

BASEBALL TIDBITS JULY 2021

JULY 25, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Pre-season did any of you think Mets, Giants, Red Sox would all be division leaders on July 25? More fun stuff with your Sunday morning coffee this week.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Trade deadline-- Friday, July 30 at 4 p.m. ET.

Since his 35th birthday, Nelson Cruz (41) has hit 220 home runs. The only players to hit more after turning 35--Barry Bonds (340) and Hank Aaron (245)

You might be surprised that Albert Pujols is among the top 30 active players in stolen bases. Pujols ranks 30th among all active players with 115 career steals. Adalberto Mondesí has 114, and A.J. Pollock 112. Pujols hasn't been caught stealing since 2015, a perfect 12-0 in that span.

Raphael Devers hit his 100th career HR, joining Frank Malzone (131 home runs with Boston) as the only Red Sox third basemen with 100+ career HRs.

Charles "Red" Barrett. On August 10, 1944, at Crosley Field in Cincinnati, he pitched a [2-0 shutout](#) for the Boston Braves against the Cincinnati Reds, the team he'd pitched four years for before World War 2. Barrett faced 29 batters that day, gave up two hits, struck out no one, and threw an average of exactly two pitchers per batter — 58 total. That's the complete game and nine-inning game record. At 1 hour, 15 minutes, it also stands as the shortest night game in major league history, and the shortest road-team win in history.

The Yankees announced they've placed outfielder [Tim Lincecum](#) on the 10-day injured list. Lincecum was acquired from the Diamondbacks as outfield depth. Lincecum set a MLB record going 29 for 29 in his first 29 stolen base attempts. His mark passes Hall of Famer Tim Lincecum, who stole 27 in a row from 1979-81.

Locastro hasn't hit much over 503 career PA (in five Major League seasons with the Dodgers, D'Backs, and Yankees), but he earned a spot in the MLB record books earlier this season by becoming the first player in history to go a perfect 29-for-29 on the first 29 stolen base attempts of his career. The streak finally ended when Locastro was caught stealing in a game against the Nationals on April 17, and in fact Locastro has been caught stealing in three of eight attempts this season.

The Angels selected pitchers in each of the draft's 20 rounds not only because they are perennially short on quality in arms, but also because pitching is always in demand in trades.

Nineteen of the 20 pitchers the Angels picked were collegians.

Just two pitches into his at-bat in the first frame of Saturday's matchup, [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) made history. The 409-foot home run marked his 30th of the season, putting the Padres on the board first in the frustrating [3-2 loss](#) to the Marlins at loanDepot park.

It took 82 games for the 22-year-old slugger to reach 30 home runs in a season, the fewest games needed to reach the mark for any player his age or younger. Speaking of his age, he is the youngest Padre to reach 30 home runs -- besting Gary Sheffield's age-23 season in 1992.

Tatis' home run made him the third shortstop in MLB history to reach 30 homers in a single season at age 22 or younger. He joins Alex Rodriguez (age 20, 1996; age 22, 1998) and Gleyber Torres (age 22, 2019).

NICKNAMES

Whitey Ford gave Pete Rose the nickname Charlie Hustle.

Ron Cey was nicknamed The Penguin by his college coach for his running style.

Bill "Spaceman" Lee gave Don Zimmer the nickname Gerbil.

Noah "Thor" Syndergaard of the Mets hit 3 HRs in 2016 to tie for the Mets single season record for HRs by a pitcher.

John "Candyman" Candelaria, Pirates pitcher, fired a no hitter on Candyman night in 1976 while fans enjoyed free chocolate bars.

Righthanded reliever Bill "Soup" Campbell pitched from 1973 to 1987 for Twins, Red Sox, Expos, Phillies, Cardinals, Tigers, Cubs. Twice he finished in the top ten for MVP and for Cy Young.

Luke "Old Aches and Pains" Appling at the age of 75 hit an HR off Warren Spahn in an old timers game in 1982.

Reggie "Mr. October" hit .278 (78 hits in 281 at bats) with 18 HRs in 77 post season games.

LeRoy "Satchel" Page got his nickname from working as a railroad porter lugging baggage.

HIDDEN BALL TRICK

Marty Barrett played 10 seasons, nine with the Red Sox. He got AL MVP votes in 1986 and won the ALCS MVP during that same, famous October. The infielder hit .433/.514/.500 in the World Series against the Mets. He was superb on defense throughout his MLB tenure and even led the league in sacrifice bunts three seasons in a row.

But Barrett also had another trick up his sleeve. Literally. The second baseman pulled off baseball's hidden-ball trick three times, including twice against the same team in a few weeks' span.

"I learned it during my first Spring Training before I ended up going to Double-A in Bristol, Conn.," Barrett told me. "It was a guy named Buddy Hunter, who used to do it all the time."

Both being second basemen, Hunter and Barrett used the same basic formula for turning the hidden-ball trick: It was predominantly done after a sacrifice bunt.

After covering first for the out, they'd hold onto the ball in their glove -- cupping it against their side. The first-base coach would be congratulating the hitter for laying down a great bunt, the third-base coach would be talking to the runner who got to second, but nobody on the other team would be paying attention to where the ball went. Hunter/Barrett would walk back over toward second, slyly let the umpire know they still had the ball (this is very important so the umpire is watching) and, generally, pitchers would know what their second baseman was doing. They'd pretend they had the ball and get ready to take the mound again.

"I just realized early on in my career that nobody was really paying attention to me," Hunter told me. "I'd talk to [the runner] a little while, BS with him, you know, how's the family, you got any kids. He'd step off to talk to me and I'd tag him out."

"Nobody was watching me," Barrett said. "So, I'd just reach over and tag him out."

Did opposing players or coaches get mad that they were tricked? Yes, of course they did.

In Barrett's case, as we mentioned above, he pulled it off once against Baltimore and twice against the same club: the Angels. That's where things got a little testy.

The first time was in California during a game on July 7, 1985 -- using the sacrifice-bunt technique. Barrett tagged Bobby Grich out when he drifted off second base.

the Angels were heading to Boston to play the Sox on July 21, third baseman Doug DeCinces was ribbing Grich about getting tricked -- saying he better not get caught again. DeCinces should've been more worried about himself.

"DeCinces hit a double to the left center-field gap," Barrett recalled. "[The ball] got in and I held it. I can't remember if I tagged him or I flipped that one over to our shortstop, but I remember when he got tagged out we were running off the field because it was the third out. He was yelling at the umpires, 'You gonna let them get away with that Little League bulls***!'"

Mike Lowell did it at third base back in 2005 (he accomplished it twice during his career).

Wily veteran Todd Helton got Matt Carpenter with the [ole fake-throw back](#) to the pitcher during his final season. After the game, he said, "I've been wanting to do that for 17 seasons. Now I can cross that off my bucket list."

Ozzie Guillen got caught a [record THREE times](#) during his career.

ANNOUNCING TEAM

For the first time on a broadcast, fans of Major League Baseball watched a game in which they did not hear a man's voice. Five women served as the on-air crew for the Baltimore Orioles game against the Tampa Bay Rays from St. Petersburg this week.

Melanie Newman, the Orioles' radio play-by-play announcer since last year, called the action for Tuesday's game. Sarah Langs, a popular baseball analyst and writer for MLB.com, was analyst in the booth. Alanna Rizzo handled the on-field reporting and Heidi Watney and Lauren Gardner anchored the pre- and postgame shows.

IS BASEBALL'S STICKY STUFF CRACKDOWN LEADING TO MORE PITCHER INJURIES?

A few days before [Major League Baseball](#) began cracking down on the use of sticky substances, Tampa Bay Rays starter Tyler Glasnow was [placed on the 10-day injured list](#) with a partial UCL tear and a flexor strain. He did not shy away from how he believed he ended up hurt.

“I woke up the next day and it was like, I am sore in places that I didn’t even know I had muscles in,” Glasnow said to reporters. “I felt completely different. I switched my fastball grip and my curveball grip. I’ve thrown it the same way for however many years I’ve played baseball.”

Glasnow was adamant that the sudden change he made to his grip played a direct role in his injury.

“I just threw 80-something innings, and then you just told me I can’t use anything in the middle of the year?” he said. “I have to change everything I’ve been doing the entire season. Everything out of the window, I had to start doing something completely new.

“I’m telling you, I truly believe that’s why I got hurt.”

It has been one month since MLB [announced revamped enforcement](#) of the existing ban on sticky substances. In that time, [spin rates are down](#) — over half the league has seen a statistically significant decline. Strikeout rates are down, by a little. The seemingly weekly no-hitters have abated. Pitchers have stopped disrobing as they leave the mound, but are still subject to routine hat, glove and belt checks from umpiring crews. So far, only one pitcher, Seattle’s Héctor Santiago, has been [ejected and suspended](#) for a potential sticky substance violation.

But there is no doubt that an additional question lingers in the back of a pitcher’s mind: Are they at greater risk of injury due to these sudden changes?

“My elbow fucking hurts,” one veteran pitcher told *The Athletic* recently. “My forearm and elbow have been sore ever since I stopped using pine tar.”

The sudden crackdown on these foreign substances, employed to help give pitchers better grip, has led to hurried attempts by pitchers to improvise — and that may lead to strains and stresses on body parts already pushed to capacity. In general, it seems that players understand something had to change; but the timing of it all is a major factor. [Cardinals](#) reliever [Andrew Miller](#) serves as a member of the MLB Players Association executive board. When asked by St. Louis media a few days before the June 21 crackdown, Miller said the biggest gripe he heard around the sport was that it seemed like pitchers would have to implement the “cold turkey” approach.

“I guess maybe MLB would argue there’s a buffer zone,” Miller said. “A rule’s a rule, also. But there’s not a whole lot of time for guys (that have been using it). Some guys haven’t hidden it as well as others, some guys are starting to be more forthcoming. But the chance to adapt — I

imagine guys that have been using stuff are throwing bullpens without it or playing catch without it, as they should be, and trying to figure out how they're going to survive."

A pitching coordinator agreed that the timing was unfortunate.

"When people train a certain way for years, it could be helpful to say, 'next year, the rule comes into hard-core effect, practice and prepare accordingly,'" the coordinator said. "Some guys would then have had a longer process of easing off of it rather than the guys who are currently feeling a physical difference in how their muscles are working."

But what's done is done, and the reality is that pitchers may be dealing with the consequences of that sudden change right now, in ways that are already showing up on injured lists and could lead to an even more significant injury spike later in the season.

While it can be relatively easy to make the correlation between a change in routine or execution and an increased injury risks, it's important to understand *how* that occurs. Lawrence Rocks, a renowned chemist and author who has dedicated a portion of his research to baseball-specific studies, says it comes down to understanding the differences between components of the human body and the scientific makeup of each.

Let's start, however, with the baseball itself.

"When the baseball comes from the factory, it has a shine on the skin that makes it aerodynamically unstable," Rocks said. "It's like a golf ball with no dimples. So, the balls are rubbed up, all a bit different. It takes off the shine and makes them more aerodynamic."

To continue establishing better grip, pitchers would go to a rosin bag. Then substances like sunscreen and pine tar were implemented. But the use of foreign substances skyrocketed to such an extent (cough, [Spider Tack](#)) that MLB was forced to step in and implement further reinforcement of the rule banning all substances.

But banning all substances, even less harmful ones like pine tar, is where Rocks believes the sport can run into problems.

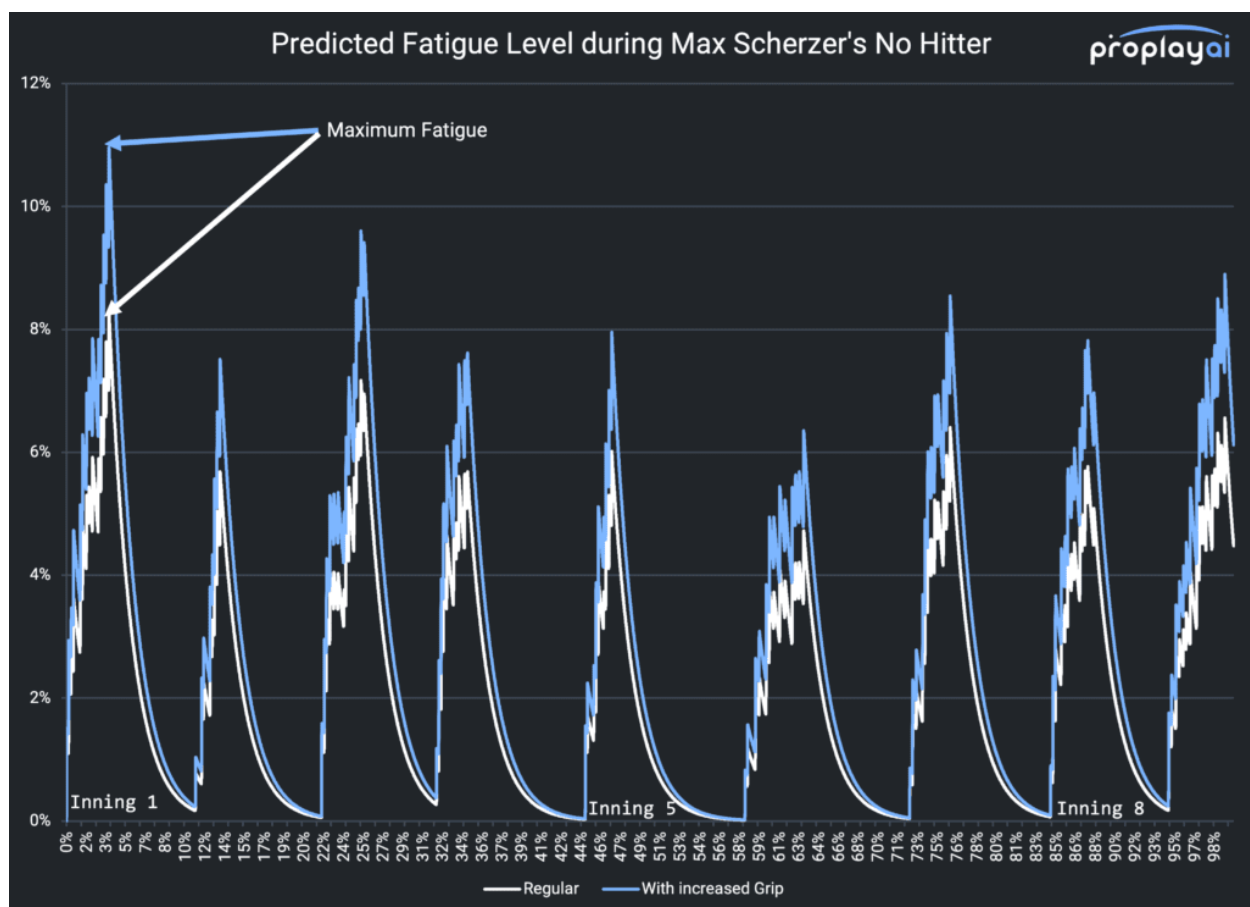
"If sticky substances, like pine tar, are removed, the pitcher needs the same grip to hold the ball tighter," he explained. "That puts strain on tendons. My take on this is, is this going to lead to some sort of tendon or ligament trouble to getting a tighter grip on the ball to throw with more spin?"

"The difference between tendons, ligaments, cartilage and muscle has been overlooked."

Mike Sonne, a Ph.D. who works with teams on pitcher biomechanics, agreed with Rocks that there's added strain on the muscles, and therefore more fatigue.

"A large group of muscles in the forearm, close to the inside of the elbow (called the flexor pronator mass) contract forcefully during the pitching delivery to protect the ulnar collateral ligament (the UCL). If those muscles didn't exist, the force passed through that ligament would cause a tear on almost every single pitch thrown, according to cadaver studies," Sonne wrote in a post on his website. "The need for this muscle to contract to protect the elbow is why issues like muscle fatigue have been found to be the biggest risk factor for elbow injuries and Tommy John surgery. Pitchers that throw while fatigued are up to 36 times more likely to have elbow surgery."

Sonne modeled what this increased fatigue — and in this instance, interpret fatigue level as the amount of force-generating capacity the muscle has lost — would look like during a start, and used [Max Scherzer's](#) no-hitter.



By his reckoning, overall fatigue would increase by a third for a pitcher weaning off grip enhancements.

Rocks argues that kind of fatigue increase is a surefire way to see injuries skyrocket. A tighter grip puts more stress on tendons and cartilage, both of which pad places like the wrist and elbow. The chemical makeup of tendons and how it progresses as players age is critical.

“Players are getting stronger, but not necessarily more flexible,” Rocks said. “So, a difference between energy and power arises. The tendons provide power and the muscles provide energy. It’s like a bow and arrow. If tendons become very brittle and then they’re stretched, they lose all flexibility.

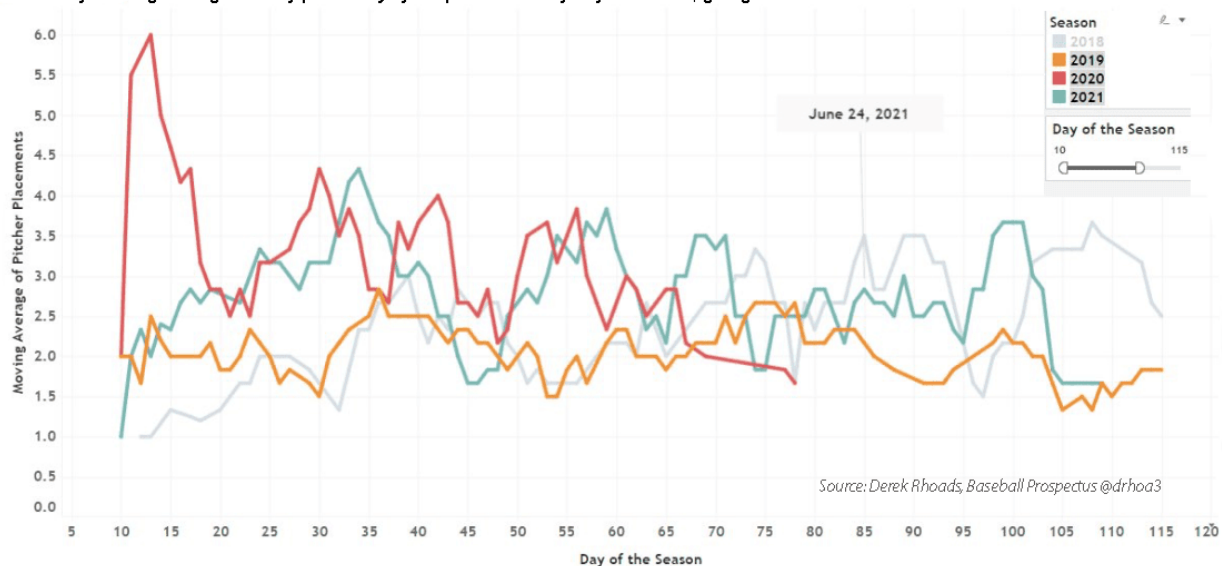
“That’s what’s happening with tendons versus muscles. Can the tendons keep up? That’s where the power comes from. That’s why there are athletes, pitchers for example, who are very thin and can throw the ball over 100 miles an hour, and there are athletes who are rather short and rather thin, and they can still hit the ball 450 feet.”

In the middle of the season, it all happens too fast to adjust and pitchers’ body parts may be suffering the consequences. And there’s little evidence that teams are adjusting for that added fatigue by adding days of rest or taking pitchers out early.

Should we be seeing an increase in injuries, then? We may already have.

Is That a Notable Late-Season Spike in Pitcher Injury?

Five-day moving average of daily pitcher injury list placements by day of season, going back to 2018



Follow the blue line (2021) on the graph and you’ll see that, in the past four years, there hasn’t been a bigger spike in injuries this late in the season than what MLB saw this year. Coming on the heels of the enforcement announcement, it could be inferred that one caused the other.

But it’s also true that, in 2018, with no such enforcement efforts, we saw three peaks that were almost as bad as the one we just underwent this season. So call the current data inconclusive.

Which would be fine, except there should be two spikes in injury rates when fatigue is increased. So a second peak could still be coming.

“I would actually think a jump at the start (of the enforcement period) as an acute response, almost like the jump we see at the start of the seasons,” Sonne said. “Then we’d see a period of normalcy then long term — like the end of season spikes — for more chronic fatigue.”

“We already have an epidemic of elbow injuries. [Tyler Glasnow](#) sent a warning shot over the league. A pitcher of his level — saying that he made whatever the sudden changes were, grip pressure or something else — and then immediately developing an elbow problem is scary,” renowned Tommy John surgeon Dr. David Altchek [told the New York Daily News](#).

While the effort to rid the game of the more extreme grip enhancement substances might be a noble one — selective enforcement of rules on the books can lead to terrible outcomes, as baseball keeps learning over and over again, and actually enforcing this rule could lead to fewer strikeouts, a stated goal for the sport — the details matter.

Why was the enforcement stepped up in the middle of the season? Was it because a few hitters griped publicly? Was it because of media coverage of the sticky stuff? Was it because offense was down and strikeouts were at an all-time high again?

We may never get a full accounting of the reasoning behind the mid-season effort, just as we may never know exactly how many more injuries this effort has caused among major league pitchers. But, for a sport that has long wondered how to better keep its best players on the field, it’s fair to wonder why they would pick a timeline that would increase injuries by any measure.

WHAT PLAYERS, MANAGERS AND DATA ARE SAYING ABOUT MLB’S EXTRA-INNING RULE

Opening day in Seattle was an omen. The [Mariners](#), having erased the Giants’ six-run lead in the late innings, saw 16 pitches from reliever José Álvarez in the home half of the 10th inning, swung just twice — missing once and fouling off the other — and walked off with back-to-back-to-back walks.

Three and a half months later, the Mariners are still in the wild-card chase, and they wouldn’t be there without their 10-1 record in extra-inning games this season. When [MLB](#) commissioner Rob Manfred said last week that the runner-on-second rule for extras will likely be abandoned after 2021, Seattle manager [Scott Servais](#) was disappointed. Like many managers, Servais initially disliked the rule, thought it watered down the game, but came around on it.

“I have to be honest — I’m a fan of it, and I was not originally,” said Servais, the winningest extra-innings manager in the majors (.765 winning percentage) in the rule’s brief history.

“We’ve benefited from it. We’ve played very well. We’ve executed well in those games. It has worked out for us and our team, but I think (the rule) has accomplished what it was set out to do.”

The runner-on-second rule, used in the minors since 2018, was introduced in the majors last summer to shorten the length of extra-inning games, provide fans with more action and reduce the roster shuffle required to restock a bullpen after a game stretches deep into extras. It has done all of that.

In 2019, 44 percent of extra-inning games ended in the 10th.

In 2020-21, 72 percent of extra-inning games have ended in the 10th.

In 2019, teams combined for .88 runs per extra inning.

In 2020-21, teams have scored 2.06 runs per extra inning.

In 2019, the longest game went 19 innings (with 24 pitchers).

In 2020-21, no game has gone longer than 13 innings.

[Royals](#) manager Mike Matheny was on board with the runner-on-second rule from the beginning. He’d watched his son Tate, a [Red Sox](#) minor leaguer, play for Double-A Portland in 2018 and noticed the excitement level at the ballpark climb as extras approached. “There were people who were going to leave but said, ‘Oh, they’re getting ready to do that extra-inning thing,’” Matheny said, later comparing it to shootouts in the [NHL](#). He’d like the rule to stay.

[Mets](#) manager Luis Rojas would, too. [Rojas was managing Double-A Binghamton](#) three years ago when the rule was adopted. He didn’t love it then, but he started liking it last year. Rojas said it struck him as crazy to have players flying across the country, in the middle of a pandemic, because a game went 18 innings and bullpens were gassed. “It has helped,” Rojas said.

“I’m fine with the extra-inning rule,” Cleveland manager [Terry Francona](#) agreed. “Sometimes as you get a little older, you’re not sure how you’re going to necessarily adjust to things like that, but I have no problem with it.

“I actually think it’s kind of fun.”

Fun isn’t how Francona would have described the rule a year ago. But it is kind of fun. MLB is on pace for 30 more walk-offs in 2021 than 2019. The rule has forced coaching staffs and front offices to rethink late-game strategy. What they expected to work and what works aren’t always the same. Matheny, the manager involved in the fewest extra-inning games in the past year (5), has observed other managers’ strategy and seen that, more often than not, playing matchups with who’s at-bat, who’s on the mound and who’s on second is smarter than a strict

philosophy — small-ball wins; always sacrifice the runner; trade the outs for a run. Some are still figuring out their style. [Pirates](#) manager Derek Shelton said he had underestimated the home team's advantage if the visiting team didn't score. That scenario impacts strategy, too.

"We initially went into it thinking you were going to need multiple runs to win because you're putting a guy (on second)," Shelton said, later adding that he'd prefer to play a regular 10th inning and add a runner in the 11th and beyond.

Servais, Mr. Extras, says there's no secret formula. In 11 extra-inning games this season, Servais has managed pretty conservatively. Mariners pitchers have issued only one intentional walk in extras this season, and their hitters have just two sacrifice bunts and two sacrifice flies. For the most part, Servais has allowed them to swing away. It has come down to execution, he said. Turns out, a 1.301 team OPS and shutdown pitching is a good way to end a game in extras.

Whether the rule returns in 2022 is, of course, not up to managers. "It's probably not even worth me having too strong of an opinion one way or the other," said [Rays](#) manager Kevin Cash, who has been involved in the most extra-inning games (20, with a .368 winning percentage) under the runner-on-second rule, including a 10-inning road win Friday night against the [Braves](#).

"Just tell us what we're doing," Francona said, "and we'll adjust."

When the extra-innings rule was implemented, it was ridiculed by players. They said it felt Little League. One joked, "It definitely does its job. It's also not baseball." Over the course of the past year, though, many have warmed to it.

But not [Rich Hill](#). When asked Sunday if he'd like to see the runner-on-second rule stay, Hill immediately replied, "No." He waited through eight seconds of silence before elaborating. "Honestly, if we want to go into it more, it's at-bats, it's innings pitched. There's a lot of different angles that we could (take). ... It's just like the seven-inning doubleheaders. This isn't development league. This isn't instructional baseball. This is the big leagues."

Hill raises an important point. We're getting less baseball now. Between seven-inning doubleheaders and the juiced extra innings, MLB is on pace for a few hundred fewer innings this season than in 2019. That means fewer counting stats for almost everyone — except most starting pitchers — and that'll cost players down the road. To some, the trade-off is OK. To Hill, it's not.

After Manfred's comment during All-Star week about eliminating the extra-inning rule and seven-inning doubleheaders, some players privately questioned whether the commissioner — knowing that many players liked the new rules — was threatening to take them away only to bring them to the table as a negotiating chip in CBA talks this winter. "All eyes on the sport, lots of attention and he's leveraging talks," one player said. "Baseball is just so weird."

BACK TO BACK

Fourteen hitters across six different teams made history on Monday and smacked seven separate sets of back-to-back home runs, an MLB record according to [Stats by STATS](#).

Two of those sets came in the same inning when Buster Posey and Wilmer Flores launched two dingers to kick off the Giants' matchup with the Dodgers in the first. Max Muncy and Justin Turner then [returned the favor](#) with a pair of solo shots.

Juan Soto and Josh Bell sent two into the D.C. sky in the first inning as well, leading the charge in an 18-1 win over Miami. Soto proved the Derby Curse a hoax, slamming an additional homer in the game and his fifth in the past four games.

Mets sluggers Pete Alonso, Jeff McNeil, Kevin Pillar and Michael Conforto all did it in one game, as Alonso and McNeil opened the scoring for New York with a pair of homers in the first and Pillar and Conforto ended the night by smashing two in the 11th inning. The Mets rode the long ball to victory, as they hit seven combined in their 15-11 marathon with the Reds.

Pavin Smith and Josh VanMeter powered the D-backs to a 4-2 win over the Pirates, hitting their homers in the second inning. Former D-back Paul Goldschmidt was a part of the fun as well, going back-to-back with Dylan Carlson for St. Louis.

MARJORIE ADAMS, WHO WENT TO BAT FOR A BASEBALL PIONEER, DIES AT 72

Her great-grandfather is considered a founding father of the game, but his contributions were not well known. She campaigned to earn him a place in the Hall of Fame.

Marjorie Adams, who tirelessly promoted the candidacy of her great-grandfather Daniel Adams, a 19th-century founding father of baseball, for the Baseball Hall of Fame, died on July 7 in a hospice in Branford, Conn. She was 72.

The cause was lung cancer, her nephew Nate Downey said.

Making the case for her great-grandfather, who was known as Doc (he came by his nickname legitimately, having received a medical degree from Harvard in 1838), became Ms. Adams's consuming passion. She advocated for him on a website, at conferences, at meetings of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) and at vintage baseball festivals, where fans play

and celebrate the sport, as if it were the 19th century. She nicknamed herself Cranky, for “cranks,” a period term for fans.

“Baseball is the national pastime,” [she said in an interview in 2014 with SABR’s Smoky Joe Wood chapter](#). “It’s important that the historical record is correct.”

That record was a lie for a long time, according to [John Thorn](#), baseball’s official historian. Abner Doubleday was for many years falsely cited as baseball’s inventor. And Alexander Cartwright, who played a role in the sport’s evolution, [was credited on his plaque at the Hall of Fame](#) in Cooperstown, N.Y., with some of the innovations that, it turned out, were actually conceived by Adams.

In the 1990s, an [article](#) about Adams by Mr. Thorn in *Elysian Fields Quarterly*, a baseball journal, helped Ms. Adams see her great-grandfather as a significant figure — and not only as “Daniel, the baseball guy,” as he was known in the Adams family.

Doc Adams began playing for the pioneering [New York Knickerbockers Base Ball Club](#) in 1845. While with the team, he created the shortstop position — as a relay man from the outfield, not a fielder of ground balls and pop flies. He made his most critical contributions to the game in 1857 at a rule-making convention of which he was chairman.

There he codified some of the fundamentals of the modern game, setting the distance between bases at 90 feet, the length of a game at nine innings and the number of men per side at nine.

Still, Adams remained obscure to anyone unfamiliar with baseball’s early history. In 2015, as Ms. Adams continued her campaign to raise her great-grandfather’s profile, Mr. Thorn presented materials about Adams to a member of the Hall of Fame’s pre-integration-era committee, which voted on inducting players, managers, umpires and executives from the time of baseball’s origins to 1946, the year before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. Adams [was put on the committee’s ballot with nine other candidates](#).

Awaiting the vote that December, Ms. Adams told MLB.com: “All I do, the first thing when I wake up, is think, “What’s my next step to help Doc?’ I’m always talking about Doc. You can’t stop me.” She added: “As Babe Ruth said, ‘You just can’t beat the person who won’t give up.’ I say that to myself 50 times a day.”

Marjorie Putnam Adams was born on Dec. 7, 1948, in Manhattan. Her father, Daniel Putnam Adams, was a banker, and her mother, Adelaide (Barkley) Adams, was a homemaker. After graduating from Stephens College in Columbia, Mo., she began a career as a saleswoman and interior designer at furniture stores in Manhattan and Connecticut.

Researching her great-grandfather’s baseball career — an effort that included several visits to Cooperstown — had a natural appeal to Ms. Adams.

"I'm not an athlete," she told SABR. "I'm a book person, a history geek." Doc Adams's election to the Hall, she said, would be "the moment of my life."

Her tenacity at promoting her great-grandfather's Hall-worthiness was such that she once printed out cards that said, "Doc Adams: The True Father of Baseball." She handed them out to strangers and struck up conversations with them about him.

"Then she wanted to be fair and honest and printed up cards that said, 'One of the True Fathers of Baseball,'" Mr. Downey said by phone. "She made me throw out the earlier ones."

Adams was nearly elected when the pre-integration era committee voted in December 2015. He received 10 votes, more than any other candidate but two short of the required 12.

"She was very disappointed," said Roger Ratzenberger, a member of SABR's 19th-century research committee who helped Ms. Adams with her campaign. "I talked to her that night and told her, 'Look at the difference now: Tonight on all the news channels, they're talking about Doc Adams.' That's what her thing was — to get attention for him."

A few months later, Ms. Adams found renewed reason for hope: documentary proof of Doc Adams's role in baseball history came up for auction. Three surviving pages of "[Laws of Baseball](#)," which were written by Adams and provided a physical record of his rule-making at the 1857 convention, [sold for \\$3.26 million](#).

Ms. Adams, who is survived by a sister, Nancy Adams Downey, believed that the "Laws" would get her great-grandfather elected to the Hall at the pre-integration committee's next scheduled meeting, in 2018. But in July 2016, the Hall restructured the panel, renamed it the early baseball era committee and postponed its vote until this December.

"It's a pity she couldn't hang on," Mr. Thorn said by phone, "because her great-grandfather's day is coming."

LIST OF THE WEEK 1

(THINK HITTING SAFELY IN 30 OR MORE STRAIGHT GAMES IS EASY? HERE ARE THE 57 MAJOR LEAGUERS WHO HAVE DONE IT).

1. Joe DiMaggio, New York Yankees: 56 games, 1941.
2. Willie Keeler, Baltimore Orioles (NL): 45 games, 1896-97.
3. Pete Rose, Cincinnati Reds: 44 games, 1978.
4. Bill Dahlen, Chicago Cubs: 42 games, 1894.

5. George Sisler, St. Louis Browns: 41 games, 1922.
6. Ty Cobb, Detroit Tigers: 40 games, 1911.
7. Paul Molitor, Milwaukee Brewers (AL): 39 games, 1987.
8. Jimmy Rollins, Philadelphia Phillies: 38 games, 2005-06.
9. Tommy Holmes, Boston Braves: 37 games, 1945.
10. Gene DeMontreville, Washington Senators (NL): 36 games, 1896-97.
T11. Fred Clarke, Louisville Colonels (NL): 35 games, 1895.
T11. Ty Cobb, Detroit Tigers: 35 games, 1917.
T11. George Sisler, St. Louis Browns: 35 games, 1924-25.
T11. Luis Castillo, Florida Marlins: 35 games, 2002
T11. Chase Utley, Philadelphia Phillies: 35 games, 2006.
T16. George McQuinn, St. Louis Browns: 34 games, 1938.
T16. Dom DiMaggio, Boston Red Sox: 34 games, 1949.
T16. Benito Santiago, San Diego Padres: 34 games, 1987.
T19. George Davis, New York Giants: 33 games, 1893.
T19. Hal Chase, New York Highlanders: 33 games, 1907.
T19. Rogers Hornsby, St. Louis Cardinals: 33 games, 1922.
T19. Heinie Manush, Washington Senators: 33 games, 1933.
T19. Dan Uggla, Atlanta Braves: 33 games, 2011.
T24. Harry Heilmann, Detroit Tigers: 32 games, 1922-23.
T24. Hal Morris, Cincinnati Reds: 32 games, 1996-97.
T26. Jimmy Wolf, Louisville Colonels (AA): 31 games, 1885-86
T26. Ed Delahanty, Philadelphia Phillies: 31 games, 1899.
T26. Nap Lajoie, Cleveland Naps: 31 games, 1906.
T26. Sam Rice, Washington Senators : 31 games, 1924.
T26: Vada Pinson: Cincinnati Reds: 31 games, 1965-66.
T26. Willie Davis, Los Angeles Dodgers: 31 games, 1969.
T26. Rico Carty, Atlanta Braves: 31 games, 1970.
T26. Ron LeFlore, Chicago White Sox: 31 games, 1975-76.
T26. Ken Landreaux, Minnesota Twins: 31 games, 1980.
T26. Vladimir Guerrero, Montreal Expos: 31 games, 1999.
T26. [Whit Merrifield](#), Kansas City Royals: 31 games, Sept. 10, 2018-19.
T37. Cal McVey, Chicago White Stockings (NL): 30 games, 1876.
T37. Dusty Miller, Cincinnati Reds: 30 games, 1895-96.
T37. Elmer Smith, Cincinnati Reds: 30 games, 1898.
T37. Tris Speaker, Boston Red Sox: 30 games, 1912.
T37. Charlie Grimm, Pittsburgh Pirates: 30 games, 1922-23.
T37. Lance Richbourg, Boston Braves: 30 games, 1927-28.
T37. Sam Rice, Washington Senators: 30 games, 1929-30.
T37. Goose Goslin, Detroit Tigers: 30 games, 1934.
T37. Stan Musial, St. Louis Cardinals: 30 games, 1950.
T37. George Brett, Kansas City Royals: 30 games, 1980.
T37. Jerome Walton, Chicago Cubs: 30 games, 1989.
T37. Sandy Alomar Jr., Cleveland Indians: 30 games, 1997.

T37. Nomar Garciaparra, Boston Red Sox: 30 games, 1997.
T37. Eric Davis, Baltimore Orioles: 30 games, 1998.
T37. Luis Gonzalez, Arizona Diamondbacks: 30 games, 1999.
T37. [Albert Pujols](#), St. Louis Cardinals: 30 games, 2003.
T37. Willy Taveras, Houston Astros (NL): 30 games, 2006.
T37. Moises Alou, New York Mets: 30 games, 2007.
T37. [Ryan Zimmerman](#), Washington Nationals: 30 games, 2009.
T37. Andre Ethier, Los Angeles Dodgers, 30 games, 2011.
T37. [Freddie Freeman](#), Atlanta Braves, 30 games, 2016.

Angels second baseman David Fletcher's hitting streak ended at 26 games last Sunday, longest of 2021 and longest in MLB in five years.

LIST OF THE WEEK 2

PITCHERS WHO WON 100 GAMES FOR MULTIPLE TEAMS

Pete Alexander	Phillies 190, Cubs 110
Lefty Grove	A's 195, Red Sox 105
Nolan Ryan	Angels 138, Astros 106
Dennis Martinez	Orioles 108, Expos 100
Greg Maddux	Cubs 133, Braves 194
Randy Johnson	Mariners 130, Diamondbacks 118
Mike Mussina	Orioles 147, Yankees 123
CC Sabathia	Indians 106, Yankees 134

Pete Alexander

Career: 1911-1930; 373-208 record, won 30 games three times, and topped 25 wins six times. He won 21 games when he was 40 years old.

Lefty Grove

Career: 1925-1941; 300-141 record, was named Most Valuable Player in 1931 when he went 31-4. He was 4-2 with a 1.75 ERA in the World Series.

Nolan Ryan

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

Dennis Martinez

Career: 1976-1988; 245-193 record; tossed a perfect game, and has the most wins by a Latin pitcher in MLB history.

Greg Maddux

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

Randy Johnson

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

Mike Mussina

Career: 1991-2008; 270-153 record, he won at least 15 games in a season eleven times.

CC Sabathia

Career: 2001-2019; 251-161 record, won the Cy Young Award in 2007 with Cleveland. He set the American League record for strikeouts by a lefthander, breaking the previous record held by Mickey Lolich.

RENAMING THE CLEVELAND INDIANS

The franchise initially went by the Bluebirds (often shortened to Blues), then Bronchos for a season before fans selected Naps in a public vote before the 1903 season. That name, a nod to Nap Lajoie, the heart and soul of the club in the early 1900s, beat out Cyclops, Emperors, Giants, Gladiators and Metropolitans. When Lajoie joined the Philadelphia Athletics after the 1914 season, the team needed a new name. There's a debate over whether "Indians" was picked to pay tribute to Louis Sockalexis, a Native American outfielder who played in Cleveland from 1897 to 1899. Sockalexis died in December 1913. A Jan. 17, 1915, article in the Cleveland

Plain Dealer carried this headline: “Baseball writers select Indians as best name to apply to the former Naps.”

They will officially start the new chapter after the conclusion of the 2021 season, the team’s 121st since becoming a charter member of the American League. All but 14 of those seasons, the team has used the name Indians. Now, the organization is banking on Guardians standing the test of time.

The name comes from sculptures on the Hope Memorial Bridge over the Cuyahoga River. A group of massive, winged Art Deco sculptures on the span are known as the Guardians of Traffic and are said to be symbols of progress. They stand just a few minutes drive from the team’s stadium.

The new logo of a flashing G with wings, borrowed from the statues, also has an Art Deco feel to it and the style of the new script “Guardians” logo is said to mimic the trusses on the underside of the bridge. The colors will remain the same: red, white and blue.

JOE POSNANSKI (THE ATHLETIC)

We start in Pittsburgh, where the [Mets](#) already trailed the Pirates 3-0 in the first inning and the bases were still loaded. Up stepped Pittsburgh’s [Kevin Newman](#), who stubbed a little ball that almost hit his foot in the batter’s box.

That would normally be a foul ball, but because it didn’t hit Newman, the ball was still live until it was touched by a fielder. And this baseball wanted to live! So it rolled toward third base and tried to get back into fair territory. It made its way so that it was touching the foul line — making it a fair ball — when Mets pitcher [Taijuan Walker](#) raced over and batted it away with his glove.

Home-plate umpire Jeremy Riggs rightly called it a fair ball, Walker spent time arguing instead of chasing the ball, three [Pirates](#) runners came around to score, Mets manager Luis Rojas absolutely lost his mind and started bumping the umpire ... it was truly weird and silly.

Giants icons [Buster Posey](#), [Brandon Crawford](#) and [Brandon Belt](#), all of them at least 33 years old, all of them a member of at least two of the Giants’ three World Series titles in the 2010s.

Posey, playing limited time so he can fully recover, is producing at his old MVP level, hitting .330 so far and slugging .555.

Belt has been injured, but he should be back soon and he, too, is slugging .500.

And Crawford, well, he's hurt now, too, but hopefully not for long. He has been playing the best baseball of his life. Crawford is a legitimate MVP candidate, hitting .286/.363/.546 with 18 homers, he has stolen all seven bases he's attempted, and he's playing good defense.

OK, so you know that the Seattle Mariners have been no-hit twice this year — twice in the first month of the season, in fact. You know that they're hitting .220 as a team, dead last in the American League, and their on-base percentage is .295, which is also dead last in the American League, and they're slugging .380, which is not quite dead last, but that's only because of the stunning power shortage in the non-Joeey Gallo/Adolis García parts of Texas.

And it's not like the Mariners' pitching is all that great either. They are ninth in the league in runs allowed and 12th in strikeouts. They have been outscored by 49 runs.

And yet, you look up and ... what the heck? The Mariners are seven games over .500. They are three games back in the wild-card race. How in the world is this even happening?

Well, it comes down to one statistic.

The Mariners are 20-8 in one-run games, best in baseball. they're 10-1 in extra innings.

Yankees loss to the Red Sox was absolutely brutal.

The Yankees have been massive underachievers in 2021. They came into the season as serious World Series contenders — many expected them to be the best team in the American League — but instead they have been hovering around .500, they can't score runs, and their starting rotation aside from Gerrit Cole has been spotty at best. DJ LeMahieu, after being a serious MVP candidate the last two years, has returned to being a league-average hitter. Giancarlo Stanton has fallen into this weird power drought. Aroldis Chapman, after starting the year like he was going to be the best pitcher the game has ever known, has a 12.66 ERA in his last 14 appearances and the Yankees are losing faith.

Still, they're the Yankees, which for every lifelong Yankee loather like myself means that at any point they can reel off a sweet little 15-game winning streak and remind us that life isn't fair.

But I have to say: That Yankees loss to Boston was so awful, so devastating that even as someone who falls firmly on the Earl Weaver side of the momentum argument, I can't help but wonder if this one will leave a lasting mark. The Yankees got a really nice start from Jordan

Montgomery, their No. 1 and No. 2 hitters LeMahieu and Brett Gardner managed to get on base and score runs, and New York led 3-1 going into the bottom of the ninth inning.

This came one day after my friend Ian O'Connor [wrote in the New York Post](#) that he fully expects the Yankees to make the postseason. The team seemed to be simply following his command.

And then it fell apart in spectacular fashion. The Yankees brought in Chad Green instead of Chapman, who had pitched the previous two nights. After striking out Christian Vázquez, Green gave up singles to Alex Verdugo and Bobby Dalbec, and then after getting the second out, Enrique Hernández rifled a double into the gap in left-center, scoring two runs to tie the game.

So that was bad.

But, the Yankees scored the zombie runner in the top of the 10th on a Brett Gardner sac fly, so, you know, who cares about momentum, right?

And then, Brooks Kiske came into the game and this is how it went.

- Wild pitch, zombie runner [Rafael Devers](#) to third.
- Wild pitch, Devers scores.
- Walk to Xander Boegarts on pitch that went like 45 feet.
- Wild pitch, Boegarts to second.
- Wild pitch, Boegarts to third.
- Hunter Renfroe sacrifice fly, the Yankees lose.

Those four wild pitches were something to behold. Yankees catcher Rob Brantly seemed helpless. The first three were split-fingered fastballs that Kiske spiked into the dirt and the fourth was a super high fastball that Brantly definitely didn't expect. In any case, you can't lose a game more painfully than that, and now the Yankees are eight games back in the division and 4 1/2 games back in the wild card race. While there's obviously more than enough time for them to overcome one or both of those deficits, well, Baseball Reference now gives them only a 12.1 percent chance of making the playoffs.

JAYSON STARK (THE ATHLETIC)

Crazy Mets Week

The Mets held a 6-0 lead in the eighth inning ... *and lost* (by allowing nine uplifting runs in the eighth and ninth)!

They followed up that debacle the next afternoon by merely ... *giving up six runs in the first inning!* But then, naturally, after losing a game in which they led, 6-0, they turned around and *won* this game after falling behind, 6-0, because ... Mets!

What the heck? You might think: Well, that can't possibly ever have happened. Except somehow it had, according to our friends at STATS Perform. The two other teams in the modern era to lose one game after taking a lead of at least six runs and then win the next game after trailing by at least six: [Yonny Chirinos'](#) 2019 [Rays](#) and Jeff Blauser's 1997 [Braves](#), who played the first of those games *against the Mets*, because of course they did.

At that point, most teams would be due for a normal game. So obviously, the Mets then went out the next day and *gave up seven runs in the first two innings* to the [Reds](#). Whereupon ... they also *won that game* (15-11, in 11 madcap innings), despite also blowing leads in both the ninth *and* 10th innings, because ... Mets!

What the heck? I asked the gang at STATS to look into this, too. They reported that in the modern era (1901-2021), only one team has ever coughed up six runs or more in the first two innings of back-to-back games but still won both of them. That team is ... *these Mets*.

Mets' bizarre path to winning was clearly sponsored by the Letter "E." There was actually a time in this game when the Mets' totals looked this way:

4 outs
4 errors

Three of those errors were by [Francisco Lindor](#)'s replacement at shortstop, [Luis Guillorme](#).

What's the last team that cranked out four errors within its first four outs of a game *and still won*?

Turned out, after way too many hours of feverish research, they'd found that team was Harold Reynolds' 1978 Mariners, then in their second year of life. Those Mariners committed *seven* errors altogether – three by Harold himself – in a wild June 25 game against the [Brewers](#). But like these Mets, they came back to win, 10-8.

Three All Star Game MVPs have homered in their first post All Star Game at bat:

Frank Robinson, Orioles 1971

Roberto Alomar, Orioles 1978

Vlad Guerrero Jr, Blue Jays 2021 (he hit 2 HRs in that first game back from the break).

What do Harmon Killebrew of the 1967 Twins, Barry Bonds of the 1994 Giants, Carlos Pena of the 2004 Tigers, Adrian Gonzalez of the 2006 Padres, Jayson Werth of the 2013 Nationals, Anthony Rizzo of the 2014 Cubs and Juan Soto of the 2021 Nationals have in common?

They all followed up All Star game appearances with two multi-homer games in their first four games of the second half.

[Padres'](#) under-appreciated [Jake Cronenworth](#)? Made his first All-Star team. Then made his triumphant return from the "break" by merely *hitting for the cycle* in his first game thereafter.

So you can add him to the most eye-popping list of all of these, courtesy of the Elias Sports Bureau, of guys who played in an All-Star Game and then hit for the cycle in their first game of The Season, Part 2:

Joe DiMaggio, 1937

Brooks Robinson, 1960

Jake Cronenworth, 2021

We just had our first week with three suspended games since 1975. And that always produces lots of Weirdness and Wildness. Like this, for instance!

HOW'D THESE PALM TREES GET TO ATLANTA? We've never seen a day-night doubleheader quite like the one the Padres and Braves attempted to play Wednesday in Atlanta. And why is that, you ask? Because Game 1 – and 4 1/2 innings of Game 2 – were played, as scheduled, in Atlanta. But thanks to a gazillion raindrops, that game got suspended, meaning they won't get around to finishing this thing until Sept. 24 – in San Diego.

So how many baseball games in history have begun in the Eastern Time Zone and finished in the Pacific Time Zone? Exactly one, according to the fabulous [Retrosheet suspended-game database](#): A's vs. Tigers in 2019. Started in Detroit on May 19. Resumed in Oakland on Sept. 6.

But how many *doubleheaders* have ever begun in one time zone and finished up three time zones away? Yep. That would be none.

Detroit-Minnesota doubleheader this week.

GAME 1 – Leadoff home run by [Robbie Grossman](#) (which, incredibly, turned into the only time in Tigers history they won a 1-0 game on a leadoff homer).

GAME 2 – Walk-off single by [Miguel Cabrera](#).

Last time any team started a doubleheader with a leadoff homer and ended it with a walkoff hit, according to [sportradar.com](#): Pirates vs. Expos on June 18, 2003 (Kenny Lofton homer against Livan Hernandez, Jason Kendall walk-off double off Rocky Biddle).

• **But the last time any AL team did that?** Brewers vs. A's, on Aug. 24, 1993 (Darryl Hamilton homer off Ron Darling, Dave Nilsson walk-off single against Kelly Downs).

THREE BAGEL SANDWICHES TO GO – So here's how it went for the Rangers last Sunday and Monday:

- Game 1 of their doubleheader in Buffalo: [Blue Jays](#) 5, Rangers 0
- Game 2 of that doubleheader: Blue Jays 10, Rangers 0
- Monday in Detroit: Tigers 14, Rangers 0

So can we help you with that math? That's three games in which the total score went: Rangers 0, *Teams Playing the Rangers* 29!

Want to guess how many other teams in the expansion era (1961-2021) have gotten shut out three games in a row, while getting outscored by at least 29 runs? Yessir. That would be none. Old record: 28-0, by [Cheslor Cuthbert](#)'s 2017 [Royals](#).

Score after two innings of Game 2 of that Sunday doubleheader: Blue Jays 10, Rangers 0.

- Score after two innings *the next day* in Buffalo: Blue Jays 0, Red Sox 11!

Since 1974, how many other teams besides the Blue Jays were ahead by 10-plus in the second inning one day and trailing by 10-plus in the second the next day (or vice-versa)?

Of course that would be none!

How many players in history have hit a postseason walk-off home run *and* a regular-season walk-off homer against the Yankees? And the answer is....

José Altuve last year's playoffs and this year game before the All Star break..

End of list.

Leader board for Most Career Homers By Guys Whose Last Name Should Have Been Their First Name.

Babe "Ruth" 714
Frank "Thomas" 521
Eddie "Murray" 504
Larry "Walker" 383

Wait. Connor Joe's first name should also be his last name. So ... Most Career Homers By A Guy Whose First Name Should Be His Last Name And Last Name Should Be His First Name? I went with:

Ryan Howard 382
Frank Howard 382

The Nationals pummeled the [Marlins](#), 18-1, on Monday. The bad news: That was three days after the Padres hung a 24-8 pounding on them. According to Doug (Kernels) Kern, that made the Nats the first team in the modern era to both lose a game and win a game by at least 16 runs in a four-day span.

all previous 24-8 games in MLB, [NBA](#), [NFL](#) or [NHL](#) history:

Oct. 26, 1975 (NFL): Oilers 24, Lions 8. Two TDs by Billy "White Shoes" Johnson. And how'd the Lions get to that "8?" Two field goals and a safety!

Jon Lester started the fabled offensive portion of his career by going 0-for-66. But then, on Monday, in that 18-1 game, Lester hit a 419-foot home run. That was the *fourth* home run of Lester's post 0-for-66 career.

How many members of the 0-for-60 Club have also hit that many home runs, you mused? And that answer is ... nobody!

In fact, according to Baseball Reference's Stathead, the only other member of that club in the modern era who ever hit *any* home runs was Bob Friend, who thumped two – both *before* his messy 0-for-76 funk in 1964-65.

But there was one really close call. In 1978-79, Vida Blue (who had one career homer at the time but ended up with four) went 0-for-59 over his first two seasons in the National League, with the [Giants](#). Then he ended that streak *with an inside-the-park homer!*

Detroit Tigers shortstop is named Zack Short. He would be the only player in history named short to start a game at shortstop.

Red Sox visited the Blue Jays in Buffalo, which was standing in for Toronto in this week's performance.

In May, the Red Sox also visited the Blue Jays, except they found them hanging around lovely and charming Dunedin, Fla., back then.

And next, in two weeks, the Red Sox will play the Blue Jays on the road for a third time. But this time (mysteriously), Toronto will look an awful lot like Toronto.

That's because the Blue Jays are about to become the first team to play home games in three different parks in the same season since ... 1903! But let's just say that, well, that wasn't this.

Back then, Elmer Flick's 1903 Cleveland Naps played games in three parks *in Cleveland* (Mahaffey Park, League Park and Neil Park), while Sport McAllister's 1903 [Detroit Tigers](#) also played games in three parks *without ever leaving Detroit* (Bennett Park, Ramona Park and Armory Park).

So how many other teams have played home games in three parks in three different states (or provinces) in the same season? According to the Blue Jays, that answer is: None!

[Lance McCullers Jr.](#) had one of the Strangest But Truest starts of the year last Friday.

First two pitches: [Tim Anderson](#) triple, [Yoan Moncada](#) double.

Final 92 pitches: 22 [White Sox](#) arrive at home plate – and *none* get a hit!

[Cardinals](#) pitcher Luis Garcia's creative line against the [Cubs](#) on Tuesday?

3 batters faced, 3 runs *but also a strikeout (and wild pitch)*.

WHAT'S UP WITH THAT? If this seems hard, we can verify that. Only two other pitchers have performed this mathematically challenged trick in the live-ball era: Ed Vosberg for the Rangers on April 28, 1996, and [Tyler Zuber](#) for the Royals last Aug. 30.

So ... once in 100 years, and then twice in 11 months,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

JULY 18, 2021

Good morning baseball fans as I watch the British Open and the rain fall here in Maine. I hope you had a fun week between HR Derby, All-Star Game and draft.

The last player to be drafted first overall by the Pirates--Gerrit Cole (2011).

[San Diego Padres](#) second baseman [Jake Cronenworth](#) hit for the cycle for the first time in his major league career as his team blew out the [Washington Nationals](#) **24-8** on Friday night.

After lining out in the first inning, Cronenworth had a two-run double in the second, an RBI triple in the third, a solo homer in the fifth and an infield single against the shift in the sixth. [Jurickson Profar](#) replaced him at second base in the bottom of the seventh.

Cronenworth is the third Padres player to hit for the cycle. Matt Kemp (Aug. 14, 2015) and Wil Myers (April 10, 2017).

AL/NL record for the most home runs after the All-Star break--Mark McGwire, STL (37 in 1999)

[Los Angeles Dodgers](#) first baseman and 10-time All-Star [Albert Pujols](#) notched his 3,284 hit on Friday night in a 10-4 win against the [Colorado Rockies](#), moving him past Willie Mays (3,283) into 11th on MLB's all-time hits list. Pujols entered the night tied with Mays.

In his first stint with the Dodgers after being [released from](#) the Angels in May, Pujols has slashed .275/.310/.514 with eight home runs and 23 RBI in 39 games this season.

The last time Pujols played at Coors Field, he tied Mays on the all-time home run list. Pujols has 675 homers to Mays' 660.

MUNCY SQUARED

The A's really did draft Max Muncy again.

Well, not the All-Star first baseman out of Baylor whom they drafted in the fifth round of the 2012 Draft, but a different Max Muncy, [this one a shortstop out of Thousand Oaks HS](#) in California taken with the 25th overall pick in 2021. That's right, Oakland has drafted two players named Max Muncy.

Despite having the same name, Max and Max are not related, although they are more similar than you might think. Dive deeper into the Max Muncy wormhole -- the Muncy-verse, if you will -- and you will find that they both have the same birthday, August 25, 12 years apart. To put a bow on the strange coincidences, Max Muncy (the Dodgers one) hit a walk-off home run on Sunday, hours before his name twin was drafted.

ALL-STAR BREAK

Two players have won the Home Run Derby and All-Star Game MVP in the same year--Cal Ripken Jr. (1991) and Garret Anderson (2003).

There have now been 202 home runs hit in All-Star Games. The most, with six--Stan Musial.

Ken Griffey and Ken Griffey Jr, Vlad Guerrero and Vlad Jr., Bobby Bonds and Barry Bonds. All father son duos who homered in the All-Star game.

The victory was the AL's eighth in a row going back to 2013, which ties for the third-longest All-Star win streak in history. The only ones longer were an 11-win run by the NL from 1972-82 and a 12-win run by the AL from 1997-2009 (not counting a tie in 2002).

While the AL went 20-37-1 in the first 58 editions, it has roared back to go 26-6-1 over the past 33. The AL now holds a 46-43-2 edge all-time, with a thin run differential of plus-6.

[Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#) extended the AL lead to 2-0 by demolishing a hanging slider from Corbin Burnes to left field, nearly reaching the Coors Field concourse. The 110.2 mph, 468-foot bomb was the longest (by 58 feet) in any All-Star Game since Statcast began tracking in 2015. (Kris Bryant set the previous record of 410 feet in 2016). It also was longer than any homer Guerrero has hit in game action, where his high is 465 feet on May 16 this year.

At 22 years and 119 days old, Guerrero became the youngest player in All-Star Game history to [win the game's MVP Award](#), which began in 1962. The previous youngest was Ken Griffey Jr. in 1992, at 22 years and 236 days old.

- Guerrero's home run is not the first from his family in an All-Star Game. Vlad Sr. homered in 2006, off Brad Penny. The Guerreros join the Bonds (Barry and Bobby) and Griffey (Ken Sr. and Jr.) pairings as the only father-son combos to each homer in at least one All-Star Game.
- At 22 years and 119 days old, Guerrero became the youngest player to homer in his All-Star Game debut, breaking a record set by Cardinals star Joe Medwick (22 years, 228 days) way back in 1934 -- the second All-Star Game ever played. He's also the second-youngest player to homer in a Midsummer Classic overall, behind only Johnny Bench in 1969 -- who was 21 years and 228 days old -- in his second All-Star Game.

joining countryman Hideo Nomo (1995) as the only Japanese-born pitchers to open an All-Star Game on the mound. Ohtani

The highlight of Ohtani's pitching appearance came when he hit 100.2 mph on the radar gun delivering a fastball to hometown favorite Nolan Arenado. Ohtani joined Chris Sale (2018) as the only starting pitchers to hit triple digits in an All-Star Game under Statcast tracking.

- [J.T. Realmuto](#) homered to get the NL on the board, marking the first time [any Phillies player had hit an All-Star Game home run](#) since Mike Schmidt in 1981. According to YES Network's James Smyth, that was the longest active streak of any team not having homered in the Midsummer Classic entering Tuesday.

Then, in the top of the next inning, the Rays' [Mike Zunino](#), also a catcher, homered for the AL. This marks just the third time that two catchers have homered in the same All-Star Game, along with 1997, with Javy Lopez and Sandy Alomar Jr., and 1969, with Johnny Bench and Bill Freehan.

Zunino's 433-footer and Realmuto's 430-footer are now the second- and third-longest All-Star Game homers of the Statcast Era, after Guerrero's.

Nationals ace and three-time Cy Young Award winner [Max Scherzer](#) threw the opening frame of the night, marking the fourth All-Star Game start of his incredible career. Scherzer joined Robin Roberts (five starts), Lefty Gomez (five), Don Drysdale (five), Jim Palmer (four) and Randy Johnson (four) as the sixth pitcher to make at least four Midsummer Classic starts. After a clean

first inning, Scherzer's career All-Star Game ERA now sits at 1.29 (one earned run allowed across seven innings).

Ohtani, as mentioned above, got the pitching win for the AL. White Sox closer and Australian native [Liam Hendriks](#) got the save. That marked the second consecutive All-Star Game in which a league's winning pitcher and save-getter were both born outside the United States, following former Yankee teammates Masahiro Tanaka and Aroldis Chapman in 2019.

Guerrero is the first Blue Jays player to win the game's MVP award. Ohtani is just the second Angels pitcher to earn an All-Star win, following Brendan Donnelly in 2003. And Hendriks is the first White Sox pitcher to earn an All-Star Game save since that statistic became official in 1969.

- The NL squad struck out just three times on the night, the fewest by either league in an All-Star Game since the AL was punched out three times in 2009. The AL struck out 12 times Tuesday, but outhomered the Senior Circuit, 2-1, in the winning effort.

He took part in the Home Run Derby on Monday – and hit 15 home runs of 475 feet or more in one round. That's never been done. And six of those 15 traveled between 500 and 513 feet! That, too, has never been done in the Statcast era.

- Then he went from bopping 500-foot home runs to being the AL starting pitcher in less than 24 hours. And he blitzed through a 1-2-3 inning Tuesday against three studs named [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#), [Max Muncy](#) and [Nolan Arenado](#) who just combined to mash 64 home runs in the first half. Try that on your PlayStation sometime.

- And in the midst of all that, Ohtani threw a 1-and-2 fastball to Arenado that was recorded at 100.2 miles per hour, followed by a second smokeball that registered at 99.7. For one thing, those were the fastest pitches Ohtani has thrown in three months. For another, you should know that only one other All-Star starter in the Statcast era has ever thrown any pitch at 100 mph or faster. And that was [Chris Sale](#) in 2018, a year in which he hit zero Home Run Derby homers and got zero at-bats in the game.

- So yes, Ohtani went hitless. But again, take a step back and think about this: Only three other starting pitchers in the history of the All-Star Game have also worked two trips to the plate into their busy schedules. Those three were Steve Carlton in 1969, Bob Friend in 1960 and Lefty Gomez in 1935. Those three combined to go 1-for-6 with a double (by Carlton) and four strikeouts. You know how many of them put a ball in play twice in one game, as Ohtani did? Right. Not a one. Only him.

- And finally, because the AL took the lead for good while Ohtani was the pitcher of record, he emerged as the winning pitcher. And that, too, is mind-blowing. Our friends from Stats Perform looked into this and found that this man, Shohei Ohtani, just became the first player to bat

leadoff in a game, be the starting pitcher and come away as the winning pitcher all in the same game. ...

THE AMAZING OHTANI (with contributions from Jayson Stark)

As the game's top players descend on Denver for the All-Star Game this week, Ohtani leads the major leagues with 33 home runs. Five of those blasts traveled more than 450 feet, the most of anybody. He also has the best slugging percentage in baseball at .698, is tied for the American League lead with four triples and has stolen 12 bases.

He has accomplished all of that while simultaneously establishing himself as the Angels' best pitcher. He has a 3.49 ERA in 13 starts, a number that would be nearly a run lower if not for one disastrous outing against the New York Yankees last month. He has struck out 87 batters in 67 innings, or 11.7 per nine innings. His average four-seam fastball has been measured at 95.5 mph.

Now Ohtani is the first player ever to be selected as an All-Star as a pitcher and hitter.

- He took part in the Home Run Derby on Monday – and hit 15 home runs of 475 feet or more in one round. That's never been done. And six of those 15 traveled between 500 and 513 feet! That, too, has never been done in the Statcast era.
- Then he went from bopping 500-foot home runs to being the AL starting pitcher in less than 24 hours. And he blitzed through a 1-2-3 inning Tuesday against three studs named [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#), [Max Muncy](#) and [Nolan Arenado](#) who just combined to mash 64 home runs in the first half. Try that on your PlayStation sometime.
- And in the midst of all that, Ohtani threw a 1-and-2 fastball to Arenado that was recorded at 100.2 miles per hour, followed by a second smokeball that registered at 99.7. For one thing, those were the fastest pitches Ohtani has thrown in three months. For another, you should know that only one other All-Star starter in the Statcast era has ever thrown any pitch at 100 mph or faster. And that was [Chris Sale](#) in 2018, a year in which he hit zero Home Run Derby homers and got zero at-bats in the game.
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Except not just in an All-Star Game. In any game — regular season, postseason or All-Star. C'mon, man. This can't be going down in real life, can it?

But now remember, Ohtani did that just one day after hitting 27 bombs in the Home Run Derby. That's not merely absurd. It's pretty much superhuman.

RUTH

Babe Ruth, who in spite of his reputation was barely a two-way player at all. Ruth began his career with the Boston Red Sox as a star left-handed pitcher, particularly in 1916 and 1917 when he earned 47 wins and posted a 1.88 ERA in 650 innings.

For as much talent Ruth had on the mound, it was immediately clear he could also hit, evidenced by his .325 batting average in 123 at-bats in 1917. So in a game against the New York Yankees at the Polo Grounds on May 6, 1918, Red Sox manager Ed Barrow started Ruth at first base for the first time. He hit a home run. Ruth played first again the next day at Washington's Griffith Stadium. He homered again.

At that point, Ruth's pitching appearances became more sporadic. Enthralled by the attention he was receiving as a batter, he "often feigned exhaustion or a sore arm to avoid the mound," according to his biography on the Society for American Baseball Research website. Ruth started 70 games in the field that season and 19 on the mound. In 1919 he started 111 games as a position and just 15 as a pitcher.

And that was the end of the two-way experiment. The Yankees acquired Ruth in 1920, and he pitched just five more times over the next 16 seasons.

ALONSO

The HR Derby now delivers \$1 million to the winner.

That incentive started in 2019, and with each victory, Alonso nearly doubled his salary in one night of epic slugging. In baseball's pay structure, which is based largely on service time, Alonso made the \$555,000 minimum as a rookie in 2019, and his salary now is just \$676,775.

Two years ago, he had 30 home runs at the break, on his way to 53, [a rookie record](#). Alonso has 17 now

He launched a record 35 home runs in the first round, and even as his opponent, Kansas City's Salvador Perez, bashed 28.

Alonso then breezed past Washington's Juan Soto and then Baltimore's Trey Mancini for the victory.

Twenty of his 74 HRs went further than 475 feet.

Alonso smashed 74 homers in all, and topped Mancini's final-round 22 with 31 seconds to spare. He joined Griffey and Yoenis Cespedes as the only back-to-back winners, and could clearly challenge Griffey's record of three overall titles.

Two years ago, Alonso belted 57 home runs total, joining Aaron Judge as the only rookies ever to win the Derby. Monday, it felt like the Mets slugger might challenge that number in the first round.

Alonso hit 25 during his three-minute round, peppering the left-field seats with tape-measure blasts, two of them breaking the 500-foot mark (512, 514). He launched 10 more home runs in his 60 seconds of bonus time, giving him an eye-popping 35 for Round 1.

Salvador Perez countered with 28, but it was no match for Alonso, who averaged 447 feet and an exit velocity of 108.4 mph in his first round. Nine of his homers exceeded 475 feet, the longest traveling 514. In all, Alonso's 35 blasts totaled 15,689 feet, with 33 of the 35 landing in left field or left-center.

Entering the 2021 contest, the longest Derby home run recorded by Statcast was 513 feet, by Judge at Marlins Park in 2017. Prior to Statcast (which has been measuring Derby home runs since 2016), the longest Derby blast is believed to be an estimated 524-foot shot by Sammy Sosa at Miller Park in 2002.

To get a sense of the Coors Field effect, consider this: There were 15 homers of more than 500 feet on Monday, as measured by Statcast. From 2016-19, there were a total of four homers that cracked 500 feet, all by Judge in 2017.

THROWING GOPHER BALLS

Alonso's designated putcher was Mets bench coach Dave Jauss.

"I don't throw hard," Jauss said, smiling. "But I can close my eyes and hit a spot."

Jauss, 64, said he once pitched a 100-inning game — for both teams — during his days as a shortstop at Amherst College in Massachusetts. ("We started with a 1-2 count," he said, "which helps.") As a coach for the Boston Red Sox when they hosted the 1999 All-Star Game, Jauss threw batting practice for hours to the league's top sluggers, including Nomar Garciaparra, Juan Gonzalez, Ken Griffey Jr. and Ivan Rodriguez.

MORE HR DERBY NOTES FROM JOE POSNANSKI

There were some remarkable moments: Ken Griffey Jr. hitting a home run that smacked off the warehouse in Baltimore, Mark McGwire crushing a series of majestic home runs over the Green Monster at Fenway, Sammy Sosa hitting some of the longest home runs any of us have ever seen in Milwaukee, [Josh Hamilton](#) hitting like 500,000 home runs at Yankee Stadium, etc.

But it's telling that not one of the players I mentioned in that paragraph actually *won* the Home Run Derby in their glorious year. Griffey hit the warehouse but [Juan Gonzalez](#) won the trophy. But then Griffey won the trophy the year McGwire blew everyone's minds. Sosa's extraordinary run in Milwaukee lost out to Jason Giambi, who hit more and less interesting homers. And in the craziest of all, Hamilton burned himself in the early rounds and [Justin Morneau](#) ended up winning that thing.

LIST OF THE WEEK—MOST CONSECUTIVE POST-SEASON GAMES REACHING BASE.

Manny Ramirez	37
Miguel Cabrera	31
Chase Utley	27
Carlos Ruiz	26
Jose Altuve	25
Daniel Murphy	25
Pablo Sandoval	25
Boog Powell	25
Carlos Beltran	24
Lance Berkman	23
Lou Gehrig	23
Rickey Henderson	22
Joe Morgan	22

Lorenzo Cain	21
Derek Jeter	21
Jeff Bagwell	21
Barry Bonds	21
Fred McGriff	21
Frank Schulte	21
Hunter Pence	20
Chuck Knobloch	20
Dan Gladden	20

(other notables Rose & Rizzuto 19, Hank Greenberg and David Justice 18, Berra, Foxx, Ruth 17)

BIGGER IS BETTER? (FROM NYT)

The size and shape of major league second basemen has been changing. Long the ball field residence of the undersized — the 21 Hall of Famers at the position are, on average, 5-foot-10½ and 172 pounds — the position is now populated less by welterweights like Joe Morgan (5-7, 160) and more by sluggers like D.J. LeMahieu (6-4, 220).

Put another way: For 50 years, from 1948 until 1998, there was never a time when more than one regular second baseman stood at least 6 feet and weighed at least 200 pounds. In 2019, the last full season, 29 such players took the field, according to Baseball Reference.

When the Milwaukee Brewers traded for third baseman Mike Moustakas (6 feet, 225 pounds) at the 2018 trade deadline, they moved Travis Shaw (6-4, 230) from third to second. A year later, they put Moustakas there for 47 games. Neither Shaw nor Moustakas previously had played a single inning of pro ball at second.

Colorado Rockies Ryan 6-foot-2, 219-pound McMahon. As the 2021 season begins its second half on Thursday, however, McMahon's seven defensive runs saved at second base are tied with Marcus Semien of the Toronto Blue Jays and David Fletcher of the Los Angeles Angels for the major league lead. That is despite McMahon's spending half his time at third base. Add his six D.R.S. at third, and McMahon has been the most valuable fielder in the majors.

Max Muncy, a college first baseman who learned third in the minors, played only three Class AAA games at second, and two in the Cape Cod League, before the Oakland Athletics installed him there in the majors in 2016. With his husky 6-foot, 215-pound build, Muncy has played second base extensively for the Los Angeles Dodgers. He leads the National League with a .414 on-base percentage this season and has offered a great deal of versatility by spending time at five positions (first, second, third, right field and left) over the last few years.

Front office executives are getting more inventive generally with roster construction, but a confluence of leaguewide trends is making experimentation at second more appealing. Strikeouts rates are at an all-time high and, with fewer balls in play, no position has seen a

greater reduction in total chances than second basemen, who are fielding 20 percent fewer batted balls per game than they were in the mid-2000s.

There are discernible reasons for the change. Pitchers are throwing more four-seam fastballs at the top of the strike zone, rather than sinking two-seamers at the knees, leading to more airborne batted balls. Better advanced scouting information is informing more precise positioning, which has led to a preponderance of shifts, and cover for players with reduced range.

Fewer ground balls and fewer base runners — the league's on-base percentage, .316, is the second lowest it has been since 1972 — have combined to produce the lowest rate of ground-ball double plays in baseball's modern era, with 2021 in a virtual tie with 1968.

That means the agility and dexterity required for pivoting on the double play are, quite simply, in less demand.

"Defensive positioning and shifting to some extent has changed the definition of positions on the dirt in a larger context," Stearns said.

"You're just playing the odds that the ball is not going to be on the ground," added Brewers Manager Craig Counsell. "You are giving up something defensively, and you're giving up something to get something. That's the decision that we make most days when we construct a lineup. In '18 and '19, that was a risk that we were willing to take. It is a risk, but on the aggregate, we felt like the offense that that player added made us better."

One of the early proponents of taking that risk was John Hart, the retired executive who, in his time leading the 1990s Cleveland Indians and early 2000s Texas Rangers, prioritized offense over defense at second. He filled the position with, among others, Carlos Baerga, Michael Young and Alfonso Soriano — all good hitters who were subpar defensively. One of Hart's lieutenants in Cleveland was Byrnes, who tried a similar approach with Jedd Gyorko during his time with the San Diego Padres.

In 2016, when the average weight of a second baseman topped 200 pounds for the first (and only) time, players at second batted .277 (highest among all positions) with a .334 on-base percentage (second) and .436 slugging percentage (third), all of which outperformed the collective totals of both corner outfield spots. (The weight of this year's average second basemen has dipped back to a still-robust 193 pounds, according to Baseball Reference.)

On August 10, 1944, at Crosley Field in Cincinnati, he pitched a [2-0 shutout](#) for the Boston Braves against the Cincinnati Reds, the team he'd pitched four years for before World War 2. Barrett faced 29 batters that day, gave up two hits, struck out no one, and threw an average of exactly two pitchers per batter — 58 total. That's the complete game and nine-inning game

record. At 1 hour, 15 minutes, it also stands as the shortest night game in major league history, and the shortest road-team win in history.

RED HOT FLETCHER

[David Fletcher](#) has been baseball's hottest hitter for more than a month and he kept it going by extending his hit streak to 26 games -- with three doubles and five RBIs -- against the Mariners on Saturday at Angel Stadium.

Fletcher's hitting streak goes back to June 13, but he's been absolutely on fire over his last eight games. batting .595 (22-for-37). He has recorded seven multihit games during that span, and his 22 hits in eight games is the most by an Angels player since Tim Salmon had 21 in eight contests in 1994. Fletcher's hit streak also ranks second in Angels history, behind only Garret Anderson's (28 games) in '98.

Fletcher was hitting just .255 through his first 60 games, but he's batted .454 (49-for-108) during his 26-game streak, helping him raise his average to .318 in 86 games this season. His .454 average over this hot stretch is the highest in the Majors by a wide margin, as the second-best is Atlanta's Freddie Freeman (.385). Coincidentally, Freeman is the last player in the Majors to have a hit streak longer than Fletcher's current mark, as he had a 30-game streak in '16.

SECOND HALF WATCH LIST (From mlb.com)

Here are 10 statistical chases -- whether it be for some of the biggest records around, or history you had no idea was even at stake -- that you should keep an eye on coming down the stretch.

1) deGrom vs. Gibson

The chase: Lowest qualified ERA in Live Ball Era

You're almost certainly familiar with this setup by now. The one-man wrecking crew that is deGrom begins the second half with a microscopic 1.08 ERA, tucked just behind Bob Gibson (1.06, 1968) for the lowest recorded by any AL or NL pitcher before the All-Star break (min. 80 innings pitched). deGrom is, of course, chasing Gibson's season-end 1.12 ERA in '68 for the lowest qualified mark by any pitcher in the Live Ball Era. Gibson's 1.12 is one of those mythical numbers in baseball that many thought would never be touched, but, then again, few pitchers in recent memory have been as talented as deGrom.

The pressure and eyeballs surrounding deGrom will only intensify the closer he gets to Gibson, so make sure you bookmark MLB.com's [Sarah Langs' ERA tracker](#) the rest of the way. Dutch Leonard's AL/NL Modern Era record 0.96 ERA, set in 1914, is still in play for deGrom as well.

2) Ohtani's impeccable Ruth impersonation

The chase: 60 home runs

Put aside the insanity of Ohtani ranking among the Majors' best hitters and pitchers at the same time. Throughout AL/NL history, that puts him in company with Babe Ruth and no one else (Martín Dihigo pulled off similar [two-way brilliance](#) in the Negro Leagues) -- and the further this season goes, the more Ohtani surpasses even what the Babe did in 1918-19.

Focusing just on Ohtani's hitting for a moment ... have you noticed he's on pace for a 60-homer season? Ohtani has hit in 94% of the Angels' games, putting him on pace for a 153-game campaign. He's already gone deep 33 times, meaning he's on pace for ... 60 home runs.

Ohtani's chase for feats we haven't seen since the Steroid Era extends beyond 60 dingers. His 9.1 at-bats per home run average is currently the [lowest by any AL/NL batter](#) not named Ruth, Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire or Sammy Sosa (throw in Josh Gibson's 7.8 AB per HR Negro League pace in 1937, and it's a true slugger's party). Ohtani is also on pace for 102 extra-base hits, which would make him the first player with a triple-digit XBH total since Bonds, Sosa, Luis Gonzalez and Todd Helton in 2001.

3) Tatis' power-speed combo

The chase: NL crowns in both homers and steals

Tatis' 28 homers and 20 steals in the first half put him in the running for a rare 40-40 season, but he's actually lined up for something even more historic: Tatis is aiming to become the [first AL/NL player to lead his league in homers and steals](#) since Hall of Famer Chuck Klein way back in ... 1932! Only two other Modern Era players besides Klein -- Ty Cobb (1909) and Jimmy Sheckard (1903) -- have pulled off that power-speed combo, and they played in an era that looks completely different from today. In fact, Matt Kemp is the only recent player to even come close when he led the NL in homers and tied for second in steals in 2011.

Tatis is still within shouting distance of Ohtani (33 homers) and Whit Merrifield (24 steals), too, so don't count out the possibility of him joining Cobb as just the second AL/NL player to lead the Majors in both categories.

4) Vlad Jr.'s Triple Crown quest

The chase: First AL Triple Crown since Miguel Cabrera (2012)

Vladimir Guerrero Jr.'s [All-Star MVP performance](#) on Tuesday was par for the course amid his incredible 2021, and he enters the second half leading the Majors in average (.332) and RBIs (73) while tied with Tatis for second in homers (28) behind Ohtani (33). In the AL, Vlad Jr. holds a six-point lead over Houston's Michael Brantley in average, and he's up on Boston's Rafael Devers by just one RBI.

When FanGraphs' Dan Szymborski used his [ZiPS](#) projection system to [estimate Guerrero's Triple Crown chances](#) back in June, the batting title seemed like his biggest uphill climb. Then Ohtani started belting homers every other at-bat. Winning this Triple Crown won't be easy, but then again they're not supposed to be.

There's also extra history at stake: The 22-year-old Guerrero could surpass Cobb (1909) as the youngest AL or NL Triple Crown winner.

5) The Craig Kimbrel Renaissance

The chase: Lowest single-season reliever ERA

Remember when [Craig Kimbrel](#) sat on the free-agent market for eight months and then struggled to a 6.00 ERA across his first season and a half with the Cubs?

If that's still your most recent Kimbrel memory, um, well, check out what he's doing this year. To call Kimbrel resurgent is understating things; he's got a Major League-best 0.57 ERA, putting him on pace with Zack Britton's AL/NL Modern Era single-season ERA record (0.54, 2016) for any pitcher with at least 50 innings. Now, the question of *who* Kimbrel chases down that record with remains to be seen. His [contract includes a vesting option](#) for 2022, making him arguably the most valuable trade chip at any position entering the July 30 Deadline.

6) Bo Bichette: Immaculate thief

The chase: 100% success rate on steals

You probably associate Bichette with his bat, but he's been a factor on the basepaths, too, going a perfect 12-for-12 in stolen-base attempts. Bichette is already the only player remaining this year with a 100% steal success rate (min. 10 attempts), so now it's time to see if he can join a surprisingly small historical club. Since the start of the Wild Card Era in 1995, only three players have finished with at least 20 steals and a perfect success rate: Alcides Escobar (2013), Quintin Berry ('12) and Chase Utley ('09). Dating back to when Jackie Robinson broke MLB's color barrier in 1947, only two other AL/NL players have gone a perfect 20-for-20 or better: Paul Molitor (1994) and Kevin McReynolds ('88).

Yet another reason to watch Bichette and the young Blue Jays.

7) Miggy's march to 500

The chase: 500 career home runs

[Miguel Cabrera](#) entered the season needing 13 more dingers to become the 28th member of the 500-homer club, but after he struggled to only seven in the first half (.348 slugging percentage), checking that off in 2021 could come down to the wire.

Cabrera already missed two weeks in April after reaggravating the left biceps muscle that's forced him to miss time before, and it's possible that's still hindering his swing. Still, plenty of

upcoming matchups against struggling pitching staffs like the Twins, Orioles, Royals and Rangers could help Miggy get the last six homers he needs to become the first Venezuelan-born player with 500 round-trippers.

8) Zunino, Grandal try to redefine the 'Mendoza Line'

The chase: 100-or-better OPS+ with sub-.200 BA

Flirting with the [Mendoza Line](#) (a .200 batting average) is not where a hitter wants to be, but catchers [Mike Zunino](#) and [Yasmani Grandal](#) are truly making the most of it. Zunino (fresh off a second-deck homer in the All-Star Game) and Grandal (in contention for an All-Star nod himself, before he [tore a tendon in his left knee](#)) have paired those batting averages with so many walks and so much power that, when you compare their overall slash lines against the league average, they've actually been *above-average* hitters.

As the second half begins, Zunino sports a 128 league-adjusted [OPS+](#) (league average = 100), while Grandal (whose current injury timetable has him returning by September) sits at 130. Neither backstop is on pace for enough plate appearances to qualify for the batting title, but when one looks across the [203 seasons](#) by AL/NL hitters with at least 300 plate appearances and a sub-.200 batting average, only three finished with an above-average OPS+: Angels outfielder Roger Repoz (108, 1971), Mark McGwire (105, 2001) and Carlos Pena (103, 2010).

Zunino and Grandal would prefer more hits if they can get them, but they're on pace to blow those three out of the water and become the most productive sub-.200 hitters ever. That's a fun consolation prize.

9) The Giants' clutch 'line changes'

The chase: Team pinch-hit HR record

Line changes are a hockey term, but Giants manager Gabe Kapler is [implementing the baseball version](#) with success. San Francisco leads the Majors with 184 pinch-hit at-bats, and Kapler has repeatedly pulled two to three pinch-hitters off his bench (a.k.a the "line change") within the same inning.

With all those changes making opponents scramble to match up, Giants pinch-hitters have already bopped nine home runs. That leads the Majors and puts San Francisco on pace to challenge the single-season team record of 17 pinch-hit dingers set by the 2016 Cardinals. If you're looking for reasons why the Giants owned baseball's best first-half record, their depth is a good place to start.

10) [Rodolfo Castro](#) is must-see TV

The chase: HRs for first 4 career hits

This one won't take long, so make sure you're tuned into Pirates rookie infielder Rodolfo Castro's at-bats as soon as the Bucs resume. Castro, a 22-year-old prospect ranked outside MLB

Pipeline's [Top 30 Pirates rankings](#), was called up for his second big league stint and clubbed a pinch-hit homer last Friday against the Mets -- his first career hit. Castro then got the start on Sunday and homered twice more -- his only two hits of the day -- making him a perfect 3-for-3 on the homers-to-hits ratio. He became the first Pirate to homer for each of his first three MLB career hits, and the first to do so for any team since the Yankees' Kyle Higashioka in 2018.

Now, here's where it gets interesting: per the Elias Sports Bureau, Trevor Story (2016) is the only AL/NL Modern Era player to homer for each of his first *four* big league hits. That means each of the next few balls Castro puts in play carries significance. If it falls for a single, double or triple, Castro's streak becomes a footnote. But if it's a homer -- well, Story's historic party of one suddenly becomes a party of two.

MLB's new Trade Deadline rules explained

The term "deadline" implies a certain sense of finality, a defining line that can't be crossed.

But for decades, baseball's Trade Deadline wasn't exactly a deadline. After it passed, there was still ample opportunity for clubs to improve their rosters with external additions in the trade market. (Remember when Dallas Keuchel publicly complained about the 2017 Astros' quiet July 31 Deadline activity, and they wound up landing Justin Verlander a month later?)

That all changed in 2019 (something you may have forgotten because of the pandemic-shortened 2020 season). There is now one, true Trade Deadline.

Because the elimination of the August waiver trade period might be as difficult for some fans to grasp as the mere existence of the August waiver trading period was difficult for other fans to grasp -- and because the strange 2020 season and its Aug. 31 Trade Deadline was difficult for *everybody* to grasp -- here's a handy FAQ that should help *all* fans understand what the true Trade Deadline entails.

When is the Trade Deadline?

The Deadline for 2021 is at 4 p.m. ET on July 30.

Why not July 31?

With July 31 falling on a Saturday that includes several day games this season, the Trade Deadline was moved up one day. But most years, it will be July 31.

What is the meaning of a "true" Trade Deadline?

The Trade Deadline is, indeed, a deadline. No players will change hands via trade after that date.

How is this different from years prior to 2019?

Prior to 2019, a player could be traded after the July Trade Deadline under one of two conditions.

1. He first cleared [revocable trade waivers](#).
2. Or if the club claiming the player on waivers worked out a trade with the team that placed the player on waivers.

As long as players were acquired by Aug. 31, they were eligible to play for their new clubs in the postseason.

The August waiver period had a profound impact on playoff races over the years. The Blue Jays acquired David Cone from the Mets after he cleared waivers in 1992, and he helped pitch them to their first World Series title. In 2004, the Cardinals worked out a trade for Larry Walker, who had cleared waivers, and he helped them reach the Fall Classic. And the Astros' acquisition of Verlander after he cleared waivers was the turning point in their bid for their first World Series championship.

Even beyond what it meant to various playoff races, the August trade period had a big effect on baseball history, such as John Smoltz going from Detroit to Atlanta, Jeff Bagwell going from Boston to Houston, Jose Bautista going from Pittsburgh to Toronto and the Dodgers and Red Sox working out a 2012 deal in which more than a quarter of a billion dollars' worth of contracts -- including those of Josh Beckett, Carl Crawford, and Adrian Gonzalez -- changed hands.

So can players still be placed on waivers after July 31?

Yes, players can still be placed on [outright waivers](#) and claimed by other clubs, but it has to be a straight waiver claim, meaning the new team takes on the player's remaining contract and no other players are involved.

Sometimes veteran players on costly contracts are placed on waivers in the hope of shedding salary, so it's possible you might see some high-priced players switch teams on waivers this August for that reason alone.

Are players acquired via waivers after July 30 still eligible for postseason rosters?

Yes. But the Aug. 31 postseason roster deadline still applies. If you are not in the organization before September, you cannot appear in the postseason for them.

What are the effects of the “true” Trade Deadline?

It has only been in effect for a relatively short time, but already we’ve seen some interesting action under the “true” Trade Deadline. In 2019, there were a whopping 25 trades made in the last two business days before the Deadline, punctuated by the Astros’ stunning acquisition of D-backs ace Zack Greinke right at the buzzer. And while 2020 was an unusually short season, its Trade Deadline still had ample activity, with 17 deals made on Deadline day alone.

So it seems safe to suggest that eliminating the waiver trade period is pushing teams to act while they still can. They must make calculated assessments of their roster strengths and weaknesses -- and their overall ability to contend for a title -- earlier than they once did, and deadlines, by their very nature, compel action.

It behooves contenders to identify and address areas of need as early in the season as possible and for teams potentially situated as sellers to market their assets early, as well. Teams that wait too long to sell could find themselves swallowing a good bit of salary near the Deadline, because quite often it was the players on contracts that outpaced their production who cleared waivers and were moved in August.

What about Minor League trades?

Veteran players on Minor League contracts (in other words, not on a 40-man roster) could see their values to contending clubs increase as injuries or other unforeseen circumstances develop after the Deadline. The key distinction is that it’s a player on a Minor League contract.

Anything else to know?

This isn’t new, but it’s worth reminding people that if you are an impending free agent who is traded during the season, the team that acquires you cannot give you a [qualifying offer](#) and therefore receive Draft pick compensation if you sign elsewhere. That means that when a team is trying to calculate its trade return for an impending free agent, it must try to determine if the prospect (or prospects) it is getting in return carry more value than the Draft pick and the associated Draft bonus pool money it would get if they give that player a qualifying offer in the offseason and he signs elsewhere.

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JULY 11, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. All-Star game, Home Run Derby, Amateur Draft. Something for everyone this week.

In the logical/no brainer move of the week, the Dodgers cancelled Trevor Bauer bobblehead night.

The last Rockies starting pitcher before Germán Márquez to be selected for an All-Star Game was Ubaldo Jiménez, 2010.

The only pitcher to win a Cy Young Award, league MVP and a Gold Glove Award in the same season was the Cardinals' Bob Gibson (1968)

Rafael Devers currently leads the Majors in RBIs. The last player to win an RBI title in their age-24 season or younger was Nolan Arenado (130 RBIs in 2015, age 24).

The only two players to win the Home Run Derby back-to-back--Ken Griffey Jr. (1998, '99) and Yoenis Céspedes (2013, '14)

YANKEES NOTES

Giancarlo Stanton has 11 of the 19 hardest hit balls in MLB this season.

All-Star in at least 3 of first 5 seasons as a Yankee--Judge, Joe D, Joe Gordon and Mantle.

Yankees have had just three managers since Joe Torre arrived in 1996, while the average team has had eight. Since George Steinbrenner died in 2010, Hal Steinbrenner has replaced the Yankees' skipper just once, when he dumped Joe Girardi in favor of Aaron Boone before the 2018 campaign. (George changed managers 11 times in his first 12 seasons owning the club.)

The Yankees have won nearly 150 more regular-season games than any of their competitors since 1996. They've claimed seven pennants and won five championships over that stretch. Even more impressive, they've reached the postseason 22 times in the last 26 seasons.

Aaron Judge got 500th hit this week. He reached 500 hits and 100 HRs in 506 games, second fastest in team history to Joe D.

Yankee lefthander Nestor Cortes, who has surrendered three earned runs in 25 ²/₃ innings this year, and who has a lower ERA than Jacob deGrom (1.05 to 1.08 if you're scoring at home),

The Yankees, meanwhile, entered the Astros series outside of MLB's top 20 clubs in hits, runs, total bases, RBI, and runs per game, and were dead last in doubles and triples.

For those of you who missed Gerritt Cole's brilliant game in Houston Saturday night--Cole found that emotional sweet spot Saturday night against the [Houston Astros](#), dialing up his fury and adrenaline to throw a shutout against his former team on 129 pitches — by far the most of his career and the most any MLB pitcher has thrown this season.

Facing [Yordan Alvarez](#) in the ninth inning of a one-run game with one on and two outs, Cole went for the fastball attack. His 127th pitch of the night was a 98 mph heater upstairs and outside that Alvarez fouled off. He then reached back and threw 99 mph right at the top of the zone for a swing and miss. His 129th and final pitch was 99.1 mph upstairs for a swinging strikeout and closure on the gutsiest performance of Cole's nine-year career.

In that moment, Alvarez was collateral damage on Cole's path of destruction. Cole had pitched an astonishing ninth inning, walking to the mound with 112 pitches on his arm already. His fastball sat at nearly 100 mph. He screamed at Aaron Boone when the manager paid him a visit with two outs, saying that he "said the F-word a lot and kind of just blacked out."

Cole threw 17 pitches in the ninth, got three outs and nearly single-handedly won a must-win game for his team. The Yankees won 1-0, with Cole allowing only three hits, two walks, and striking out 12. Cole (and [Aaron Judge](#), whose solo home run was the only run scored) gave the Yankees a victory that finally resembled the season-saving jolt of energy that the team has badly needed. He rediscovered his command and leaned more on called strikes (29) than swings and misses (13) to rack up his strikeouts.

FIRST HIT, GRAND SLAM, NO PROBLEM

In a matchup of aces Thursday night, Padres rookie reliever [Daniel Camarena](#) stole the show.

With one of the most unlikely at-bats you could think of, the 28-year-old left-hander joined the San Diego ranks in incredible fashion. His fourth-inning grand slam off of Max Scherzer spurred the Padres to a 9-8 walk-off victory over the Nationals at Petco Park.

The Padres trailed, 8-0, at one point in the fourth inning, and the Nats had a 98% [win probability](#). That number was still at 94% when Camarena stepped to the plate with the Padres down by six runs.

Camarena came into the game to pitch the top of the fourth inning after Padres ace Yu Darvish gave up a season-high six runs in three innings. After the Padres loaded the bases in the bottom half of the frame, Camarena connected on a 96.5 mph fastball from Scherzer that he sent 416 feet to right field for the two-out grand slam, pulling the Padres within two runs, at 8-6.

Camarena became the second pitcher in Padres history with a grand slam, joining Mike Corkins (Sept. 4, 1970). Camarena is also the first relief pitcher from any team to hit a grand slam since Don Robinson on Sept. 12, 1985, for the Pirates against the Cubs.

Collecting his first hit via a grand slam also made Camarena just the second pitcher to do so. The only other pitcher in National League or American League history to record his first hit via a grand slam was Bill Duggleby who went deep on April 21, 1898 with the Phillies, according to STATS.

It also was the first time Scherzer allowed a home run with a pitcher at the plate, much less a grand slam.

Camarena's slam highlighted a comeback win for the Padres, which ended on [Trent Grisham's](#) walk-off single in the ninth that brought home [Tommy Pham](#).

The eight-run comeback tied the biggest comeback win in Padres history. On only two other occasions have the Padres fought back from eight-run deficits -- on June 10, 1974 against the Pirates and May 2, 1970 against the Giants.

FERNANDO TATIS JR.

League leader in homers *and* steals *and* OPS *and* runs created

The only player who has ever led his league in all four of those departments in the same season was Ty Cobb — 112 years ago.

Comparing him to the other \$300 million shortstop, Francisco Lindor.

Lindor has half as many extra-base hits as Tatis (44-21) and one-third as many homers (27-9).

But even if you stack Lindor up against his whole league, he ranks next-to-last among all NL shortstops with 300-plus plate appearances in average (.220), slugging (.356) and OPS (.674). Only the mightily scuffling [Kevin Newman](#), of the [Pirates](#), trails him in all of those categories.

OHTANI

(running notes from yet another unbelievable week). Ohtani, who has 15 homers in his last 20 games. Ohtani also became the first player in Major League history to have at least 32 homers and 12 stolen bases before the All-Star break. Ohtani's 32 homers before the break is tied for 13th in Major League history and the Angels still have three games remaining against the Mariners this weekend. Barry Bonds holds the all-time record with 39 homers before the break in 2001.

Ohtani's start on the mound on Tuesday was also his last one before the Midsummer Classic, and he heads into the break with a 3.49 ERA with 87 strikeouts in 67 innings over 13 starts. He's also batting .279/.364/.700 with 54 extra-base hits, 69 RBIs and 63 runs scored in 81 games.

Most homers in a season by a Japanese-born player in the Major Leagues, as he passed Hideki Matsui with his 32nd blast.

It was the [first time in 100 years](#) anyone had hit five homers and picked up a win within a week. As an exclamation point, the next day, [Sunday](#), June 20, he homered again.

Shohei Ohtani's last two weeks: June 15 • HR June 16 • HR June 17 • 6 IP, 1 ER, 5K, W June 18 • 2 HR June 19 • HR June 20 • HR June 21 • OFF June 22 • 0/3 June 23 • 6 IP, 1 ER, 9 K June 24 • OFF June 25 • HR June 26 • 1/3 June 27 • HR June 28 • HR June 29 • 2 HR

He has a 32.3% strikeout rate while pitching. It's [the 12th-best](#) in baseball, better than Yu Darvish or Clayton Kershaw or most anyone else. Setting aside any worries about whether the two-way role would limit his availability, the Angels have played 85 games, and Ohtani has appeared in 80 of them.

[Shohei Ohtani](#) made history by becoming the first player selected as an All-Star as both a position player and a pitcher that the two-way sensation absolutely obliterated yet another home run.

After smacking two home runs on Tuesday night [against the Yankees](#), and [two more against the Orioles](#) in Friday's series opener, he hit a solo home run that went a projected 459 feet in the third inning of Sunday's [6-5 walk-off win](#) over the Orioles at Angel Stadium.

It was another impressive feat from Ohtani, who was elected as the starting designated hitter by the fans for the All-Star Game, while also being voted by the players as one of five starting pitchers to make the American League roster. He's also set to participate in the Home Run Derby on July 12 and the Angels are open to him both hitting and pitching in the game on July 13.

It was the 31st homer of the year for Ohtani, who has already tied the record for homers in a season by a Japanese-born player, joining Hideki Matsui. Matsui hit 31 homers in 162 games in 2004, while Ohtani reached 31 in just his 78th game.

Ohtani also became just the 10th left-handed hitter to reach at least 31 homers before the All-Star break, joining Babe Ruth (1921, '28, '30), Roger Maris ('61), Reggie Jackson ('69), Ken Griffey Jr. ('94, '98), Luis Gonzalez ('01), Barry Bonds ('01), David Ortiz ('06), Chris Davis ('13) and Christian Yelich ('19). It's tied for the third-most homers before the break over the last 20 seasons, as only Albert Pujols (32 in '09) and Davis (37 in '13) have hit more, according to ESPN Stats & Info. He's also the only player in AL history with at least 31 homers and 12 stolen bases before the All-Star break.

Then Friday-- There were only three fans sitting in the entire right-field portion of the upper deck at T-Mobile Park in Seattle. That was mostly because the seats are so far from home plate and the sun hits directly into the spectators' eyes.

They went up there to get away from the crowd and just kind of chill. Those plans were interrupted when [Shohei Ohtani](#) crushed a 463-foot blast right in their direction.

It was just the sixth homer hit to the upper deck. It cleared the first five rows of seats, about three sections over from the foul pole, where many of the upper-deck shots have gone previously. This one was farther.

It was the 33rd home run of the season for Ohtani, and one of the most majestic. It drove in his 70th run of the season and gave him a five-homer cushion for the [MLB](#) lead heading into his first Home Run Derby on Monday.

RED SOX ALL-STARS

[J.D. Martinez](#), [Nathan Eovaldi](#) and [Matt Barnes](#) were named American League All-Star reserves, set to join [starters Bogaerts and Devers](#) at the Midsummer Classic at Coors Field on July 13. Their five All-Stars are the most of any club in the AL. The last time the Red Sox had five All-Stars was 2018, when they were represented by Martinez, Chris Sale, Mookie Betts, Mitch Moreland and Craig Kimbrel.

For Martinez, this is his fourth career All-Star nomination, three of which have come during his time with Boston. His first came with the Tigers in 2015. First time in Red Sox history to have SS and 3B starters in an All-Star game.

MORE NO HITTERS

When John Means no-hit the Mariners in May, it was the Orioles first no-hitter since 1991 and the first complete-game no-hitter since 1969. What a team, those 1969 Orioles. They won 109 games in the regular season before losing to the Mets in the World Series. Palmer actually ranked third on the team in victories that season (going 16-4), trailing Cuellar's 23 wins and the 20 that McNally had. Palmer's no-no was Aug. 16 against the A's. He walked six and struck out eight.

Cy Young, Nolan Ryan, Randy Johnson, Hideo Nomo, Jim Bunning all threw no hitters in both AL and NL.

Edwin Jackson of the Arizona Diamondbacks no-hit the Rays in 2010, though it was hardly a conventional no-no. Jackson walked eight batters, including seven in the first two-plus innings of the game. He threw 149 pitches, only 79 of them strikes.

Nolan Ryan threw seven no-hitters, three more than any other pitcher. Only once did he throw two no-hitters in one season. 1973.

Nine pitchers who won 300 or more games and never tossed a no-hitter -- Grover Cleveland Alexander, Kid Nichols, Lefty Grove, Early Wynn, Steve Carlton, Don Sutton, Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine and Clemens.

From Jayson Stark—de Grom

He's the most important piece of the Mets' first-place puzzle in any year, but especially this year. All around him, 27 of his teammates have spent time on the injured list. Eleven teams have outscored his team's offense by at least 100 runs. And no National League team with a winning record has scored three runs or fewer more times than the Mets (41). In other words, his offense hasn't exactly carried this juggernaut to the top of the NL East.

So do I even have to spell out the value of having an ace around who gave up two earned runs or fewer in 13 starts in a row? Or the helpful fact that the Mets have scored first in 10 of deGrom's 15 starts this season. Or that there hasn't been a single start all season in which he left with his team trailing by more than a run?

deGrom the hitter is batting .364. Hitters facing deGrom are batting .126. According to sportsradar.com, that would be the biggest differential by any starting pitcher (10 starts or more) in the live-ball era — busting a record held by Walter Johnson (.184 points) *for the last 95 seasons*.

He reached the break with 146 strikeouts but only 39 hits allowed. And since All-Star breaks became a thing almost 90 years ago, only four other pitchers (with Randy Johnson doing it twice) have ever reached the break with at least 100 more punchouts than hits. But they all needed anywhere between three and eight more starts.

Nolan Ryan 1977 (biggest differential at 113)

Randy Johnson 2001

Chris Sale 2018

Randy Johnson 2000

Max Scherzer 2017

More than half of his outs are strikeouts! In those 15 starts, deGrom has recorded 276 outs. And 146 — or 53 percent — are strikeouts. You can probably guess how many other starters

have gotten to the All-Star break with K's representing more than half of their outs. Yessir. That would be none!

And that's not all! This man has a WHIP of 0.54. If he keeps this up, of course that'll be the best ever ... And deGrom has allowed an absurd 3.82 hits per nine innings. Uh-huh. Also unheard of by any qualifying starting pitcher ... And would you believe his strikeout/walk ratio is 146 to 11? That comes to 13.27 strikeouts for every walk. You'll never guess where that would rank over a full season? OK, yeah you will. No. 1 is an excellent guess.

Meanwhile, Matt Harvey of the Orioles isn't having the best year.

Once, he was a top-four finisher in an actual Cy Young election (2013). Now, thanks to a 7.70 ERA that ranks as the highest in baseball among all starters with at least 70 innings
Opposing hitters against Harvey this year: .322/.373/.519

He's already allowed more runs than he gave up all season in 2015! That, too, is a very true story. The 2015 Matt Harvey: 62 runs in 29 starts. The 2021 Matt Harvey: 71 runs in 18 starts.

He's every base stealer's green light! Opposing base stealers when Harvey is on the mound this year: 12 for 13. How many AL pitchers have allowed more stolen bases than that? Yup. Zero.

And that's not all! Harvey's home ERA: 7.90 ... His road ERA: 7.52 ... His home WHIP: 1.81 ... His road WHIP: 1.72 ... Opposing hitters with runners in scoring position: .432/.456/.684/1.141 ... Opposing hitters with runners on third and less than two outs: They're somehow hitting .643 — with a 1.563 OPS.

You might remember how bad the Phillies bullpen was last year. It ain't getting much better.

We're halfway through this season, and the Phillies have blown 22 saves. Their team record is 25. They have 78 games left to play. What could possibly go wrong?

The all-time record for blown saves in a season is 34, by John Wasdin's 2001 [Rockies](#). The Phillies are on pace for 42. I'll take the under, but still.

The Phillies have held a lead in 64 of their 84 games this season. That's seven more games than the Mets have led in. But bad bullpens make leads disappear. [Joe Girardi](#) could tell you all about it.

Between June 14 and June 30, the Phillies handed a lead to their bullpen in 11 different games. They won four of them. And they blew four save opportunities *in the games they won!*

Their overall numbers don't approach the historic ugliness of last year. But since June 14, they've piled up the most blown saves in baseball (eight!), the worst home run/fly ball ratio

(21.7 percent) of any bullpen in baseball, the third-most unearned runs allowed (nine) of any bullpen in baseball and the highest percentage of inherited runners scoring (41.1 percent!) of any bullpen in baseball.

Bruce Bochy managed the Giants for 13 years. Won over 1,000 games. Won nearly 70 percent of his postseason games. Won three World Series. And how many Manager of the Year trophies did he collect while wearing that uniform? Incredibly, that would be none.

JOE POSNANSKI

Joey Votto of the Reds has led the league in on-base percentage seven times. The only players in baseball history who have led the league in OBP that often are:

1. Ted Williams, 12 times
2. Barry Bonds and Babe Ruth, 10 times
3. Rogers Hornsby, 9 times
4. Votto and Stan Musial, 7 times

Look at that company. Considering that on-base percentage is probably the single most important stat there is, that alone is enough for me to consider Votto Hall of Fame-worthy. But he has been much more than just an on-base machine: he won an NL MVP in 2010, perhaps should have won another in 2017, he has hit for power (306 career HRs), he has been a Gold Glove first baseman.

Tom Reich, the player agent who became one of baseball's most powerful figures in the 1970s and '80s when he negotiated multimillion-dollar deals for many of the game's greatest stars in the early years of free agency, died on Friday in Los Angeles. He was 82.

At a party one night in 1969, Mr. Reich met the Pirates pitcher Dock Ellis at a time when baseball's longstanding reserve clause bound players to their teams until they were traded, sold or released.

Ellis, a fine pitcher but ultimately best known for [claiming he was under the influence of LSD when he pitched a no-hitter](#) against the San Diego Padres in June 1970, said he was unhappy with the Pirates' management. Mr. Reich said he would negotiate his next contract free of charge.

In addition to Ellis, Mr. Reich went on to represent the Pirates' Dave Parker, Manny Sanguillen, Al Oliver and John Candelaria and the Cincinnati Reds' Joe Morgan, George Foster and Ken Griffey.

A boom time for players and agents arrived when Peter Seitz, the arbitrator in disputes between baseball ownership and the players' union, ruled after the 1975 season that the reserve clause in every player's contract created only a one-year right of renewal, and not the perpetual right claimed by owners.

In February 1982, Mr. Reich negotiated George Foster's five-year deal with the Mets worth at least \$10 million (about \$28.5 million today), an annual average sum second only to that of the Yankees' Dave Winfield. Mr. Reich's other clients included Sammy Sosa, Mo Vaughn and Jack Clark.

In his radio interview two years ago, Mr. Reich noted how "when I started, the players had no rights whatever — until the era of Marvin Miller."

"I need to take a tranquilizer to discuss the inequity of him not being in the Hall of Fame," he said.

Mr. Miller, who changed the baseball landscape by fighting for players' rights as the executive director of their union from 1966 to 1982, [died in November 2012](#). After being rejected for the Hall many times, he was finally voted into Cooperstown for the class of 2020.

LIST OF THE WEEK—ACTIVE CAREER SAVES LEADERS

Craig Kimbrel 368

Kenley Jansen 333

Aroldis Chapman 292

Mark Melancon 232

Joakim Soria 226

Greg Holland 217

Edwin Diaz 160

Zack Britton 153

John Axford 144

Alex Colome 140

Wade Davis 140

DRAFT CRYSTAL BALL (from mlb.com)

The [No. 1 overall pick](#) in the Draft is supposed to be the no-brainer, the slam dunk, the no-doubt-about-it type of pick. Those taken with the first selection are the ones slated not just for a big league career, but for superstardom.

As history has shown, it hasn't always worked out that way.

With the Pirates preparing to open the [2021 Draft](#) on Sunday night, a review of the first 56 years of the event (1965-2020) reveals the challenge Pittsburgh faces. With the benefit of hindsight, and excluding the three most recent years, only eight of those No. 1 picks stand the test of time as the optimal choice based on the information available today.

Below is a look at each top selection, and the player who now appears to be most deserving, among all the picks who signed that year. Each player is listed with his career Baseball-Reference [WAR](#) through Wednesday's action. (Active players yet to reach the Majors are listed as "N/A," while retired players who never got there are listed as "DNP.")

2020 (Tigers): Spencer Torkelson (N/A)

Should've picked: Torkelson

Torkelson is MLB Pipeline's [No. 3 prospect](#).

2019 (Orioles): Adley Rutschman (N/A)

Should've picked: Rutschman

Rutschman is MLB Pipeline's [No. 2 prospect](#).

2018 (Tigers): Casey Mize (2.2 WAR)

Should've picked: Mize

Mize has made strides in 2021 (3.59 ERA in 17 starts) but figures to get a lot of competition from his 2018 classmates.

2017 (Twins): Royce Lewis (N/A)

Should've picked: Trevor Rogers, 13th overall, Marlins (3.1)

Lewis' future [still looks bright](#), despite injury setbacks, but Rogers has already developed into an All-Star in Miami, with the 23-year-old posting a 2.22 ERA through 17 starts. Still, this is far from decided, especially with high-ceiling arms Hunter Greene (No. 2 overall, Reds) and MacKenzie Gore (No. 3, Padres) ascending toward the Majors.

2016 (Phillies): Mickey Moniak (-0.1)

Should've picked: Shane Bieber, 4th round, Indians (11.6)

Moniak has played only a handful of MLB games thus far, while Bieber won an AL Cy Young Award in 2020. Pete Alonso, Bo Bichette, Corbin Burnes and Zac Gallen also were snagged after the first round.

2015 (D-backs): Dansby Swanson (7.0)

Should've picked: Alex Bregman, 2nd overall, Astros (25.4)

Not only did the D-backs select Swanson over his fellow SEC shortstop, they shipped him to Atlanta just six months later in a disastrous trade for pitcher Shelby Miller.

2014 (Astros): Brady Aiken (N/A)

Should've picked: Matt Chapman, 25th overall, A's (22.0)

Injury concerns led to Houston not reaching a deal with Aiken, who went 17th to the Indians a year later hasn't played since 2019. Aaron Nola (seventh) and Trea Turner (13th) are among the other stellar options here.

2013 (Astros): Mark Appel (N/A)

Should've picked: Cody Bellinger, 4th round, Dodgers (18.5)

Appel is [back in the Phillies' system](#) this year, so his story isn't over yet. Bellinger hasn't been the same since his 2019 NL MVP campaign, and one could argue for Kris Bryant (second), Tim Anderson (17th) or Aaron Judge (32nd) instead.

2012 (Astros): Carlos Correa (30.9)

Should've picked: Correa

Injuries have limited Correa at times, but the 2015 AL Rookie of the Year remains the most productive player in this class.

2011 (Pirates): Gerrit Cole (29.6)

Should've picked: Cole

This class was stacked, but it's hard to argue with Cole, even though he didn't reach his peak until leaving Pittsburgh.

2010 (Nationals): Bryce Harper (36.2)

Should've picked: Jacob deGrom, 9th round, Mets (43.7)

The 2015 NL MVP has hardly been a bust, but deGrom appears on his way to a third NL Cy Young Award -- and perhaps a [record-breaking season](#) -- in 2021.

2009 (Nationals): Stephen Strasburg (32.8)

Should've picked: Mike Trout, 25th overall, Angels (76.0)

Washington hardly regrets selecting the 2019 World Series MVP, even though Trout appears on his way to all-time great status.

2008 (Rays): Tim Beckham (3.8)

Should've picked: Buster Posey, 5th overall, Giants (43.7)

Beckham struggled to hold down a regular MLB role, while Posey became a seven-time All-Star catcher and three-time champion in San Francisco.

2007 (Devil Rays): David Price (39.8)

Should've picked: Price

Several other players would have been worthy top picks, including fellow lefty Madison Bumgarner (10th overall), but Price has been about as productive as any of them.

2006 (Royals): Luke Hochevar (3.7)

Should've picked: Clayton Kershaw, 7th overall, Dodgers (71.6)

Hochevar's relief work helping K.C. win the 2015 World Series takes a bit of the sting out of passing up Kershaw and Max Scherzer (11th overall).

2005 (D-backs): Justin Upton (33.8)

Should've picked: Andrew McCutchen, 11th overall, Pirates (45.6)

Upton has put together a solid career, but he hasn't quite reached the heights of MVP winners McCutchen or Ryan Braun (fifth overall).

2004 (Padres): Matt Bush (2.5)

Should've picked: Justin Verlander, 2nd overall, Tigers (71.8)

Bush, a high school shortstop, finally made the Majors as a Rangers reliever in 2016, following years of issues on and off the field.

2003 (Devil Rays): Delmon Young (3.2)

Should've picked: Ian Kinsler, 17th round, Rangers (54.1)

Young did at least sprout a trade tree that brought Matt Garza, Chris Archer, and now Tyler Glasnow and Austin Meadows to Tampa Bay.

2002 (Pirates): Bryan Bullington (-0.2)

Should've picked: Zack Greinke, 6th overall, Royals (74.0)

While Bullington pitched fewer than 100 MLB innings, Greinke has himself on a Hall of Fame path.

2001 (Twins): Joe Mauer (55.2)

Should've picked: Mauer

The local kid from St. Paul certainly made good in Minnesota.

2000 (Marlins): Adrián González (43.5)

Should've picked: Chase Utley, 15th overall, Phillies (64.5)

Traded before he reached Miami, A-Gon did become a five-time All-Star, though not the well-rounded player Utley was in Philadelphia.

1999 (Devil Rays): Josh Hamilton (28.2)

Should've picked: Albert Pujols, 13th round, Cardinals (99.3)

Hamilton did eventually become a superstar for a short time, but not with Tampa Bay. Pujols reached that status two years removed from playing in junior college.

1998 (Phillies): Pat Burrell (18.9)

Should've picked: CC Sabathia, 20th overall, Indians (62.6)

Burrell's nearly 300 homers don't match Sabathia's 251 wins and 3,093 strikeouts.

1997 (Tigers): Matt Anderson (-0.6)

Should've picked: Lance Berkman, 16th overall, Astros (52.0)

Anderson wound up with a 5.19 ERA in 257 career relief appearances. Berkman, a local pick from Rice, spent 12 of his 15 seasons in Houston.

1996 (Pirates): Kris Benson (12.8)

Should've picked: Jimmy Rollins, 2nd round, Phillies (47.6)

Benson started 200 MLB games but wasn't quite the same after having Tommy John surgery in 2001. Rollins took home an NL MVP Award in '07.

1995 (Angels): Darin Erstad (32.3)

Should've picked: Roy Halladay, 17th overall, Blue Jays (64.2)

Erstad had a 240-hit season (2000) and was a key part of a championship team ('02), but Halladay is in the Hall of Fame, and Todd Helton (eighth overall) and Carlos Beltrán (second round) could get there, too.

1994 (Mets): Paul Wilson (2)

Should've picked: Nomar Garciaparra, 12th overall, Red Sox (44.3)

While Wilson pitched only one season for the Mets before he was traded, Nomar became a superstar in Boston before injuries interfered.

1993 (Mariners): Álex Rodríguez (117.5)

Should've picked: Rodríguez

A-Rod made the Majors before turning 19 and was an elite player by 20.

1992 (Astros): Phil Nevin (15.9)

Should've picked: Derek Jeter, 6th overall, Yankees (71.3)

Nevin played 12 MLB seasons, hit more than 200 homers and was an All-Star in 2001, but it would take a lot more to overcome Jeter.

1991 (Yankees): Brien Taylor (DNP)

Should've picked: Manny Ramírez, 13th overall, Indians (69.3)

Taylor never made the Majors, while Ramírez became one of his generation's most feared hitters.

1990 (Braves): Chipper Jones (85.3)

Should've picked: Jones

Fortunately for the Braves, they chose Jones over pitcher Todd Van Poppel.

1989 (Orioles): Ben McDonald (20.8)

Should've picked: Jeff Bagwell, 4th round, Red Sox (79.9)

Baltimore got a solid pitcher but missed on four Hall of Famers: Bagwell, Frank Thomas (seventh overall), Trevor Hoffman (11th round) and Jim Thome (13th round).

1988 (Padres): Andy Benes (31.4)

Should've picked: Mike Piazza, 62nd round, Dodgers (59.6)

Benes was arguably this Draft's best pitcher, and nobody saw Piazza coming, as the 1,390th overall pick.

1987 (Mariners): Ken Griffey Jr. (83.8)

Should've picked: Griffey

Between Griffey and A-Rod, Seattle absolutely nailed two No. 1 overall picks in a seven-year span.

1986 (Pirates): Jeff King (16.8)

Should've picked: Gary Sheffield, 6th overall, Brewers (60.5)

King was a useful big league hitter, but few were as dangerous with a bat in their hands as Sheffield.

1985 (Brewers): B.J. Surhoff (34.4)

Should've picked: Barry Bonds, 6th overall, Pirates (162.8)

That year's top four picks (Surhoff, Will Clark, Bobby Witt, Barry Larkin) had careers ranging from good to great, yet they barely produced more combined WAR than Bonds.

1984 (Mets): Shawn Abner (-1.3)

Should've picked: Greg Maddux, 2nd round, Cubs (106.6)

Abner, a high school outfielder who had a .591 OPS in the Majors, was chosen over Mark McGwire (10th overall), while Tom Glavine joined Maddux as a second-round selection.

1983 (Twins): Tim Belcher (26.0)

Should've picked: Roger Clemens, 19th overall, Red Sox (139.2)

Belcher was a productive pitcher for 14 seasons, if not an ace like Clemens, but that was only after he didn't sign with the Twins.

1982 (Cubs): Shawon Dunston (11.5)

Should've picked: Bret Saberhagen, 19th round, Royals (58.9)

Dunston was a two-time All-Star shortstop in Chicago, while Saberhagen narrowly leads a pitching class that also featured Dwight Gooden (fifth overall), David Wells (second round), Jimmy Key (third round) and Kenny Rogers (39th round).

1981 (Mariners): Mike Moore (27.9)

Should've picked: Tony Gwynn, 3rd round, Padres (69.2)

Moore started 440 MLB games on the mound, but Gwynn became a San Diego icon.

1980 (Mets): Darryl Strawberry (42.2)

Should've picked: Strawberry

While his last big season came at age 29, Strawberry's prime was worthy of the top pick.

1979 (Mariners): Al Chambers (-0.5)

Should've picked: Orel Hershiser, 17th round, Dodgers (56.1)

Chambers, a high school outfielder, played only 57 MLB games. Hershiser and Don Mattingly (19th round) both were late-round gems.

1978 (Braves): Bob Horner (21.9)

Should've picked: Cal Ripken Jr., 2nd round, Orioles (95.9)

Horner was the NL Rookie of the Year in 1978, but Ripken was still playing 13 years after his final game.

1977 (White Sox): Harold Baines (38.7)

Should've picked: Ozzie Smith, 4th round, Padres (76.9)

Baines now has a plaque in Cooperstown, but this choice is a tossup between fellow Hall of Famers Smith, Paul Molitor (third overall) and Tim Lincecum (fifth round).

1976 (Astros): Floyd Bannister (26.4)

Should've picked: Rickey Henderson, 4th round, A's (111.2)

Bannister made only 39 of his 363 starts for Houston, which missed not only Henderson, but also Alan Trammell (second round), Jack Morris (fifth) and Wade Boggs (seventh).

1975 (Angels): Danny Gooden (-1.7)

Should've picked: Lou Whitaker, 5th round, Tigers (75.1)

Gooden is the only player to be picked No. 1 overall twice (see below), but it only translated into 252 big league games and a .674 OPS.

1974 (Padres): Bill Almon (4.6)

Should've picked: Dale Murphy, 5th overall, Braves (46.5)

Almon played 15 years in the Majors but never at the level of Murphy, a two-time NL MVP.

1973 (Rangers): David Clyde (0.6)

Should've picked: Robin Yount, 3rd overall, Brewers (77.3)

While Clyde became a cautionary tale about rushing a young pitcher, Yount became the best player in Brewers history.

1972 (Padres): Dave Roberts (0.4)

Should've picked: Gary Carter, 3rd round, Expos (70.1)

Roberts had a .644 OPS in the Majors, while Carter was an 11-time All-Star catcher.

1971 (White Sox): Danny Gooden (-1.7)

Should've picked: Mike Schmidt, 2nd round, Phillies (106.9)

Two of the best third basemen of all time, George Brett and Schmidt, went back-to-back with the 29th and 30th overall picks.

1970 (Padres): Mike Ivie (7.3)

Should've picked: Rich Gossage, 9th round, White Sox (41.1)

Ivie only got 500 plate appearances in a season once. Gossage became a Hall of Fame reliever.

1969 (Senators): Jeff Burroughs (17.8)

Should've picked: Bert Blyleven, 3rd round, Twins (94.5)

While Burroughs was the 1974 AL MVP, Blyleven's 22-year career on the mound sent him to Cooperstown.

1968 (Mets): Tim Foli (5.7)

Should've picked: Thurman Munson, 4th overall, Yankees (46.0)

Foli's 16 MLB seasons as a light-hitting shortstop pale in comparison to Munson's 11 as a superstar catcher.

1967 (Yankees): Ron Blomberg (9.4)

Should've picked: Bobby Grich, 19th overall, Orioles (71.1)

Blomberg's biggest distinction is as the first designated hitter in MLB history. Grich was a six-time All-Star second baseman, and an underappreciated Hall of Fame candidate.

1966 (Mets): Steven Chilcott (DNP)

Should've picked: Reggie Jackson, 2nd overall, A's (74)

A shoulder injury prevented Chilcott, a catcher, from reaching the Majors, while Jackson became Mr. October.

1965 (A's): Rick Monday (33.1)

Should've picked: Johnny Bench, 2nd round, Reds (75.2)

Monday had a stellar career, but Bench is arguably the greatest catcher of all time.

OHTANI BY TOM VERDUCCI OF SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Shohei Ohtani Isn't Babe Ruth—He's Better

Ohtani is a once-in-a-century player in a year when we need to be awed, inspired and distracted. Comparing him to the Babe is no longer enough.

This has been a trying baseball year. The news feed streams headlines about [sticky substances](#), [Trevor Bauer](#), Marcell Ozuna, Jared Porter, Mickey Callaway, Roberto Alomar, an expiring labor deal, the slowest games ever (3:08 average to play nine innings), the [most strikeouts ever](#), and the fewest hits since the DH was added in 1973.

As disheartening as the mire can be, this year also gifts us the wonder that is Shohei Ohtani. He is a once-in-a-century player in a year when we need to be awed, inspired and distracted. He is a ballplayer in the most fundamental sense of the word. Shunning specialization in a society that craves and rewards it, Ohtani pitches, hits and runs, and does all of it with the irrepressible joy and purpose of a Little Leaguer.

A coronation is scheduled for next week. The most amazing baseball player of our lifetime will be crowned as such. Ohtani will take part in the All-Star Home Run Derby next Monday and—if baseball has any sense of justice and theatre—he will pitch and hit in the All-Star Game the following day. He is the first player ever to be [selected as an All-Star hitter and pitcher](#). He will be the star of stars. This is his time.

What Ohtani is doing deserves such a showcase because his baseball genius for the Los Angeles Angels has otherwise been underappreciated. Babe Ruth, his closest comp, was a true two-way player only for a 218-game window in 1918 and 1919—and not even the Babe slugged or ran like Ohtani while doing so. This is not like what Samuel Johnson once said about a dog walking on its hind legs: “It is not done well, but you are surprised that it is done at all.” No, this two-way show is more like a dog dancing the role of Princess Odette in *Swan Lake*.

Ruth quit the two-way business after just those 218 games, telling reporters while golfing in Los Angeles after the 1919 season, “The outfield is where I belong. It is too hard on the arm to play every day and then take your turn in the box. I found that I was never effective that way.”

Those who suggest Ohtani is compromising his greatness by not specializing—“*He can be another [deGrom](#)!*” “*He can be another Yelich*”—are missing the point of why he came to the major leagues and what is in his heart.

“I sat in the room with him,” says Angels manager Joe Maddon, then with the Cubs when Ohtani was a restricted international free agent after the 2017 season. “He made it clear he was coming here because he wants to pitch and hit. This is what he loves. He loves baseball and he loves the challenge. I will submit to you that by doing both you are seeing the best version of Shohei Ohtani, not by limiting him.”

For 500 years people have gazed at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in absolute wonder. A bevy of scientists also looked at it with image analysis software and saw embedded in Michelangelo’s brushstrokes a spatial relationship known as the golden ratio. Likewise, the aesthetics of Ohtani are best appreciated in person—especially in Denver next week—and without too much thinking, let alone math. But because this is baseball, a community in which numbers are its lingua franca, Ohtani also deserves a statistical appreciation of his uniqueness:

- If you had to distill the amazement of Ohtani to one sentence, it would be this: he hits the ball harder than Juan Soto (92.5–92.3 mph exit velocity), throws harder than Yu Darvish (95.4–94.8 mph), and runs faster than Randy Arozarena (28.9 -28.7 sprint speed).
- He leads the major leagues in home runs *and bunt hits*. (He is 4-for-4 when bunting for a hit, an unmatched success rate.)
- Until this year, no player (and we’re looking at you, Babe) ever hit 30 homers and made 10 starts on the mound in the same year. Ohtani did it *in just 81 games*.
- He is the first AL player ever with 31 homers and 12 stolen bases by the All-Star break.
- Roll this around your head: the major league home run leader also throws the toughest pitch to hit in baseball. Batters are hitting .083 against his splitter, which ties Tyler Glasnow’s curveball for the lowest batting average on any pitch that ended at least 70 at bats. Ohtani has thrown 389 splitters in his career and allowed only nine hits and an .069 batting average on the pitch. No batter has ever hit a home run off the Ohtani splitter.
- After 347 career games of hitting and pitching, Ohtani has a higher slugging percentage than Ruth did at the same point (.552–.541).
- Ohtani is slugging .674 against lefties. Only three left-handed hitters ever slugged that high against lefties in a full season: Stan Musial (twice), Ruth and Lou Gehrig (min. 200 PA).
- Ohtani has thrown almost as many fastballs (515) as he has seen as a hitter (548). He has hit five times as many extra-base hits off fastballs as he has allowed, 25–5.

First 332 Games Hitting

HR RBI SLG

Willie Mays 72 218 .565

Shohei Ohtani 77 213 .552

First 24 Games Pitching

W-L ERA SO

Roger Clemens 10-6 4.23 143

Shohei Ohtani 7-4 3.97 149

JAYSON STARK, THE ATHLETIC

AL MVP of the Half-Year: [Shohei Ohtani](#), [Angels](#)

I'm coming to the conclusion that the American League MVP of the half-year isn't actually a baseball player. He's clearly a Marvel superhero who merely uses baseball as his planet of superhuman residence.

So let's start his MVP case this way. Shohei Ohtani has a 178 OPS+. You know who has never had *any* season with a 178 OPS+? Oh, only [Aaron Judge](#), [Giancarlo Stanton](#), [Joey Votto](#), [Nolan Arenado](#), [Paul Goldschmidt](#), [Manny Machado](#), [Buster Posey](#) or nearly anyone else currently playing baseball.

But Shohei Ohtani also has a pretty cool hobby — the one where he pitches and has held those unfortunate humans who have to hit against him to a collective average of .195. Which means Ohtani has a lower opponent batting average and higher strikeout rate (11.7 K/9 IP) than [Yu Darvish](#), [Zack Wheeler](#) or [Gerrit Cole](#) (among many, many others). And this, remember, is just Ohtani's side gig!

So how unheard of is what this man is doing? Let's count a few ways.

He's on pace for 60 homers and 102 extra-base hits! Here comes your handy dandy list of everyone who has ever had a season of that many home runs and extra-base hits: Babe Ruth (1921), Barry Bonds (2001) and Sammy Sosa (2001). And that'll do it.

His OPS is .437 points higher than the hitters who face him! I keep looking at this and shaking my head. Ohtani's OPS when he gets to hit: 1.064. The OPS of the poor dudes who have to bat against him? That's just .627. Do that math, and you get this: He's out-OPS-ing the hitters who face him by a ridiculous .437 points.

Here, courtesy of the Elias Sports Bureau, are the only guys in history who had a .400-point differential or better in a season of at least 100 plate appearances on the mound and at the plate:

Differential, player, OPS and Opponent's OPS

.467 Babe Ruth (1918) .968 .501

.447 Babe Ruth (1919) 1.114 .667

.441 Walter Johnson (1925) 1.033 .592

(Source: Elias Sports Bureau)

But even if you lower that bar to 50 plate appearances, our friends at sportradar.com, tell us that it just adds one more Babe Ruth season (a .413-point differential in 1915). And nobody in the last half-century (except Ohtani, 2018) is even within 150 points of this!

As a pitcher, he has nearly twice as many Ks as hits allowed! Ohtani is now 13 starts into this season, and those numbers look like this:

Hits: 46

Ks: 87

That projects to 166 whiffs, 88 hits. And in the history of baseball, only seven pitchers have ever had a season of at least 150 strikeouts and twice as many K's as hits allowed. Here they come: Pedro, Randy Johnson, Brad Lidge (in relief!), [Max Scherzer](#) (twice), [Justin Verlander](#), Gerrit Cole and [Chris Sale](#). Not pictured (but came as close as Ohtani is): Nolan Ryan! (Plus Kerry Wood, Yu Darvish and [Blake Snell](#).)

And other stuff! Ohtani the hitter has the most extra-base hits (54) in the American League ... Ohtani the pitcher has allowed the third-fewest extra-base hits (17) of any AL starting pitcher with 65 innings or more ... Hits of *any* kind against Ohtani the pitcher (just 46) ... Besides leading the league in homers, Ohtani the hitter is tied for the AL lead in triples (with four) ... Ohtani the pitcher has faced 510 hitters in his career — and still hasn't allowed *any* triples.

I could go on here. No need. You've seen it. You get it. I [wrote last week](#) about what might happen to the MVP debate if [Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#) winds up winning the Triple Crown. But you know what's even rarer than a Triple Crown? Finding an actual superhero who keeps finding ways to go where no baseball player has ever gone before.

OHTANI FROM JOE POSNANSKI OF THE ATHLETIC

Hold Me Close, Ohtani Dancer

My friend Anthony Castrovince at MLB.com [wrote a great story](#) about how Ohtani reminds him of another dominant two-way player who was not named Babe Ruth. Martin Dihigo was Mr. Everything in the Negro Leagues. They called him El Maestro and he played every position, hit with power, ran the bases with speed and was a great pitcher. He's in the Hall of Fame and people who saw him play say he deserves to be there both as a pitcher and a hitter.

The Negro Leagues had others who were dominant as both pitchers and hitters, beginning with the [great Bullet Rogan](#). Leon Day was a fantastic outfielder and a Hall of Fame pitcher. Double Duty Radcliffe, as his name suggests, pitched and caught. There were more.

And it is a reminder of something: In Little League, the team's best pitcher is often also the team's best hitter and the team's best fielder (how many times in your Little League life did you see the pitcher get taken out and just move to shortstop?). That changes as the years go on; at some point, pitchers reach a level where not only are they not expected to hit anymore (or at least not expected to hit well), they are not even allowed to catch pop-ups.

It didn't *have* to be that way. The theory I've always heard is that it's too demanding physically, mentally and emotionally for one player to try and become one of the best pitchers in the world *and* become one of the best hitters in the world. The argument is there isn't enough time in the day to perfect both artforms. Plus, the game as it is played naturally resists two-way players; starting pitchers require an entire four-day plan to prepare for each start and playing in the field on those days just doesn't fit into the equation. Also, hitters require complete concentration, and pitching in the middle of all that doesn't quite work.

Yes, even as Ohtani does things that have never been done in [Major League Baseball](#), the Greek Chorus sings that he has to give up pitching at some point because he's too valuable a hitter.

It is difficult for us to see beyond the ordinary. We have all been trained to believe that, yes, in Little League, in high school ball, maybe even in college, being a great pitcher and a great hitter can go hand in hand. But that changes in pro ball. It simply isn't possible once you reach a certain level.

And this is why Ohtani shatters our minds — it's because we believed all that stuff. We believed it impossible. But Ohtani shows us that it *is* possible. Here is his month so far:

July 2: 2-for-4 with 2 homers and 3 runs scored against Baltimore. Also stole a base.

July 3: 0-for-2 against Baltimore but he was intentionally walked twice.

July 4: Hit home run No. 31 against the [Orioles](#).

July 5: Held to one hit against the Red Sox.

July 6: Pitched seven innings against Boston, allowing five hits and two runs. Also doubled.

July 7: Two hits against Boston, including his 32nd home run.

Yes, it's all very possible ... and it probably wouldn't be happening if Ohtani grew up in the United States. It definitely wouldn't be happening except for Ohtani's insistence that he would pitch and hit. This goes back to the beginning of this week's review; it is the diversity of the game — the fact that the biggest stars in baseball right now come from all over the world — that makes baseball wonderful. The players bring with them not only their own talents but unique backgrounds and approaches.

Baseball was becoming homogenous and dry when the game finally began really integrating in the 1950s. That changed the way baseball was played. An influx of extraordinary and unique players from Latin America — Minnie Miñoso, Roberto Clemente, Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda, Tony Pérez — changed the way baseball was played, and it has continued on.

In the past 25 years or so, a number of Japanese players came over — Hideo Nomo, [Ichiro Suzuki](#), [Yu Darvish](#), obviously Ohtani — and they make Major League Baseball so much richer and more fun.

MORE FROM TOM VERDUCCI AND SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

[The Baserunning Myth](#)

"Baserunning is worse than ever."

"Guys get rushed to the majors without learning how to run the bases."

"Players today don't work on baserunning the way players used to."

You might have heard such "analysis" so frequently that you probably believe it to be true. There is one problem with this analysis: it's not true.

The research team at MLB Network looked at baserunning statistics over the past 50 years to answer this question: Do players today get thrown out on the bases more than they used to?

They looked at how many runners reached base on a yearly basis (not including home runs) and how many of them were thrown out. The result was shocking to those in the “baserunning today is terrible camp.”

Players today get thrown out on the bases *at the lowest rate in the past 50 years!* The exact opposite is true.

Only 2.63% of runners get thrown out on the bases. Ten years ago, it was 3.16%. Twenty years ago, it was 3.22%. Thirty years ago, 3.34%. Forty years ago, 3.87%. And 50 years ago, 3.72%.

It’s not even close. Runners have vastly *improved* at not getting thrown out on the bases.

So the next time you hear someone rant about how bad baserunning is, realize that their opinion is formed by the ubiquity of highlights. Every rare baserunning mistake is highlighted and noted with a shake of the head, making it seem as if it happens more frequently. The “bad baserunning” trope is not supported by the facts.

When Hitting Is Hardest

In a typical 2021 game on Saturday in Cleveland, Houston and Cleveland combined to use six relievers to get the 18 outs in innings seven through nine. Offense came to a standstill. Batters managed one hit in 20 at bats against the late-inning relievers—and only five balls in play out of 93 pitches over about 70 minutes.

Every reliever threw with elite velocity and a wipeout breaking pitch (splitter, slider or curveball): Nick Sandlin, James Karinchak and Phil Maton for Cleveland, Ryne Stanek, Cristian Javier and Ryan Pressly for Houston. They averaged 95.8 mph with their fastballs.

This game was typical. It has never been more difficult to hit in the late innings of a baseball game than it is now. Never. By a lot. Here’s the data:

Lowest MLB Batting Average, Innings 7-9

	Year	AVG
1.	2021	.228
2.	2020	.232
3.	1968	.239
4.	2014	.241
T5.	2012	.242
T5.	2013	.242
T7.	1967	.243

Year AVG

T7. 2011 .243

T7. 2015 .243

T7. 2017 .243

T7. 2018 .243

Some observations:

- The lack of late offense is accelerating. Batting average in the late innings is down 16 points in just two years. (It was .244 in 2019).
- Nine of the 11 all-time worst late-inning batting averages have occurred since 2011.
- One of out every four plate appearances in innings seven through nine is a strikeout (25%). More than one of every three turns at bat in the late innings is a strikeout or walk (34.5%).
- Through Saturday there were 2,337 more strikeouts than hits this season; 57% of that gap accrues in innings seven through nine.
- The average fastball velocity is 93.2 mph through the first six innings, and 94.1 mph from the seventh through ninth.

GREAT ALL STAR PERFORMANCES FROM MLB.COM

Below is a ranking of 14 of the best box score lines compiled in baseball's summer showcase, stretching all the way back to the inaugural All-Star Game in 1933.

(Note: Since we're looking at performances over a game's entirety, individual moments like Reggie Jackson's towering home run in 1971 or Torii Hunter's sensational catch to rob Barry Bonds in 2002 will have to be remembered in other spaces.)

1. Pedro Martinez, 1999

Final line: 2 IP, 0 R, 5 K out of 6 batters faced

Whose performance was more dominant: Martinez or Carl Hubbell?

We'll get to Hubbell later, but Martinez gets the edge here for his incredible five-strikeout performance given the competition, the high-octane offensive era and the tight dimensions at Fenway Park. Making his first start in the All-Star Game, Martinez took the mound right after an

emotional tribute to Red Sox legend Ted Williams and proceeded to punch out five of the game's most feared sluggers of the time: Barry Larkin, Larry Walker, Sammy Sosa, Mark McGwire and Jeff Bagwell. Martinez's combinations of high-90s fastballs and his devastating low-80s changeup were simply untouchable that night in Boston, sending the raucous home crowd into pandemonium.

"I just wanted to be part of it," Martinez would say afterward, "have fun with it. I thought seeing Ted Williams come in, the crowd going wild and the planes passing by, this is one we'll hopefully all enjoy, the fans and me."

That much was certain, and Martinez's All-Star Game MVP Award was essentially locked up as he walked off the mound following a strike-'em-out, throw-'em-out double play to end the second inning. It's safe to say Martinez's start will never be forgotten in New England.

2. Bo Jackson, 1989

Final line: 2-for-4, HR, 2 RBI, 1 R, 1 SB

Jackson was at the top of American sport in the late 1980s, captivating America with his incredible athleticism while excelling in both Major League Baseball and as a running back in the National Football League. One of the big storylines heading into the '89 All-Star Game was where manager Tony La Russa would pencil Jackson into his lineup. As it turned out, the leadoff spot was an excellent choice.

NL manager Tommy Lasorda compared it to both a golf ball and a cannon ball. Former President Ronald Reagan, who was up in the broadcast booth beside Vin Scully, said it "sounded different, and it went forever." No matter the description, Jackson's leadoff homer off Rick Reuschel had to almost be seen to be believed as it traveled an estimated 448 feet over the center-field fence at Angel Stadium. Jackson later stole second -- becoming the second player, after Willie Mays, to both homer and steal a bag in the Midsummer Classic -- on a sore hamstring of which no one was aware. In those days, it truly did seem like Bo could do it all.

3. Carl Hubbell, 1934

Final line: 3 IP, 0 R, 2 H, 6 K

The second All-Star Game was held at the Polo Grounds and Hubbell, the Giants' ace, certainly seemed to feel right at home. It's easy to forget that the AL's first two batters reached against Hubbell to begin the game, because what he did afterward was truly astonishing. Employing his trademark screwball, Hubbell struck out five straight future Hall of Famers: Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx, Al Simmons and Joe Cronin.

Hubbell later said Ruth was the only one of the five that he tried to strike out, but try or not, Hubbell's two innings mark one of the most impressive pitching displays in history -- All-Star Game or otherwise.

4. Ted Williams, 1946

Final line: 4-for-4, 2 HR, 5 RBI, 1 BB, 4 R

Honorable mention goes to Williams' [walk-off homer to end the '41 All-Star Game](#), but we'll highlight one of the most dominant complete-game displays ever seen in the Midsummer Classic. Williams was simply unstoppable in his first All-Star Game following his three years of service as a fighter pilot in World War II, reaching base in all five of his plate appearances and driving in nearly half the AL's runs in a 12-0 rout.

Williams' most memorable moment in this virtuoso performance was his homer off Rip Sewell's famous "eephus" pitch in the bottom of the eighth. The way the "Splendid Splinter" was swinging the bat that day, one can hardly blame Sewell for trying something different.

5. Ichiro Suzuki, 2007

Final line: 3-for-3, 1 HR, 2 RBI, 1 R

The "HR" initials in the box score hardly do justice to Ichiro's breathtaking trip around the bases en route to the first (and still only) inside-the-park homer in All-Star Game history. Taking advantage of the ball's crazy carom off the right-field wall at San Francisco's AT&T Park that eluded Ken Griffey Jr., Ichiro turned the AL's 1-0 fifth-inning deficit into a 2-1 lead in the blink of an eye, strolling to home plate standing up to make history.

"You know, in batting practice tonight, I saw some balls take some weird hops off that fence out there," fellow All-Star Torii Hunter told ESPN. "And I said to myself, 'If anyone ever hits one off one of those corners out there, somebody's going to get an inside-the-parker.' Well, here came Ichiro."

Ichiro's inside-the-parker might have been enough to make this list, but that wasn't his only contribution. The Seattle star led off the game with a single off Jake Peavy and singled again in the third to complete a perfect night at the plate.

6. Tim Lincecum, 2009

Final line: 3-for-3, 2 RBI, 1 3B, 1 SB

Raines' line is all the more impressive considering he didn't enter the '87 All-Star Game as a defensive replacement until the *bottom of the sixth inning*. His first hit didn't come until the ninth inning, but Montreal's speedster made each of his three plate appearances count. Raines singled off Dave Righetti in the ninth and got to third base in his typical lightning-quick fashion via a steal and a throwing error, but he was stranded there as the go-ahead run. Raines singled in the 11th and was stranded again ... then he decided to drive in his own runs two frames later.

With the game still, incredibly, *scoreless* in the 13th, Raines drove a pitch from Jay Howell into the left-center-field gap and plated what proved to be the game-winning runs with an electric

triple. Speed and power were Raines' trademarks, and he put both on display that night in Oakland.

7. Al Rosen, 1954

Final line: 3-for-4, 2 HR, 5 RBI, 1 BB, 2 R

The '54 All-Star Game was a pure slugfest featuring 20 combined runs on 31 hits. The AL eventually came out on top, 11-9, thanks in large part to Rosen's pair of dingers. Cleveland's slugger broke up an early pitcher's duel with a three-run blast off Phillies ace Robin Roberts, and then plated two more on a dinger off Johnny Antonelli in the fifth.

Rosen went on to single in the sixth and drew a walk in the eighth that led to Nellie Fox's game-winning, two-run single. In an All-Star Game chock full of big offensive stat lines, Rosen's stood out above the others. Incredibly, Rosen both excelled that day and went on to hit .300 for the season with a broken finger.

8. Arky Vaughan, 1941

Final line: 3-for-4, 2 HRs, 4 RBI, 2 R

Ted Williams, as mentioned, hit the game-winning homer on this afternoon, but Vaughan did all he could in the NL's losing effort at Detroit's Briggs Stadium. Vaughan, one of the best shortstops in baseball history, homered off Sid Hudson and Eddie Smith to plate four of the Senior Circuit's five runs. That pair of dingers represented one-third of the homers Vaughan hit across the entire '41 regular season.

9. Willie McCovey, 1969

Final line: 2-for-4, 2 HR, 3 RBI

The '69 season was a banner year across the board for McCovey, who captured his lone NL MVP Award with an NL-leading 45 homers and 126 RBIs and an MLB-best 1.108 OPS. The NL jumped all over the AL with nine runs over the first four innings in this matchup at Washington's RFK Stadium, highlighted by McCovey's two-run homer off Blue Moon Odom in the third and a solo shot off Denny McLain in the fourth. That was plenty good enough to earn "Stretch" the game's MVP Award as the NL claimed its eighth consecutive All-Star Game victory.

10. Derek Jeter, 2000

Final line: 3-for-3, 2 RBI, 1 R

Jeter took full advantage of his first All-Star Game start at Turner Field, the same place he helped the Yankees defeat the Braves for a second time in the World Series the previous fall. Batting second, the Yankees shortstop doubled to left off an in-his-prime Randy Johnson in the first inning and then singled up the middle against peak Kevin Brown in the third. Jeter knocked a go-ahead, two-run single off Al Leiter in the fourth before he was pulled the next inning, easily

earning the game's MVP honors. That fall, Jeter would become the first player to capture both the All-Star Game and World Series MVP Awards in the same season.

11. Dave Parker, 1979

Final line: 1-for-3, 1 RBI, 1 BB, 2 outfield assists

Parker's plate performance takes a backseat here to his work from right field, where he made not one but *two* game-saving throws that live on in All-Star Game lore. Red Sox star Jim Rice led off the seventh with a double, but Parker threw him out with a cross-field rocket as he tried to go for three. That kept the NL within a run to set up Lee Mazzilli's game-tying homer in the eighth, and Parker promptly followed with an arguably even more impressive throw home to nab Brian Downing in the bottom half. Mazzilli put the Senior Circuit ahead with a bases-loaded walk and the NL walked away with a 7-6, comeback win -- thanks in large part to Parker's clutch defense.

12. Shane Bieber, 2019

Final line: 1 IP, 0 R, 3 K

Bieber was named to the AL's roster as an injury replacement only five days before the Midsummer Classic got underway in Cleveland, but he rose to the occasion and got Progressive Field rocking with a perfect three-strikeout fifth inning. Willson Contreras (looking), Ketel Marte (swinging) and Ronald Acuña Jr. (looking) went down as punchout victims in order as part of a coming out for Bieber, who became just the third player to win an All-Star Game MVP Award in his team's home stadium. Bieber would go on to dominate many more hitters en route to winning the 2020 AL MVP Award.

13. Babe Ruth, 1933

Final line: 2-for-4, 1 HR, 2 RBI, 1 R

The All-Star Game was far from a certainty as a perennial showcase, until the game's biggest star ushered in the event with what he did best. Facing NL starter Bill Hallahan with a runner on in the third, Ruth slugged a pitched deep into the right-field seats at Comiskey to record the first All-Star Game home run and send the crowd of nearly 48,000 into a frenzy. The Midsummer Classic may have never reached its current notoriety if Ruth hadn't launched it off the ground with one mighty swing.

4. Larry Jansen, 1950

Final line: 5 IP, 0 R, 1 H, 6 K

The 1950 All-Star Game at old Comiskey Park is remembered more for being the first one to go to extra innings, but don't sleep on Jansen's clutch performance out of the bullpen. Making the first of his back-to-back All-Star appearances, Jansen came in with his NL club down a run in the seventh and proceeded to hold a mighty AL lineup scoreless for five brilliant frames. The righty's six strikeout victims included future Hall of Famers Larry Doby, George Kell and Ted

Williams, and he held the Junior Circuit at bay long enough for Red Schoendienst to hit his game-winning homer in the top of the 14th.

GEORGE WILL OF THE WASHINGTON POST

(If you haven't read Will's book "Men at Work" run to your library or Amazon and read it—great stuff).

WASHINGTON Even if you belong in the basket of deplorables – Americans uninterested in baseball – you should be intrigued by the sport's current problems. At the all-star break, Major League Baseball's 2021 season is demonstrating, redundantly, that the quality of the game as entertainment is declining. Paradoxically, the problems arise from reasonable behavior based on abundant accurate information.

Improved technology generates data about pitches' spin rates, the launch angles of batters' swings, particular batters' tendencies on particular pitches and much more. Improved kinesiology increases pitching velocity. The results include a slower pace of play, diminished action, fewer balls in play and more of them handled by radically repositioned infielders.

Five seasons ago, there were 3,294 more hits than strikeouts. Three seasons ago, strikeouts edged past hits. Writer Jayson Stark notes that until 2018 there had never been a month with more strikeouts than hits. This April there were almost 1,100 more strikeouts than hits, and writer Tyler Kepner says this season is on a pace for approximately 5,000 more strikeouts than hits. Twenty-four percent of plate appearances end in strikeouts (they are increasing for the 16th consecutive season, partly because today's average fastball's velocity is 93.8 mph, 2.7 mph more than 14 years ago. As of mid-June, the .238 collective major league batting average was 15 points below 2019. In 2015, teams shifted infielders on 9.6 percent of all pitches. This season, teams are shifting on 32 percent (usually an infielder in shallow right field), which will erase perhaps 600 hits.

With pitchers dawdling to recover between high-exertion, high-velocity pitches and with 36 percent of at-bats ending with home runs, strikeouts or walks, around four minutes pass, on average, between balls put in play. Players spend much more time with leather on their hands

than with wood in their hands, but have fewer and fewer opportunities to display their athleticism as fielders. Home runs predominate because scoring by hitting a ball far over defensive shifts is more likely than hitting three singles, through shifts, off someone throwing 98 mph fastballs and 90 mph secondary pitches. This means fewer baserunners. In 2021, there probably will be 1,000 fewer stolen bases than 10 years ago.

Writer Tom Verducci notes that in the last 26 minutes of 2020's most-watched game, the final World Series game, just two balls were put in play. In this game, the ball was put in play every 6.5 minutes, and half the outs were strikeouts.

More pitches and less contact. Longer games (13 minutes 17 seconds longer than a decade ago) and less action. No wonder fans who have been neurologically rewired by their digital devices' speeds are seeking other entertainments. Major league attendance has fallen 14 percent from its 2007 peak.

Last season, MLB made an action-creating change – a runner is placed on second base to begin each extra half-inning. And MLB is experimenting with other changes in various minor leagues.

Because pitching velocity is suffocating offense, MLB could move the pitcher's mound back a foot (from today's 60 feet six inches) to give batters more reaction time. The changed physiology of pitchers has, in effect, moved the mound closer to home plate: In the 1950s, the Yankee's 5-foot 10-inch Whitey Ford had a Hall of Fame career. Today, 6-foot 4-inch pitchers, with long arms and long strides, release the ball significantly closer to the plate than Ford did.

Requiring four infielders to be on the infield dirt – or, even bolder, requiring two infielders to be on the dirt on each side of second base – as the pitch is thrown, would reduce reliance on home runs, which are four seconds of action, followed by a leisurely 360-foot trot. A 20-second pitch clock might reduce velocity by reducing pitchers' between-pitches recovery time. And by quickening baseball's tempo, the clock might prevent batters from wandering away from the batter's box and ruminating between pitches. Stolen bases might increase if pitchers had to step off the rubber before throwing to first base. After a walk and then a steal, one single would produce a score.

Baseball fans, a temperamentally conservative tribe, viscerally oppose de jure changes to their game. They must, however, acknowledge the damage done to it by this century's cumulatively momentous de facto changes in the way it is played. What Edmund Burke said of states is

pertinent: “A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation.”

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JULY 4, 2021

Pirates

(we seldom lead with Pirates updates but here you go)

[Max Kranick](#), Pirates 23 year old right hander became the first starter since 1893 to pitch a perfect debut of at least five innings.

He was through five innings on just 50 pitches in St. Louis before a rain delay set in. Initially, Kranick was instructed to keep his arm warm. A half-hour later, though, the storm was still rolling through, and Kranick was told that his day was done. He wasn't upset. He didn't argue. He'll always be able to say something no other starter can say: He was perfect in his big-league debut.

Adam Frazier is just the second Pirates infielder elected to start the All-Star Game since fan voting was reinstituted in 1970. The other was Bobby Bonilla (third base, 1988).

Speaking of Bonilla, you might recall his Mets contract and the significance of July 1. Bonilla retired from Major League Baseball in 2001, and 20 years later, the 58-year-old is still banking \$1.19 million every July 1, referred to by some fans as “Bobby Bonilla Day.” His contract with the New York Mets calls for him to receive \$1,193,248.20 each year until 2035, when he will be 72 years old.

Clayton Kershaw beat the Cubs Sunday night. Kershaw struck out a season-high 13 batters in eight innings of one-run ball. It was vintage stuff from the left-hander, who last struck out at least 13 batters on July 9, 2017, against the Royals. He hadn't completed eight innings in a start since August 2018, when he did it twice.

Rich Hill of the Rays, in his 17th Major League season, with his 10th big league team. The 41-year-old left-hander enters his start Tuesday night at Nationals Park with a 3.52 ERA and 78 strikeouts in 76 2/3 innings over 15 starts this season. He was the American League Pitcher of the Month in May, posting a 0.78 ERA over six outings while helping the Rays enjoy their best month in franchise history.

As of this morning we have three players batting over .333

Nick Castellanos, Reds .340

Michael Brantley, Astros .340

Vlad Guerrero Jr. .337

Griffin Jax of the Twins became the first graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy to start a MLB game on Saturday. Jax already became the first Air Force Academy graduate to make a Major League roster on June 5, and he became the first graduate to appear in a Major League game when he debuted on June 8. Seems appropriate on July 4 weekend.

Joey Votto of the Reds drove in his 1,000 career run this week.

Can deGrom beat Gibson's ERA record (per Jayson Stark)?

Where does Bob Gibson's 1.12 ERA rank on your list of the romantic numbers in baseball? He'd be No. 2 for me, right behind 56, for Joe DiMaggio's legendary hitting streak and just ahead of Ted Williams' .406. This sounds like a Twitter poll waiting to happen. But instead, let's ask this:

Is this the year that Gibson's 1.12 falls off the pedestal where it has resided since 1968?

That's a question I've never seriously asked, halfway through any season, in the time I've covered baseball. But I'm asking it now because Jacob deGrom is so Gibson-esque, he almost makes you ask: *Why wouldn't he do it?*

Just look at how much better positioned deGrom is to pull this off than Gibson was at the same stage in '68. These are their numbers through June in those years:

deGrom 7-2 with a 0.69 era in 78 innings pitched.

Gibson 9-5 with 1.14 era in 142 innings pitched.

deGrom is giving up 3.5 hits per 9 innings pitched while striking out 14.1.

Gibson gave up 5.4 hits per 9 innings while striking out 6.6

Gibson was on his way to 304 2/3 innings over 34 starts, so he had far less margin for error. DeGrom is headed for not much more than half that many innings. But meanwhile, he's the first qualified starter to enter July with an ERA under 1.00 since Walter Johnson — 103 years ago!

So let's say deGrom finishes with exactly 162 innings pitched, which is right about his current pace. He could give up twice as many earned runs in July, August and September as he allowed in April, May and June (six) — and still finish with an ERA under 1.12. Does that seem out of the question?

"I believe he'll do this," said one NL scout who covers the Mets. "The way he's able to expose hitters' swings, I don't think there has ever been a better time to break that record."

OK, so technically, Gibson doesn't hold "that record." Dutch Leonard (1.00, in 1914) actually had the lowest ERA by any pitcher since earned runs became an official stat. But Gibson's 1.12 is the lowest in the live-ball era. So much like that .406 of Williams, it feels like a record even if the history books don't agree.

Gibson through June in 1968—9-5, 142 innings pitched with 1.14 era.

deGrom through June 7-2, 78 innings pitched with a 0.69 era.

By the way, DeGrom has left three different games early; sustained two of the three injuries on swings. Universal DH anyone?

OHTANI

It seems that [Shohei Ohtani](#) is reaching new milestones every day, and the two-way superstar's latest came Monday with his first career hit at Yankee Stadium, a no-doubt first-inning homer that left the bat at 117.2 mph. The drive off Yankees righty Michael King was Ohtani's 26th of the season, pulling him into a tie with Toronto's Vladimir Guerrero Jr. for the Major League lead. It was the hardest-hit homer by an Angels player since Statcast began tracking in 2015, topping Ohtani's own record from earlier this season.

He was also coming off a game that saw him double, triple, homer and steal a base in a win over the Rays on Sunday.

As a hitter, he has a 1.031 OPS, he has smashed 30 homers and he leads the league in triples. As a pitcher, he has struck out 82 batters in 59 innings and the league hits .188 against him.

Friday night was the latest display of Ohtani's record-setting power as his two home runs vs. the Orioles at Angel Stadium wowed the crowd. But it was his speed on the basepaths that provided the walk-off [8-7 victory](#) over the Orioles. The Orioles and Angels engaged in a back-and-forth battle throughout the game that endured four lead changes. With the game tied at 7, it set things in motion for Ohtani to do one of the many things he does best.

His speed put the go-ahead run in scoring position when he stole second base on the first pitch of Jared Walsh's at-bat in the ninth. Ohtani was issued a free pass to first base with one out as he laid off four sliders from Baltimore reliever Paul Fry. On the second pitch, Walsh smacked a 214-foot line drive to right field as Ohtani kicked it into another gear to narrowly score on the throw to home.

Ohtani became the first American League player to record 30 home runs and 10 stolen bases in his team's first 81 games of the season. Sammy Sosa (Chicago, 1998) and Albert Pujols (St. Louis, 2009) are the only other two players to accomplish the feat.

Ruth set a record in 1919 with the most home runs (29) in a single season with at least 10 games pitched. Ohtani has already shattered the 100-plus-year-old record with 12 pitching appearances and 30 homers for the Halos this season.

The record for most multi-homer games by a player born in Japan is Ichiro Suzuki (7 multi-homer games)

STREAKS

The Cubs enjoyed a 27-12 stretch from May 1-June 13, but the club has gone 4-11 over its past 15 games and is now five games out in the National League Central.

The Brewers have won 11 straight. The only Brewers team that can claim a [longer winning streak](#) in the regular season was the '87 Crew, which was dubbed "Team Streak" by Milwaukee Sentinel sports writer Tom Haudricourt after it set an American League record and matched the Major League record with a 13-0 start, had a 12-game losing streak not two weeks later, then saw Paul Molitor chase history during a 39-game hitting streak later in the summer.

And yes, the 2018 Brewers belong in the conversation as well after they won 12 consecutive games when they mattered most. That streak covered the final eight games of the regular season and the first four games of the postseason.

The 11-game streak is part of a longer stretch in which the Brewers have won 30 of their last 40 games.

Joey Gallo continued his otherworldly stretch in the Rangers' 8-3 win over the A's on Thursday at Oakland Coliseum with a towering two-run home run, his fifth straight game with a long ball. It was his 20th of the season, and he has seven homers in those five games.

With Thursday's home run, Gallo became the first Rangers player to homer in five consecutive games since Mike Napoli in 2012. Gallo also joins Josh Hamilton as the only other Ranger to hit seven home runs in a five-game stretch. Frank Howard accomplished the feat as well in 1968, back when the club went by the Washington Senators.

Since the beginning of June, Gallo is slashing .291/.456/.722 with 11 home runs. Compare that to April and May, when Gallo slashed .216/.367/.398 with nine home runs.

FAST AND POWERFUL

Most home runs, NL players

1. Fernando Tatis Jr. (SD): 26
2. Kyle Schwarber (WSH): 25
3. Ronald Acuña Jr. (ATL): 22

Most stolen bases, NL players

1. Trea Turner (WSH): 18
2. Fernando Tatis Jr. (ATL): 17
3. Ronald Acuña Jr. (SD): 16

Both Acuña and Tatis are battling for the NL home run title. Both are battling for the stolen base title. (And that's with Tatis having missed 19 games).

Since RBIs became an official statistic in 1920, 10 players have won a total of 12 [Triple Crowns](#) in the AL or NL, most recently Miguel Cabrera in 2012. Four players have produced a [40-homer, 40-steal season](#), all since 1988. More exclusive--only *three* players in the Modern Era (since 1900) have led the AL or NL in both homers and steals, and none since 1932

Chuck Klein, 1932 Phillies

38 HR (T-1st in NL), 20 SB (1st)

Ty Cobb, 1909 Tigers

9 HR (1st in AL), 76 SB (1st)

Jimmy Sheekard, 1903 Brooklyn Superbas

9 HR (1st in NL), 67 SB (T-1st)

Only one player in the past 43 seasons has even finished in the top three in the AL or NL in both categories. That was the Dodgers' Matt Kemp in 2011. Besides Kemp, others who finished in the top three in both HRs and SBs in a single season:

Bobby Bonds, 1977 Angels

37 HR (T-2nd in AL), 41 SB (T-3rd)

Hank Aaron, 1963 Braves

44 HR (1st in NL), 31 SB (2nd)

240 career bases, with 15 or more in each season from 1960-68.

Frank Robinson, 1961 Reds

37 HR (3rd in NL), 22 SB (3rd)

Willie Mays, 1955 Giants

51 HR (1st in NL), 24 SB (2nd)

Mays won four home run titles and four stolen base titles, but they didn't line up in the same year.

Goose Goslin, 1930 Senators/Browns

37 HR (T-3rd in AL), 17 SB (T-3rd)

Tony Lazzeri, 1927 Yankees

18 HR (3rd in AL), 22 SB (T-3rd)

Teammates Babe Ruth (60) and Lou Gehrig (47) made Lazzeri a distant third in homers.

Ken Williams, 1922 Browns

39 HR (1st in AL), 37 SB (2nd)

This was the only 30-30 season in AL or NL history until Mays in 1956.

George Sisler, 1919-20 Browns

1920: 19 HR (2nd in AL), 42 SB (2nd)

1919: 10 HR (T-2nd in AL), 28 SB (2nd)

Sisler also hit .407 in 1920, and his 257 hits stood as the single-season record until Ichiro broke it in 2004.

Ty Cobb, 1907/1910-12 Tigers

1912: 7 HR (3rd in AL), 61 SB (3rd)

1911: 8 HR (T-2nd in AL), 83 SB (1st)

1910: 8 HR (T-2nd in AL), 65 SB (2nd)

1907: 5 HR (T-2nd in AL), 53 SB (1st)

Red Murray, 1908 Cardinals/1909 Giants

1909: 7 HR (1st in NL), 48 SB (2nd)

1908: 7 HR (3rd in NL), 48 SB (2nd)

Honus Wagner, 1908 Pirates

10 HR (2nd in NL), 53 SB (1st)

This was Wagner's fifth stolen base title, but he never led in homers.

SCHWARBER

Kyle Schwarber hit a leadoff home run in their [8-4 win](#) over the Mets. His blast against right-hander Jerad Eickhoff flew a Statcast-projected 439 feet at 110.2 mph to right field. It was his 11th career leadoff home run and sixth of the season. And he didn't stop there. In the fifth, Schwarber sent a second homer 409 feet at 105.8 mph for his 13th career multi-home run game (fifth of the season).

Schwarber's 15 home runs so far in June are the most in any month in Nationals team history (2005-present), passing Bryce Harper's mark of 13 in May 2015. With every homer, the historical references pile up. Schwarber's 11 home runs in his last nine games are tied with former Washington Senator Frank Howard for the most in any nine-game stretch since 1901. Looking at an even bigger picture, he also joined Barry Bonds (2001) and Sammy Sosa (1998) as the only players to hit 15 homers in a 17-game stretch.

Kyle Schwarber set the record for most Nationals HRs in a month on Monday, with his 14th and 15th of June. That broke a team record held by Bryce Harper (13 HRs in May 2015)

His numbers, *just as a leadoff man*, last month almost seem made up. But here goes:

The good news: 16 HR in 19 games, .986 SLG, 1.384 OPS

The weird news: 0 doubles, 0 triples, 8 singles, 5 runs when he didn't homer himself in

Rickey Henderson never hit more than eight homers in any month. Schwarber just hit eight homers *in five games*.

He had as many homers out of the leadoff hole last month (16) as singles, doubles, triples and walks combined. And his average, in all at-bats from that spot in which he didn't homer, was .148.

He has 15 homers in 17 games, he's actually homered 15 times in 16 games as a leadoff hitter — he's hitting .371 and slugging more than 1.100 in those games. It's jaw-dropping. Manager Dave Martinez, who has been teammates of Larry Walker, Frank Thomas, Chipper Jones, Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa, says he has never seen anything like it.

And it is Bonds and Sosa who are of particular interest since they were the only two players before Schwarber to ever hit 15 homers in 17 games.

YASMANI

Looking at [White Sox](#) walk/homer machine Yasmani Grandal, it all depends on which line on the stat sheet you get stuck on at any given moment.

On one hand, Grandal emerged from June tied for the team lead in home runs, with 12. On the other hand, he also emerged from June with a batting average of .180. And how many players in history have ever led *any* team in homers with an average that low? Right. Zero!

But here's the Strange But True Grandal feat that really blows my mind. Let's take a look at all AL hitters who got at least 200 plate appearances through the end of June.

Most hits — [Cedric Mullins](#), 99

Fewest hits — Yasmani Grandal, 32

On-base pct. of the guy with the *most* hits — .391

On-base pct. of the guy with the *fewest* hits — .391

SPIN RATES (from WSJ)

On June 3, the [leaguewide batting average was .236](#), lower than any single season in history. That day, word emerged that MLB planned a crackdown. And the sport changed instantaneously.

The spin rate on pitches plummeted, moribund offenses woke up and pitchers who throw faster than ever were left to figure out how to hurl baseballs without the goops and gunks that had become their not-so-secret best friends.

Over the last 10 days through Wednesday, the average rotations per minute on sliders across MLB was down 3.7% from the 10 days ending June 3, according to a Wall Street Journal analysis of MLB pitch-tracking data. The RPM on four-seam fastballs dove even further, by 3.9%.

Comparing those same two time periods, something curious happened: leaguewide hitting surged. While those spin rates *decreased*, slugging percentage *increased* by 24 percentage points, or 6.2%. Hitters also have a .246 batting average since June 3, a sizable leap from the start of the season. On Wednesday of this week, seven teams broke out and scored nine runs or more, led by Atlanta's 20-2 romp over the New York Mets.

For some pitchers, the change has been far greater. Among pitchers who have thrown at least 25 sliders both before and after June 3, 39 have seen their slider's RPM drop by more than 5% through Wednesday. That list includes many of baseball's elite: the New York Yankees' Gerrit Cole, the Washington Nationals' Max Scherzer, the Los Angeles Angels' Shohei Ohtani, and the Los Angeles Dodgers' Trevor Bauer, among others.

The last four weeks of baseball might seem like a small sample size, but even a short period of baseball produces an incredible trove of information. Since June 3, there have been more than 108,000 pitches thrown in Major League Baseball games. Those pitches also look quite different than the ones earlier in the season.

There are 243 pitchers who have thrown at least 25 sliders both before and since June 3. Of those, 138 have seen their average spin rate drop by at least 1%, according to the WSJ analysis, while 78 have dipped by at least 3%. The median decline is 1.5%, meaning the league average pitcher has seen his slider change considerably.

The same phenomenon has affected fastballs. There are 318 pitchers with 25 four-seamers before and since June 3, and 205 of them have fallen by 1% or more. [In an era when high heat has become the most pernicious weapon for pitchers](#), their heat suddenly has less rise.

Cole, the Yankees ace, has been a flashpoint in the drama ever since he was called out by an opposing hitter and gave a wishy-washy answer about whether he used illegal stuff. He had a 1.78 earned-run average through the first two months, but had a 4.65 ERA in June.

His pitches are also far less spinny. Among the 37 pitchers who have thrown at least 100 sliders both before and since June 3, none has seen a bigger decline in spin rate than Cole at 6.3%.

Cole can take some solace in the fact that he's far from alone. Among the elite pitchers who have seen their slider spin rate experience a major decline in recent weeks are Shohei Ohtani (down 6.6%), Zack Greinke (5.2%), Trevor Bauer (5.2%), Max Scherzer (5.2%), Marcus Stroman (5.2%), Shane Bieber (4.5%) and Aroldis Chapman (4.5%).

One player seemingly unaffected happens to be the best pitcher in the game. [New York Mets ace Jacob deGrom has a minuscule 0.95 ERA](#) this season and, on June 21, became the first pitcher to be inspected by umpires for any illegal sticky stuff. They didn't find anything.

And in an amazing twist, his pitches have managed to get even more devastating: the average RPM on deGrom's fastball and slider have both gone up by more than 1% over that span.

RUNS, RUNS AND MORE RUNS

Tacky stuff clamp down Cause and effect? Jared Walsh's game-tying grand slam off Aroldis Chapman in the top of the ninth inning at Yankee Stadium was notable beyond the immediate shock it sent through the Bronx.

When Walsh touched home after his huge blast, he did so as the 201st run of the day (well, technically the *previous day*; it was after midnight in New York) across American and National League action. Per the Elias Sports Bureau, Wednesday's slate marked the first calendar day in which AL/NL teams combined to score at least 200 runs since Sept. 26, 2009 -- meaning it's been well over a decade since we've seen the kind of scoring we saw Wednesday and early Thursday morning.

The final tally rested at 204 runs after the Angels sealed a rain-soaked [11-8 victory](#) in the Bronx, only 18 runs shy of the AL/NL Modern Era record of 222 combined runs set on June 10, 1962, per Elias. While there were fewer teams back in 1962, when the AL/NL Modern Era record for the highest-scoring day was set, that day in question featured *20 games* on the calendar, as all 20 teams in existence played doubleheaders. Wednesday's schedule featured 15 games and three teams scored at least 15 runs. Six teams put up at least 10 runs and 20 teams scored at least five times. Not a single team was shut out.

By the way, also on Friday the Brewers saw the Cubs score seven first-inning runs and then responded by scoring *15 unanswered runs* of their own in a [22-run game](#) that, incredibly, saw just one lead change. Per ESPN Stats and Info, the Cubs joined the Giants (April 26, 1976) as the only teams in the past 50 seasons to score seven runs in the first inning, only to lose by seven or more runs.

It was the first time since 1900 that two teams (Angels and Brewers) won on the same day despite giving up 7 runs in the first inning.

GREAT HOME RUN DERBY PERFORMANCES

Blue Jays: Vladimir Guerrero Jr., 2019

Result: Runner-up (91 total HR)

Guerrero entered the 2019 Home Run Derby the youngest participant in the event's history at 20 years and 114 days old, with just eight career Major League home runs. He came out of the event holding the record for both the most home runs in a single round (40, after three swing-offs) and in an overall Derby (91). In the end he didn't win, dropping the final round to Pete Alonso by a score of 23-22. But he had an epic journey all the same. Guerrero actually broke the single-round record *twice* that night, with his 29 homers in the first breaking the previous record of 28 and his second round barrage setting the final record of the night. It's awfully hard to blame Guerrero for tiring after hitting 69 home runs before he even got a piece of Alonso.

Yankees: Aaron Judge, 2017

Result: Won (47 total HR)

Whoever entered the 2017 Home Run Derby would be facing reigning champ Giancarlo Stanton on his home turf, and it seemed perfect for Judge to be one of those challengers. The 6-foot-6 Stanton had never really had a physical match in the Majors until Judge's debut. Unfortunately, a face-off between the two wasn't in the cards -- Stanton was knocked out in the first round by Judge's teammate Gary Sánchez -- but he did get a piece of fellow 2017 Rookie of the Year Cody Bellinger in the second round before defeating Miguel Sanó in the finals, 11-10. Judge became the first rookie to ever win the Home Run Derby outright (Wally Joyner was a co-champ in his rookie year), and put to bed any concerns about a Derby hangover by setting the rookie home run record at 52 a few months later.

Other winners: Tino Martinez (1997), Jason Giambi (2002), Robinson Canó (2011)

Tigers: Prince Fielder, 2012

Result: Won (28 total HR)

Fielder was a Derby mainstay in the late 2000s and early 2010s. He went to six of them in his career, tied for third all-time with Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa. And he won twice, at the time becoming only the second player in history to ever win multiple Derbies. The second came in 2012 when Fielder represented the Tigers (his first win in 2009 had been with Milwaukee).

Unsurprisingly, Fielder had the [three longest home runs](#) of the night (at 476, 464, and 461 feet) and his final round saw him hit seven home runs before recording his second out.

Athletics: Yoenis Céspedes (2013)

Result: Won (32 total HR)

Fun fact: Céspedes is the only person not named Griffey or Fielder to ever hoist a second Home Run Derby trophy. He was also the first non-All-Star to win the Derby in 2013, edging out a 20-year-old Bryce Harper, who was attempting to become the youngest champion in the history of the event. Unfortunately for Harper, Céspedes brought a whole lot of experience with him -- as he noted afterwards, [he'd already participated](#) in five home run derbies in his native Cuba before defecting in 2011.

Mariners: Ken Griffey Jr., 1998

Result: Won (19 total HR)

Let's be honest, Griffey is kind of the king of the Home Run Derby. He's participated in eight and won three. No one else can say that, and with most of the players on his heels having retired, those records are probably safe for a while. The 1998 event had his highest home run total, but Griffey also won in 1994 and 1999, and his 70 career Derby home runs, while just the eighth most today, were well beyond any participant of his era.

Marlins: Giancarlo Stanton, 2016

Result: Won (61 total HR)

While Guerrero Jr.'s 91 home runs in 2019 still stands as the record for the most in a single Derby, thanks to Pete Alonso (more on him later), the record for the most total home runs by a winner is still the 61 hit by Stanton in 2016. Statcast data was available for the 2016 Home Run Derby, so the following probably won't shock you -- Stanton had the [20 hardest-hit](#) and 10 longest home runs of the night, and averaged a distance of 446 feet and a 111.9 mph exit velocity (Carlos González ranked second in both categories with 430 feet and 107.4 mph averages). Winning was really just the icing on the cake after all that.

Mets: Pete Alonso, 2019

Result: Won (57 total HR)

Just three years after Aaron Judge debuted, on the other side of town, Alonso showed up with much the same playbook. Judge set the rookie home run record at 52 in 2017 -- Alonso hit 53. Judge was the first solo rookie Home Run Derby champion, and Alonso was the second. He didn't have an easy path to victory, either -- Alonso faced Carlos Santana in the first round, Ronald Acuña Jr. in the second, and finally outlasted Vladimir Guerrero Jr. in a 23-22 final at Progressive Field.

Other winners: Darryl Strawberry (tied, 1986)

Nationals: Bryce Harper, 2018

Result: Won (45 total HR)

In the long combined history of the Expos/Nationals franchise, Harper is the only player to

appear in more than one Derby, and he leads the pack with 69 home runs in his Derby career (Larry Walker is second with four). After finishing as runner-up to Yoenis Céspedes in 2013, Harper got another shot in 2018, in his home ballpark, and it didn't go to waste. Harper hit [four of the five longest home runs](#) of the night (478, 473, 467 and 465 feet) and led the pack with 12 at 110 mph or above. He hit five home runs in the first and second rounds that traveled 450 feet or further, and just as many in the final round alone. Harper is just the third player in Derby history to win one in his home ballpark.

Brewers: Prince Fielder, 2009

Result: Won (23 total HR)

In addition to his six Derby appearances, Fielder is the only player to appear on this list twice, which is definitely also an achievement. Fielder is Milwaukee's only Derby champion as well as Detroit's -- as a matter of fact, he's the only player in the history of the event to win it for two different teams. The 2009 All-Star festivities were held at Busch Stadium, so Fielder got the chance to spoil St. Louis' dreams of having Albert Pujols win his first Derby on his home turf. After hitting 11 home runs in the first round and six in the semifinals, Fielder hit another six in the final round to seal the deal. Another fun fact about Fielder's opponents? That final round matchup came against Nelson Cruz in his first All-Star Game appearance.

Dodgers: Joc Pederson, 2015

Result: Runner-up (39 total HR)

Quick -- who holds the record for the most career Derby home runs? The section header probably gave it away. Pederson's 99 home runs are the most in Derby history, which becomes even more impressive when you consider he's only competed in two of them. Pederson was just 23 when he made it to the final round as a rookie in 2015, and hit almost twice as many home runs that night as he had in his career to that point. The 2015 Home Run Derby was the first to adopt the bracket format, which meant Pederson had to knock out Manny Machado (13-12) *and* Albert Pujols (12-11) to get through to the final round, where he ultimately fell to Todd Frazier by a score of 15-14.

2015 was his highest finish, but he may have been even better in 2019, when he was knocked out in the second round. That year, Pederson was the reason Vladimir Guerrero Jr. *needed* those 40 home runs to get through to the finals -- they'd ended regulation time tied at 29, and it took two swing-offs for Guerrero to finally dispatch of Pederson.

Two Orioles who have won the Home Run Derby--Cal Ripken Jr. (1991) and Miguel Tejada (2004)

FROM JOE POSNANSKI

For eight innings, it looked like Colorado's [Germán Márquez was going to throw a no-hitter](#), which, off the top of my head, would have been the 1,314th no-hitter of the season. In the end, he did not — Pittsburgh's Ka'ai Tom got the single to break it up — but Márquez ended up doing something even rarer: He threw a Maddux.

You might know that a Maddux — a stat invented by Jason Lukehart — is a complete-game shutout where the pitcher throws fewer than 100 pitches. Maddux threw 13 Madduxes, which is the known record (accurate pitch counts go back to 1988) and that record ain't ever getting broken. There have now been 13 Madduxes thrown in *all of baseball* since the beginning of the 2017 season.

Marquez's Maddux is the first since August of 2019 and you get all the prizes if you just happened to know that it was thrown by Seattle's [Yusei Kikuchi](#). The last five Madduxes now belong to Márquez, Kikuchi, [Steven Matz](#), [Mike Leake](#) and [Sandy Alcántara](#). It's been a long time since one of the real superstars of the game pitched a Maddux.

Washington's [Trea Turner](#) hit for his third cycle today against the Rays. That ties the all-time record. (Adrián Beltré (2015 with Rangers, 2012 with Rangers, 2008 with Mariners; Bob Meusel for the Yankees in 1921-22-28 and Babe Herman twice for the Dodgers in 1931 and for the Cubs in 1933)

Turner has been a wildly underrated player, it seems to me. And that's interesting because Turner was plenty hyped. He was a first-round pick in 2014 and by 2016 he was one of the most talked-about prospects in baseball. He came up that year and was crazy good, hitting .342 in 73 games, slugging .567, stealing 33 bases, I mean *everybody* should have been talking about him. He held his own in the outfield even though he was trained to play shortstop.

He led the league in stolen bases and scored 100 runs in 2018. He was even better in 2019, hitting .298/353/.497 with 19 homers, 35 steals and 96 runs scored. He also played a good shortstop. Turner missing the first six weeks of the season because of injury was a big reason why those Nationals got off to such a terrible start. But in the 118 games he started after that, the Nats played .627 baseball, they went to the playoffs, they won the World Series, and he was perhaps the critical factor.

Then last year, in the shortened season, he was beyond sensational, hitting .335/.394/.588 and led the league in hits and triples. He did finish seventh in the MVP balloting.

And this year, he's basically doing the same thing.

This guy is a flat-out superstar. But for some reason, people rarely seem to talk about him. It feels like his entire time in Washington, he's been overshadowed by [Bryce Harper](#), by [Max Scherzer](#), by [Anthony Rendon](#), by [Juan Soto](#), etc.

LIST OF THE WEEK—CAREER RUNS SCORED

(the top ten are relatively easy but how many of the next ten did you get?)

Ricky Henderson	2295
Ty Cobb	2245
Barry Bonds	2227
Henry Aaron	2174
Babe Ruth	2174
Pete Rose	2165
Willie Mays	2068
ARod	2021
Cap Anson	1999
Stan Musial	1949
Derek Jeter	1923
Lou Gehrig	1888
Tris Speaker	1882
Albert Pujols	1861
Mel Ott	1859
Craig Biggio	1844
Frank Robinson	1829

Eddie Collins	1821
Carl Yastrzemski	1816
Ted Williams	1798

HOW BAD IS IT FOR THE YANKEES?

Yankees are 8-8 in games Cole has started this year.

BETTING BASEBALL

(from Brent Musburger's Vegas Information and Sports Network—visn.com)

MLB underdogs got off to a hot start this year. In April and May, dogs went 352-446 (44%) but produced roughly + 20 units due to the plus money payouts. But ever since the weather started heating up, a switch has been flipped and favorites have roared back with a vengeance. Since June 1st, favorites have gone 282-152 (65%) winning roughly + 40 units.

We've seen home favorites perform especially well, going 490-310 (61%) on the season. Road favorites have gone just 238-194 (55%). The best spot has been to target non-division home favorites (283-165, 63.2%). This way you can take advantage of the "better" team with their home crowd behind them but also avoid the "divisional dog" angle. Familiarity levels the playing field and benefits the underdog. The lack of familiarity benefits the favorite. So if the non-division home favorite is playing an opponent they don't see that often, it provides an additional edge.