood.

- Gehrig started 2,124 of the games during his streak at first base, the most of any player at the position in that span, of course. The next-most starts at first in that span were 1,540 by Jim Bottomley. But Gehrig started 2,127 of the games in total -- so the three other games? Those were started in left field, right field and at shortstop, once each.
 - Gehrig faced seven opponents over the course of his streak -- which makes sense, since the American League had just eight teams at the time. He played at least 300 games against all eight, with 309 games against the Senators leading the way, followed by the Tigers (307), Browns (307), Indians (304), White Sox (302), Athletics (301) and Red Sox (300).
 - Four different managers helmed the Yankees over the course of Gehrig's streak. It began under Miller Huggins, who managed the first 722 games. Next was Art Fletcher, for the subsequent 11 games, before Bob Shawkey managed the next 154 -- just the 1930 season. The primary manager over the course of the streak was Joe McCarthy, for the final 1,243 games.
 - The setting for Gehrig's streak consisted of 10 different ballparks, with his most games at any road park coming at Griffith Stadium, home of the Senators, where he played 156 contests. A perfect half (1,065) of his 2,130 games during the streak were at Yankee Stadium.
- Gehrig's lifetime 1.080 OPS ranks third all time behind Babe Ruth and Ted Williams. How rare is a career OPS of 1.000 or better? Ruth, Williams, Gehrig, Barry Bonds, Jimmie Foxx, Hank Greenberg, Rogers Hornsby and Mike Trout are the only MLB players with at least 1,000 plate appearances and an OPS that high.
- This man was a run-producing machine. Of the six highest single-season RBI totals in history, Gehrig owns three of them -- 185 in 1931 (second most) and 173 in '27 and '30 (tied for fifth most).
 - Gehrig's 114.1 WAR is the most of any first baseman in history, ahead of Albert Pujols' 99.4. And if we look specifically at his best seven years, his 68.1 WAR in those is also the highest such total for any first baseman, well ahead of Pujols' 61.7.
 - Gehrig belted 23 [grand slams](#) during his career, which stood as an MLB record for more than 70 years until Alex Rodriguez eclipsed the mark in 2013. Rodriguez finished his career with 25. Manny Ramirez is third on the all-time list with 21.

- Gehrig tallied at least 400 [total bases](#) in five different seasons, peaking at 447 in 1927 -- the [third-highest single-season figure](#) of all-time. Only [six other players](#) in MLB history have even recorded more than one season with at least 400 total bases, with Chuck Klein's three such campaigns representing the next highest collection behind Gehrig. The last time any player topped 400 total bases was back in 2001, when Bonds, Luis Gonzalez, Todd Helton and Sammy Sosa all reached the benchmark.
- Two-hundred base hits represent one of the biggest accomplishments for a Major League hitter in one season, but combining the contact skills for 200 hits with the patience required for 100 walks makes for a [much smaller club](#). Gehrig paired 200 hits with 100 walks in seven different seasons, over twice as many as any other player in history except for Wade Boggs, who achieved that combo in four straight years from 1986-89.
- Gehrig just missed out on an eighth such season in 1928, when he racked up 210 hits and walked 95 times. No player has put up a 200-100 season since Todd Helton back in 2003.
- Gehrig's prime stands as a stupefying example of consistent excellence. In the 11-season span from 1927-37, Gehrig not only played in every single game, but also hit the following benchmarks in each season: A .300 average, a .424 OBP, a .583 slugging percentage, a 1.015 OPS and a 166 OPS+.
- How many other players have produced 11 qualifying seasons with an OPS+ of at least 165? Just three: Ty Cobb, Ruth and Bonds.
- Gehrig is one of only 10 different players to win a batting Triple Crown since RBIs became an official statistic in 1920. And he's one of only four players during that time to win the *MLB* [Triple Crown](#) -- that's leading not just his league, but the Majors, in batting average, home runs and RBIs. Gehrig did it in 1934, when he batted .363 with 49 homers and 166 RBIs. The other three to do it: Hornsby (1925), Williams (1942) and Mickey Mantle (1956).
- As great as he was in the regular season, Gehrig was maybe even greater in the World Series. Consider this: he had a career .340 batting average and .632 slugging percentage in the regular season, both among the best all-time. In the postseason? He had a .361 batting average and .731 slugging percentage. Both of those are second-best among all players with 100 or more career playoff plate appearances, trailing only Paul Molitor (.368) in average and Ruth (.744) in slugging. The Yankees won six of the seven World Series Gehrig played in.
- Although he's not among the all-time top 20 in World Series games played -- his 34 games are tied for 24th -- Gehrig is tied for fifth in Fall Classic homers (10) and ranks third in RBIs (35). Gehrig recorded a 1.214 OPS in seven career World Series, tying him with Ruth for third in World Series history (min. 50 plate appearances) behind David Ortiz and George Springer.
- Gehrig played in a very different era than today. One sign of that? He rarely struck out, even while hitting for power.

- The peak example was 1934, when Gehrig led the Majors in homers (49) and struck out just 31 times in 690 plate appearances. That's 1.6 times as many homers as K's. No other player in history has put together a season with more than 32 homers *and* at least 1.5 times as many big flies as K's.
- Gehrig led the AL, if not all of the Major Leagues, in nearly every significant offensive category over the course of his career. Just in terms of the AL, he led in games played (seven times), plate appearances (twice), runs scored (four times), hits (once), doubles (twice), triples (once), home runs (three times), walks and intentional walks (three times each), batting average (once), OBP (five times), slugging (twice), OPS and OPS+ (three times each), total bases (four times), position player WAR (four times) and win probability added (six times).
- Gehrig's star might have been born in 1920, when he hit a clutch, [late-game grand slam](#) over the fence at Chicago's Wrigley Field for his Commerce (N.Y.) High School team that inspired newspapers to call him "The Babe Ruth of the High Schools in New York" -- three years before he joined the mighty Ruth in the Yankees lineup.
- On the day Yankee Stadium opened -- April 18, 1923 -- Gehrig was pitching for Columbia University against Williams College and struck out 17 batters to set a school record that stood for nearly half a century.
- Gehrig never hit 50 homers in a season, but he came close several times, socking 49 homers in 1934 and '36, 47 in '27 and 46 in '31. Gehrig and fellow Hall of Famer Harmon Killebrew are the only players with multiple seasons in which they hit exactly 49 homers. Killebrew never had a 50-homer season, either. Gehrig also fell seven homers shy of 500. When he retired, his 493 homers put him second in MLB history behind Ruth.

You could argue that Gehrig's worst full season was his best.

Despite leading the league in games played (as always), he hit fewer than 30 homers for the first time in a decade, and his batting average dropped nearly 60 points and tied for his career low. His conditioning was questioned, his games-played streak was scrutinized, his All-Star selection was widely lamented. And even when the season ended with his Yankees once again victorious in the World Series, Gehrig's four singles in 14 at-bats had barely been a factor.

Back in 1938, it would have been preposterous to propose that Gehrig was having his best season, because the prevailing thought at the time was that the "Iron Horse" was running out of steam. But knowing what we know now about both the science and the stats, his '38 season takes on a much different dimension.

Yes, Gehrig "only" hit .295 with 29 home runs, both of which were disappointing drops from his career norms. But more modern metrics tell us he had a .932 OPS and a 132 OPS+ (32% better than league average) and was worth 4.7 Wins Above Replacement.

More importantly, he did it as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, was beginning to erode him from the inside.

From WSJ

Pitches that are at least 3 feet off the ground—up in the strike zone for most batters—have accounted for 22.2% of pitches this year, according to tracking data from MLB. It's the highest proportion since 2011.

The difference now is that these pitches are completely befuddling to anyone holding a bat. Major-league hitters have a paltry .191 average against them this season, which is the lowest mark on record. In 2021, pitches that high thrown at least 95 miles per hour have accounted for 4.4% of all pitches, the highest on record, and batters have never done worse against them with a .151 average.

Baseball insiders point to a confluence of factors that made high heat the hottest pitch in the game. Fastballs are going faster than ever. Some believe umpires are more inclined to call high strikes. And the pitch brilliantly exploits the gaping holes batters created when they altered their strokes to swing upward and hit more home runs.

almost every MLB pitcher throws overhand, the rotation of the ball, now precisely calculated and tracked as "spin rate," makes it seem like it's elevating simply because it isn't dropping as fast as the batter expects. It's the ultimate countermeasure to an uppercut swing.

The speed of those pitches in 2021 is only making them more vicious. The average four-seamer now travels at 93.6 miles per hour, the fastest since pitches were uniformly tracked, and the spin rate has increased along with the velocity.

DeGrom, whose microscopic 0.71 ERA in 2021 is the lowest for a qualified starter through May in over half a century, has combined these effects to become practically unhittable. A league-leading 25.2% of his pitches are clocked at 98 miles per hour or more and cross the plate at least 3 feet off the ground.

But DeGrom didn't always pitch this way. It took his four-seam velocity leaping from 94 miles per hour in 2014 to 99.1 in 2021. His location has also evolved. In his first year in the league, only 17.3% of all of his pitches were at least 3 feet off the ground. This year, those pitches account for 30.4%. He's hurling harder, higher, and putting together one of the greatest seasons by anyone who has ever thrown a baseball.

Some of you know that I was a side arm pitcher way back in the day so I really enjoyed this piece—hopefully the graphics will come through email.

Giants reliever Tyler Rogers throws a pitch that defies gravity — or does it?

Kent Tekulve was sitting at home a couple of weeks ago in front of the TV. The Pirates game was on. He watched Giants reliever [Tyler Rogers](#), a right-hander with a submarine delivery, take the mound. He watched Rogers throw a breaking ball.

Tekulve sat up as straight as an old sidearm pitcher can.

“That’s what my breaking ball looked like when I first started pitching,” Tekulve said. “I had to spend two or three years trying to make the breaking ball *not* do what his does.”

Namely, go up.

Even among the fraternal order of unconventional pitchers, there is nothing in the major leagues quite like Tyler Rogers’ breaking ball. It’s different. It appears to break Newtonian physics as it rises on the way to the plate. It is the apple that never lands. It is resulting in some of the ugliest swings you’ll ever see. And the pitch, which averages 71.4 mph, has been as devastating as anyone’s triple-digit fastball.

Rogers has thrown 152 breaking balls this season. Opponents are batting .108 against them. Combined with a sinking two-seamer plus a four-seamer that keeps batters honest — a repertoire featuring more soft serve than a Mister Softee truck in July — and Rogers ranks in the 97th percentile in lowest average exit velocity and the 95th percentile in lowest hard-hit rate. He also ranks in the 1st percentile with a 12.5 percent strikeout rate, bucking every pitching trend in the game. That’s no biggie, though, when you haven’t allowed a single instance of barreled contact all season. He’s allowed exactly [one barrel in his career](#).

Rogers owned a 0.68 ERA with six saves while appearing in 26 of the Giants’ first 50 games — numbers that got ruffled a bit when he allowed a three-run home run to Austin Barnes in a blown save at Dodger Stadium Saturday night. That blip aside (which involved a misplay from Mauricio Dubón that brought the tying run to the plate, by the way), you could argue that Rogers has been as valuable as anyone on the roster as the surprising Giants began the season with a 32-20 record and spent nearly a month atop the standings in the loaded NL West.

Maybe the Giants aren’t winning with smoke and mirrors. But yes, absolutely, their most prolific reliever is dominating with a pitch that acts like a parlor trick.

It’s a pitch that Tekulve, the closer who shut the door for the 1979 world champion Pirates and one of the most durable relief arms in baseball history, once viewed as a flaw to be corrected.

“You didn’t want anything up in the strike zone,” Tekulve said. “That’s where hitters did damage. You wanted to stay away from belt high, and you didn’t want to hang anything upstairs. You wanted to throw down and keep them on the ground. So I had to work on it and create enough movement to get it off the middle of the bat and get groundballs.”

Of course, that was back when launch angle applied only to NASA scientists.

“We’ve been playing this game for what, 150 years?” Tekulve said. “For the first 145 years, hitters all swung the same. Then someone or a computer somewhere figured out that 85 percent of strikes were thrown at the thigh or the knee. Now they’ve developed a swing path that is able to lift the ball that’s down.

“It also means when they’re swinging at the top of the strike zone, they’re swinging almost straight up. So pitchers are throwing high, and not just fastballs. They’re throwing curveballs at the top of the strike zone. We used to call that a hanger. You didn’t want to throw that. But that’s what they’re throwing now.

“And Tyler is throwing something that none of those overhand guys can throw. He came along at exactly the right time against hitters doing something they haven’t done in 145 years, and it’s advantageous to him because he’s the only one who can do it.”

Statcast defines the Rogers breaking ball as a slider. He thinks of it more as a curveball. Hitters might choose other descriptive words for it. Whatever you call it, the pitch has no comparison in today’s game.

Giants right-hander [Kevin Gausman](#), after watching Rogers induce feeble swings against the breaking ball in a game against the Cincinnati Reds last month, sought him out in the dugout.

“You’re going to hit a lefty in the face one day, and the guy’s probably going to swing at it,” Gausman told him. “Which is crazy to think about.”

Rogers hasn’t hit a lefty batter in the face yet — not that he has that in mind as a goal — but he might have thrown his most important breaking ball of the season Wednesday in Arizona.

With Rogers summoned to protect a one-run lead, the Diamondbacks loaded the bases on three singles: an infield chopper, a poked single and a harder-hit grounder with one out that got past third baseman [Evan Longoria](#). The Giants were poised to get the second out when Ketel Marte hit a spinning tapper that [Buster Posey](#) appeared to field in front of the plate and then stepped on the dish for a forceout. But umpire Nick Mahrley ruled it was foul, and Giants manager Gabe Kapler couldn’t persuade him to consult with the rest of his crew.

Rogers waited out Kapler’s argument and promptly threw another of his UFO hoverballs. Marte took a straitjacketed swing. Out recorded, crisis averted. One more ground-ball out and the Giants shook hands on a 5-4 victory.

"I like to be economical, not always pitching for the strikeout," Rogers said. "That's good for the pitch count. But sometimes you have to choose your spots."

Rogers' breaking ball is the rising tide that has lifted the Giants' boat. But ... c'mon. The pitch isn't really rising.

Or is it?

Studies that analyze concepts like Magnus force and lift coefficient have shown that it might be scientifically possible for a pitch to continue rising as it crosses home plate, but it would require an amount of spin plus velocity that [exceeds the achieved maximum of human potential](#).

Eno Sarris, [writing for FanGraphs in 2015](#), raised the prospect of a riseball thrown from a submarine delivery and graphed height-adjusted release point data against average vertical movement for fastballs. Sarris interviewed former sidearm left-hander Javier Lopez, who said the nearest thing to a riseball he ever witnessed was when he played in Arizona with reliever Byung-Hyun Kim.

Sarris also cited [a 2013 interview](#) Darren O'Day gave to MASN in which the sidearm reliever said he often turned to a fastball he would intentionally throw at the top of the zone.

"A lot of sidearmers have trouble elevating fastballs, but I elevate a four-seam fastball up and in on lefties. It kind of keeps them off balance so that I can get them out down and away," O'Day said.

"I get a lot of swinging strikes. So I pitch up in the zone. Traditionally, sidearmers are sinkerballers. They get a lot of groundball outs. If you look at my results, you see more popups and flyouts because I do pitch up so much."

O'Day said his teammates even have a name for that elevated fastball he throws.

"My teammates have affectionately named that pitch the Jennie Finch. You know, the fastpitch softball player, very famous," O'Day said. "Actually, I think she may throw harder than me. So they've named it that. They just call it the Finch."

Remember what happened when Finch [faced major-league hitters](#) at the 2004 Pepsi All-Star Softball Game? She struck out Albert Pujols, Brian Giles and Mike Piazza. Giles called her riseball "the fastest thing I've ever seen from that distance. It rises and cuts at the same time."

Even Barry Bonds only managed to foul off one of Finch's 43-foot pitches when they faced one another.

Of course, Finch's famous riseball wasn't actually rising when it crossed the plate. It just looked like it was. It's the same with Rogers' breaking ball. And that has everything to do with one other variable.

Launch angle among hitters might be all the rage, but pitchers have their own version: the release angle at which a pitch is thrown. We just don't talk about it because there's so little variation from one pitcher to the next.

There are exceptions, especially among some pitchers whose breaking balls tend to pop out of their hands. Yu Darvish is one example. His breaking ball is leaving his hand this season at an average positive vertical angle of 2.6 degrees. Rich Hill, another purveyor of the poppin' yakker, is averaging a positive vertical angle of 2.46 degrees.

For the most part, though, conventional pitchers try to stay on top of the ball and create a downward plane. When the ball leaves their hand, vertical release angle for all pitch types tends to average zero degrees.

Rogers is not a conventional pitcher. He combines sidearm action with a bent-at-the-waist delivery that results in an average release point of 1.5 feet above the ground.

"It has to rise, right?" Rogers said with a laugh. "If I'm releasing it 1.5 feet off the ground, it has to go up or it's not a strike."

How does he achieve that? With a positive vertical release angle of 5.27 degrees on breaking pitches — by far the most extreme outlier in the game today.

Slider release angle



[Tyler Rogers](#)

5.27 degrees



[Paolo Espino](#)

3.15



[Yu Darvish](#)

2.6



[Rich Hill](#)

2.46



[Nabil Crismatt](#)

2.36



[Jake Woodford](#)

2.18



[Tyler Ivey](#)

2.1



[Alec Mills](#)

2.04



[Aaron Loup](#)

1.98



[Zac Lowther](#)

1.98

Rogers has the league's most pronounced positive release angle on fastballs, too, but he's able to impart sidespin that creates arm-side run. His fastball acts as a slider to a left-handed hitter and as a slower version of a two-seamer to right-handers. It's how he achieves 2.15 groundballs for every fly ball — the highest ratio in the majors among all pitchers who have thrown at least 25 innings.



[Tyler Rogers](#)

5.9 degrees



[Adam Cimber](#)

3.7



[Tim Hill](#)

1.9



[Joe Smith](#)

1.8



[Steve Cishek](#)

0.9



[Ryan Thompson](#)

0.8



[Austin Brice](#)

0.7



[Wyatt Mills](#)

0.6



[Alex Claudio](#)

0.5



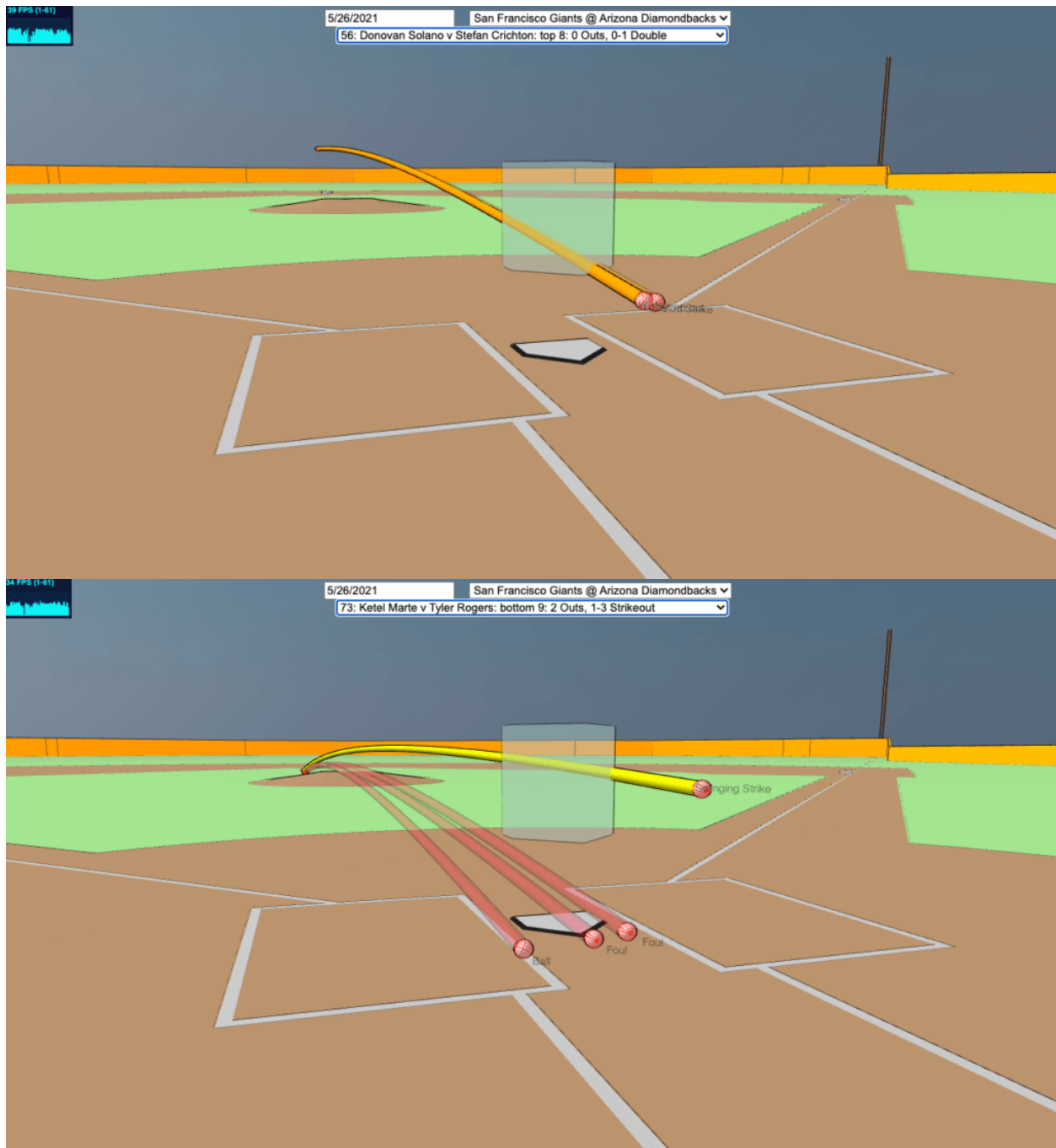
[Noe Ramirez](#)

0.1

“So you have a guy whose fastball acts like a curveball and whose curveball acts like a fastball,” Giants pitching coach Andrew Bailey said. “When we talk about (perceived) rise, we’re usually talking about fastballs. He’s doing it with his breaking ball. It’s got that shoot-up-fastball type of movement profile. It’s definitely a unique arsenal, and teams and players, knock on wood, have had a difficult time adjusting to it. It’s such a unique release point and movement plot chart. Guys aren’t used to seeing it.

“Does it rise? Probably not. But to the eyes, and over the 60 feet and 6 inches, it does.”

That's the magic with Rogers' breaking ball: The ball appears to be rising out of his hand because, thanks to his low release point and positive release angle, it is — for most of the distance to the plate, anyway. Check out the side view movement charts of two breaking balls from the late innings of Wednesday's game at Arizona: first, a slider from conventional Diamondbacks reliever Stefan Crichton, then the strikeout pitch that Rogers threw to Marte.



You can see that Rogers' breaking ball definitely begins to drop before it gets to the plate. But we also know from multiple studies on visual acuity and reaction time that hitters must decide

to swing within 200 milliseconds, or when the ball is barely halfway to the plate. Rogers' breaking ball is still rising at that point. So from a hitter's perspective, it looks like it's rising all the way into the catcher's mitt.

What's a powerful way for a major-league team to neutralize the launch angle revolution? Fight fire with fire. Fight launch angle with release angle.

If you have a submarine pitcher on your staff, anyway.

There's one more major component to Rogers' value this season: The Giants are able to deploy him virtually without limitation.

Rogers, taking the mound to the bouncy notes of The Beatles' "Yellow Submarine," led the majors with 29 appearances in last year's pandemic-shortened 60-game season. The rail-thin 30-year-old appeared in 15 of the Giants' first 24 games this season. Whether the Giants were winning or losing (mostly winning), they were playing close games almost every night. As recently as May 19, Rogers was on a pace to appear in 94 games this season.

A recent six-game stretch in which he didn't pitch took him off that pace. But a busy week could put him back on track for just the 10th 90-appearance season by a pitcher in major-league history. He'd also break the team record of 89 appearances, set by Julian Tavaréz in 1997 and matched by Jim Brower in 2004.

Tekulve owns [three of the nine seasons with 90-plus appearances](#). Right-hander Mike Marshall owns three more, including his record-setting 106 appearances for the Dodgers in 1974. Former Mets left-hander Pedro Feliciano, who appeared in 92 games in 2010, is the most recent inductee into the club.

Rogers would love to join them.

"Absolutely, it's something I've started to take pride in, being able to pitch a lot," he said. "As a guy who's not going to strike out a lot of people or throw hard, this is going to be my value, to be available every day."

Submarine pitchers are nearer to knuckleball pitchers in terms of arm stress and stamina, but that doesn't mean they don't deal with aches, pains and roll-out-of-bed stiffness. Tekulve, who never required an arm procedure and didn't go on the disabled list until he was a 41-year-old in 1988, remembered a time when his arm was sore in Los Angeles and he went to see Dr. Frank Jobe, the orthopedic surgeon who performed the pioneering reconstructive elbow procedure on Tommy John.

"Ah, you'll be fine," Jobe told him.

As Jobe explained to Tekulve, when a pitcher throws overhand, all his tendons and muscles are raised up off the bone with no support system as he's generating the power and arm speed required to throw a fastball as hard as he can. As a pitcher drops down, he gets more and more support from his muscles and bone structure.

"If God had wanted us to be pitchers," Jobe told him, "he'd have built us with our arms over our heads, not at our sides."

So when Tekulve created a rest-and-recovery program for himself, it had more to do with stretching and working out any stiffness in all his other hinges.

"To be able to throw a lot of games, it's what you do in between the games that counts," Tekulve said. "You have to do as much of the work as you need to do while throwing as few baseballs as possible. Find all the other ways to get around it. You have to go out there with the philosophy that every pitch I don't throw today is another pitch I can throw tomorrow."

That's not the easiest philosophy to follow in today's game, and not just because of the emphasis on strikeouts. There's a three-batter rule on the books now, too.

Rogers says he doesn't do anything fancy between appearances. He lifts weights twice a week and runs five or six out of seven. He'll take advantage of the many recovery tools the Giants provide their players, such as Normatec air compression sleeves. The float pod has become a personal favorite this season: imagine the egg-shaped space capsule from "Mork and Mindy" but with a jacuzzi inside.

Sounds like the perfect way for a submarine pitcher to unwind.

"You lay there for half an hour in the water and it basically takes the gravity off your spine for a little bit," Rogers said. "It's quiet. It's a whole other world. It's a mental and physical recharge."

Bailey smiles every time he watches his pitchers loosen up their arms before batting practice. Other than when Rogers throws to bases, it's the only time he gets to see the pitcher throw overhand.

"I don't know what allows him to bounce back so great, but he does," Bailey said. "He always wants to be out there. He's sharper the more he pitches, and no moment is too big for him."

Would the Giants coaching staff allow Rogers to appear in 90 games?

"I don't know," Bailey said. "We've got a lot of games to go. Any time you talk about that pace, we want to be receptive to how he's feeling. But if he continues to feel good and is able to take the ball, sure. I don't know if there's a threshold of, 'Oh, he can't pitch in X number of games.'"

“He’s been unbelievable. He takes the ball, and he’s communicative on how he’s feeling. We understand that’s a large workload, so we want to find times to get him a day or two whenever we can. We want to be receptive to that while also understanding that he’s really valuable to our team.”

A decade ago, Rogers was studying fire science and throwing in the mid-80s on the baseball team at Garden City Community College in Kansas. He figured he would drop baseball after a while. He’d surely be hoisting ladders and answering alarm calls by now, extending a family legacy. His father, Scott, and uncle, Mike, are the first fourth-generation firefighters in Colorado history.

But instead of Rogers dropping baseball, baseball dropped him. His coach at Garden City, Chris Finnegan, recognized him as a pitcher with limited upside. Finnegan had overseen a few other submarine conversion projects over the years. He suggested that Rogers try throwing from a lower arm slot, too.

The submarine delivery allowed Rogers to get a scholarship to keep pitching at Austin Peay State University in Tennessee and then on to pro baseball, where he patiently took the mound for six seasons in the Giants’ minor-league system and made a pair of Triple-A All-Star appearances. Now in his third big-league season, he is still refining pitch shapes and learning how his stuff best exploits hitters.

He even added a bit of deception this season: a pair of bright white cleats, which he is wearing at the suggestion of outfielder Austin Slater. If he’s going to release the ball from his shoe tops, why not distract batters with another white blur or two?

During last year’s shutdown period, Rogers came across a phone number for former A’s knuckle-dragging reliever Chad Bradford and gave him a call. They ended up talking for two hours. Bailey put Rogers in touch with a former Oakland teammate, submarine right-hander Brad Ziegler. When Rogers found out that I had spoken with Tekulve, the first thing he did was ask for his phone number, too.

“It’s a nice little country club of guys who throw like that,” Bailey said with a laugh.

Catching Rogers has been another learning process. Posey said Rogers has graduated from a pitcher hoping to find the zone to a pitcher who can more reliably place his fastball and breaking ball to corners of the strike zone. Posey also has a better understanding of how those pitches play against various swing types.

“I feel pretty comfortable with him now,” Posey said. “It did take a while.”

Rogers has boosted his zone rate from 50.9 percent last year to 56.5 percent this year. His first-pitch strike rate is 69.8 percent, a vast improvement from 58.5 percent last season. And perhaps just as significant, his misses have been more competitive. Hitters are making contact on 77.3 percent of pitches thrown outside the zone, an 11 percentage-point increase from last season. It's a trend that should result in even more soft contact and efficiently achieved outs.

For any other pitcher, a dip in whiff rate from 24.2 percent to 13.3 percent would be a red flag. For Rogers, it's one more sign that he's getting outs on fewer pitches — and standing a better chance to get back on the mound the next day.

Rogers said he had an epiphany after a couple of years in the minor leagues. If conventional pitchers are constantly trying to stay on top of the ball, shouldn't he try to get all the way underneath it?

"I know, right?" Rogers said. "It didn't dawn on me until after I made the adjustment. That's what the minor leagues are for, to figure out that stuff."

Rogers isn't that much different from other pitchers. He just does everything in mirror opposite, which comes naturally to him. [He's been a mirror opposite his entire life.](#)

His identical twin brother, Taylor, is a successful left-hander in the Minnesota Twins bullpen who throws from a conventional arm slot. Every year on their birthday, Dec. 17, baseball is the present they give to one another. They play catch for the first time as they begin to ramp up for the coming season.

When Taylor made his major-league debut in 2016, nobody was more excited than Tyler, and vice versa when Tyler debuted in 2019. The brothers were supposed to cross paths for an interleague series in Minnesota last year, but the pandemic erased those plans. For now, they follow each other with every appearance and call each other to share observations and feedback.

"It's like having another coach — the best coach you can have," Tyler Rogers said. "He called me the other day and it was, 'Dude, what are you eating? How are you feeling? What is going on?' I told him that'd be cool to set the appearance record for the three-batter era. Maybe that's something to look back on after the season."

It's not as if the Giants are worried about matchups when they send Rogers to the mound. Not when he can fling one of those UFO breaking balls under a lefty batter's chin — a pitch that nobody else in the game can throw.

Back in Western Pennsylvania, there's a retired 74-year-old sidearmer who will be watching and hoping for someone to join him in the 90-appearance club — and someday, maybe join him as a pitcher who closed out a World Series, too.

“Guys like Tyler and I, our arms work the same,” Tekulve said. “He’s throwing sidearm. It’s just sidearm with a severe tilt in his upper body.”

“But none of those guys who are throwing overhand can do what he does with his breaking ball. Hitters have one small point where those two paths are going to cross where they’ll be able to hit that pitch. The rest of the time, they’ll be in front or behind it.

"It's just a really, really good pitch."

[illegible]

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.