

BASEBALL TIDBITS AUGUST 2021

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

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August 29, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Five weeks left in the regular season. For your reading pleasure...

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

You might win a bet when you ask which four pitchers in MLB history won 15 or more games in 16 or more seasons?

Greg Maddox	18
Cy young	18
Warren Spahn	16
Walter Johnson	16

Would you have guessed that Ron LeFlore (Tigers/White Sox centerfielder 1974-1982) stole 455 bases? Different era.

Only three Cubs rookies to hit 25 or more home runs in a season--Kris Bryant (26 in 2015), Billy Williams (25 in 1961) and Patrick Wisdom (25 in 2021).

Two-way sensation [Shohei Ohtani](#) reached yet another incredible milestone on Saturday night, as he became the first Angels player ever to hit at least 40 homers and steal 20 bases in a season.

Ohtani reached the mark with his 20th stolen base of 2021, coming in the fifth inning of a 10-2 win over the Padres at Angel Stadium. Ohtani already had reached the 40-homer mark -- he leads the Majors with 41 home runs this year. And it doesn't include the fact he's also 8-1 with a 3.00 ERA and 127 strikeouts in 105 innings as a pitcher this season.

Ohtani became the first American League player with a 40-20 season since Curtis Granderson in 2011, and he reached the mark before September. The only other American Leaguers to reach 40 homers and 20 stolen bases prior to September were Alex Rodriguez in 2007 and Ken Griffey Jr. in 1999.

The last Major League 40-20 seasons were by Atlanta's Ronald Acuña Jr. and Milwaukee's Christian Yelich in 2019. Ohtani is just the fifth foreign-born player to reach those marks, joining Alfonso Soriano (2006), Jose Canseco (1988, '91 and '98), Larry Walker ('97) and Acuña.

In Saturday's game against the Padres Justin Upton of the Angels drove in his 1,000th career run. Upton became the eighth active player to reach the mark, joining Albert Pujols, Miguel Cabrera, Robinson Canó, Nelson Cruz, Evan Longoria, Ryan Zimmerman and Joey Votto.

NOT ALL WHO WANDER ARE LOST

Wander Franco of the Rays reached base in his 28th straight game, tying Mickey Mantle for the second-longest streak in AL history by a player 20 or younger. Frank Robinson had an amazing 43 game on base streak in 1956.

When the Tampa Bay Rays shortstop singled in the fourth inning of his team's 3-1 win over the Philadelphia Phillies on Tuesday, he became the first sub-21-year-old player in 31 years to reach base in 25 consecutive games, according to ESPN Stats & Info.

Franco joined an exclusive company with his feat, too. Only Hall of Famers Ken Griffey Jr. in 1990 and Roberto Alomar in 1988 reached base in 25 straight games

His reached-base streak is the longest in the majors this season and the longest by a rookie in the team's 23-year history. Franco hit .332/.398/.536 with 27 homers, 145 RBIs, 48 doubles, 20 triples, 27 stolen bases and just 75 strikeouts in 829 at-bats over 214 minor-league games.

Since homering and driving in three runs in his first big league game, the Rays' 20-year-old shortstop has had to endure the kind of growing pains that most rookies go through. In the 19

games after his debut, Franco hit .184/.241/.303 with 20 strikeouts. It was a far cry from the player who, in nearly 1,000 minor league plate appearances, batted .332/.398/.536 with 95 extra-base hits and more walks (95) than strikeouts (75).

Over the past month, though, Franco has flipped the switch and become one of the best hitters in the game. That's not an exaggeration, either—in the last 30 days, Franco ranks 12th among qualified batters in fWAR (1.2), tied with Juan Soto and ahead of Aaron Judge. Since July 22, Franco is batting a scorching .325/.383/.521 with a microscopic 10.9% strikeout rate.

DON GULLETT

Don Gullett. 7th all-time pitcher winning percentage. Member of 4 consecutive World Series Championship teams ('75, '76 Reds; '77, '78 Yankees). With a "mere" 109 wins, retired at age 27 after 9 seasons due to arm trouble. He trails:

Spud Chandler	109-43	.717	1943 AL MVP, 4 World Series for the Yankees
Dave Foutz	147-66	.690	Won 41 games for St. Louis in 1886
Whitey Ford	236-106	.690	Hall of Famer, 11 World Series for Yankees
Clayton Kershaw	184-83	.689	Still rolling with the Dodgers
Bob Caruthers	218-99	.688	40 game winner twice in the 1880s
Pedro Martinez	219-100	.687	3 Cy Young awards, 5 ERA titles
Don Gullett	109-50	.686	

The next two behind Gullet are Babe Ruth and Lefty Grove.

YOUNGEST PITCHERS AT TIME OF AT TIME OF 300th CAREER SAVE:

29	Craig Kimbrel
31	Francisco Rodriguez
31	Huston Street
31	Kenley Jansen
32	Robb Nen
33	Aroldis Chapman

(bonus points if you knew Huston Street and Robb Nen both had 300 saves).

ADDING TO THE LIST OF GREAT PLAYERS I HAD NOT HEARD OF

Hooks Dauss was a righthanded pitcher for the Detroit Tigers from 1912 to 1926. He was given the nickname "Hooks" because his curveball was hard to hit. He compiled a career record of 223–182 with a 3.30 ERA. His best years were in 1915 when he had a 24–13 record and in 1919 with a 21–9 record.

COLE ON A ROLL

Gerrit Cole struck out nine A's batters in his six-inning outing, reaching 200 strikeouts this season in 148 innings. With about five weeks left in the season and likely around six starts left, Cole is chasing Ron Guidry's single-season franchise strikeout record (248) and is in position to be a candidate for the AL Cy Young award. Cole has a 2.80 ERA in 148 innings across 24 starts, the third-lowest ERA amongst qualified starters in the American League. He's thrown the fifth-most innings and has the highest K/9 rate.

Cole has won all three of his starts since returning from the COVID-19 injured list, posting a 0.51 ERA over that stretch. He shattered the previous Yankees record for fewest innings to reach 200 strikeouts in a season, which was previously 168 1/3, set by Michael Pineda in 2016.

Yankees pitchers with 200 K in a season:

L Severino	2017-18
D Cone	1997-98
R Guidry	1978-79
G Cole	2021
M Pineda	2016
CC Sabathia	2011
R Johnson	2005
M Mussina	2001
R Clemens	2001
M Perez	1992
Al Downing	1964
W Ford	1961
B Turley	1955
R Ford	1910
J Powell	1904
J Chesbro	1904

GIANCARLO STANTON

Giancarlo Stanton has 9 HR tracked at 470+ feet since 2015.

No other player has more than 4.

Stanton's HR at 472 feet is his second longest home run as a Yankee.

His only one longer was 483 on 7/25/20 at Nationals.

Stanton has now homered in four consecutive games. That's his longest streak as a Yankee and tied for the second longest streak of his career.

Want to feel old department Part 1—Lou Piniella turned 78 this week. Cup of coffee with the 1964 Orioles and 1968 Indians, Rookie of the Year with the Royals in 1969, KC 1969-1973, Yankees 1974-1984. Managed Yankees, Reds, Mariners, Tampa Bay and Cubs including the World Series champ Reds in 1990.

Want to feel old department Part 2—Ron Guidry turned 71 this week. Gator/Louisiana Lightning went 170-91 in 14 seasons for the Yankees. 25-3 and Cy Young in 1978 with a 1.74 ERA. He went 5-2 in 10 post season games including 3-1 in the World Series with a 1.69 ERA and 4 complete games.

NOT A BAD WEEK IN KANSAS CITY

KC Catcher Salvador Perez hit 2 grand slams this week against Seattle.

In his last two games, he has four hits, eight RBIs, two grand slams and just one strikeout.

Perez became the 24th player in the history of the American and National leagues to hit grand slam home runs in back-to-back games

Perez went 3 for 5 with four RBIs and a walk to give him three consecutive games with a homer. His 36th home run of the season tied [Steve Balboni](#) (1985) for the third-most in a single season in franchise history behind [Jorge Soler's](#) 48 in 2019 and Mike Moustakas' 38 in 2017. Perez is now one shy of tying [Carlton Fisk's](#) AL single-season record for homers in a season by a catcher.

Perez also moved into a tie with [Danny Tartabull](#) for the second-most career grand slams (five) in franchise history. [Frank White](#) sits in first place with six.

The Royals had never hit grand slams on back-to-back days until Thursday, but they tied an AL record with grand slams in three consecutive games. Their streak started with Whit Merrifield's blast Wednesday afternoon in a loss at Houston.

The all-time leader for grand slams by a catcher is Hall of Famer Mike Piazza (14 career grand slams). Perez is the first American League catcher with 35 homers since Hall of Fame backstop Pudge Rodriguez (1999). In 10 seasons Perez has hit 188 HRs. He is a 7 time All Star, 5 time Gold Glove winner.

Then on Saturday Perez homered for the fourth consecutive day and third consecutive game against Seattle in the Royals' [4-2 win](#) at T-Mobile Park, securing a series victory in the four-game set and Kansas City's seventh win in its last nine games.

The homer was Perez's 37th of the season, his seventh in the past nine games and his 16th in 39 games since the All-Star break -- and since the Home Run Derby, which saw him crush 28 as part of the All-Star Week festivities.

Perez, who was the designated hitter Saturday, has hit 25 home runs as the catcher and 12 as the DH. Among American League players who have played at least 75 percent of their games in a season behind the plate, Perez is now tied with Carlton Fisk, who hit 37 in 1985.

With 33 games to go this season, Perez is 11 home runs shy of matching Jorge Soler's 2019 Royals single-season record of 48. After Saturday, he's hit 16 homers in his previous 33 games.

YASAMI

[Chicago White Sox](#) catcher [Yasmani Grandal](#) drove in eight runs — matching the most by a single player in a game this season — as his team defeated the crosstown rival [Cubs](#) 17-13 on Friday.

Playing in his first game since July 5 after he was activated off the injured list Friday, Grandal went 4-for-6 and swatted two home runs and a double. Both homers were three-run shots. His eight RBIs matched [Los Angeles Dodgers](#) outfielder [AJ Pollock's](#) tally from May 2 for the most in an MLB game in 2021. For the season, Grandal is batting .203 with 16 home runs, 46 RBIs and a .875 OPS. He is the first White Sox player to drive in eight runs in a game since Robin Ventura in 1995.

Cardinals back up catchers behind Yadier Molina (a lonely, relaxing job):

Andrew Knizner, 2019-21

Matt Wieters, 2019-20

Francisco Peña, 2018

Carson Kelly, 2016-18

Eric Fryer, 2016-17

A.J. Pierzynski, 2014

Tony Cruz, 2011-15

Gerald Laird, 2011

Jason LaRue, 2008-10

Gary Bennett, 2006-07

Kelly Stinnett, 2007

Einar Díaz, 2005

Mike Mahoney, 2005

11-12-13 STRAIGHT, YANKEES WINNING STREAK

11--The last time the [Yankees](#) won 11 games in a row, some of the pitchers of record went by the names Guidry, Niekro and Righetti. It was 1985, and the only current player on the Yankees roster who was alive to see it was outfielder [Brett Gardner](#), who celebrated his 38th birthday on Tuesday.

12--The [New York Yankees](#) won their 12th consecutive game, beating the [Oakland Athletics](#) 7-6 Thursday. [Aroldis Chapman](#) picked up his 300th career save to help the Yankees win 12 straight games for the first time since 1961.

13--During the course of their 13-game winning streak, the [Yankees](#) have beaten six different teams in four different cities while scoring 75 runs and allowing only 35. At 76-52, the Yankees are tied with the [Astros](#) for the second-best record in the American League (behind Tampa Bay).

The Yankees have scored at least five runs in eight consecutive games, and have scored at least five in 18 of their 25 games played in August. New York is hitting .254 /.340/.448 with 37 home runs in August; its .788 OPS as a team is the third-highest in the AL this month,

One difference for the Yankees in August has been a tendency to hit the ball in the air more than they hit it on the ground. Their rate of ground balls to fly balls in August (entering Friday) was .97, making it the first month in which the built-for-power Yankees have hit fly balls more often than grounders. 13 consecutive wins matched the longest winning streak in the majors this season. The bullpen's 2.21 ERA in August (entering Friday) is the best in the AL.

The Yankees matched the longest winning streak by a Yankees team in the past 60 years, matching a feat achieved by the Mickey Mantle- and Roger Maris-led squad from Sept. 1-12, 1961. The Yanks improved to 12-1 in games when Judge and Stanton both homered, including the postseason. 13-game winning streak is six shy of the longest in franchise history, which was set from June 29-July 17, 1947.

Oakland was the other Major League team to enjoy a 13-game winning streak this season, correcting a slow start by not losing from April 9-24. But the fading A's have now lost 10 of their past 12.

Longest Yankees Winning Streaks

19 (1947)	won World Series
18 (1953)	won World Series
16 (1926)	lost World Series
15 (1960)	lost World Series
15 (1906)	missed playoffs
14 (1941)	won World Series
13 (1961)	won World Series
13 (1954)	missed playoffs
13 (Current)***	

1939 Yankees won 12 straight and won the World Series.

The streak ended Saturday with a 3-2 loss to the A's at the Oakland Coliseum. It was the Yanks' first loss since the Aug. 12 Field of Dreams Game against the White Sox in Dyersville, Iowa.

MATT OLSON'S HISTRIC TRICK—FEWER K'S, MORE POWER

On pace for 40 homers, A's star has biggest K% drop in last 20 years

Oakland's Matt Olson's punchouts grew to an out-of-hand 31.4% of his plate appearances in a wayward 2020, [ninth highest](#) among qualified hitters. Olson tinkered with that famous swing last winter and joined the growing wave of hitters turning to [high-speed pitching machines](#) for

batting practice. The result? Olson didn't just cut down that strikeout rate; he's nearly *sliced it in half*, all the way down to a 16.1% mark entering Friday. In the span of a year, Olson went from the ninth percentile among qualifiers in strikeout rate to the [83rd percentile](#). Looking at the last 20 seasons (from the slow comedown of the Steroid Era through MLB's strikeout surge), Olson owns *the largest K% drop*.

Largest year-to-year decrease in K%, last 20 seasons

Min. 200 PA in each season (4,783 player seasons)

1) Matt Olson (2020-21): -15.3%

2) Justin Smoak (2016-17): -12.7%

3) Austin Riley (2019-20): -12.6%

4) Felipe Lopez (2004-05): -10.4%

5-T) Aaron Hicks (2019-20): -10.2%

5-T) David Ortiz (2010-11): -10.2%

5-T) Cody Ross (2012-13): -10.2%

Here's what's even more fascinating about Olson, though -- cutting down strikeouts is great, but generally power hitters will live with some empty swings. Big cuts are how they bring value to their clubs, and trading off too much of that pop just to put the ball in play defeats the purpose. Olson, however, is living in the best of both worlds: He's accompanied that strikeout dip with a major slugging *increase*, from a pedestrian .424 in 2020 to a more Olson-esque .555 entering Friday.

Olson is routinely one of the hardest-hitting swingers, ranking among the game's top 20% in average [exit velocity](#), [hard-hit rate](#) and [barrel rate](#) (percentage of batted balls struck with the most powerful in-the-air contact) in each of his four full seasons. With fewer empty trips back to the dugout, he's giving himself more chances to rip. This Matt Olson is essentially an improved v2 of the Olson that belted 36 homers in 2019 -- with more on-base ability.

Olson, 2019: 127 G, 36 HR, 25.2% K rate, 9.3% BB rate, 135 [wRC+](#)

Olson, 2021: 122 G, 32 HR, 16.1% K rate, 12.1% BB rate, **153 wRC+**

BILL FREEHAN AND THE HOF

Last week I promised some thoughts on Freehan, and whether he belongs in the Hall of Fame (in response to several subscriber emails).

1963 - 1975

15 years

1591 hits

200 HRs

758 RBIs

.262 average
1774 games
11 time All Star
5 Gold Gloves
3 times in the top 7 for MVP including second to Denny McClain in '68.

I looked at All Star and Gold Glove catchers from 1958 to 1981 (5 years before Freehan to 5 years after Freehan) and looked at career comparisons on [baseballreference.com](https://www.baseball-reference.com) where they use Bill James' "similarity scores". (please see <https://www.baseball-reference.com/about/similarity.shtml> for how James does his calculations).

I didn't consult the terrific book "The Cooperstown Casebook: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In, and Who Should Pack Their Plaques" By Jay Jaffe (I gave my copy to trivia savant and subscriber Neal Bradley—I highly recommend the book) but I did find a Jeffee blog post—see below..

I placed the best catchers from Freehan's era into three buckets—HOF, Candidates, and Good but Not Great. (feel free to email your arguments on the assignments). 46 players in the Freehan era were All Stars, Gold Glove winners or both. There are 19 catchers in the Hall of Fame. I considered 8 (including Freehan) as legit candidates for election.

19 Hall of Fame Catchers

Johnny Bench	Josh Gibson
Yogi Berra	Gabby Hartnett
Roger Bresnahan	Ernie Lombardi
Roy Campanella	Bill Mackey
Gary Carter	Mike Piazza
Mickey Cochrane	Ivan Rodriguez
Bill Dickey	Louis Santop
Buck Ewing	Ray Schalk
Rick Ferrell	Ted Simmons
Carlton Fisk	

Hall of Fame from Freehan era

Johnny Bench, Reds

Yogi Berra, Yankees
Gary Carter, Expos
Carlton Fisk, Red Sox
Ted Simmons, Cards
Joe Torre, Braves (as a manager)

Candidate

Bob Boone, Phillies
Bill Freehan, Tigers
Elston Howard, Yankees, Red Sox
Thurman Munson, Yankees
Lance Parrish, Tigers
Manny Sanguillen, Pirates
Jim Sundberg, Rangers
Gene Tenace, A's

Good but Not Great

Ed Bailey, Reds, Giants
Earl Battey, Senators, Twins
Bruce Benedict, Braves
Smokey Burgess, Pirates
Chris Cannizzaro, Padres
Paul Cassanova, Senators
Del Crandall, Braves
Bo Diaz, Indians, Reds
Brian Downing, Angels
Johnny Edwards, Reds
Andy Etchebarren, Orioles
Ray Fosse, Indians
Jerry Grote, Mets
Tom Haller, Giants
Ed Herrman, White Sox
Randy Hundley, Cubs
Terry Kennedy, Padres
Don Leppert, Senators
Sherm Lollar, White Sox
Tim McCarver, Cards
Jeff Newman, A's
Biff Pocoroba, Braves
Darrell Porter, Royals
Ellie Rodriguez, Orioles
Johnny Romano, Indians

John Roseboro, Dodgers
 Bob Schmidt, Giants
 Hal Smith, Cards
 John Sterns, Mets
 Steve Swisher, Cubs
 Gus Triandos, Orioles
 Butch Wynegar, Twins

Freehan vs. other HOF candidates

Bill Freehan					
Games 1774	Hits 1591	AVG .262	SLUG .412	Awards 16	Field PCT .993
Bob Boone					
Games 2264	Hits 1838	AVG .254	SLUG .346	Awards 11	Field PCT .986
Elston Howard					
Games 1623	Hits 1490	AVG .274	SLUG .427	Awards 12	Field PCT .993
Thurman Munson					
Games 1423	Hits 1558	AVG .292	SLUG .410	Awards 12	Field PCT .982
Lance Parrish					
Games 1988	Hits 1782	AVG .252	SLUG .440	Awards 15	Field PCT .991
Manny Sanguillen					
Games 1448	Hits 1500	AVG .296	SLUG .398	Awards 3	Field PCT .986
Jim Sundberg					
Games 1962	Hits 1493	AVG .248	SLUG .348	Awards 9	Field PCT .993
Gene Tenace					
Games 1555	Hits 1060	AVG .241	SLUG .429	Awards 1	Field PCT .986

Awards = All Star selections + Gold Gloves + MVP + ROY + Silver Slugger. (in years when there were two All Stars games only one appearance was counted).

Baseball reference.com says Darrell Porter as the closest statistical comparison to Bill Freehan.

Bill Freehan

Games 1774 Hits 1591 AVG .262 SLUG .412 Awards 16 Field PCT .993

Darrell Porter

Games 1782 Hits 1369 AVG .247 SLUG .409 Awards 4 Field PCT .982

Whether you agree with the comparison or not, Darrell Porter doesn't strike me as a Hall of Fame catcher.

This simplistic analysis excludes advanced batting and fielding stats and post season performance. But it does show that Bill Freehan isn't significantly stronger statistically than his best contemporaries.

Jaffee: Playing during a pitcher-friendly era, Freehan hit .262/.340/.412, good for a 112 OPS+, but for all of his accomplishments, the fact that he played his last game at age 34 and finished his career with "only" 1,591 hits and 200 homers caused him to get short shrift from Hall of Fame voters. He was named on just two out of 415 ballots (0.5%) when he became eligible in 1982, disqualifying him from further consideration by the BBWAA, and he never got a sniff from the Veterans Committee or subsequent Era Committees. He ranks [16th in JAWS among catchers](#), and while he's below the career and peak WAR standards at the position, it's one that is significantly underrepresented within the Hall. There are just 19 catchers enshrined for their work in the AL, NL, and bygone 19th-century leagues, fewer than any position besides third base (15) and far fewer than right field (27), the non-starting pitcher position with the most.

DISMANTLED

The last time [Cubs](#) won at home before Monday, [Anthony Rizzo](#) homered, [Javier Báez](#) delivered the walk-off and [Craig Kimbrel](#) picked up the win.

Nearly a month — and a franchise-record home losing streak — later, Chicago ended a 13-game skid at Wrigley Field with a walk-off, 6-4 win over the [Colorado Rockies](#). Trailing 4-1, the Cubs rallied for three runs in the eighth to tie it before [Rafael Ortega](#) hit the game-winning, two-run home run with one out in the ninth.

The Cubs' last win at Wrigley came against the Reds on July 26. In the days that followed, Chicago traded many of its star players, including Rizzo, Kimbrel, Báez and [Kris Bryant](#).

The Cubs moved to 55-72 with Monday's win and are 4-17 in August.

The Cubs had gone 28 days between wins at Wrigley Field and unloaded Rizzo, Báez, Bryant and Kimbrel during that time. It's back to the default setting for Cubs fans: Wait until next year.

ORIOLES FINALLY WIN

The Orioles are bad. That gave a reason to think back to the manager Frank Robinson's 1988 Orioles that started 0-21.

Robinson, of course, was right. His team had two future Hall of Famers, first baseman Eddie Murray and shortstop Cal Ripken Jr.; a former MVP and Rookie of the Year, outfielder Fred Lynn; a four-time All-Star catcher, Terry Kennedy; and a number of other reasonably accomplished major leaguers, including former All-Star pitcher Mike Boddicker. Yet for more than three weeks, it couldn't win a game, setting the record for the longest losing streak in American League history, and falling just two losses shy of the all-time record of 23 straight defeats, held by the 1961 Phillies.

Robinson had taken over for Cal Ripken Sr. at 0-6, still the earliest managerial change in major-league history.

From 2012 to '16, the Orioles won more regular-season games than any team in the American League. They were bound to regress. Meanwhile, the major-league club is on pace to lose 112 games — this, after losing 115 in 2018 and 108 in '19, baseball's last two full seasons.

The current Orioles have done it with a run differential of negative-102. The '88 team actually was more competitive during its 0-21 start, with a run differential of negative-85 despite playing three more games.

Chicago, where Ripken and Murray hit home runs to finally bring the streak to an end with a 9-0 victory at the old Comiskey Park (Mark Williamson earned the win, Dave Schmidt the save). Even that night, the Orioles could not fully celebrate: Bill Ripken had to be taken to the hospital after getting hit in the head by a pitch. And of course, the team was 1-21, with five months to play. It would finish 54-107.

The streak, at least, produced some local color, perhaps, in part, because it came at the start of the season. Fans in Baltimore drove with their lights on during the day to show support for the Orioles. About halfway to 0-21, a local disc jockey, Bob Rivers, said he would [remain on the air](#) until the team won a game. He took naps only during some recorded concert programs and a six-hour jazz program. It took nearly 11 days for the Orioles to set him free.

The Orioles returned home from their four-city, 12-game trip with a 1-23 record. A crowd of 50,402 filled Memorial Stadium on "Fantastic Fans Night," and the occasion proved historic in more ways than one. That night, Gov. William Donald Schaefer announced the team had agreed

to a 15-year lease for a new ballpark at Camden Yards. The ballpark, which would open four years later, would become a landmark, a model throughout the sport.

KC Royals lost 19 straight in 2005. the Orioles would break the 1961 Philadelphia Phillies' modern era record of 23 consecutive defeats. The 1889 Louisville Colonels — managed mainly by William Van Winkle Wolf, who went by Chicken — hold the overall mark, with 26.

the Orioles ended May with a streak of 14 losses. They had no dreams of contending this season, anyway, and could become the first team since the expansion Mets in the 1960s to lose at least 108 games in three consecutive non-abbreviated seasons.

The opening day payroll — \$57 million, according to Baseball Prospectus — ranked 27th in the majors, ahead of only Miami, Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

Baltimore starters have a 6.22 earned run average; no team has been worse in a full season since the 2003 Texas Rangers, at 6.24. Dean Kremer and Keegan Akin, who showed promise last summer, have combined to go 0-15 with a 7.62 E.R.A. Among pitchers with at least 100 innings, Harvey (6.27) and Jorge Lopez (6.30) have the two highest E.R.A.s in the majors.

MIGGY HITS NUMER 500

Blue Jays starter Steven Matz, is the 345th MLB pitcher Cabrera has taken deep

Cabrera became the 28th member of Major League Baseball's [500-homer club](#) —

Cabrera became the first player to reach 500 homers since David Ortiz in 2015, and the first player ever to reach the mark as a Tiger. He's the first Venezuelan-born player to get there, and the sixth player born outside the United States. The latter list includes Ortiz, Albert Pujols, Sammy Sosa, Rafael Palmeiro and Manny Ramirez.

He went eight homerless games after hitting his 499th career homer in Baltimore, and he was 4-for-31 since that drive when he stepped to the plate Sunday with one out in the sixth and a 1-0 Detroit deficit.

Matz started him off with a pair of 94 mph sinkers. With a 1-1 count, he tried to change speeds and get Cabrera chasing a changeup off the plate. But Cabrera's opposite-field swing -- the swing he has been working on all year to try to ingrain, the swing he said was inconsistent -- connected.

The 400-foot drive just cleared the fence and landed in the underbelly of Rogers Centre, where Tigers bullpen catcher Tim Remes quickly retrieved it. It was Cabrera's first home run in Toronto since Sept. 9, 2017.

The homer was also his 2,955th career hit, leading into his next milestone chase. With 36 games left in the Tigers' season, he would need to go on a tear to become the first player in Major League history to record his 500th home run and [3,000th hit](#) in the same season.

Cabrera entered one of baseball's more revered inner circles as the 28th member of the [500-home run club](#), becoming the first to join it since David Ortiz in September 2015 and, perhaps, the last new member we see for quite a while: 41-year-old Nelson Cruz is next on the active list with 443 homers (though he continues to defy Father Time), followed by 38-year-old Robinson Canó with 334 and 31-year-old Giancarlo Stanton with 332.

Cabrera's résumé as an 11-time All-Star, two-time American League MVP Award winner, four-time AL batting champ and AL Triple Crown winner.

Cabrera entered Sunday still owning a healthy career batting average of .311 and stood just 46 hits shy of 3,000. He could eventually retire with a .300-plus average, 500-plus doubles, 500-plus homers and 3,000-plus hits. If so, he'd be the only third Modern Era AL/NL player (since 1900) to check all those boxes, following arguably the [two greatest right-handed hitters in AL/NL history](#): Henry Aaron and Willie Mays.

The number of AL/NL players with 500 career homers and 3,000 hits is also very small, of course: Aaron, Mays, Eddie Murray, Rafael Palmeiro, Albert Pujols and Alex Rodriguez. Cabrera remains under contract with the Tigers through at least the end of the 2023 season (with vesting options for '24 and '25), meaning he would be on 3,000-hit watch at the start of '22 if he doesn't get there before the end of '21.

Cabrera is the first Venezuelan-born player to bash 500 career home runs, and he would be the country's first player to reach 3,000 hits as well. He is the sixth 500-home run club member born outside the United States, joining Ortiz, Palmeiro, Pujols, Manny Ramirez and Sammy Sosa. By slugging his milestone blast in Toronto, Cabrera became the first player to hit his 500th homer outside the United States.

Do you remember Cabrera's first homer? It was a walk-off shot against the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in the 11th inning of his first Major League game on June 20, 2003. The 20-year-old Cabrera joined Billy Parker (1972) and Josh Bard (2002) as only the third Modern Era player to club a walk-off homer in his MLB debut. Carlos Pèrez (2015) has joined that club since.

The baseball world first got a glimpse of Cabrera's greatness at large when, later that year, he homered off seven-time Cy Young Award winner Roger Clemens in Game 4 of the World Series. He is still the second-youngest player (after Andruw Jones) to go deep in the Fall Classic.

Cabrera's Marlins would defeat the Yankees in six games to win that World Series, and while Cabrera hasn't worn a Marlins uniform since 2007, he is still fifth on the franchise's all-time homer list (138) and fourth on its RBIs list (523).

Cabrera went on to have his best years, of course, with the Tigers. He captured four AL batting crowns in a span of five years, including three straight from 2011-13. Believe it or not, Hall of Famer Rogers Hornsby (1920-25) is the only other AL/NL right-handed hitter in the Live Ball Era (dating back to 1920) to claim three consecutive batting crowns, with right-handed hitters Nap Lajoie (1901-04) and Honus Wagner (1906-09) achieving the feat in the Dead Ball Era. In other words, Cabrera is the only right-handed hitter in over 100 years of AL/NL baseball to take home three league batting titles in a row.

Adding Cabrera's most recent crown in 2015, he is on a short list of players with at least four batting titles in the Live Ball Era, joining Tony Gwynn (eight-time batting champ), Rod Carew (seven), Hornsby (seven), Stan Musial (seven), Ted Williams (six), Wade Boggs (five), Roberto Clemente (four), Harry Heilmann (four) and Bill Madlock (four).

In 2012, Cabrera led the AL with 44 homers, 139 RBIs (both Major League bests as well) and a .330 average to become the first league [Triple Crown winner](#) since Red Sox legend Carl Yastrzemski claimed the honor in 1967. No player has achieved the feat since.

Cabrera's historic season helped him edge Mike Trout for his first of two consecutive AL MVP Awards, the first AL player to claim [back-to-back MVP honors](#) since Frank Thomas (1993-94). No player in either league has captured back-to-back MVPs since Miggy.

Cabrera topped 100 RBIs for the first time at just 21 years old for the 2004 Marlins, tying many others for the second-youngest AL/NL 100-RBI season behind 20-year-olds Ty Cobb, Al Kaline, Mel Ott, Rodriguez, Juan Soto and Williams. Cabrera logged at least 100 RBIs each year until his injury-shortened 2015 season, a run of 11 consecutive 100-RBI campaigns that's tied with Al Simmons for the fourth-longest streak by any Modern Era AL/NL player behind Rodriguez (13), Jimmie Foxx (13) and Lou Gehrig (13).

Cabrera's 12 100-RBI seasons are tied for sixth most in the Modern Era behind Pujols (14), Rodriguez (14), Foxx (13), Gehrig (13) and Babe Ruth (13).

Three hundred total bases can be used as a loose benchmark for an accomplished hitting season, and Cabrera first crossed that threshold in 2004. He proceeded to rattle off 10 more consecutive 300-total base campaigns with Florida and Detroit through '14 for an 11-year streak that only trails Gehrig (13), Mays (13) and Pujols (12) for the longest among Modern Era AL/NL players.

After an injury-shortened 2015 season, Cabrera added his most recent 300-total base campaign in '16 to give him 12 total, tied with Pujols for fifth on the Modern Era AL/NL list behind Aaron (15), Mays (13), Musial (13) and Gehrig (13).

Though Cabrera's career is not yet over, his place among Tigers legends is already very much secure. His 362 homers in a Tigers uniform rank third on the franchise's [all-time list](#) behind Kaline (399) and Norm Cash (373). Cabrera entered Sunday with a .531 slugging percentage as a Tiger, putting him in a fairly safe position for second on the Tigers' all-time list, behind Hank Greenberg (.616) and ahead of Harry Heilmann (.518). His .919 OPS for Detroit is safely ahead of Charlie Gehringer (.884) for fourth on the list behind Greenberg (1.028), Cobb (.951) and Heilmann (.927).

Hall of Famer Musial famously retired with a perfectly symmetrical 1,815 hits at home and 1,815 hits on the road, giving him one of the coolest stats in baseball history. Cabrera doesn't quite have the perfect split Musial had, but he's pretty close (and there's still time): He entered Sunday with 1,488 hits at home and 1,466 hits on the road. His homer split is also almost perfectly even: 248 long balls at home and 252 on the road.

Here's a rundown of the 28 sluggers who crushed at least 500 dingers.

1) Barry Bonds: 762

500th HR: April 17, 2001

Bonds' age-35 through -39 seasons that began the 21st century -- including his single-year record 73 homers in 2001, the year he knocked No. 500 -- is perhaps the most dominant stretch by any player. He passed Hank Aaron to take the top spot on the all-time list on August 7, 2007.

2) Hank Aaron: 755

500th HR: July 14, 1968

Aaron was the model of consistency, clubbing at least 20 homers in a record 20 of his 22 full big league seasons. He overcame racist taunts and death threats to famously pass Babe Ruth on April 8, 1974.

3) Babe Ruth: 714

500th HR: Aug. 11, 1929

Ruth was the first slugger to reach 500 homers, and it would take 11 years for anyone else to reach the milestone. Of course, the Great Bambino was also the first player to hit Nos. 200, 300, 400, 600 and 700.

4) Alex Rodriguez: 696

500th HR: Aug. 4, 2007

Rodriguez became the youngest player to hit 500 homers when he knocked the milestone tater

at Yankee Stadium at 32 years and eight days of age. He also joined Mickey Mantle as only the second player to hit his 500th homer in the Bronx.

5) Albert Pujols: 677

500th HR: April 22, 2014

Pujols crushed his 499th and 500th career homers in the same game against Washington, becoming the third-youngest player to reach the milestone. The 445 homers Pujols belted with the Cardinals from 2001-11 are the most struck by any player across his first 11 big league seasons.

6) Willie Mays: 660

500th HR: Sept. 13, 1965

Mays hit his 500th blast during a career-best 52-homer campaign for the Giants in 1965. That came 10 years after he clubbed 51 for the Giants in 1955, the longest stretch between 50-homer seasons for any player.

7) Ken Griffey Jr.: 630

500th HR: June 20, 2004

"The Kid" knocked No. 500 on Father's Day with his father, Ken Sr., in attendance at St. Louis' Busch Stadium. Griffey was, at one time, the youngest player to reach 350, 400 and 450 homers before injuries slowed his pace.

8) Jim Thome: 612

500th HR: Sept. 16, 2007

Thome picked a great time for his 500th dinger, knocking it off Angels reliever Dustin Moseley in the bottom of the ninth for a walk-off, two-run shot on the South Side of Chicago. He finished his career with 13 walk-off homers, an MLB record.

9) Sammy Sosa: 609

500th HR: April 4, 2003

Sosa remains the only player with three different 60-homer seasons, memorably knocking 66 in 1998 as both he and Mark McGwire surpassed Roger Maris' longtime single-season record. The Dominican native became the first player born outside the United States to reach 500 homers, quickly followed by Rafael Palmeiro (Cuba) just over a month later.

10) Frank Robinson: 586

500th HR: Sept. 13, 1971

Robinson, who famously won an MVP Award with both the NL's Reds and the AL's Orioles, also became the first player to knock at least 200 dingers in each league. He hit No. 499 in the first inning of the first game of an Orioles' doubleheader against the Tigers, and No. 500 in the bottom of the ninth in Game 2.

11) Mark McGwire: 583

500th HR: Aug. 5, 1999

McGwire jacked 49 homers in 1987 to set the single-season rookie record, and became a national household name when he outslugged Sammy Sosa and briefly set the all-time mark with 70 dingers in '98. His 500th blast came the following summer and made him the quickest player to reach the total in terms of games played.

12) Harmon Killebrew: 573

500th HR: Aug. 10, 1971

Killebrew waited 16 agonizing games after hitting his 499th career homer, and then suddenly knocked Nos. 500 and 501 in back-to-back at-bats. He hit more dingers than anyone else during the 1960s and, at the time of his retirement, stood in elite company atop the career leaderboard alongside Aaron, Ruth, Mays and Robinson.

13) Rafael Palmeiro: 569

500th HR: May 11, 2003

Palmeiro knocked his milestone shot on Mother's Day as part of a 17-10 slugfest victory for the Rangers. He got a tip of the cap from Indians hitting coach Eddie Murray, the man he would pass on the all-time list roughly one month later.

14) Reggie Jackson: 563

500th HR: Sept. 17, 1984

Jackson's 500th homer, as a member of the Angels in a loss to the Kansas City Royals, came on the 17th anniversary of his very first homer. He hit that one for the Kansas City A's in a game *against* the Angels.

15) Manny Ramirez: 555

500th HR: May 31, 2008

Ramirez missed out on knocking No. 500 on his 36th birthday by just one day, crushing the milestone off submariner Chad Bradford at Baltimore's Camden Yards. Ramirez [wrote the No. 34 on his batting helmet](#) in honor of teammate David Ortiz, who exited the game with a wrist injury, before hitting that 500th homer.

16) Mike Schmidt: 548

500th HR: April 18, 1987

Schmidt, like Thome, saved his milestone for when his team really needed it, crushing No. 500 on a 3-0 count with the Phillies down to their final out against the Pirates. One of baseball's greatest third baseman happened to finish that game at shortstop -- one of just 24 games in which he appeared at that position.

17) David Ortiz: 541

500th HR: Sept. 12, 2015

Ortiz joined Pujols as the second player to check off Nos. 499 and 500 in the same contest, knocking his milestone at Tampa Bay's Tropicana Field -- a ballpark where he went deep more times (35) than any other visiting player.

18) Mickey Mantle: 536

500th HR: May 14, 1967

Mantle is as synonymous as anyone with hitting tape-measure home runs, and he holds the all-time record of 18 career World Series homers on top of the 536 he hit in regular-season play. The Mick retired third on the all-time list behind Ruth and Mays.

19) Jimmie Foxx: 534

500th HR: Sept. 24, 1940

For five years, the only names in the 500 club were Ruth and Foxx. "Double X" hit his milestone in the same inning that Ted Williams, Joe Cronin and Jim Tabor also went deep against Philadelphia, Foxx's former club.

20-T) Frank Thomas: 521

500th HR: June 28, 2007

Thomas' 500th blast came at the Metrodome (the place where he hit his very first homer in 1990) against the team he tormented the most (52 career dingers against the Twins). "The Big Hurt" authored the first 40-homer season in White Sox history in 1993, the year in which he won the first of his back-to-back AL MVP awards.

20-T) Willie McCovey: 521

500th HR: June 30, 1978

Hall of Fame manager Sparky Anderson once said of McCovey, "If you let him bat 600 times and pitched to him instead of around him, he'd hit 80 home runs." The lefty drew a ton of respect from pitchers, including 260 intentional walks -- baseball's fifth-highest career total.

20-T) Ted Williams: 521

500th HR: June 17, 1960

Many believe Williams could have challenged Ruth's former record of 714 home runs if he hadn't lost several of his prime seasons to service in the military. His final homer, which came on his final swing as a big leaguer, is one of the most famous sendoffs in history.

23-T) Ernie Banks: 512

500th HR: May 12, 1970

Banks probably would have finished with even more homers had he not begun his career in the Negro Leagues. His 512 dingers with the Cubs are the fourth-most hit by any player who spent their careers with just one franchise, following Schmidt, Mantle and Williams.

23-T) Eddie Mathews: 512

500th HR: July 14, 1967

Mathews' 500th blast came against the stiffest of competition, Hall of Fame ace Juan Marichal, and exactly one year before his teammate, Aaron, knocked his 500th homer. Mathews hit his first homer at age 20, and he still holds the record for the most four-baggers struck by anyone (190) through their age-24 season.

25) Mel Ott: 511

500th HR: Aug. 1, 1945

Ott was the first National Leaguer to enter the 500 club, doing so at the Polo Grounds where he clubbed so many of his shots. The 5-foot-9 slugger with the high leg kick knocked 61 homers before his 21st birthday, which remains a record to this day.

26) Gary Sheffield: 509

500th HR: April 17, 2009

No. 500 for Sheffield was also his first hit as a Met, having joined New York after the Tigers released him in Spring Training. It was also one of just two career pinch-hit homers for Sheffield, who knocked his first one off the bench 15 years prior.

27) Eddie Murray: 504

500th HR: Sept. 6, 1996

Murray's milestone put him in very exclusive company as he joined Aaron and Mays as the third player to pair 500 career homers with 3,000 hits (Palmeiro, Rodriguez and Pujols would later join them). Orioles fans, fresh off the celebration of Cal Ripken Jr.'s record-setting 2,131st consecutive game, which happened exactly one year before, gave Murray a standing ovation that lasted nearly nine minutes.

28) Miguel Cabrera: 500

500th HR: Aug. 22, 2021

Cabrera became the first Venezuelan-born player to join this list when he drove a signature blast the opposite way at Toronto's Rogers Centre. That earned Cabrera a curtain call from the Canadian crowd. Cabrera's homer also marked his 2,955th career hit, putting him closer to the doorstep of an even more exclusive club of 500 homers *and* 3,000 base knocks.

100 WINS IS NOT ALWAYS ENOUGH

Something to think about with the Giants and Dodgers on 100 win pace. If you win 100 games in a season, you're a powerhouse team. But you're not always a first-place team.

Ten rare times through MLB history, a 100-win team has been relegated to second-best by an even stronger division champion or pennant winner. It's only happened four times in the divisional era, which began in 1969. Before that, going back to 1903, the year of the first World Series, six additional 100-win teams finished second in a pennant race.

Here are the 10 teams that have come before -- every 100-game winner that finished in second place since the beginning of the Major League Baseball postseason.

2018 Yankees: 100-62

Finished 2nd to: Red Sox (108-54)

The Yankees-Red Sox rivalry reignited in full force in 2017, when both teams made the playoffs for the first time since 2009. In 2018, it heated up even further. Not only were the Yankees and Red Sox both playoff teams, they both won at least 100 games. But only one team could be the AL East champion, and that team was Boston. So the Bronx Bombers -- led by the slugging duo of Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton, star rookies Gleyber Torres and Miguel Andújar, ace starters Luis Severino and Masahiro Tanaka and one of the deepest bullpens ever assembled -- had to settle for a Wild Card berth. The Yankees and Red Sox faced off in the postseason, and Boston emerged the winner on its way to a World Series championship.

2001 A's: 102-60

Finished 2nd to: Mariners (116-46)

The 2001 A's had plenty of star power -- the dynamic starting pitching trio of Mark Mulder, Tim Hudson and Barry Zito, plus Jason Giambi, Miguel Tejada and Eric Chavez powering the offense. Giambi (.342 batting average, 38 home runs, 120 RBIs) finished second in AL MVP voting, and Mulder (21-8, 3.45 ERA) finished second for the AL Cy Young Award. It took a historically great Mariners team to prevent Oakland from winning the AL West. Seattle tied the MLB regular season wins record, led by Ichiro in his breakout MLB debut. At least Oakland still made the playoffs, unlike the other teams on this list, who had the misfortune of playing before the Wild Card era. The A's lost a dramatic five-game ALDS to the Yankees.

1993 Giants: 103-59

Finished 2nd to: Braves (104-58)

In 1993, Barry Bonds, the reigning NL MVP with the Pirates, left Pittsburgh to sign with the Giants. San Francisco immediately went from a 90-loss team to a 100-win team. Bonds won the first of his five MVP Awards in San Francisco, hitting .336 with a Major League-leading 46 home runs and an NL-best 123 RBIs. While Bonds was piling up those numbers, the Giants were battling the Braves in the NL West division race. On the final day of the regular season, the two teams were tied at 103-58, and the Giants had just won 13 of 15 games to pull even. But in Game 162, the Giants lost to the Dodgers, and the Braves beat the Rockies to win the division by a single game. The Giants missed the postseason and became the only NL team in the divisional era to win 100-plus games and not win its division.

1980 Orioles: 100-62

Finished 2nd to: Yankees (103-59)

The 1980 season was the last time the Orioles reached the century mark in wins. But they ended the season with nothing to show for it. The O's were in striking distance of the Yankees entering the stretch run, just 1 1/2 games back when September began, but the Yankees never faltered. New York won the AL East by three games, even though Baltimore took the season

series, 7-6. This Orioles team had more than one Hall of Famer -- a 24-year-old Eddie Murray anchored the lineup, hitting .300 with 32 homers and 116 RBIs, and a veteran Jim Palmer was still in the rotation, going 16-10 with a 3.98 ERA in 224 innings.

1962 Dodgers: 102-63

Finished 2nd to: Giants (103-62)

A thrilling pennant race between the rival Dodgers and Giants ended with the two teams tied at 101-61 after 162 games. That forced a three-game tiebreaker series to determine who would represent the NL in the World Series against the Yankees. The first two games were split -- the Giants knocked Sandy Koufax out early in Game 1, but the Dodgers pulled out a walk-off win in Game 2. In the winner-take-all Game 3, Los Angeles held a 4-2 lead entering the ninth inning, but the Giants rallied for four runs to win the pennant. Though the Dodgers' season had some high points -- Koufax threw his first no-hitter, Don Drysdale won the Cy Young Award, and Maury Wills stole 104 bases to win MVP -- there was no postseason berth waiting at the end. But Los Angeles would win the World Series the next year.

1961 Tigers: 101-61

Finished 2nd to: Yankees (109-53)

The 1961 Tigers won 101 games, but not only did they finish second in the AL, the Yankees ran away with the pennant. New York went 109-53, finishing eight games ahead of Detroit. The Tigers entered September only 1 1/2 games back, but they lost their first eight games of the month -- including a sweep at the hands of the Yanks, who won their first 12 games of September to open up an 11 1/2-game lead over Detroit. Even the star efforts of Norm Cash, who won the batting title with a .361 average and also belted 41 home runs and drove in 132 runs, weren't enough. The Yankees had MVP Roger Maris, who hit 61 homers to break Babe Ruth's single-season record, and runner-up Mickey Mantle, who hit 54 of his own.

1954 Yankees: 103-51

Finished 2nd to: Indians (111-43)

This season of 100-win misfortune came on the heels of the Yankees' record five straight World Series wins from 1949-53. In 1954, the Indians set what was then an AL record with 111 wins, breaking the '27 Yankees' mark by one. Those 111 wins delivered Cleveland the AL pennant by eight games over the Bronx Bombers. The Yankees had the AL MVP in Yogi Berra, who hit .307 with 22 home runs and 125 RBIs, and also got strong seasons from Whitey Ford (16-8, 2.82 ERA) and a young Mickey Mantle (.300 batting average, 27 homers, 102 RBIs). But they had to wait two whole years until 1956 for their next World Series title.

1942 Dodgers: 104-50

Finished 2nd to: Cardinals (106-48)

The 1942 Dodgers had a 10-game lead in the NL as late as Aug. 5, but the Cardinals mounted a comeback over the final two months of the season to top Brooklyn by two games in the pennant race. St. Louis took three of four games from Brooklyn -- two of which were walk-off wins -- in a late-August series, then won the clubs' final two meetings in mid-September to tie the Dodgers in the standings. The Cards passed the Dodgers the next day, and even though Brooklyn closed the season on an eight-game winning streak, there was little they could do because the Cardinals won 12 of their final 13 games.

1915 Tigers: 100-54

Finished 2nd to: Red Sox (101-50)

The 1915 Tigers had Ty Cobb in his prime -- Cobb had a Major League-best 208 hits and 96 stolen bases, and his .369 batting average won him his ninth straight batting title and was part of a run of 12 batting titles in 13 seasons from 1907-19. But it wasn't enough to get them to the World Series that year. The Red Sox edged Detroit by 2 1/2 games for the AL pennant, led by Hall of Famer Tris Speaker and, of course, pitcher Babe Ruth. The Babe went 18-8 with a 2.44 ERA that year. He also hit a team-high four home runs.

1909 Cubs: 104-49

Finished 2nd to: Pirates (110-42)

This was the year that started the Cubs' 108-year World Series drought. The 1909 Cubs were reigning World Series champions, and they had a stacked team that included Hall of Famer Mordecai "Three Finger" Brown (27-9 with a 1.31 ERA in 342 2/3 innings) and the Joe Tinker-Johnny Evers-Frank Chance double-play combination of poetic fame. But despite Chicago's 104 wins, the Pirates took the pennant by 6 1/2 games, winning 110 games of their own. It wasn't a particularly close race, as the Cubs never got closer than 4 1/2 games back of Pittsburgh in the final month of the season. Little did the Cubs know that their World Series title the year before would be their last for more than a century.

TOPPS LOSES ITS LICENSING DEAL FOR BASEBALL CARDS AND TEARS UP PLANS TO GO PUBLIC

Topps has been synonymous with trading cards, particularly baseball cards, for 70 years.

That era will soon be over. Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association are ending their licensing agreement with Topps in favor of a deal with Fanatics, the up-and-coming sports collectible brand. The loss of baseball rights also led to the abrupt cancellation on Friday of a plan for Topps to go public, casting its future into question.

The company, which also owns Bazooka gum, [announced a deal in April](#) to merge with a special purpose acquisition company, or SPAC, run by Mudrick Capital. The \$1.3 billion merger was set to go to a shareholder vote next week.

Topps and Mudrick announced Friday morning that the deal was off, a day after they were notified that the baseball contracts will not be renewed when they expire in 2022 for players' images, which the players' union controls, and 2025 for team logos, which Major League Baseball controls.

Andy Redman, executive chairman of Topps, said in a statement that the company had been left in the dark by its negotiating partners at the league and the players' union.

"Not only were we unaware that Major League Baseball was negotiating with anybody other than Topps regarding our rights beyond 2025," he said, but Topps was told on Thursday by Noah Garden, the league's chief revenue officer, "that a deal was completed, finalized and exclusive with Fanatics."

"Similarly, as recently as the All-Star Game on July 13 in two one-hour conversations, Evan Kaplan from M.L.B. Players Inc. never indicated to Topps that the union was negotiating with any other parties about our rights," Mr. Redman added. Mr. Kaplan is managing director of the players' union.

A representative for the league did not immediately respond to a request for comment. A spokesman for the union did not have a comment.

Topps has been owned by Tornante, the investment firm of the former Walt Disney Company chief Michael Eisner, and the private equity firm Madison Dearborn since 2007, when the two acquired it [for \\$385 million](#).

Fanatics, [most recently valued at \\$18 billion](#), has been drawing on its ties to major sports league teams to expand [beyond hats, hoodies and other branded merchandise](#). In June, it started a digital collectibles firm, Candy Digital, which has teamed up with Major League Baseball to introduce [a series of nonfungible tokens](#). Fanatics has also poached a number of executives from sports teams, gambling companies and tech firms as it considers expanding into ticketing, betting and gambling.

The baseball deal reflects Fanatics' growth ambitions, moving into baseball cards when they have exploded in popularity, amid growing interest from homebound traders and digital investors buying NFTs.

Fanatics will create a new trading card company and give both Major League Baseball and the players' union seats on the board, said a person familiar with the plans, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because those plans were not yet public. The union and the league will get a stake in the company, a shift to owning a piece of the company that makes money from

its members' images rather than simply licensing those images. Sports unions have in recent years [bolstered their commercial arms](#) to help players earn more from their likenesses.

Riding high on its new licensing deals, Fanatics could consider trying to acquire one of the three major card companies: Panini, Upper Deck or Topps, a person familiar with the company's thinking said. That would mirror its strategy with the apparel company Majestic, which it [acquired](#) after winning the rights to make major-league uniforms that Majestic previously held.

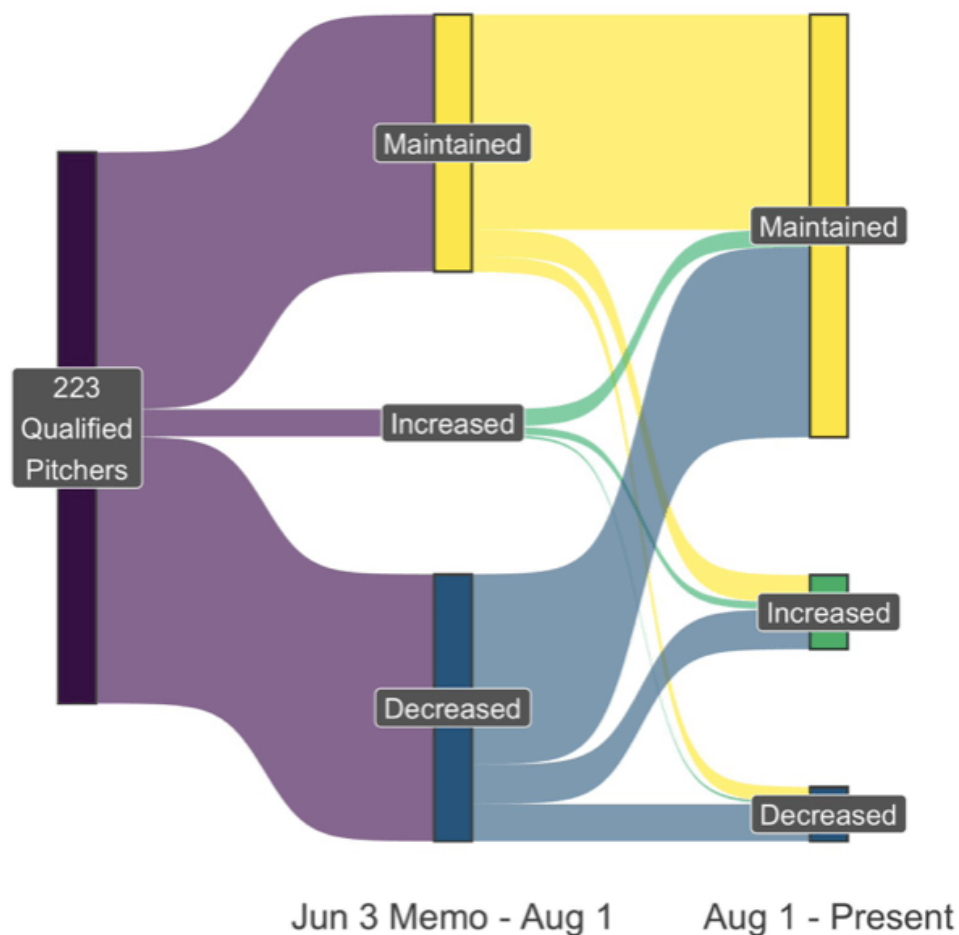
STATE OF THE PUSH TO GET RID OF STICKY STUFF

Does baseball want to make sure that no pitchers *anywhere* are using a foreign substance to enhance the spin and stuff of their pitches? Or is it okay with rarer infractions? What's the major motivation — making sure nobody does it at all, or reducing the dominance of spin (and resultant strikeouts) in the game?

The reason to ask is that some evidence exists that spin is creeping back into the major league game. The overall spin in the league is nowhere near where it was before late June, when baseball started to frisk pitchers in-game in an effort to spot and stop the use of sticky stuff. But some pitchers have found a way to increase their spin rates significantly after an early July post-enforcement swoon.

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4-Seam Fastball Spin Rate Change



So of the 200-plus qualified starting pitchers who were pitching in June, a little under half maintained their spin rate after the memo and the enforcement. Just a handful increased their spin, and the largest portion saw their spin decrease. And from that group, the group that decreased, roughly a fifth of them have seen their spin then subsequently *increase*. For roughly seven pitchers (depending on your thresholds and what significant dates you use), that increase was on the level of 200 or more RPM, around what we found might be attributable to some of the [more extreme substances like Spider Tack](#).

These numbers are in line with anecdotal concerns that players are finding a way around the enforcement strategy.

“You should also take a look at spin by inning,” said a major league coach about what they were seeing. The thinking was that because the inspections are somewhat rote — they’re done in the same three locations on a pitcher’s body and equipment, and conducted in one of the early innings and then one of the later innings — a starting pitcher could find a new location for his

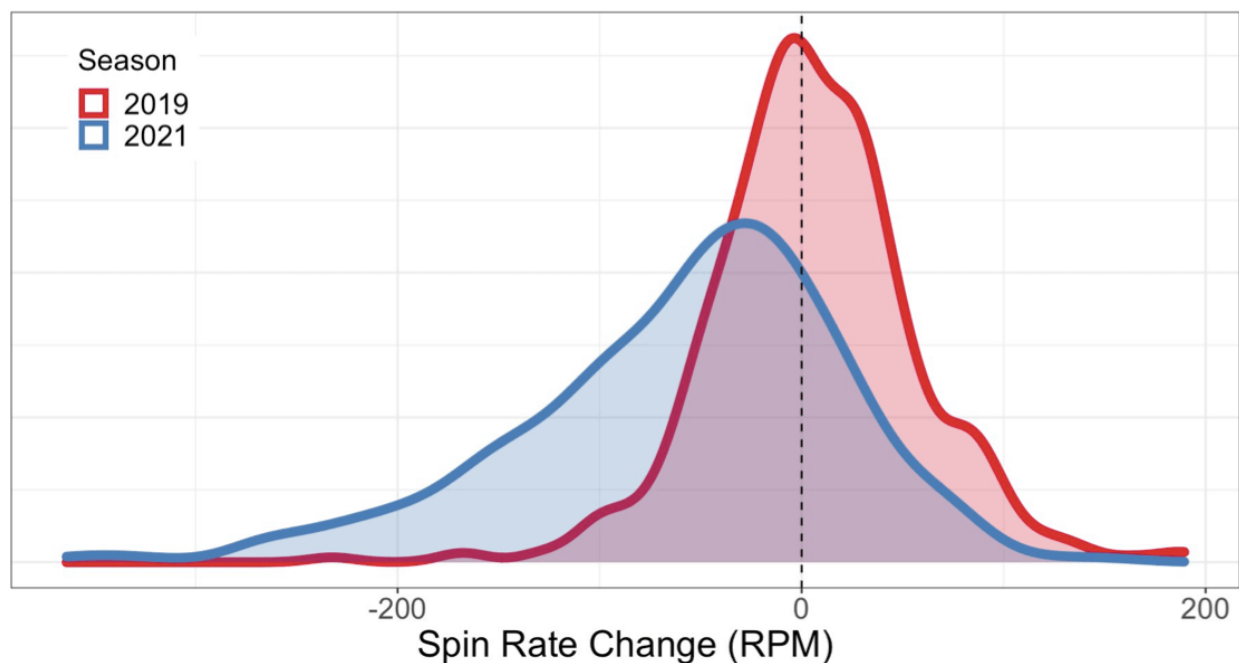
grip substance, or a starting pitcher who has just been checked might feel like they've got a couple of innings before they get checked again.

The variance in spin from inning to inning is up nearly 50 percent in August compared to earlier in the season. Among pitchers who had three starts in August and five starts in April and May, the standard deviation in spin from inning to inning has increased from 21.5 RPM to 29.4 RPM. The number of pitchers that had more than a 50 RPM standard deviation from inning to inning doubled in August.

In other words: from inning to inning, spin rates are jumping a lot more post-enforcement than pre-enforcement. And that 50 RPM threshold is interesting. Here's a graph that shows what league spin changes looked like in 2019 vs this season. You'll notice that a 50 RPM change would represent a significant level of change in 2019. Now there are pitchers seeing that sort of change from inning to inning in August of 2021.

Spin Rate Change Density | FF

04/01-06/02 vs 06/03-Present



You'll also notice from the chart that spin is down this year. That's still true, even with August included in the data set. The enforcement effort has had an effect. The ants have been cleaned up, the food thrown out, the league-wide strikeout rate is down by around the one percent figure that [our model predicted](#), and four-seamers have lost around an inch of ride and 10 percent of their whiffs since late June.

Baseball is a little different now. But the cheese is still out there (there's too much money at stake, and an inch of ride and all those fastball whiffs could be the difference between sinking

and swimming), and the cracks in the door (and the enforcement policy) are too large to keep the ants out forever. Ants always find a way.

So the main question for all of us fans and stakeholders in the game is the same: Is this winning?

'He Knows It All Because He's Seen It All'

Steve Vucinich's 54th and final season with the Athletics has pushed the team's equipment manager past Connie Mack for the longest run in franchise history. He has stories to spare.

Steve Vucinich has been around the A's for so long, has known so many people and seen so many things, that when he starts talking about the old days, one story seems to flow into the next. It almost has to.

This year marks Vucinich's 54th with the franchise — the team's entire run in Oakland — and it vaults the A's equipment manager ahead of the venerable Connie Mack when it comes to years of service with the team. Mack, of course, began managing the Philadelphia Athletics in the team's inaugural season in 1901 and held the position for the next 50 years, abetted by the not-inconsequential detail that he was also the team's owner (a role he continued until 1954 when he sold the debt-ridden franchise).

Should one manage to vault ahead of such a legend, one becomes, by way of the transitive property, a legend oneself. And legends have stories. If you're lucky, you'll get to hear some of them from Vucinich, one barely acknowledged transition at a time.

"Lew Krausse had one of the worst tempers ever," said Vucinich, 69, one recent day from behind his desk at the Oakland Coliseum. "He'd take a bat to his locker and just hammer it, screaming. Catfish Hunter was the opposite. One time we were screwing around in the clubhouse, playing football. Cat was pulled from the game early; he snuck in and went, 'Aha! Caught you!' He was just so mellow even though he'd just gotten his ass kicked. Hunter's best friend on the team was Paul Lindblad, a guy from Chanute, Kansas, an avid hunter and fisherman. That's why they clicked. Paul was one of the first guys I ever saw run for exercise. He ended up playing in Texas, and he liked it so much that he stayed there and became a home builder. One time, a bunch of guys went deer hunting, and Paul takes his dog with him. Well, they got so far out, and here comes Paul two hours later carrying the dog. The dog got so tired he didn't want to move, and Paul had to carry the dog the last two miles back. That was a guy in great shape."

Eat your heart out, Connie Mack.

This season will be Vucinich's final one with the A's; in March he announced that, after spring training next year, he will finally retire. He's already booked a summer cruise to Alaska, as if to protect himself from revisiting the decision.

[‘He’s Catholic, Al. Hire Him.’](#)

Through Vucinich's decades with the A's — during which his positions have included peanut vendor, ball boy, home clubhouse attendant, assistant equipment manager, visiting clubhouse manager and, since 1993, home clubhouse and equipment manager — he has seen the first major league game played in Oakland, two perfect games, five work stoppages and six World Series appearances. He watched the birth of [the Swingin' A's](#), the advent of Billy Ball, the rise and fall of the Bash Brothers and the creation of Moneyball.

He has packed the team for one trip to Mexico and three to Japan, and twice visited Catfish Hunter's farm in Hertford N.C. He's been on hand for 21 postseason series (plus three wild-card play-in games) and four championships, mopping up more spilled champagne than a Times Square street cleaner on New Year's Day.

In the process, Vucinich, who is called Vuc (pronounced “Voose”) by pretty much everybody, has become the institutional memory of his club.

“If you want to know any history about the Oakland Athletics, call Vuc,” said Ray Fosse, who played with the A's from 1973 to 1975 and has been part of the team's broadcast crew since 1986. “He knows it all because he's seen it all.”

“People will tell you how Vuc is the historian of the organization,” added Billy Beane, the team's executive vice president of baseball operations, “but that's about 50th on the list of who he is and what he's meant to the team.”

Vucinich is a local, born in Alameda, just across a narrow estuary from where the Athletics have played since arriving from Kansas City in 1968. He began hawking peanuts at the Coliseum in 1966 as a teenager, first for the Raiders and then, two years later, for the A's. The latter job lasted all of four days, at which point one of the team's clubhouse attendants unexpectedly quit. Vucinich descended into the depths of the Coliseum, glad-handing a security guard to gain access to the clubhouse office of the equipment man Al Zych. There, he lobbied Zych and a club vice president who happened to be making the rounds.

“What high school do you go to, kid?” asked Joe DiMaggio, the vice president in question.

“St. Joe's,” said Vuc.

“He's Catholic, Al,” the Hall of Famer said. “Hire him.”

Zych did as instructed. Vucinich still hasn't left.

Vucinich's parents did not approve of his promotion to clubhouse attendant, less because it distracted from his high school studies and more because it paid only \$5 a day when pushing peanuts in the grandstand earned him closer to \$20. For Vucinich, the money was incidental.

He became a salaried employee in 1974 when he was named visiting clubhouse manager, a promotion that inspired him to drop out of college. "It got me inside the gates," Vucinich said. "Plus, it was a full-time gig with decent money."

To describe the money as decent involved some hustle. Vucinich's salary as a clubhouse manager, or clubbie — \$300 per month — was decidedly *not* decent. But like all clubbies, he made plenty of extra cash through players who paid for services like food and laundry (in 1974 it was \$5 per head, per day). Vucinich got to keep whatever remained after expenses. Those profits, plus tips for personal errands, could more than double his paycheck.

Special requests from players are an endless source of Vucinich's stories. He found an after-hours birthday cake for Roger Clemens and once filled a steamer trunk with Coors for Carl Yastrzemski and Dwight Evans when they were unable to source the beer east of Kansas. (Modern versions of the same story involve procuring players wine from Napa and the occasional In-N-Out burger run.)

"It's the toughest job in baseball, taking care of a bunch of prima donnas, each of whom has a different need and thinks he's the best guy and expects you to take care of him *right now*," said Sal Bando, captain of the three-peat championship A's teams from 1972 to 1974. "The way Vuc has handled it all these years, it's amazing."

These days, the parameters of Vucinich's position are more profound than ever. He arrives at the ballpark at about 10 a.m. for night games, and remains until things wrap up. He packs the team — communal equipment and individual gear alike — for every road trip. Whereas uniform orders once consisted of jerseys, pants and cotton undershirts, today they include throwback and alternate options, plus a broad array of performance gear. Then again, Vucinich no longer has to stock or clean ashtrays.

"Everything's changing," he said, "so you'd better get on board or you're going to ride that pony out of the parking lot and not come back."

Last season was particularly trying, with rigid coronavirus protocols affecting every level of clubhouse interaction. The M.L.B. procedure document Vucinich had to implement was 107 pages and covered everything from individual toiletries to pitchers keeping their own baseballs for bullpen use. Vucinich removed clubhouse furniture and transitioned the team's dining facility outdoors, making do with a staff at two-thirds capacity given the strict limits on clubhouse personnel.

He endured. Vuc has made a career of enduring.

The Next Chapter

For Vucinich, an unexpected benefit of the pandemic was its serving as a dry run for retirement. The divorce rate among ballplayers seems to spike shortly after they quit, when their wives learn what it means to live with them full-time. Luckily for Vuc, Mrs. Vuc remains enamored of her husband.

In early February, 1989, Valerie O’Leary was a manager at the A’s spring training hotel. With players not scheduled to arrive for another couple of days, she found Vucinich and a scout as the only patrons at the bar. O’Leary, being the consummate hostess, comped them some drinks, leading her husband to joke ever since that “I met her when she was buying rounds for the house.”

The couple married in 1990, and three years later welcomed a daughter, Kayla. In 1996, when Kayla was three, she and her mother were watching the A’s on TV when the camera panned to Vuc in the dugout. “That’s Steve Vucinich,” Fosse said on the broadcast, “who says that it’s time for Kayla to go to bed now.”

The befuddled little girl could not understand why, when she waved to daddy, he would not wave back.

As Vucinich prepares for life at home full time, he still talks reverently about the clubhouse men who preceded him. He recalls listening to stories from Pete Sheehy of the Yankees, and the Kawano brothers — Yosh with the Cubs and Nobe with the Dodgers — and Mike Murphy, who has been with the Giants since 1958.

“Let me tell you about Butch Yatkeman, the equipment guy for the Cardinals,” Vucinich said, launching into another story. “When Butch retired, the players got him a first-class ticket anywhere he wanted to go on TWA. Well, he used it to go to Chicago to see the Cardinals. He could have driven there in three hours. He didn’t want to go anyplace else.”

So why quit? Vucinich is nearly 70, and is making more money than ever. Sort of. M.L.B.’s latest collective bargaining agreement, signed at the tail end of 2016, banned clubbie dues, which by that point had risen to \$75 per player per day. The A’s balanced the discrepancy with a pay raise that, while not fully accounting for money lost, did just about double Vucinich’s base salary. For a man whose pension is based on his highest-earning years, this was significant.

His decision to retire is about more than money, though. Sometimes it’s just time.

Today’s players could be Vucinich’s grandchildren, a detail that is not lost on him. It also helps explain how he has managed to persevere. “A lot of guys in my position don’t last because they

don't want to change," he said. "Well, players have changed, so I have to change, too. Believe it or not, it's helped keep me young."

Next spring, when Vucinich packs his own gear bag — long labeled No. 27, in honor of his favorite player, Catfish Hunter — for the final time, it will mark the end of the longest era in Athletics history.

"Vuc's retirement still doesn't seem real," Beane said. "When he's actually gone — when I walk into the clubhouse and he's not there — it's going to hit me harder than I think I'm admitting to right now. He just means so much to the team."

Vucinich merely smiles at notions like this. He has trips to make with his family, and beers to drink with his pals in Arizona, where he has made his off-season home since 2001. And who knows? If the A's buy him a plane ticket to travel anywhere he wants to go, he might just choose to fly a couple of hours north to watch a team he could never truly quit.

JAYSON STARK—WEIRD AND WILD, PADRES/DODGERS AND MORE

Dodgers 5 Padres 3 in 16 innings

THE TOTALS! Here at Weird and Wild, we do the math so you don't have to. This game featured: 5 hours and 49 minutes of upside-down baseball, 125 batters marching toward the old batter's box, 489 pitches delivered to those 125 hitters, 47 names in one box score, 19 pitchers, two Padres pitchers pinch-hitting in extra innings *with the bases loaded* (which didn't end well), 14 hits, 34 strikeouts, 14 walks, but a record-tying 11 intentional walks, an *intentional balk*, Max Muncy going 0 for 7 *on his birthday*, three runners getting thrown out at the plate on extra-inning ground balls where they didn't have to run, 10 consecutive Zombie Runners that *didn't* score in extra innings and exactly one hit by the Padres in the last 4 hours and 15 minutes of this game. Got it? Whew.

FOUR HOURS WITHOUT A HIT? All right, about those Padres. It isn't quite true that they went 0 for 4 hours in this game — but it was close. According to our great Padres writer, Dennis Lin, the Padres did go hitless for an incomprehensible 3 hours and 42 minutes! What?

Right. In between an [Adam Frazier](#) fifth-inning single at 8:45 PDT (11:45 back east) and [Fernando Tatis'](#) game-tying homer in the 15th at 12:27 PDT (3:27 a.m. back east), the Padres sent 38 men to the plate ... *and none of them got a hit*. Yet amazingly, after all that, *they still hadn't lost yet!*

We ran that past our friends at STATS Perform. And in the 48 seasons of reliable play-by-play data, dating back to 1974, they could only find two other teams that sent 38 hitters in a row to the dish (or more) without any of them getting a hit.

Pittsburgh Pirates, 07/06/1980 vs [ChC](#): 45
San Diego Padres, 08/25/2021 vs LAD: 38
New York [Mets](#), 04/28/1985 vs [Pit](#): 38

The Pirates went from the sixth to the 19th innings between hits in that game in 1980. The Mets went hitless between the first and 12th in that game in 1985. And both of those teams actually won — the Pirates in 20 innings, the Mets in 18. Wild. Or is that Weird?

WE AIN'T SCARED OF NO ZOMBIES — Before this marathon busted out, no extra-inning game in [the Manfred Man era](#) had lasted more than 13 innings. That's because those Zombie Runners, who get awarded second base with nobody out, almost always score eventually. But not in this thing.

These teams somehow went 10 consecutive half-innings in extras — all of which started with a runner in scoring position, remember — without getting any of them around. So how many times has that happened — in *any* game, not just with Zombie Runners lurking? In those 48 seasons of STATS play-by-play data, that answer is: Never!

STATS found zero games in which any teams went 10 straight half-innings — extra innings or otherwise — with at least one runner in scoring position without any of those runners scoring. The last time that even happened in six straight half-innings in extras was May 5, 2014, when the Pirates and [Giants](#) did that. Pre-Zombie!

SET THAT ALARM FOR 3 A.M. — It wasn't till really, really late back east that run-scoring finally filled the night. The Dodgers scored two in the top of the 15th, on three singles, two stolen bases and one Zombie Runner. Then Tatis lit up the night with a riveting two-run, game-tying home run in the bottom of the 15th. But then A.J. Pollock won it for the Dodgers in the 16th with a two-run *leadoff home run*. So...

- It was the first game in which both teams homered in the 15th inning or later, according to the great Doug (Kernels) Kern, since David Ortiz and [Mark Teixeira](#) bopped late-night bombs on April 10, 2015.
- Pollock hit the first multi-run home run by a Dodger, in the 16th inning or later, in over a century, since Hi (Hello) Myers hit one in Philadelphia — *on April 30, 1919!* (Thank you, Doug Kern.)
- But it was the first game in history in which *both* teams hit a multi-run homer in the 15th or later, according to STATS. So wow.

IT TAKES TWO — Thanks to Jon Weisman, of [Dodger Thoughts](#), for the late-night tweeting that inspired this gem. Over the first 28 half-innings of this game, every one of them featured no more than one run (and mostly no runs, obviously). But then ...

There were three half-innings *in a row* in the 15th and 16th, with *two* runs. Had to fire that question past STATS, too — and learned that ... in the entire modern era, dating back to 1901, there had been only one other game featuring at least 28 half-innings in a row of one or no runs, followed by at least three half-innings with two runs (or more). That was [Astros](#) 7, Mets 5, in 16 similarly surreal innings, on June 16, 1995. Joe Orsulak with the last out!

ZEROES ARE OVERRATED — Another hat tip to Jon Weisman for leading me down this rabbit hole.

So has *that* ever happened? A game in which 10 pitchers or more show up on the mound for any team, at least nine of them allow no earned runs and the 10th (the only one to get scored on) vultures the win? Since I'm only a glutton for so much punishment, I merely checked games before September — but did go all the way back to 1901.

And how many other games did I find that fit this description? If you guessed none, you win!

AND THAT'S NOT ALL — Want more? Sure. Why not?

- The Dodgers issued *eight* intentional walks in this game (of course, that's a record). And that was in *six innings* (10th to 15th). The [Orioles](#) have issued eight intentional walks *in the last calendar year*. That was in 1,349 innings — in which they faced 5,168 hitters and had no interest in walking pretty much any of them.
- How'd all those Zombie Runners avoid scoring in extra innings? The two teams went a combined 0 for 12 with ZRISP (Zombie Runners in Scoring Position) from the 10th to the 12th. Then came a non-RBI single, followed by 0-for-another-12 with ZRISP, followed by yet another non-RBI single. So that's how.
- The Dodgers used 15 players in the No. 9 hole. That's a first in the modern era for games before September, Doug Kern reports.
- The Padres went a mind-blowing 4-for-52 in this game. According to our friends at Codify Baseball, no team in the modern era had ever gotten more at-bats and fewer hits in *any* game.
- Oh, and one more thing. The Dodgers had [Corey Knebel](#) commit an *intentional balk* in the 15th, to get [Victor Caratini](#) off second base so he couldn't relay signals to Tatis. That went well. Two pitches later, Tatis whomped that game-tying homer. How many times had Knebel balked unintentionally in his career before that? That would be none. And the last time the Dodgers tried that intentional-balk trick, back in 2019 with [Kenley Jansen](#) on the mound, who was the hitter? Who else? Victor Caratini.

Orioles, oh NOOO

Here's the first sign your team is having kind of a rough season: When its name appears in a sentence that includes the phrase:

Since the 1899 Cleveland Spiders.

Here at Weird and Wild World HQ, we love those Spiders, a.k.a., The Worst Team That Ever Played Baseball. By which we mean: *114 games under .500 (20-134)! ... and also minus-724 run differential! ... and also spectacular 1-40 finish in their last 41 games!*

So the good news is, the 2021 Orioles aren't *that* bad. But they've now, officially, worked themselves into the conversation in the Worst Teams Since the Spiders debate. And as someone who loves Camden Yards and has a mother-in-law who still watches every Orioles game, I'm not a fan of that. But here we are. And here's why I can argue this case:

THE 33-SKIDOO CLUB — Fortunately, the Orioles managed to win Wednesday (and also Thursday). So at least they avoided becoming only the seventh team in the post-Spiders era to lose 20 games in a row. Unfortunately, they did not avoid this:

- They did become the first team to lose 19 in a row (or more) and have another losing streak of 14 in a row (or longer) in the same season since ... (right!) ... *the Spiders!*
- They also became just the second team in the post-Spiders portion of baseball history to rack up 33 losses *just in two losing streaks*. And the last team to do that did it *60 years ago*. That was Clay Dalrymple's fabled 1961 [Phillies](#), with a record 23-gamer and a 10-gamer. Not pictured: Casey Stengel's belovedly horrendous 1962 Mets.
- And what was the last team to do it before those Phillies? ... Right! ... *the Spiders!* With 40 games worth of losses in just two streaks (24 and 16) — plus many more horrid streaks where those two came from. But just remember, had the Orioles not won Wednesday, they would have been the first team to reach 34 since ... right! ..*the Spiders!*

TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST SWOON — By winning Wednesday and Thursday, the Orioles guaranteed they wouldn't break the record for worst winning percentage in a calendar month (any month) by any team since ... right! ... *the Spiders!* (That modern record, for months of 21 games or more, is 1-22, by [Jeff Stone's 1988 Orioles](#).) But...

- These Orioles *were* the first team to *start* any calendar month by going 1-20 since those '88 Orioles. And the last team before them to do that was ... right! ... *the Spiders!* (They went 1-27 that September, after the city of Cleveland told them to please never play a home game again.)
- And also ... the Orioles' 7.68 team ERA in August, even after those two straight wins, is still quite a sight. But that's not even the Weird and Wild part. It would also be *the worst ERA by any team in any month* since earned runs became an official stat over a century ago. (Minimum: 21 games in the month.) Those 1899 Spiders, incidentally, averaged 8.14 runs allowed per game

that September. But there were lots and lots of errors in those days. So had ERA existed, even they wouldn't have gotten to 7.68.

OFF THE RECORD — Fourteen pitchers have started a game for these Orioles. Zero of those 14 have a winning record. Would you believe that 14 pitchers also started a game for those 1899 Spiders? None of them had a winning record, either, because ... *Spiders!* (The only pitcher on that Spiders team, in fact, who didn't have a losing record was their *shortstop*, Harry Lochhead, who got into one game in emergency relief, but a little too late to lose it.)

WHEN SPIDERS INSPIRE — Finally, after running up a 19-game run differential of (yikes) *minus-108* — worst by any team over any 19-game span since ... right! ... *the Spiders* — something amazing happened Wednesday. The Orioles went into the eighth inning trailing the [Angels](#), and then...

The O's erupted for five runs in the eighth ... to take the lead after the third inning for the first time in 15 days ... and then won, to stop that losing streak. And according to the Elias Sports Bureau, only one other team in history had ever come from behind in the eighth inning or later to win a game that ended a losing streak of 15 games or longer.

And that team was ... right! ... *the Spiders!* Who ended a 24-game streak. And then, naturally, never won again before the franchise was mercifully disbanded.

HEY, "Y" NOT — There are times in every season when I'm well aware there is reason to wonder what's wrong with me. This note might be one of those times. But I'm going there anyway. "Y" the heck not?

This happened last Friday, in an Astros-Mariners game. First, [Yordan Alvarez](#) stepped in to hit in the third inning — and homered. Then [Yuli Gurriel](#) was next, and...

So if you're catching on here, that's back-to-back home runs by guys whose first names start with a "Y." And guess who was pitching? And what do you mean — "Y" do I ask?

That would be [Yusei Kikuchi](#), naturally. Which meant we'd just seen ... back-to-back homers by dudes whose names start with a "Y" — off a pitcher whose first name also begins with a "Y." And I don't know why my friends from STATS even humor me when I ask them stuff like: Has this ever happened? But luckily, they do. And that answer is...

It *has* happened one other time in history: [Yasiel Puig](#) and Yasmani Grandall, off [Yovani Gallardo](#). On the Fourth of Jul-"y" in 2016. And "y"es, "y"ou're welcome!

CATCH SOME ZZZ'S — Luckily, I'm not the only one. Same night. Rays-White Sox in the Trop. And NBC Sports Chicago's Chris Kamka was all over this big moment in the history of the alphabet.

Starting catcher for the [White Sox](#): [Seby Zavala](#).

Starting catcher for the [Rays](#): [Mike Zunino](#).

Last game with two starting catchers whose names started with Z: June 4, 1965 — Don Zimmer (Senators) and Jerry Zimmerman ([Twins](#)). And wasn't that a special moment of alphabetical Zen?

THE BUCK DOESN'T STOP HERE — The most useless edition of useless name info keeps on rolling, though. When Giannis Antetokoumpo joined the [Brewers](#) last week (well, Brewers ownership, anyway), I thought to myself:

Breaking! We have a new longest last name in baseball history!

Except for two minor issues: 1) He would need to somehow play, which I'm 100 percent down for. And 2) even if he did, it turns out that Antetokoumpo *looks* longer than it is. It's "only" 13 letters, my friends. So Giannis would still be tied for No. 2 in the longest-baseball-name all-time annals, even if he plays first base some night.

- The reigning champ: Still [Jarrod Saltalamacchia](#) (still 14 letters).
- The large group with Giannis (kind of) at 13 includes Tim Spooneybarger, William Van Landingham and Todd Hollandsworth. OK, I'm done now.

THE TY THAT BINDS — So ... maybe I'm not done, after all. Because [Ty France](#). Who, on Sunday and Monday, did something awesome: Hit game-tying home runs in the ninth inning two games in a row.

That's a first in [Mariners](#) history, by the way.

Which got me to thinking again. Ty France — Game-Tyer!

Because that makes *six* game-"ty"-ing homers this year for the pride of France (but no, not *that* France). So I wondered, because of course I did: Is it possible this guy just set the record for most "tys" by a Ty?

OK, so due to technical difficulties with digging up accurate Ty Cobb home-run data (because 1909!), the Peach doesn't qualify for this conversation. But I could check all the Tys in the post-Cobb-ian era, because yeah, I did. And the winner is ...

Ty Wigginton! Who, amazingly, hit nine game-"ty"-ing homers in 2006. But hang on. All of France's game-"ty"-ers were launched in the sixth inning or later. And Wiggy only hit five of those that year. So there's that.

BROTHERLY GLOVE DEPT. — Last Saturday in San Diego, [Aaron Nola](#) finally pitched to his big brother, Austin, for the first time ever — and whiffed him in their very first plate appearance. In

fact, Aaron threw the two hardest pitches he's thrown all season *to his brother*, which is a tribute to brotherly adrenaline at its finest. Right?

But back to that strikeout. If they're looking for trash-talk suggestions, they should know that's actually the fourth time in the last 50 years that a pitching brother has punched out his position-player brother the first time they faced each other in the big leagues. The others, because of course you have to know:

April 12, 1988 — Mark Davis K's Mike Davis

Sept. 5, 2019 — Brian Moran K's Colin Moran*

July 10, 2021 — Kyle Zimmer K's Bradley Zimmer*

**only career PA against his brother!*

(Source — [sportradar.com](https://www.sportradar.com))

CATCH HIM IF YOU CAN — In non-family/Name Game news ... is there anybody in baseball having a less ballyhooed big year than Salvy Pérez? The [Royals](#) catcher just had his *fifth* multi-homer game of the year. And that's not a sentence we've written about a lot of catchers. In fact ...

The only catchers with more multi-homer games in a season than that, according to baseball-reference.com/Stathead, (and by the way we're graciously including games where they DH'd):

8: Javy López, 2003

6: Mike Piazza, 1995

The group at five includes Yogi Berra, Roy Campanella, Joe Torre, Gabby Hartnett and (of course) Matt Nokes!

HOME OF THE FREELAND — I don't even know where to start with Game 2 of that Cubs-Rockies doubleheader Wednesday — the first seven-inning doubleheader game of the Zombie Runner era to make it to a 10th inning. But it was hard to miss this:

[Kyle Freeland](#) didn't pitch for the [Rockies](#) ... *but he did play right field!*

That happened in the 10th inning of a game that got way out of control. But whatever. The Rockies won anyway (13-10). And if we don't count [Michael Lorenzen](#) or [Shohei Ohtani](#), that goes down as just the second time in the last five years that any pitcher played the outfield in a game that A) his team won and B) he never got around to pitching in.

The other to do it: [Adam Kolarek](#), who spent *two innings* in right field for the Dodgers (the eighth and ninth) in a 5-0 win over the Angels last Sept. 27. Last to do this before him was [Pedro Strop](#) in the Joe Maddon Plays *Three* Pitchers in the Outfield Game on June 28, 2016. And

why do we mention that? Well, who was the opposing manager in the Adam Kolarek Game? Right. Joe Maddon.

Trea Turner hit a home run to lead off the Dodgers' half of the first inning against the Mets this week. . But it wasn't just the home run that we'd seen before. Who was pitching for the Dodgers that night? A fellow named [Max Scherzer](#).

Now think back to Turner's two other home runs leading off a game this season. Who was pitching in both of those games? Also Max Scherzer. Except ...

These games happened for *two different teams* (Dodgers, [Nationals](#)).

So are you wondering what I was wondering? Has anyone ever hit leadoff homers for the same starting pitcher in the same season for two different teams? I ran that past STATS. And the correct Strange But True answer is ...

Only one man has ever done that. And it's ... Trea Turner.

In fact, there are only six other instances since 1901 of any hitter/pitcher combo doing that *in their careers*. And the 2021 Nationals got mixed up in one of them, too.

Tommy Harper Marty Pattin Brewers, Red Sox

Bill North Vida Blue A's, Giants

Rafael Furcal Odalis Pérez Braves, Dodgers

Rafael Furcal Greg Maddux Braves, Dodgers

Trent Grisham Zach Davies Brewers, Padres

Kyle Schwarber Jon Lester Cubs, Nationals

Trea Turner Max Scherzer Nationals, Dodgers

(Source — STATS Perform)

The Phillies. They can find painful ways to lose, man. But also Strange But True ways to lose. Let's review what happened to them last Saturday in San Diego.

With two outs in the ninth, Aaron Nola was pitching a one-hitter ... and had allowed zero earned runs ... and had a two-run lead. And then...

[Jake Cronenworth](#) took him to the Crone Zone, with a game-tying two-run homer.

The Phillies would lose in 10. And you know how long it had been since any team lost a game like that (no more than one hit allowed over 8 2/3, no earned runs, lead of at least two runs)? How about 32 years.

There are only two other games, according to STATS, that fit that description since 1974. Wow.

Date/pitcher/team/opponent/hits/lead/losing final score

April 22, 1985 Dave LaPoint, SF LAD 1 2-0 3-2 (10)

July 23, 1989 Chuck Cary, NYY TEX 1 4-0 5-4 (10)

August 21, 2021 Aaron Nola, PHI SD 1 3-1 4-3 (10)

JOIN THE ANGELS, SEE THE WORLD — Here's to the Angels, a team that just finished the Strangest But Truest road trip of the season ... to five different states!

They visited New York (makeup game with the Yankees) ... and Michigan (three in Detroit) ... and Ohio (two in Cleveland) ... and Pennsylvania (Little League Classic in Williamsport) ... and, finally, Maryland (hey there, Camden Yards).

Not to say you don't see that much. But the last time the Angels did that, according to Elias, [Mike Trout](#) wasn't born yet (April 20-May 3, 1990). And besides those five states, they also visited three different time zones: Central (Minnesota) ... Eastern (Boston/New York/Baltimore) ... Pacific (makeup game in Seattle).

THE BOSTON SLAMMER — About 20 minutes into his second stint with the [Red Sox](#), Travis Shaw did [this](#) cool thing Monday—grand slam against the Rangers. It was only the fifth walk-off slam, in the 11th inning or later, in the history of the Red Sox. But that wasn't even close to the Strange But True part. The Strange But True part was that (thanks to Zombie Runner Wackiness), [Travis Shaw](#) hit a walk-off grand slam in an inning *where only three hitters batted*. (Error ... intentional walk ... slam!)

The only other walk-off slam, in a three-batter inning, in history: José Altuve on June 15 — also against the [Rangers](#). Fun Zombie Runner niche by those Rangers!

JOE POSNANSKI OF THE ATHLETIC

[Christian Yelich](#) had been in a nasty power slump. Since June 27 — 36 games — he'd hit one home run. He was hitting .216 over that time and slugging .304. It was staggering and awful to watch. This guy in 2018 and 2019 was placing his bid for best player in baseball. He won batting titles both seasons, led the league in slugging both seasons, stole a bunch of bases, too, won the MVP in 2018, and finished second for the MVP in 2019 even after missing a bunch of games after fouling a ball directly off his kneecap.

Everything about the guy was both solid and awesome. You couldn't help but like him. His teammates idolized him. The [Brewers](#) went all-in and gave him a nine-year deal for \$215 million.

And he has looked pretty close to helpless ever since. Knee injuries. Back injuries. Bad mojo. He hit just .205 during the 2020 season, but maybe you could chalk that up to the pandemic. But this season more or less picked up where last year's ended, with the added awfulness of his power being gone. In 2018 and 2019, more than one-third of the fly balls he hit left the park. In 2021, that number plummeted to barely 12 percent.

So, it was thrilling to see Yelich smash two home runs, one of them a monster 454-foot grand slam. And it's so tempting to say that Yelich broke out of his power slump and now will return to being the Christian Yelich of old.

And you know what? Maybe he will. It's a pretty good guess that the main reason for his troubles has been nagging, frustrating injuries. He was hitting pretty well coming out of spring training, but back problems forced him to miss three weeks just after the season began. He came back for a game in early May, got two hits, but then missed another two weeks. When he got back, he looked like a shell of himself — he hit less than .200 for a month and then, though his average went up slightly, basically stopped hitting the ball hard.

But it has been better the past 10 games or so. He looks healthier. He seems to feel healthier. There are good feelings as the Brewers maintain the largest division lead in the National League.

"There's a lot of baseball yet to be played," he says. "The season is far from over."

Red Sox in free fall

I have not liked very much what the Boston Red Sox have done since they won their World Series in 2018 with one of the greatest seasons in baseball history. They were meh in 2019 as their starting pitching fell apart. Then, they let manager Alex Cora go over his involvement in the [Astros' sign-stealing scandal](#) — he was eventually suspended for a year. During that year, the Red Sox traded the wonderful Mookie Betts to Los Angeles as they sought to get under the

luxury-tax threshold. Then they [celebrated on social media](#) after they dropped below the luxury-tax threshold. Then, as soon as Cora's suspension was over, they rehired him.

Then they got off to a shockingly good start in 2021, found themselves in first place against all expectations and somehow [ended up getting super prospect Marcelo Mayer](#) in the draft. Everything seemed to be coming up roses.

And the Red Sox responded to this good fortune ... by basically doing nothing. They desperately needed pitching help, but they didn't land [Max Scherzer](#) or [Kyle Gibson](#) or Jose Berríos or anybody else. They stood back as the [Yankees](#) got [Anthony Rizzo](#), even as the Sox desperately needed help at first base with [Bobby Dalbec](#) struggling mightily. They did pick up an injured [Kyle Schwarber](#), but beyond that, they made no real effort to get better for the final two months of the season — even though they knew that [Chris Sale](#) would come back, which might help make the Red Sox dangerous come playoff time.

The Sox lost a stupefyingly bad game today against the doormat [Texas Rangers](#). Boston committed five errors, ran into one of the worst double plays imaginable and got entirely shut down by [Jordan Lyles](#), who had given up 29 runs in his previous 35 innings. It was as bad as it gets in a 10-1 loss, and Boston is now 7-15 since the trade deadline — including an ugly sweep against the Yankees — and has not only dropped out of first place in the division but also is now on the outside looking in at the wild-card race.

I'm just not liking this team's direction at all. As I've written before, if you are the Boston Red Sox with all those resources, [you have to go for it every year](#). Yes, as many Red Sox fans will tell you, this is a flawed team that was unquestionably overachieving earlier ... but the nemesis Yankees went all-in to win. The Red Sox did not, and that could shape the American League season.

Red-hot ... [Royals](#)?

The Kansas City Royals have not been much of a factor in 2021 — there's a good chance that unless you live in or around Kansas City, you have been entirely unaware of them this season. And that's not unjustified; they have not been closer than 15 games back in the division since the beginning of July.

But this has been a truly weird season for the Royals. They started the year red-hot, won 14 of their first 21 and were in first place in early May. Then they lost a billion games in a row. Then they played quite well and pushed their record to over .500 and were still sort of in the race in early June. Then they lost a billion games in a row. Then, later in the month, they again lost a billion games in a row.

And then they sort of got hot again, won seven of eight, plodded around, and now they are again in a stretch where they have won seven of eight. Since July 20, they are 20-13, the third-

best record in the league over that stretch. And today, they pounded the dominant Astros and Royals legend [Zack Greinke](#), 7-1. The Royals have beaten the Astros in three out of four lately.

Yes, this is just a confirmation that baseball is a really strange game where good teams will play badly for long stretches and bad teams can play really well for long stretches. But I'll tell you what it makes me think about: I really wish baseball would *reward* bad teams that play well rather than punishing them by dropping them in the draft. You're telling me the [Baltimore Orioles](#), who are [tanking like nobody's watching](#), deserve a higher pick than the Royals, who have kept plugging away and clawing and fighting even though the season was lost months ago? Teams should be given a chance to *play their way* out of mediocrity rather than *lose their way* out of mediocrity.

Orioles get destroyed again

OK, so, I cannot honestly say, "Wow, I've never seen anything quite like this Orioles fiasco," because I *have* seen something like it. I had a front-row seat for the Kansas City Royals' 19-game losing streak in 2005. I was a columnist for The Kansas City Star then, and early in that losing streak, I made the joke that I would follow the team and write about it every single day until it won. I saw images during that losing streak that still haunt me.

But here's the thing: The Orioles' 19-game losing streak, impossible as it is to believe, is even worse. The Royals, during their streak, were outscored 148-64, which is abysmal. They had a team ERA of 7.31, which is terrible. They averaged 3.36 runs per game, which is atrocious.

The Orioles have been worse on *every single front*.

I can give you the numbers. The Orioles have been outscored 163-55, their team ERA during the losing streak is 8.50, they are averaging less than three runs per game, but it really comes down to something basic: Those Royals were *trying*. That was just a bad baseball team. They had been bad all year. They had a manager quit on them in the middle of the season. They were playing a hodgepodge of kids who weren't ready, castoffs trying to stay in the big leagues and a handful of good major-leaguers, like Mike Sweeney and [David DeJesus](#) and a young Greinke, who were just trying to figure out what the heck was going on. There was something almost mystical about that team; every ball bounced the wrong way.

But the Orioles — nothing about this team feels right, and it hasn't from the start. Success for this team is losing. The experts say that they have an exciting minor-league system. The accounting books say that only Cleveland and Pittsburgh have lower 40-man payrolls. The system says that the Orioles and [Diamondbacks](#)* are in stiff competition for next year's first overall pick.

** The Diamondbacks are terrible, yes, but they have also been very unlucky. They remind me more of those 2005 Royals. The team is an almost unbelievable 7-24 in one-run games. Even the worst teams tend to win a higher percentage of their one-run games than they do the rest of*

their games — the Orioles, for example, have a .333 winning percentage in one-run games, which is terrible ... but they have a .300 winning percentage in the rest.

The Diamondbacks, meanwhile, have a .225 winning percentage in one-run games and a .385 winning percentage in the rest. This is a bad team, make no mistake about it. But it should have a few more wins.

And this is how you rebuild in 21st-century baseball: You tank and tank until the gravitational pull shifts. The Orioles have had a couple of nice surprises. [Cedric Mullins](#) has emerged as a wonderful power-speed combo player. [John Means](#) has pitched pretty well, and he threw a no-hitter in which he faced the minimum. [Trey Mancini](#) has returned from cancer treatments and has been an inspiration. [Matt Harvey](#), whose career track has been one of the saddest I've ever seen, has kept on trying even with his once-Dark Knight stuff all but gone.

Individually, they're certainly trying.

But collectively, this team was put together to lose ... and it loses. The Orioles already had a 14-game losing streak earlier in the season, but that's nothing compared with this calamity. Already in this streak, they have lost 13-1, 12-3, 16-2 and 10-0. Today, against the distinctly mediocre [Angels](#), they trailed 8-1 in the third inning when they had the genius idea of intentionally walking [Shohei Ohtani](#). I can't even begin to describe how much I hated that walk and the decision-making behind it.

But it was OK because the Orioles gave up five more runs the next inning to cinch the loss.

I know that some Orioles fans are OK with this as long as it leads to being really good in a couple of years. They have seen what strategic tanking did for the Astros, the [Cubs](#), even the [White Sox](#). They wear each loss as a battle scar for what they want to believe are good times ahead — after all, in the grand scope of things, what's the difference between a 90-loss season, a 100-loss season and a 115-loss season?

That's baseball's big problem — there *should* be a difference between those three things. Teams should not be rewarded for 19-game losing streaks where the team's only sign of competitiveness is intentionally walking baseball's most exciting player after the game is already lost.

Sale's immaculate inning

On Sept. 7, 1953, in the second game of a doubleheader between Detroit and Chicago, the [Tigers'](#) Billy Hoelt pitched an immaculate inning — nine pitches, three strikeouts. It was the seventh inning, in case you're fully into the trivia, and he struck out the White Sox's Jim Rivera looking, then Mike Fornieles and Chico Carrasquel swinging.

From what I can tell, nobody noticed. The Detroit Free Press did put the Tigers on the front page of the paper because they swept the doubleheader and in the process moved into sixth place — their “Highest League Standing Since 1951,” the headline blared. But there was no mention of Hoef’s accomplishment.

Maybe that’s not too surprising. The immaculate inning wasn’t really a thing in 1953. And the reason is this: They basically never happened. Hoef’s immaculate inning that day was the first in almost exactly *twenty-five years*. Nobody had thrown one since Lefty Grove back in 1928 — Grove actually had two immaculate innings that season, which tells you a little bit about his dominance.

I bring this up now not only because Chris Sale [pitched an immaculate inning today](#) — the third of his career — but also because there have now been *four* immaculate innings in 2021. Heck, there were only four immaculate innings in the entire 1970s. And this year is actually not particularly special. There were eight immaculate innings in 2019 and eight more in 2017. It’s a fairly common thing now because batters strike out so much more.

In fact, Sale’s immaculate inning pretty much explains why they’re happening more now than ever before. It happened in the third inning of the Boston-Minnesota game, and here it is, pitch by pitch:

Sale versus [Nick Gordon](#)

Pitch 1: 91 mph fastball, middle of the plate, Gordon fouled it into the dirt.

Pitch 2: 76 mph slider, looked at least an inch outside, called a strike by umpire Chris Guccione.

Pitch 3: 94 mph fastball, way up and out of the zone, Gordon swung through it for the whiff.

Sale versus [Andrelton Simmons](#)

Pitch 1: 85 mph changeup, nasty pitch, down and moving away, Simmons swung and missed.

Pitch 2: 79 mph slider, dropped low and out of the zone, Simmons fouled it off.

Pitch 3: 95 mph fastball, even more up and out of the zone than the one to Gordon, Simmons swung through it for the whiff.

Sale versus Rob Refsnyder

Pitch 1: 78 mph slider, perfect pitch, caught Refsnyder looking.

Pitch 2: 87 mph changeup that almost looked like a cutter — except Sale doesn’t really throw a cutter.* Anyway, the ball moved in on the hitter, and Refsnyder fouled it back.

**In 2018, MLB's tracking system labeled two of Sale's pitchers as cutters, and in 2019, he threw two or three pitches that the system simply could not definitively label. Sometimes, the guy just throws pitches that defy explanation.*

Pitch 3: 81 mph slider, broke down and almost into the dirt, nowhere near the zone, and Refsnyder tried to hold back his swing — it looked really close on video — but the umpire ruled that he did swing.

So, nine pitches, and I'd say five of them were outside the strike zone. This is the genius of Sale; he throws pitches that look like strikes until they aren't. And it's a perfect skill in this time when hitters are looking to drive the ball, even at the cost of some swings and misses.

Anyway, Sale is now the second pitcher in baseball history to throw three immaculate innings. The other guy, you might have heard of him: Sandy Koufax.

Stark: Where's the mound? The Atlantic League's latest lab experiment, three weeks in

YORK, Pa. — From the same league that first brought you the Robot Ump Show! ... And Watch Those Hitters Steal First Base! ... It's the Atlantic League's latest, greatest baseball lab experiment, Where's The Mound?

Now here's the correct answer to that question: Where is the mound? Not where it used to be — for, like, the last 128 years.

With deepest apologies to everyone who thought 60 feet, 6 inches was one of baseball's most hallowed numbers, delivered from the mountain top on a stone tablet by Abner Doubleday ... yeah, well, not in the Atlantic League. [Not anymore, at least.](#)

On Aug. 3 (with one funky little exception, which we'll explain shortly), baseball's most innovative independent league moved the gap between home plate and the pitcher's rubber to the newfangled distance of 61 feet, 6 inches. It's "only" a foot. But never have 12 inches rocked the baseball world more than these 12.

From the big leagues to the Atlantic League, players look at this change and are bonded by one common reaction: What the heck are we even doing?

[Big-league All-Star Freddie Freeman](#): I don't know (about) those 61 feet. I don't know. I'm a baseball guy. I'm an old-school young guy, you know? I love (that) it's been 60 feet, 6 inches for a long time. So I don't know.

York Revolution pitcher Duke Von Schamann: We're not here to play in an experimental league. We're here to be the best baseball players we can be. And we want to play that game. We don't want to play a different game.

So that's where some players stand. But high above their orbit, in the 30,000-foot strata where these decisions are made, the folks who run baseball basically respond with a simple: Sorry, not sorry.

All they're aspiring to do, they say, is to look for ways to tweak their sport to make it more entertaining, more watchable, more 21st-century fun. And everybody who signed on to play in the Atlantic League knew the deal.

This is where baseball's biggest ideas are hatched. This is the control room where these experiments will be trotted out, lived out, studied and debated — in real life and real time. And this is no renegade independent league. This is all being brainstormed, sponsored and monitored by [Major League Baseball](#).

So what are they up to here? Why are they messing with this formula that has been in place since the days of Cy Young and Ice Box Chamberlain? And is it producing a new, improved version of baseball that should then head straight for New York, as opposed to York?

We've spent the last few weeks asking big leaguers, baseball officials and the confused citizens of the Atlantic League themselves about this fascinating change. So get ready for a look inside life at 61 feet, 6 inches.

1. Will the first guinea pig please step forward

It was just over three weeks ago, on a Monday in West Virginia, that Gastonia Honey Hunters leadoff man [Boog Powell](#) would go where no baseball player had ever gone before. He would dig into a batter's box and see a pitcher staring back at him, from 61 feet, 6 inches away.

In truth, the league wasn't supposed to start the vaunted 61-6 era until the next day. But the team in West Virginia ran into reconstruct-the-mound challenges and got league permission to jump the gun by a day. Whatever, though. Back to this historic at-bat.

Boog Powell: "First pitch, I moved about a foot up in the box from where I normally stand, just to see if there's a difference. I didn't care, ball or strike. I (just) did my normal timing. And then second pitch, I moved back to the same timing. And I could tell a difference, doing it. It wasn't that big of a difference. But I could tell."

What almost happened after that was the shot heard 'round the Atlantic League. Powell, who spent parts of two seasons (2017-18) in the big leagues with the [Mariners](#) and A's, pulled a baseball over the right-field fence. So it should have been a historic home run in the very first at-bat ever taken by a hitter standing 61 feet, 6 inches from the pitcher. Alert Cooperstown!

Alas, two other regrettable issues then arose: A) The umpire missed the “over the fence” part, so it was a double. And B) the game then got rained out anyway.

But do the details matter, really? Boog Powell was still the first man ever to do what he did. There were even witnesses. So just think, we told him. Suppose this thing catches on and eventually makes it to the big leagues. What, we asked, would he tell his kids in like 15 years?

Powell: “That I was the first batter to try it out. I was the first guinea pig.”

2. It’s a Theo Thing

The idea, Theo Epstein told us earlier this season, is simple: “To restore the right balance between modern pitchers and modern hitters.” Who wouldn’t be in favor of that, right? Other than, oh, every pitcher on earth?

But if the goal is to produce more action, then the way to get there is more contact. And if the goal is more contact, maybe the way to do that is to find a way to counteract the relentless rise in pitchers’ velocity. And if the goal is to counteract more velocity, wouldn’t it make sense (theoretically) to move the mound back? Makes sense to Theo. And lots of other people, too.

“If you move the mound back a foot, you would give hitters an extra 100th of a second (to react),” Epstein said, [on a Starkville edition of The Athletic Baseball Show](#). “And that 100th of a second corresponds to basically like a tick and a half of velocity. Which would sort of mean that you’re restoring velocity to where it was maybe eight to 10 years ago, when the contract rate was a little bit better, the strikeout rate was a little bit more under control.”

So the thinking behind moving the mound is logical. And we’re all in favor of logic. But does it look like this mission is going to be a success? Well, it’s still really, really, really early. But so far, that answer would be no, actually.

Atlantic League games through Sunday

60’6” versus 61’6”

Games	233	67
Time of Game	3:08	3:06
PA	18,391	5,462
Runs	6.33	6.37
BA	.277	.279
SLG	.444	.462

ISO	.167	.183
HR%	2.90%	3.40%
K%	18.30%	18.80%
BB%	12.40%	11.30%

We see there has been a slight uptick in homers and slugging. But is there appreciably more contact? 'Fraid not.

NON-CONTACT PCT (BB+K) AT 60-6 – 30.7%

NON-CONTACT PCT (BB+K) AT 61-6 – 30.1%

So we posed this question to York Revolution manager Mark Mason: “With this change, is it a better game? A worse game? Or the same game?”

Mark Mason: “Same game for me.”

The Athletic: “Same game? Imperceptible? How can that be?”

Mark Mason: “It just is. I wish I could answer that in a different way. I wish I could say, well, the game has gotten much better ... I just would say, if you talk to a diehard fan that comes to the game every night, if you told them that we didn’t move the mound back, or we did move it back if they didn’t know about it in advance, they would they’d tell you nothing looks different. The game looks the same.”

3. Follow the bouncing breaking ball

Yep, the average fastball feels about 1.3 mph slower at 61 feet, 6 inches. But the pitchers don’t seem to mind that part as much as you’d think.

York pitcher Duke Von Schamann: “By the time I pitched the second time, it felt almost normal. I was surprised at how my body just kind of adapted to the new distance. And I found kind of my normal (throwing mechanics) pretty quickly.”

Gastonia manager Mauro Gozzo: “I’m still seeing swings-and-misses on the guys that I’ve seen swings-and-misses with — like our harder throwers ... If a pitcher is setting up his pitches correctly, or the sequencing is good, I still think with that 1.3 mph difference, it’s enough to get it by the bat head. I don’t think it’s going to make that much of a difference for the batter to make more contact.”

So call off those alarm sirens. But guess what? Big-league pitchers never heard those sirens in the first place. When we asked some of them about this dramatic attempt to neutralize their fire-spitting fastballs, that was already the least of their worries.

[White Sox](#) closer **Liam Hendricks**: “I’ve already bounced way too many curveballs. So I’m really not a fan of it.”

Oh yeah. Those bouncing curveballs. They’re a reminder that when you add a foot to the flight of every pitch, you may subtract from effective velocity — but you also add a foot of movement. And try to tell the hitters they should throw a party over that.

[Dodgers](#) masher **Max Muncy**: “The ball moves enough. It doesn’t need more time to move that much. I mean, guys with Wiffle Balls, it doesn’t need an extra foot to move even farther.”

The Athletic to **Max Muncy**: “Yes, but there’s more reaction time.”

Retort of Max Muncy: “Sure. I guess. There’s also more time for the ball to move. Also, no one throws a straight ball anymore. If people were throwing it as straight as an arrow, put it back at 70 feet. But they don’t. So ...”

So ... believe it or not, we couldn’t find a single big-league hitter who was in favor of this, even though the whole point of trying it is to help them. Nobody understands why that is more than a former big-league hitter who now finds himself in the world of 61 feet, 6 inches.

Boog Powell: “It’s different to adjust to, honestly. I mean, just being a foot up for so many years and everything, and now, I can’t even imagine a (Clayton) Kershaw slider from this distance ... I just feel like all the pitchers that have a lot of movement and spin rate and everything, it’ll be tougher to hit those guys because I mean, that extra foot is just an extra foot of break.”

4. What we learned in study hall

Somebody’s going to get hurt. Pick a pitcher. Any pitcher. Ask them about moving back the mound. And while we doubt there are prop bets on this sort of thing in Vegas, if there were, this would be the safest wager of the century. They *will* tell you that somebody is going to get hurt.

[Brewers](#) ace [Brandon Woodruff](#): “My gosh. I’m assuming that it’s going to bring more injuries and people prone to injuries, especially pitchers ... One foot – that can make a lot of difference. If they did that to you right now (in midseason), it’s like your body would have to completely adjust. And I just see people getting hurt.”

We heard that song more times than “Thunder Road.” This can’t be safe, can it? Moving the mound distance in the middle of a season? Or even just moving it at all? How, these pitchers wondered, can that be safe?

OK, hold on. For one thing, most teams in this league have had one bullpen mound set at 61-6 all season, so their pitchers could acclimate in advance. But also, before MLB and the Atlantic League went down this road, they waited for the [results of a 2019 study](#) conducted by the American Sports Medicine Institute, headed by Dr. James Andrews and Glenn Fleisig.

In that study, 26 college pitchers threw fastballs from three mound distances – 60 feet, 6 inches; 62 feet, 6 inches, and 63 feet, 8 inches (half the distance between home and second base). They then concluded: “It is unlikely that moving the mound backwards (by any of those distances) would significantly affect pitching biomechanics and injury risk.”

But a funny thing happened when we cited that study to ever-cerebral [Yankees](#) ace [Gerrit Cole](#). He raised some questions of his own.

Gerrit Cole: “The only thing I would say is that those are college pitchers, and they’re, like, 19, and like Gumby at that point. And they haven’t critiqued or tailored their stride length or their release point or their mechanics at the highest level ... So it’s one thing to experiment with college pitchers. I think it’s another thing to experiment with people that have made it their professional craft for over a decade.”

Excellent point. And Cole wasn’t through. If those college pitchers only threw fastballs in that study, he said, shouldn’t further research be done on the impact of breaking balls at that extra distance?

Cole: “That would be a significant impact on everybody, to be able to throw a good breaking ball. To be able to get that forward snap on the pitch has a lot to do with mechanics, weight distribution, with balance to the delivery. All those things are going to have to be adjusted.”

So *has* there been a rash of injuries because of the midseason move back to 61-6? It feels way too soon to tell. The transactions column hasn’t overflowed. Both managers we talked to said their teams have adjusted fine. But when we relayed Cole’s concerns about having no breaking balls in the study, Atlantic League players had an emphatic reaction: He’s right!

Duke Von Schamann: “(The difference in throwing a breaking ball) is, it’s almost like a dance move. You’re thinking, OK, I have to get to the same release point. But each pitch feels different. I mean, they shouldn’t feel different, but they pretty much do. So any kind of pitching study you do, if you’re going to test if it hurts your body at all, you should definitely test all pitches. That seems obvious.”

5. Save the guinea pigs

We have to admit: Much as we see the reason to test a significant change like 61-6 in a league like this, we came away from our journey to the Atlantic League feeling sorry for the players who find themselves playing baseball inside that test tube.

York second baseman [Jack Kenley](#): “Honestly, I think it hurts us tremendously ... If an affiliate (minor-league) team needed players and they came to the Atlantic League to raid players ... (it’s easier to) pull a guy (from a different league) who’s playing from the same distance and playing under the same rules as everyone else.”

Kenley, a former [Tigers](#) prospect who was playing in Double A earlier this season, may find himself in the Atlantic League now. But he still dreams the same dreams as the players around him, of escaping independent ball and reaching the big leagues.

He has been one of the Revolution’s best players, too, with a .317 average and .986 OPS in his first 57 games. But he wonders. Are the scouts watching him seeing a guy who is just a good hitter – or simply a player they think got hot because his league moved the mound back?

Kenley: “Say you have a guy who’s going off here (in the second half). Who’s to say that 61 feet, 6 inches is the reason for you going off? Or now you get pulled out of here, and you get to a double-A or triple-A roster or something like that. Now you’re facing a 93-mile-an-hour fastball that plays to a 96. (In your mind), you’re seeing it as 96.”

The mound distance isn’t the only worry that gnaws at their brains. Players continue to gripe about the inconsistency of their favorite robot umps (ABS), calling a redefined strike zone that they don’t think resembles the zone being called in any other league on earth. So they worry about whether the scouts watching them are factoring that in, too.

Duke Von Schamann: “I just feel like it hurts us for getting looks (from big-league organizations) because they can’t make a good comparison. You know, we’re doing this with a foot difference. We’re playing on the (ABS system). All the pitching numbers in this league are way off the scales this year. They’re way inflated. And they don’t know if that’s just because we’re not doing good, or is it because of (ABS), or a mixture of both? So we want to be on the same level, the same rules as MLB, because that’s where we’re trying to go. And that’s what we’ve been practicing our whole lives.”

League officials have tried to reassure them that big-league teams aren’t evaluating them based on numbers. They’re theoretically being evaluated based on Statcast data, which is supposed to factor out all the extraneous stuff they’re worried about. But is that true?

If it makes them feel better, one scout, who covers this league for a big-league team, told us there is “some truth” to that, because MLB is providing more advanced metrics from the Atlantic League than any other league. So teams are watching that info closely. But ...

Anonymous scout: “I just think the mound change adds a little more uncertainty to ‘what you’re buying’ in these players, since no one really knows how to scale for the changes yet.”

Bingo. So doesn’t that sum up life as a baseball lab rat? It ought to be cool to say you’re playing in the most-watched independent league in North America. But for the men inside that test

tube, it doesn't feel cool. It feels like they're the guinea pigs in this experiment, running through a maze to nowhere.

Jack Kenley: "'Guinea pigs' is a very good way to put it – because when your pet guinea pig dies, no one really cares ... We are not cared about. That's just how it is."

6. This year, the Atlantic League. Next year ... Cleveland?

When we told one baseball official we'd surveyed a bunch of big leaguers on their feelings about 61 feet, 6 inches, he knew how that poll would turn out before he even heard our findings.

"Let me guess," he said. "They all told you it's the worst idea in history."

Well, no. None of them actually put it that way. But let's just say it's not their favorite baseball innovation of modern times. That seems safe.

[Liam Hendriks](#): "I know they've done the science behind it, they say, right? But from my pure mindset now, I can see there being a lot of injury risks, injury concerns with something like that happening ... And our bodies tend to be doing things that are a little different once you get older and you've learned a certain way. You're asking a guy who's been doing the same thing for the last 30 years to go out there and try and change it, possibly overnight, and then expecting nothing to happen? OK."

Even in the Atlantic League, there were quite a few players who saw this coming in midseason and said: "Get me outa here." Because they had contracts they had to honor, they were not allowed just to quit. So quite a few – many of them former big leaguers – asked their teams to trade them to some other independent league.

Former Orioles reliever [Donnie Hart](#), for instance, pushed Gastonia to trade him – and wound up in Winnipeg. It may not have been real convenient. But hey, at least the mound was right where it used to be.

Boog Powell: "It just sucks that we have to do this when some of us didn't want to. And a lot of pitchers I mean, threatened to quit, like, just go away from this league. And some did. A lot of the pitchers didn't want this to happen. But since it's happened, there hasn't been much talk about it. We've kind of just thrown it over our heads, and we've got to deal with it now."

Powell was in a big-league spring-training camp (with the [Reds](#)) as recently as last year. So we asked him if he could ever see major-league baseball players saying: *Hey, 61 feet, 6 inches seems like a good idea. Let's do that.*

Powell: "My gut tells me no. But it would be interesting for them to try it, like during spring training or something, just to see it. Have Kershaw throw from one of these mounds against

[Chris Taylor](#) or something, or someone from the team, and see how that ball breaks, or how much difference the break is compared to what they're used to."

The Athletic: "You think they need to see it with their own eyes?"

Powell: "Yeah, that's what I mean. I've seen guys (pitch with it) here, and some have been really good. But I just can't imagine those guys and their (big-league) arms doing this. It would just be crazy."

Has Major League Baseball seen enough good in this to bring it to a bargaining table this winter and propose it to major-league players? Can't answer that yet. We're not much more than three weeks into this, and nothing about it is clear – for now.

But for all the grumbling, which everyone expected, it's still worth remembering that none of this is happening just because MLB and the Atlantic League enjoy messing with people. It's happening because it's part of a search for a better sport and a better tomorrow.

Maybe none of this will lead them to that better tomorrow. But at least the mission is exciting, even if those executing that mission aren't feeling that noble sense of purpose.

The Athletic: "Do you ever feel like you're part of something big – like the next wave of no more entertaining game?"

Duke Von Schamann: "No, it doesn't feel like that currently. But when you say that, we can imagine that. And we hope that's how it goes. We can see independent ball getting cooler, and hopefully the boys make more money in the future and more people get picked up, because it's pretty cool. We love it. We're happy to be a part of it. We love that we're partnered with MLB. That's amazing. In the future I can see it being super cool.

"But right now, we just want to play ball and have fun ... We're all about growing the game, and if we need to change stuff, that's fine. Just don't change the rules so much that we're not playing the same game. That's all we ask."

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AUGUST 22, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Lots of interesting stuff popped up this week including some longer reads on baseball cards, a woman astrophysicist, a hitting streak fantasy league and the great Peter Gammons—enjoy.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Don't look now but the Yankees and Dodgers have both won 9 straight games. The Braves have won 8 straight. And the Orioles have lost 17 straight.

Yankees were .500 on July 4 after blowing two leads in 10-5 loss to the Mets. Since then they have played .718 ball, best in MLB to get to 72-52. It took just 21 games to pick up 9 ½ games on the Red Sox.

Joey Votto of the Reds reached 2000 career hits this week. Other Reds with 2,000 hits for Cincinnati:

Pete Rose 3358

Barry Larkin 2340

Dave Concepcion 2326

Johnny Bench 2048

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Votto is the second player ever to record his 2,000th hit, 300th home run and 1,000th RBI in the same season. Cubs great Billy Williams also did it in 1971.

Last players in each league to win an MVP award for two different teams--Alex Rodriguez (Rangers in 2003, Yankees in '05 & '07); Barry Bonds (Pirates in 1990, '92; Giants in '93, 2001-04).

Catchers with 40 or more HRs in a season:

Javy Lopez 42 in 2003 for Atlanta

Todd Hundley 41 in 1996 for Mets

Roy Campanella 40 in 1953 for Brooklyn.

Mike Piazza 40 in 1997 for Dodgers, 40 in 1999 for Mets

Johnny Bench hit 40 HRs twice but not all his HRs were hit as a catcher.

David Ortiz hit 47 HRs as DH in 2007 for the Red Sox, most in a season by a DH. Jim Thome, 4 for the 2004 Phillies and Karl Schwarber, 4 in 2017 for the Cubs have the most HRs in a season as DH for a NL team.

The Twins have used 30 different pitchers this year. The franchise record is 36 set in 2017.

Michael Brantley of the Astros is leading the AL in batting. Jose Altuve is the only Astros player to win a batting title (2014, 2016-17).

Fernando Tatis Jr. The Padres superstar leads the NL in [home runs and stolen bases](#) -- an absurdly rare combination. Only three players in recorded history have done so, and the last was the Phillies' Chuck Klein in 1932. The other two took place more than 100 years ago -- Ty Cobb in 1909 and Jimmy Sheckard in 1903.

The Rockies are 41-21 (.661) at Coors Field this season, but just 14-45 (.237) on the road. That's a .424 difference in winning percentage. The largest single-season split belongs to the 1945 Philadelphia Athletics, who went 39-35 (.527) at Shibe Park and 13-63 (.171) everywhere else -- good for a .356 split. Even stranger, the Rockies have a chance to shatter club records for most home wins (55) and most road losses (60).

Greg Maddux (1988-2004) holds the record for most consecutive 15-win seasons, with 17.

Francisco Lindor of the Mets and Bryce Harper of the Phillies are both signed through 2031. Mookie Betts of the Dodgers is signed through 2032.

MLB's all-time leader for most putouts as a catcher... Iván Rodríguez (14,864 putouts). Telling you the race gets closer by the day would have given too much away — [Yadier Molina](#) is second, with 14,394 putouts and counting.

Orioles are awful at 38-84 for a .311 winning pct. They have lost 17 straight.

Eli Jones, out of Eastlake Little League in Washington, became the first player to toss a solo no-hitter of six-plus innings since 2015 in the Little League World Series on Saturday, keeping Martin County North Little League from Florida at bay during a 1-0 win.

Jones, 12, struck out five during his masterpiece, issuing two walks over six innings, and became the first player since 2015 to carry the load by himself.

Not only did Jones turn in a gem on the mound, but he also helped himself at the plate, driving in the only run of the game in the fifth inning to round out the all-time performance.

Jones' no-no was the second no-hit effort in Williamsport, as Gavin Weir and Cason Mediger threw a combined no-hitter for South Dakota in the tournament's opener. Weir came one out short of going wire-to-wire, going 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings before giving way to Mediger due to pitch-count limitations.

This week would have been Roberto Clemente's 87th birthday. He died in a plane crash 50 years ago. In 1971 Clemente hit .341, was an all-star (12th straight) and won a gold glove (11th straight). In seven world series games against the Orioles he delivered 12 hits including 2 HRs, 2 doubles and a triple. In 1972 he played in 108 games, collected his 3,000th hit five days before the season ended. Ten weeks later on a relief flight to aid victims of an earthquake in Nicaragua he died.

Yankees starter Luis Gil became the first MLB pitcher with scoreless starts in his first three career appearances following the Yankees 2-0 win over the Red Sox Tuesday.

Gil has thrown 15 $\frac{2}{3}$ scoreless innings to begin his major league career. Gil passed Joba Chamberlain (15 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings) as the most by a Yankees starter since 1961. The rookie gave up 3 hits, 4 walks and struck out 4 batters against Boston retaining his 0.00 era.

In his major league debut Gil threw 6 scoreless innings against the Orioles. He backed that up with 5 scoreless innings (8 strikeouts) against Seattle.

Ernie Banks, Ted Williams, Harmon Killebrew, Barry Bonds, Ty Cobb, Tony Gwynn, Ken Griffey Jr. Never won a World Series.

Some others: Zack Greinke, Joey Votto, Jacob deGrom, Andrew McCutchen, Nolan Arenado, Giancarlo Stanton, Evan Longoria, Freddie Freeman, Paul Goldschmidt, Manny Machado, Bruce Harper, Mike Trout. Zero World Series titles between them.

Salvador Perez of the Royals caught in his 1,000 game this week joining Yadier Molina, Buster Posey and Kurt Suzuki as the only active catchers with at least that many games behind the plate. At 2078 Molina is 4th all-time in games caught, trailing Ivan Rodriguez (2427), Carlton Fisk (2226) and Bob Boone (2225)

TORONTO RBI MACHINE

The Blue Jays' high-octane lineup already features an MLB-high five sluggers with 70 or more RBIs before the end of August: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (89), Teoscar Hernández (84), Bo Bichette (77), Randal Grichuk (74) and Marcus Semien (73). A very hot September by Bichette, Grichuk and Semien could give Toronto *five* 100-RBI sluggers in a single season.

That sounds like a lot, right? It very much is. Here's the entire list of Modern Era (since 1900) AL/NL teams that featured five different hitters with 100-plus RBIs: The 1936 Yankees and ... that's it. That's the *whole* [list](#).

The 1927 Murderers' Row Yankees didn't have five 100-RBI guys. Neither did any of the Big Red Machine teams. The 1936 Yankees featured Gehrig (152), DiMaggio (126), Lazzeri (109), Selkirk (107), Dickey (107).

History buffs will recognize four Hall of Famers out of those five Yankees (including DiMaggio in his rookie year). The '36 Yanks won 102 games, averaged nearly 6.9 runs per contest (third highest in AL/NL history) and outscored opponents by 334 runs (fourth most in AL/NL history).

If the Blue Jays fall a little short of those Yankees, they could still very well have five 90-RBI hitters -- and *that's* rare, too. The Majors haven't seen a club do that since 2007, and it's happened only five total times since the turn of the millennium.

Teams with five 90-RBI hitters, since 2000

2007 COL: Garrett Atkins | Brad Hawpe | Todd Helton | Matt Holliday | Troy Tulowitzki

2007 NYY: Bobby Abreu | Robinson Canó | Hideki Matsui | Jorge Posada | Alex Rodriguez

2002 NYY: Jason Giambi | Jorge Posada | Alfonso Soriano | Robin Ventura | Bernie Williams

2000 ANA: Garret Anderson | Darin Erstad | Troy Glaus | Tim Salmon | Mo Vaughn

2000 CWS: Paul Konerko | Carlos Lee | Magglio Ordóñez | Frank Thomas | José Valentín

In case you were wondering, Carlos Delgado (145 in 2003) holds the Blue Jays single season RBI record.

HE's NO OHTANI

Max Scherzer. The right-hander already has eight All-Star selections, three Cy Young Awards and nearly 3,000 strikeouts, to name a few. And he's hardly finished.

But here's one number that assuredly will not be bronzed for Cooperstown: 0-for-a-season.

Scherzer, who turned 37 last month, remains dominant on the mound in 2021, compiling a 2.69 ERA in 22 starts, including his first three since a Deadline trade from the Nationals to the Dodgers. But at the plate? That's a different story.

When Scherzer steps in the batter's box [on Saturday afternoon](#) at Dodger Stadium, where he will draw the start against Rich Hill and the Mets, this will be the 2021 batting line he drags with him:

44 PA, 0-for-41, 0 BB, 0 HBP, 2 sac bunts, 1 sac fly, 1 RBI, 17 SO

(Scherzer went 0-1 on Saturday in the Dodgers win over the Mets).

You can probably do the math, but that works out to a slash line of .000/.000/.000. And that means Scherzer is in historic territory of the sort to which he is unaccustomed. Assuming he gets at least six more plate appearances and never records a hit, a walk or a hit-by-pitch, he will break the record for the most trips to the plate in a season without reaching safely.

Most PA in a season with zero times on base^

1. 49 -- Wei-Yin Chen (2016 Marlins)

2) 44 -- Max Scherzer (2021 Nationals/Dodgers)

3) 42 -- Jason Bergmann (2008 Nationals)

4) 36 -- Vicente Palacios (1994 Cardinals)

5) 35 -- Hal Finney (1936 Pirates)

^Does not include reaching on an error or fielder's choice

Scherzer also is currently tied for the sixth-most hitless at-bats in a full season (41), although that particular record is out of reach. In 1962, pitcher Bob Buhl went an astonishing 0-for-70 for the Milwaukee Braves and the Cubs, although he drew six walks and was hit by a pitch.

(We're specifically dealing with single seasons here, but Scherzer's streak is actually at 48 plate appearances going back to 2019 -- 54 if you include the postseason. Then again, if you go across

seasons, five other pitchers since 2010 have gone through a streak of at least 48 plate appearances, led by Ivan Nova, who didn't reach 70 straight times between June 11, 2017, and July 22, 2018. Or, if you want a Hall of Fame example, Nolan Ryan endured a 63-PA drought during the 1984-85 seasons.)

But Scherzer is no Chen (.068 career OBP), Buhl (.129) or even Ryan (.148) when it comes to handling the bat. Of the 48 active pitchers who entered this season with at least 200 career plate appearances, Scherzer ranked sixth in batting average (.193) and eighth in on-base percentage (.221).

not stepping to the plate at all in 2020 -- when the universal DH was adopted temporarily as part of the COVID-19 protocols -- could have combined with Scherzer's advancing age to cut into his hitting ability. (MLB pitchers had a .128 average and .159 OBP in 2019; this year that's fallen to .109/.149).

But let's assume that Scherzer's career numbers represent his true talent level. Given that baseline, MLB.com senior data architect Tom Tango calculated the chances of Scherzer failing to reach base safely in 44 consecutive plate appearances at roughly 60,000 to 1. So we're already in extremely unlikely territory, but what about the rest of the season?

Assuming Scherzer gets eight more starts, he should wind up with about 62 total plate appearances. The odds for him putting together that many in a row without reaching? How about roughly 5 million to 1.

RIP BILL FREEHAN

I was a big Bill Freehan fan (AL over NL).

Really top AL catcher for a long time. RBI total was surprisingly small compared to HRs.

15 years
1591 hits
200 HRs
758 RBIs
.262 average
1774 games
11 time All Star
5 Gold Gloves
3 times in the top 7 for MVP including second to Denny McClain in '68.

Pretty strong. Maybe not HOF but worth a discussion (next week).

Freehan is best remembered for that 1968 season, in which he caught 155 regular-season games — including nearly all of Denny McLain's 31 victories — before handling World Series MVP Mickey Lolich's three complete-game victories in the Fall Classic. As the runner-up to McLain for the American League MVP award that year, Freehan posted career highs in home runs (25), RBIs (84) and runs scored (73).

In the pivotal play of the Fall Classic, with the Tigers trailing St. Louis 3-1 in the series and 3-2 in the fifth inning of Game 5, the Cardinals threatened to extend their lead on a sharp single by Julian Javier. Speedster Lou Brock tried to score standing up, but left fielder Willie Horton made a perfect one-hop throw to Freehan.

Selected to 11 All-Star Games, the five-time Gold Glove catcher played his entire career with the Tigers, appearing in 1,774 games in 1961-76. Freehan became the regular starting catcher in 1964, batted .300 that year and was chosen to the first of his 10 consecutive All-Star teams. In the 1967 All-Star Game, he caught all 15 innings for the American League in a 2-1 loss to the National League.

When Freehan retired following the 1976 season, he held the major league records for chances (10,714), putouts (9,941) and fielding average for a catcher (.993). The records were broken respectively in 1987 (Bob Boone), 1988 (Gary Carter) and 2002 (Dan Wilson).

Freehan went to the University of Michigan. In addition to playing tight end in football, Freehan had a stellar Big Ten baseball career. In his junior year of 1961, he batted .585, still a conference record.

Days later, he signed with the Tigers and received a \$100,000 bonus that his father withheld until Freehan earned a history degree in 1966.

Following his major league career, he later took leave from his successful manufacturer's representative business in 1990 to become the head coach of the Michigan baseball program for six seasons.

Freehan caught 1,581 games in a Tigers uniform, more than 500 more than anyone else in franchise history. His five Gold Gloves rank fifth among catchers in Major League history and second only to Kaline for Detroit players at any position. His 10,714 chances, 9,941 putouts and .993 fielding percentage topped the all-time list for Major League catchers when he retired.

OHTANI

[Shohei Ohtani](#) is still the odds-on favorite for American League MVP, and it isn't close. If you had 39 homers, 86 RBI, 17 steals and a 1.017 OPS at the plate, plus a 7-1 record and 2.93 ERA on the mound, I'd give it to you, too.

Update from Wednesday—Ohtani pitched against the Tigers. Threw a career high 7 innings. Ohtani needed just 90 pitches to record 24 outs -- and 69 pitches were thrown for strikes. He didn't walk a batter for the fifth time in 18 starts this season. Ohtani has been on a roll on the mound, posting a 1.58 ERA in six starts dating back to July 6. It's helped him lower his ERA to 2.79 on the year with 120 strikeouts in 100 innings. He is 8-1. Oh, and he hit his 40th HR. He hammered an 0-1 slider that left the bat at 110.1 mph and went a projected 430 feet.

Ohtani broke the record for the most homers in a season by a Japanese-born player in the Major Leagues when he passed Hideki Matsui with his 32nd dinger back in July. The [AL MVP favorite](#) has a chance at becoming the Angels' single-season home run leader if he keeps this up. Troy Glaus holds the record with 47 homers, which he accomplished in 2000.

He also became the first left-handed hitter in Angels history to reach 40 homers, surpassing Reggie Jackson's total of 39 in 1982. And he became just the fourth AL pitcher to throw at least eight innings and hit a homer in a game since the DH was instituted in 1973, joining Jon Garland (June 18, 2006), Kris Benson (June 17, 2006) and Bobby Witt (June 30, 1997).

Shohei Ohtani reached 40 homers and 15 stolen bases (he has 18) in 122 games, the second-fastest in any season. Only player faster--Ken Griffey Jr. (117 games in 1998)

VLAD JR.

But here's something to watch over the last quarter of the season: Will [Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#) be the first hitter since Ted Williams to win his league's triple crown and not win MVP? Entering the week, Guerrero was fourth in the AL in batting average (.314, chasing [Michael Brantley's](#) .332), second in homers (35, four back of Ohtani) and second in RBI (88, one behind [Rafael Devers](#)). It's completely conceivable that Guerrero could catch up in homers and RBI, though beating Brantley in batting average will be a challenge.

The past four Triple Crown winners — [Miguel Cabrera](#) in 2012, Carl Yastrzemski in 1967, Frank Robinson in 1966 and Mickey Mantle in 1956 — were named their league's MVP that season. But not Williams. He took the Triple Crown in 1942 (36/137/.356) but lost in MVP voting to the Yankees' Joe Gordon, 270 votes to 249. And then it happened again! In 1947, Williams secured his second Triple Crown (32/114/.343) and was defeated in MVP voting by Joe DiMaggio, 202 to 201. I demand a recount. Williams won two MVPs in his career, 1946 and 1949, and finished second four times.

Speaking of Vlad Jr., Vladimir Guerrero Jr. to take a run at Jose Bautista's franchise record of 54 home runs set back in 2010, but the young superstar, who is sitting at 35 homers, still has a shot at 50. George Bell's 47 (1987) rank second in franchise history behind Bautista.

MORE MILESTONES

Nelson Cruz, the 41-year-old slugger showing no signs of slowing down in his pursuit of a World Series with the Rays, is in range of two notable names on the all-time home run leaderboard. He entered Wednesday with 442 career homers, tied with Dave Kingman for 42nd on the all-time list. If he were to hit eight more this season, reaching the 450 mark, he'd claim sole possession of 40th on the list by passing Hall of Famers Jeff Bagwell and Vladimir Guerrero. That would also put Cruz within one more 30-homer season of passing iconic Hall of Famers Willie Stargell, Stan Musial and Chipper Jones, among others. Cruz averaged 41 per season from 2015-19,

Cedric Mullins recently became the seventh Oriole to reach the 20-homer, 20-stolen base plateau, while also joining Fernando Tatis Jr. as the only players in the 20-20 club so far this season. No Oriole has ever gone 30-30, and only 40 big leaguers have compiled that many homers and stolen bases in a single season in AL/NL history. Can Mullins join those ranks? Entering Wednesday, he'd need 10 homers and eight steals over the Orioles' last 43 games -- difficult and significant, but not impossible. The last big leaguers to go 30-30 were Christian Yelich (44 home runs, 30 stolen bases) and Ronald Acuña Jr. (41 homers, 37 steals) in 2019.

There is a very small list of Red Sox position players who have been more productive in their 20s than Xander Bogaerts. The shortstop, who turns 30 on Oct. 1, had 418 career extra-base hits entering Wednesday. That puts Bogaerts in good position to pass Bobby Doerr (428) for fourth on the team's all-time list for players in their 20s. To keep in perspective the kind of company Bogaerts is keeping, these are the only other Red Sox players who had more extra-base hits in their 20s prior to Bogaerts: Carl Yastrzemski (471), Ted Williams (462) and Jim Rice (458). Yaz, Williams, Rice and Doerr are Hall of Famers.

Aroldis Chapman is just one save away from 300 for his career -- a milestone that has been achieved by only 30 other pitchers in Major League history, most recently by Kenley Jansen of the Dodgers. Of Chapman's 299 career saves, 137 have come with the Yankees (146 with Reds, 16 with Cubs).

The Braves will most likely join the 2008 Marlins as the only teams to ever have four infielders hit at least 25 homers in a season. Freddie Freeman and Austin Riley have each exceeded the mark. Dansby Swanson entered Wednesday with 24 homers and Ozzie Albies had 22. Freeman is the only member of this group to previously have a 30-homer season.

Pete Alonso will likely join the 100-homer club at some point this season, but just how quickly he gets there could prove to be historic. He entered Thursday with 95 home runs in 328 career games. He can't become the [fastest to reach the 100-homer mark](#) -- Ryan Howard holds that honor by doing so in just 325 games -- but if Alonso can hit five homers over the next 26 games, he would check in as the *second*-fastest to reach the 100-homer club. Gary Sánchez is currently No. 2 on that list, having hit his 100th home run in his 355th career game.

Tigers greats Mickey Lolich and Bill Freehan are alone atop the list of all-time pitcher-catcher batteries at 324 starts together. Adam Wainwright and Yadier Molina, at 297, won't catch them this season, but they are just nine starts behind Red Faber and Roy Schalk for third. Already with 23 starts together this season, time may be short for even third place. But 300 is within reach and then its on to 325.

Bumgarner is not known as a strikeout pitcher, but he continues to climb the career strikeouts list, having recently passed Jerry Reuss to move into 102nd place. With 1,912 career strikeouts already in the books and another six weeks left in the season, Bumgarner should easily be able to slip into the top 100 by passing Hideo Nomo (1,918 strikeouts) and Tom Gordon (1,928).

THROWING ANOTHER "MADDUX"

Last week was Adam Wainwright of the Cardinals. This week Max Fried of the Braves needed just 90 pitches in throwing a Maddux against the Orioles. The last Braves pitcher to achieve this feat was Shelby Miller on May 17, 2015 -- who threw 94 pitches in his version.

A Maddux describes a start in which a pitcher tosses a shutout on fewer than 100 pitches. It's named after Hall of Fame pitcher -- and former Brave -- Greg Maddux. Fried joined the ranks of two other Braves pitchers who tossed shutouts on 90 or fewer pitches (since pitch counts began being tracked in 1988): Tom Glavine and Maddux himself, who did it five times and was the last Braves pitcher to do it in 90 pitches or fewer.

IMPACT OF ENFORCING AGAINST STICKY STUFF

It has been nearly two months since [Major League Baseball](#) formally stepped up its enforcement of rules prohibiting pitchers from applying foreign substances to baseballs. And the republic has yet to crumble.

Umpires routinely check pitchers for substances on the field without incident or delay. Most pitchers seem to have adjusted to only using rosin as a grip enhancer. And so much for the fear that pitchers would lose control without the sticky stuff. Since June 3, when the league first signaled changes were coming, the rate of hit batsmen is essentially the same.

Advanced substances enable pitchers to increase their spin rates and movement on their pitches. But post-June 3, the spin-velocity ratio, a metric that controls for velocity increase over time, is at its lowest level since the league first measured it in 2015. And the goal of the enforcement, to boost offense by eliminating an unfair competitive advantage some pitchers were using, is being fulfilled.

Offense generally picks up in the summer months, but through Sunday the rate of increase in 2021 was higher than it was in the league's last full season, 2019, indicating the sticky stuff was indeed working against hitters. The current season started four days later than the one in '19, so we adjusted the starting points and dividing lines accordingly:

2019

March 28 to May 30: .249 BA, .747 OPS, 22.9 K%, 8.8 BB%

June 1 to Aug. 11: .257 BA, .768 OPS, 22.7 K%, 8.2 BB%

2021

April 1 to June 3: .236 BA, .707 OPS, 24.1 K%, 8.9 BB%

June 4 to Aug. 15: .248 BA, .739 OPS, 22.9 K%, 8.6 BB%

So what we've seen is a 32-point jump in OPS compared to a 21-point jump in '19, and a decline of 1.2 percent in strikeout percentage compared to 0.2 percent. Those differences, combined with the decline in spin-velocity ratio, are significant, suggesting that the increased enforcement has had the desired effect.

BUILDING THE WHITE SOX

Eight homegrown first-round picks ([Tim Anderson](#), Carlos Rodón, Zack Burdi, Zack Collins, Jake Burger, Nick Madrigal, Andrew Vaughn, Garrett Crochet) have contributed to the White Sox this season. Madrigal was traded to the Cubs, Burdi was designated for assignment Monday and Collins has lost playing time to Seby Zavala, [a former 12th-round pick](#). But eight first-rounders is

still an impressive number, and amateur scouting and player development are just two paths the team has taken to success.

The White Sox also were built through domestic free agency ([Yasmani Grandal](#), [Dallas Keuchel](#), [Liam Hendriks](#)), international free agency (José Abreu, [Luis Robert](#)) and trades in which they acquired multiple young players ([Lucas Giolito](#) and Reynaldo López, [Yoán Moncada](#) and [Michael Kopech](#), Eloy Jiménez and [Dylan Cease](#)).

The team's pro scouting department also came up with three veteran position players ([Billy Hamilton](#), [Jake Lamb](#), [Brian Goodwin](#)) who helped the team weather the losses of Jiménez and Robert earlier in the season.

SURPRISING MLB LEADERS AS OF LATE AUGUST

MLB Wins: [Kyle Hendricks](#), Cubs -- 14

Hendricks is playing for a team that's 15 games under .500. He is, leading the National League (and the Majors) in wins. The Cubs have 54 wins this year: Hendricks, absurdly, has 14 of them. Even crazier: He also leads the Majors in hits allowed (159).

MLB Hits per 9: [Freddy Peralta](#), Brewers -- 4.673

Two years ago, Peralta pitched 85 innings and gave up 87 hits. (This is a good way to get a 5.29 ERA.) This year, he has thrown 121 1/3 innings and given up ... 63. That's cutting his hits per nine in *half*.

MLB HBP: [Austin Adams](#), Padres -- 16

I'm not saying that Adams will not be satisfied until he has plunked all of us, professional baseball players, accountants, actuaries, deli cashiers, everyone he sees. But he leads the Majors with 16 hit batsmen even though he has only thrown 41 2/3 innings. He has faced 183 batters and has hit 16 of them. That means he hits one out of every 11.4 batters he faces.

MLB Sac Bunts: [Adam Wainwright](#), Cardinals -- 12

Wainwright, who will turn 40 years old at the end of the month, is actually second in the NL in some major categories, including innings pitched and batters faced. But the former Silver Slugger has been putting down bunts like it's 1984.

AND THEN THERE ARE THE GIANTS

Perhaps the most surprising area in which the Giants have excelled in 2021 is the power department -- they're leading the National League and second in the Majors with 181 home

runs this season (the Blue Jays have hit 183 with five different players at 20 or more homers, led by Vladimir Guerrero Jr.'s 35).

While you'd normally expect a team leading the league in homers to have at least one player with 30 or more by this point in the season or on pace for 30 or more, San Francisco isn't even close -- the club's home run leader is Brandon Crawford, who has 19 (the recently acquired Kris Bryant has 21 for the season, but three with the Giants so far).

Yet it's mid-August and these 2021 Giants have already hit more homers than they hit during all of the 2019 season (167). They're on pace to set a franchise record for homers in a season -- and remember, they had this guy named Barry Bonds, who hit 73 by himself in 2001, when the club hit 235 overall to set the franchise mark.

That the Giants don't have anyone with even 20 homers to this point in the season isn't exactly shocking, though. San Francisco hasn't had a player with 30 or more home runs in a season since all the way back in 2004, when Bonds hit 45. To put things into perspective, every team in the Majors except for the Giants, Marlins and Tigers had a 30-plus-home run hitter in 2019. Detroit last had one as recently as '16, while the Marlins had Giancarlo Stanton hit 59 in '17.

But with San Francisco near the very top of baseball in home runs so far in '21, it could very well end up with the team home run crown despite having no players hit 30 or more during the season.

Not counting seasons shortened due to a pandemic or strike, that hasn't happened in 35 years - the last team to do it was the 1986 Tigers, for whom Darrell Evans led the lineup with 29 homers. How did that year's Detroit club do it? Well, it had six different players hit at least 20 homers. In addition to Evans, there was Kirk Gibson (28), Lance Parrish (22), Alan Trammell (21), Darnell Coles (20) and Lou Whitaker (20).

As for the Giants, their home run output up and down the lineup could look very similar when this season is over. Entering Friday, here is the breakdown of Giants hitters with at least 10 homers on the season:

Brandon Crawford: 19
Mike Yastrzemski: 18
Brandon Belt: 16
Buster Posey: 15
Wilmer Flores: 15
LaMonte Wade Jr.: 15
Alex Dickerson: 13
Darin Ruf: 13
Evan Longoria: 10

One big reason the Giants are leading the NL West and have a chance to lead baseball in homers is the rejuvenation of Buster Posey. The veteran catcher's power has returned after he sat out the pandemic-shortened 2020 season. Posey has returned to something close to his 2012 NL MVP form -- his 15 homers this season are more than he hit in 2018 and '19 combined (12). That goes along with a .322/.416/.536 slash line (155 OPS+).

IMPRESSIVE RUN

Five players in MLB history have been All-Stars for 18 straight seasons—Aaron, Mays, Musial, Carew, Ripken Jr.

THEY TRIED TO BEAT DIMAGGIO AND LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, THEY FAILED (FROM NYT)

In M.L.B.'s Beat the Streak game, fans build virtual lineups in hopes of topping Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak. After 20 years, no one has won.

Roberto Aguirre-Hunn Jr., a chef in East Lansing, Mich., was just six picks away from assembling a virtual hitting streak that would have netted him \$5.6 million in 2019. But he chose D.J. LeMahieu to extend his streak to 52, and LeMahieu went 0 for 4, leaving Aguirre-Hunn in tears.

In 2008, Bob Paradise, a retired carpenter in Massachusetts, built a streak to 48 games and hoped to extend it with Ichiro Suzuki against Detroit. But in Suzuki's final plate appearance after going hitless in three at-bats, he took a fastball in his back, and Paradise felt like he took a punch in the gut.

Michael Karatzia, a FedEx operations manager from Red Bank, N.J., crafted a streak of 49 games in 2007, but then he picked Placido Polanco against the Athletics. In a game with 23 combined hits, Polanco couldn't produce even one, and Karatzia went down with him.

They all have stories like that. Everyone who has played Beat the Streak, a popular niche fantasy game run by Major League Baseball that offers a \$5.6 million prize to anyone who can assemble a string of players to beat Joe DiMaggio's record 56-game hitting streak, has eventually lost. It costs nothing to enter, except some aggravation and a sobering lesson in how remarkable DiMaggio's feat really was back in 1941.

"I was so close," Aguirre-Hunn recalled of his 51-game streak, "and I couldn't do anything but cry about it. It just goes to show how hard it is."

Hard is an understatement. Impossible might be more accurate, considering that since the inception of Beat the Streak in 2001, more than 4.5 million unique players have accounted for

over 100 million streaks of various lengths, and no one has caught or passed Joltin' Joe. Two people have matched Aguirre-Hunn's game-record of 51, but no one has passed it.

"Getting a 56-game streak is incredible," said Anette Hosoi, a professor of applied mathematics and data analysis at M.I.T. "The odds of that are really astronomically small."

It is possible, and even probable, she said, that someone will win the game one day, as long as people keep playing it enough. But would you keep playing a game that no one has won in its 20-year existence? At least someone eventually wins Power Ball. Beat the Streak, on the other hand, appears to be a more vexing challenge, requiring stamina and knowledge rather than simply luck. But it also offers more intrigue and fun than picking a string of random numbers.

Contestants can choose up to two players on any given day, and if those players get a hit, the streak continues. One day you might click on Shohei Ohtani against the Red Sox, and the next day it's Pete Alonso against the Reds. Or you might pick Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Tim Anderson on the same day. As long as they get hits, the streak stays alive. Get a streak of 57 together and you win.

Gregg Klayman, a senior vice president at M.L.B., invented the game soon after he began working there in 2000. At first the prize was \$100,000. A few years later the league upped it to \$1 million and in 2011 it went to \$5.6 million, a nod to DiMaggio's magnificent streak. As with many such games, an insurance company stands ready to make the ultimate payoff — if it ever happens.

"I would have thought someone would win in the first 10 years," Klayman said. "I'm still surprised no one has."

The game made its debut on April 2, 2001, the same day as the first games for Suzuki and Albert Pujols, the players who have been picked more than anyone else over the years. It took three years for someone to reach a streak of 40 games, so Klayman and his colleagues adjusted the rules to make it easier. Now players can make two picks in a day and beat the streak in as few as 29 days. Contestants can also take a mulligan now and keep their streak alive after one hitless day.

Klayman gladly offers strategic hints. The best method, backed by Hosoi's calculations, is to pick a good leadoff hitter on the road with a high batting average and a low on-base percentage (contrary to current-day analytics, walks are a negative in Beat the Streak). A visiting batter is preferable because if the home team is winning, it won't bat in the ninth inning, so there are fewer opportunities to get a hit.

That cost Aguirre-Hunn in 2019. LeMahieu was the Yankees' leadoff batter that day, but Brett Gardner made the last out in the bottom of the eighth with LeMahieu on deck. Making it even more painful was that Aguirre-Hunn, 34, had changed his strategy once he got to 50. Until then,

and with the help of his girlfriend, Angela Sanzica, Aguirre-Hunn had gone mostly with his gut, like an old-school manager picking players he just felt good about.

Then after he reached 49 he started overanalyzing, scanning statistical data and hunting for good matchups. On the fateful day his gut told him to pick Whit Merrifield, who always seemed to get a hit against the Tigers, who happen to be Aguirre-Hunn's favorite team. But the charts and readouts pointed to LeMahieu. Whitfield, of course, got a hit that day.

"I really believe if I stuck with my gut, I would have made 57," Aguirre-Hunn said. "I learned a hard lesson."

Klayman, the game's godfather, has seen dozens of streaks fall like that. Even though his responsibilities lie more in product and content strategy these days, he keeps a paternal eye on Beat the Streak. Once someone gets to 38 (about two-thirds of the way), he pays closer attention. If they reach 45, Klayman watches every at-bat of that day's picks. Entering Sunday's games, the current leader, who uses the handle sameOldG, was up to 39.

But something has always derailed even the most carefully constructed streaks. Like the fellow who got to 51 games and then chose Ezequiel Carrera, who was having a good first six weeks of the season, but proved to be a .262 hitter in his short career. DiMaggio's career mark was .325.

"Your life is on the line and you go with Ezequiel Carrera," Klayman said. "It's an odd choice."

Klayman, 46, is a self-described baseball geek who grew up in the Bronx playing Strat-O-Matic and fantasy baseball by mail. He originally calculated the odds of beating the streak at 2.04 million to 1 based on a sensible formula he concocted.

But Hosoi, the M.I.T. professor, says the odds can vary dramatically depending upon a few key factors, most notably the number of at-bats. She determined that assuming everyone picks a .300 hitter every day and those hitters all had four at-bats, a streak of 57 games should be reached approximately once every 4.3 million attempts by everyone combined.

But four at-bats in a baseball game are hard to guarantee because of walks, hit batsmen, substitutions and injuries. If the number of at-bats is reduced to three, then the figure soars to approximately one winner every 17 billion combined attempts.

The odds of an individual reaching a streak of 57 games on any single attempt (while picking a .300 hitter who averages four at-bats per game) is roughly 1 in 6.3 million. If you drop it to 3.5 at-bats, it is 1 in 236 million. Power Ball is 1 in 292.2 million.

Hosoi also calculated that with 3.5 at-bats for a .300 hitter, it should take about 31 million attempts to reach a streak of 51, which is generally consistent with the numbers thus far (a little over 100 million attempts). Based on that, she wonders if it might take another 20 years to get a winner.

And maybe .300 isn't even good enough. DiMaggio batted .408 during his streak and walked in only 8.5 percent of his plate appearances, a notch below his career rate of about 10 percent. Today's players are encouraged to walk. Add infield shifts to the mix and relievers who throw 100 miles per hour in the latter few innings, and it is hard for everyone to get a hit these days.

"You are far better off taking someone with a lower batting average who won't get walked," Hosoi said.

Or hit by a pitch. Paradise, the retired carpenter who chose Suzuki in 2008, was riding a wave of momentum when he cracked 40. People began reaching out with offers of support and even marriage. Then Ichiro got hit by Kenny Rogers in the eighth, one inning after the Mariners had hit Curtis Granderson with a pitch. Paradise may have been the victim of baseball's unwritten rules of retaliation.

"That was the cruelest fate of all time," Klayman said.

Now retired and living outside of Bradenton, Fla., Paradise was at a friend's July 4 cookout in central Massachusetts that day, and said the air went out of the whole party.

"It was a great experience, though," he said. "Other than marrying my wife, it was the best thing that ever happened to me."

The year before, Karatzia was up to 49 — just eight picks away from glory — when he lost. He had a good system, too, alternating a group of 10 hot hitters.

"Then Placido Polanco screwed me," he said. "But it wasn't a total loss. I won five grand and went to Atlantic City."

The person with the longest streak at the end of the year wins a prize, originally \$5,000, and now \$10,000, which is what Aguirre-Hunn took home in 2019. But he was a nervous wreck for most of his streak. After reaching 20, he would choose four candidates and ask Sanzica, who says she knows virtually nothing about sports, to pick two of them. The system hummed along for about 10 days, but once they got to 40, Sanzica opted out.

"It was getting really tense and I couldn't take the pressure anymore," she said. "I didn't want to be responsible if he lost it."

Now Sanzica makes her own picks every day. Her highest streak this year is 15, but she still has a chance — as improbable as it may seem — just like DiMaggio did.

And if she or someone else does win, does the game just start up again? Is it over?

"We've never figured that out, what happens next," Klayman said. "We probably should get on that."

He might have another 20 years to ponder the question.

WHAT IS IN THE BOX IN YOUR CLOSET?

A T206 Honus Wagner card sold for \$6.6 million in an online auction early Monday morning, setting a new record in baseball card sales.

The card was issued in American Tobacco Co. cigarette boxes from 1909 to 1911 and has been highly desired by collectors for years. The auction, organized by [Robert Edward Auctions](#), opened on July 23 with the starting bid at \$1 million. Bidding closed just after 12:30 a.m. ET on Monday at the price of \$5.5 million. REA adds a 20 percent buyer's premium, which inflated the official sale price to \$6.6 million.

Monday's sale set a new baseball card record. A 2009 rookie card for [Mike Trout](#) set a new record in August 2020 with its \$3.9 million sale price but was then passed by the [\\$5.2 million sale of a Mickey Mantle card in January](#).

The previous record for the T206 Wagner was \$3.75 million, [sold in May](#).

Wagner played 21 major-league seasons and led the National League in batting average in eight seasons. The legendary shortstop for the [Pittsburgh Pirates](#) retired in 1917 and was among the Baseball Hall of Fame's inaugural class in 1936.

[What's the allure of the Wagner card?](#)

Craig Custance, senior writer: As the sports card market makes its raging comeback, the T206 Honus Wagner continues to be the gold standard in collecting. There's so much allure to this card — from the debated backstory about why they're so rare to the hint of scandal that seems to follow this card around. There's a surge in popularity in modern cards, especially in the basketball market, but this vintage baseball card remains king.

Michael Salfino's guide to buying a Mickey Mantle card (if you aren't a millionaire)

Mickey Mantle is, and always will be, the face of the baseball card collecting hobby. That makes him the face of vintage baseball card investing, too.

Historically, it's been impossible to lose money buying Mantle cards. When I wrote [this article for The Wall Street Journal](#) in 2016, the 10-year ROI on PSA 8 (Near Mint-Mint)-graded Topps Mantle cards in every year was 544.3%. That compared then to 66.4% for the S&P Index, 129.5% for gold and 39.5% for the median NYC house. Since then, and that article was written late in the year so it's not even five years, PSA 8 ROI is 194.8% (S&P is 82.1%, gold 33.5% and NYC real estate down 25.4%).

But a PSA 8 Mantle card is going to cost you at least \$2,000. This is not an option for the novice collector. Our objective here is to see if we can get you into a well-graded Mantle card (a PSA 6, which is Excellent-Near Mint). The first thing we have to do is pretty much forget every base card issued by Topps (beginning in 1952) or Bowman (1951-55 for Mantle) prior to 1960. And we have to open ourselves up to non-base cards featuring Mantle: All-Star cards, cards where he's featured with other players, MVP cards, cereal and Jello-O cards and 1964 stand-up Topps cards (with no back where kids were told to pop the perforated figure from a standard-size card — never do this, kids). These are still Mantles, and the market is finding them. And the populations often are lower in even PSA 6 grades.

This vintage market, which used to be more stable and long-term, suddenly has volatility. You need to [check with the PSA site](#) the day you buy to get a sense for the value of the card — book value, most recent sale, average recent sales.

Even if it's graded by another company, you can mentally convert it to PSA. Would it “cross over” for the same grade or a lower grade? If you're keeping it in the holder do you dock it at least a grade, just a half grade or not at all? Bottom line: you are always buying the card in the holder, not the holder. Not all PSA 6s, for example, are the same. Centering, corners, edges, image (prioritized in that order) are key differences. And if the card is qualified (meaning letters next to the grade) that means that card is actually worth two full grades less. So a PSA 7 qualified OC for off-center or ST for stain is really a 5 (and not even a good 5). Simple rule for novices: don't buy qualified cards (non-PSA graders do not offer qualifiers).

As of Monday (2/22), here were the “bargain” base Mantles (meaning his actual card that year and not a special card), according to PSA. This roughly averages recent sales (prices paid, not asking price). I'm ranking these in the order of expected value:

1962 — No. 200 (\$500-\$800): One of the Top 5 most condition-sensitive issues ever by Topps. The “wood” border exposes most minor flaws and all corner wear. Centering is not that bad in this set. Image quality is a bigger issue. This was Mickey's third and final MVP season. It's not that attractive a card. His hair is uncharacteristically mussed. But he does have that Topps “light of god” shining on his face. A 60-40 centered (and don't forget top and bottom, and not just side to side) in a PSA 6 is a way tougher card than this price suggests and thus, I believe, a bargain.

1963 — No. 200 (\$600-\$1000): Another very tough card again with the bottom borderless color showing every flaw. So it's also undervalued in a PSA 6. Centering is tougher here than in 1962, too (centering isn't easy in any year). Mantle is batting righty, his favorite side, in the bubble that is the signature design element on the card. He has the sunlight on his face and the shadow of the cap on his forehead, something Topps demanded their photographers shoot. You can see the facade of Yankee Stadium in the background.

1966 — No. 50 (\$400-\$600): The image here is usually very good. I think this is an underrated card design. Centering is the biggest challenge here. A perfectly centered card of this year (and

most years) is worth a full-grade more, generally. Mickey is batting lefty and the colors of the name and team elements contrast very nicely with the Yankees uniform. More sunlight and cap shadow.

If you go to eBay now and try to get these prices in “Buy it Now,” you’ll call me a liar. They’ll be much higher. The prices I cite are eBay auction prices, which only make you pay one increment higher than the next highest bid (even if you bid \$100 more). But be very careful with this. Dealers get cards in auctions and then charge a premium in “Buy It Now,” generally. But sometimes, and increasingly so in today’s market, there’s an inversion when an auction closes, and you can “buy it now” for less money. You have to act fast or the sellers take the listing down and re-list at a higher price.

It may take you a month to get a card you’re chasing. Be patient. The market could move up or down in this period but stick to your price. You’re holding these cards, so bet on a Mantle building off its most recent established higher value, as that’s generally been the case.

Trust me that you are not ready to buy a raw card. Your best shot for buying smartly and most economically is targeting one graded at a card shop or local show (tough to find in these COVID-19 times). Then, cash is king and you can buy multiple cards for greater discounts. Also, I cannot say this enough, buy the card that looks best and not the grade — seek deals in other graders if you think their cards measure up to the average cards in the same grades that you can see images of on the PSA site. For now, never take the cheese from a seller that “this card is better than the grade” — meaning you pay any more than the high range for that grade.

If you want to spend less money and get the same Mantle upside, you can look to non-base cards. Here are my favorites of those at current market prices in PSA 6:

1968 Super Stars — No. 490 (w/Willie Mays and Harmon Killebrew, \$150-\$200 in a PSA 6 and \$300-\$400 in a 7): Centering is always tough with these horizontal cards. But it’s a beautiful card, and how can you go wrong with Mantle and Mays? Remember, Mays collectors have to have this card, too. As for Killebrew, he was great but he’s not collectable outside of his rookie card; still it’s cool that 1,759 homers are on one card.

1962 Manager’s Dream — No. 18 (w/Mays \$300-\$400 but rising quickly): Very hard to get a great image in this 1962 card. And it’s just Mantle and Mays, two immortals. If I saw a very nice one, I’d pay more. But if prices happen to be much higher when you’re looking, again go to the dealers or a card show where the prices are more in line with the monthly reports, or just wait for them to come down since there is not the same kind of demand for these cards as there is for base cards.

1957 Power Hitters — No. 407 (w/Berra \$500-\$600): Here’s a chance to get an early(ish) Mantle. This is his second MVP season. Berra on the card isn’t Mays but Berra is an icon himself. Centering on this card is so tough. This card has doubled at least in just the past month, so maybe wait a month and see if you can buy on a dip or just get lucky in a lop-pop auction or

from a dealer pricing based on an old book. Note that a nice one of these is a very tough find. Even in the 1990s, collectors just didn't think these non-base cards would ever be worth real money.

1958 World Series Batting Foes — No. 418 (w/Aaron, \$500-\$700): This would be No. 1 if price was no issue. It's just a beautiful card taken at the World Series in 1957 and with Aaron batting righty and Mantle lefty right next to each other (Compare that with Aaron's 1957 base card that was transposed to make him look like he's left-handed). Top-to-bottom centering is very tough here, too. Also the images are often printed poorly. If you can find a sharply printed, centered one? Wow. Even in a PSA 5 or equivalent, that's gold. There will be no bargains here, though, I can assure you.

1958 All-Star — No. 487 (\$300-\$400): Last year, you could get a PSA 8 for this price. Now those are going to be \$1,000 at least. I think this card is super sharp with the stars and the cut-out, classic Mantle batting pose. You can easily find this raw and in person you can check the sizing by just taking a new card and seeing if it matches size in height and width perfectly. Always have a new card in a holder with you for quick sizing guidance. This way, you'll never buy an obviously trimmed card. Micro-trimmed? Well, those fool even the graders.

"SHE ASTONISHED ME": HOW AN ASTROPHYSICIST IS HELPING THE OKLAND A'S FINE-TUNE THEIR PITCHES (FROM SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS)

[Oakland Athletics pitching analyst Samantha Schultz brings astrophysics to her MLB job](#)

OAKLAND — Samantha Schultz called her mom from college in the middle of a meltdown, frustrated with the complicated math she needed to master for her degree in astrophysics from St. Mary's College.

Her post-graduate plan had been to get her Ph.D. in particle physics. That wasn't her plan anymore. Through tears over the phone, Schultz told her mother the new one: to work in baseball.

Huh?

That her science-obsessed daughter wanted to go in another direction was shocking enough. But getting where she wanted to go in baseball was harder than math.

"You look at the front office names, and going off first names, 98 percent of women are in marketing or something similar — not baseball operations," Schultz's mother, Elizabeth Baldwin, said last week. "I told her, 'You might have to start out with something boring like cricket, or hockey.'"

“She said, ‘Nah, I’m gonna do baseball.’”

Now 26, Schultz is a pitching analyst for the A’s. In four years, she has gone from the Big Bang to the big leagues.

“She was confident it would be baseball and not some other sport she had minimal interest in — and she did it,” Baldwin said. “She astonishes me.”

First love

When it came to baseball, the Giants were Schultz’s first love.

While other baseball fans in the Bay Area and around the globe were engrossed by Barry Bonds’ home run chase and enigmatic stardom, Schultz was drawn to the pitching — Jason Schmidt, Robb Nen and, later, Matt Cain and Sergio Romo. But it was the undersized Tim Lincecum, with his powerful delivery and the supernatural movement on his pitches, that gave flight to her love of pitching.

“It was the dominance,” she said. “Watching him be dominant with mechanics that are not routine and something you wouldn’t teach. The beauty of his changeup. The way he used his pitches, it made me fall in love with pitching as its own art form.”

After leaving St. Mary’s with her astrophysics degree and math minor, Schultz enrolled in the sports management program at Columbia University. It was there, while working with the baseball team, that opportunity began to knock. And knock. And knock.

The woman who had worked without pay for the St. Mary’s baseball team, serving as official scorer and in any other capacity, had been recruited by Major League Baseball’s diversity fellowship program. She had an internship with the New York Mets and was juggling offers from the Tampa Bay Rays and the San Diego Padres. She had been a runner-up for a uniformed position as a traveling analyst with the Cincinnati Reds, which would have made her the first uniformed woman on an MLB coaching staff — a few years before Giants trailblazer Alyssa Nakken.

In a baseball landscape where teams are constantly looking for a unique edge and expertise, an astrophysics background was proving attractive.

“Every team that I’ve ever interviewed for has been very interested in the physics degree,” Schultz said. “How I can leverage the degree, how they can apply it to pitching and even beyond the actual pitching. I think as someone with a physics degree — my brain works a bit differently than somebody with, say, a computer science degree.”

Wanting to return to California, Schultz accepted the Padres job — where she mostly worked on base running, some hitting, or helped out assistant coaches with information. But her

passion for pitching called. In 2019, an opening popped up as a pitching analyst for the Oakland A's.

Though an early pioneer in analytics-based research and development, the A's operate with one of Major League Baseball's smallest but most eclectic departments of research scientists and analysts. Assistant Director of Research & Analytics Ben Lowry is an economics major and Baseball Systems Developer Ben Lewis a computer science major. Research Scientist David Jackson-Hanen has a Ph.D. in math.

"Part of the reason for hiring Sam was that I don't understand physics, so it's nice to have someone who does," A's general manager David Forst said. "We try to build a group with various strengths and with people who have the ability to fill in the gaps in our department. The physics side was different than anyone else we had here, but she spoke intelligently about pitching in a way that I hadn't heard and we didn't have in our group."

San Diego was the site of baseball's annual winter meeting in 2019, so Schultz attended. She met with a group from the A's front office, including Forst, who asked if it would be OK for team president Billy Beane to join them at lunch.

Of course, Schultz said calmly while her excitement surged.

"Don't bring up 'Moneyball,'" she told herself. "That's cliché."

She had read the book as a high schooler, and the book became a movie with Brad Pitt starring as Beane, then the A's general manager. The book, which detailed Beane's revolutionary thinking on player evaluation, had surfaced in Schultz's mind during those days and nights of complicated math problems.

At lunch, Schultz barely touched her crab sandwich — not because of nerves, but because she just couldn't find time to take bites between conversation. When Beane asked Schultz what brought her from physics to baseball, she had no choice but to tell him. "Moneyball," she said. The book had shown her that she could pursue her passion for baseball with her physics education as a strength.

"I'm glad you brought it up," Beane replied. "Because the thing I'm most proud about from 'Moneyball' is that people like you read that story and think, 'Hey, I can do this.'"

Two days after her interview, the A's offered her the position of pitching analyst.

A job to do

A's relief pitcher Lou Trivino has a pitch — a cut fastball — that was widely considered to be one of the best in baseball a few years ago. Somewhere along the way, he lost it. Schultz is helping him find it. That's her job.

“She really understands numbers and is able to communicate it well,” Trivino said. “I usually don’t like talking to people that only look at numbers because it’s data-driven, and I’m like, ‘OK, cool, my cutter sucks. I obviously know it sucks. How can you help me figure it out?’”

To get his cutter back to its elite form without inundating him with numbers, Schultz gave Trivino a simple course of action: throw it negative-2 or negative-3 inches more toward his glove side.

During bullpen sessions, Trivino will tinker with grip tweaks or throw it at a slightly different angle while Schultz, monitoring the movement on an iPad, replies with a simple “good” or “bad” grade.

“One of my biggest strengths is to take this complicated stuff and put it into baseball language,” Schultz said. “It’s not like I’m on the mound doing equations with the pitchers.”

Schultz understands a breaking ball can be more effective when its gyro spin — or bullet spin — is high. Or a two-seam fastball can be more effective when it creates turbulent pockets of air. She’ll suggest a pitcher adjust his grip or throw harder at a different angle to create the wanted movement.

“If I say, ‘OK, we need to get more gyro spin on this ball,’ what I might say to a pitcher is to roll it off your middle finger,” Schultz said.

She knows Trivino’s cutter needs to have force that creates movement to the negative side. That means Trivino must apply different pressures or throw at different angles to get his cutter to actually cut off his other pitches.

With Schultz’s help, Trivino is finally seeing negative movement on his cutter again. He knows in Schultz’s terms, those negatives are a positive.

“That’s the beautiful thing about Sam,” Trivino said. “I’m getting negative numbers now.”

Her 2020 season was limited by the pandemic. Not only fewer games — 60 instead of 162 — but limited contact with players. What is happening this season, with Trivino in particular, is the start of something.

“I hope my career and story inspires any underrepresented group to get into baseball,” Schultz said. “Not just women and physicists, but anyone who has a passion for the game.”

“A lot of people, when I said I wanted a career in baseball, didn’t think it made a lot of sense. But it was a natural fit for me. ... Now I’m at the A’s, working with the Moneyball people.”

MUSIC AND BASEBALL

From the relaxing sounds of a Wurlitzer organ in pregame introductions to the ear-splitting heavy metal that accompanies a closer's entrance from the bullpen, baseball has always been a sport framed by music.

Certain songs are synonymous with a team or a player. You only need to hear a few bars of "New York, New York" after the final out to know you're at Yankee Stadium. If you heard "Hell's Bells" in the ninth inning of a [San Diego Padres](#) game, you knew the home team had a late lead for Trevor Hoffman to protect. And Harry Caray let you know that "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" was a group song that accommodates voices in every register.

"Take Me Out to the Ballgame" emerged from New York's Tin Pan Alley in 1908 and is baseball's most enduring song. Its first stanza introduces the character who tells her beau that she'd much rather see baseball than a show. What is her name?

As the introduction goes, "Katie Casey was baseball mad, Had the fever and had it bad." When her young beau called to see if she'd like to see a show, "Miss Kate said, 'No, I'll tell you what you can do....'"

A handful of Major League teams tack on their own regional song to "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." In Milwaukee, it's "Roll Out the Barrel." In Houston, it's "Deep in the Heart of Texas." What song do the New York Mets play at Citi Field?

Lazy Mary. Lou Monte's 1958 hit, which is as synonymous with Italian restaurants as red and white checkerboard tablecloths, was featured in the opening scene of "The Godfather" and has been played at almost every Mets home game since the mid-1990s.

The Yankees play the Frank Sinatra version of "New York, New York" after every home game. But for years, they only played the Sinatra version after victories. They'd play a different version of the song after losses until the singer complained to the team. Who is this singer?

Start spreading the news? Only if it's good news, apparently. Liza Minnelli's version is iconic in its own right, and the Yankees agreed that it shouldn't be associated with losing.

Sometimes more than one player or team will co-opt a song as their theme music, which can make for some awkward moments. Metallica's "Enter Sandman" will always be associated with Hall of Fame closer Mariano Rivera. What other accomplished closer used that song throughout most of his career?

Billy Wagner continues to receive healthy support on Hall of Fame ballots.

It's generally a good thing for a musical artist's song to become someone's baseball theme music. But not always. Atlanta Braves closer John Rocker would take the mound to a certain heavy metal hit song, but after he made racist and homophobic statements to Sports Illustrated in 1999, which band asked him to discontinue using their hit?

Twisted Sister asked Rocker to stop playing "I Wanna Rock."

You're at Dodger Stadium, which unofficially has the loudest sound system in the major leagues (if not the Western Hemisphere). You watch Kenley Jansen close out a victory in the ninth inning. From his entrance theme to the victory theme, what two artists are you guaranteed to hear at full blast?

Tupac Shakur and Randy Newman

Explanation: It's "California Love," then if everything works out, "I Love LA."

Beloved Phillies broadcaster Harry Kalas died in 2009, but which of his favorite songs — a rendition performed by Kalas himself — remains on the regular playlist at Citizens Bank Park?

"High Hopes"

We just don't hear standard bearers for current stars like we did in the 1940s and '50s like Les Brown's "Joltin' Joe DiMaggio" or The Treniers with their ode to Willie Mays. Which of Mays' attributes were not praised in the lyrics to "Say Hey"?

According to the song, Willie swings the bat "like a little lead pipe.", runs the bases like a choo choo train, he covers center like he has jet shoes, he hits it farther than Campy can.

PETER GAMMONS—IN AN AGE OF NUMBERS, THE CATCHER=PITCHER DYNAMIC IS PROVING VITAL TO TOP CONTENDERS.

One August morning, first light rises late, then turns to dusk shortly after the 7:09 first pitch; at the same time, the light of another season is narrowing as we head towards autumn, the games clicking past us on the road to our conclusion. It becomes different. When the [Rays](#) lose a game at Fenway Park 20-8, one can still joke with manager Kevin Cash that back on June 27, 2003, the first 11 [Red Sox](#) hitters reached base against the [Marlins](#), Johnny Damon had three hits in the first inning, it was 23-5 when the game ended after midnight — and when it *all* ended 115 days later the Marlins were world champions.

It's around this time, though, that the dimming of the days makes everything a little less funny. The [Padres](#) get no-hit in [Tyler Gilbert](#)'s first major league start — pitching for a team that at the

time had the worst record in baseball — and the reaction is whether to turn over the hitting coach, not the page.

When [Chris Sale](#) returns after two years, pitches five strong innings and gives thanks to all the medical assistance and the teammates who made it possible, and Aaron Boone explains to the New York media that [Luis Severino](#) must go for another MRI on his shoulder, the urgency of the messages contrasts, just like a Julio Urías injured list stint, when two Cy Young award-winning pitchers named Kershaw and Bauer are already missing, reminds Dodger Nation that those [Giants](#) are not what ZiPS told you they were.

It is that time, the fourth quarter of the regular season, when game preparations are crystalized, and when what Giants president of baseball ops Farhan Zaidi calls the synchronicity of catchers and pitchers and coaches and advance scouts and analytics order the days.

In an age when making the postseason is a significant bridge to the next year, the 17 teams less than five games from a postseason spot on the Ides of August know just how vital it is that each of their pitchers has what Rays pitching coach Kyle Snyder calls “the knowledge and preparation to get to where he wants to be to get hitters out.”

To know Snyder, or most pitching coaches, be they named Mark Prior or Larry Rothschild or Matt Blake, is to know how much they take it upon themselves when somehow the wires are crossed and things go awry. Yet they don’t bear this burden alone. They have help. And some of the best assistance comes from the men crouching behind the plate, executing game plans and giving pitchers the confidence to get to where they want to be.

The Rays are an interesting place to start because of their regular catcher, [Mike Zunino](#). The morning of the 2012 draft, I heard the [Mariners](#) were probably going to take Zunino with the third pick of the first round. I texted Florida coach Kevin O’Sullivan about his catcher, and he texted back, “Jason Varitek.” As someone who knows how pitchers revered Varitek’s selfless work behind the plate, his preparation and his ability to steer the process, it was high praise — a call one Rays official calls “a really good comp.”

Zunino’s career slash line is .201/.299/.548, although he did hit .209 with 24 homers and a 137 OPS+ last season. He consistently hits lefties, and in fact he had the highest OPS against them (1.201) in [MLB](#) through last weekend. He is behind the plate in the majority of Tampa’s games because the Rays historically are built on run prevention; even in a season when they have been third in runs per game (5.16), topped only by the [Astros](#) and [Dodgers](#), his presence is arguably more important than ever for a team that lost [Charlie Morton](#) and [Blake Snell](#) in this offseason, has more than 10 pitchers on the injured list and has been transitioning to a younger starting staff.

Snyder says “we learn from one another.” There is the game-planning information that coaches, analysts, advance scouting experts and catchers prepare in collaboration, there are mechanics and other subtleties that Cash and Snyder decipher during the game, and Snyder

says, "(Zunino) and I help each other. I can make suggestions. But he's back there. He has the front row seat to things that are very difficult to pick up from the dugout. He sees everything, and that is vital."

To further the Varitek comp, on one of his recent podcasts, Bret Boone recalled that Varitek could learn what was going through Boone's mind by how he took a pitch. "He was unbelievable how he figured things out by a take," Boone said. "He'd know where I was looking, in or out, or what pitch I was sitting on, what I wanted to do. He spooked a lot of hitters just (because) we knew what he picked up behind us."

Brad Ausmus, who in his 19 1/2 seasons as a major league catcher ranks seventh on the all-time games caught list, has always said, "the job of the catcher is to create conviction in the pitcher." Ausmus caught one pitcher he believed "had such conviction that he never threw a pitch he didn't think was going to be perfect." That would be Roy Oswalt, who not incidentally was number one on Bill James' list of "Big Game Pitchers" from the seasons 1950-2002.

There are many ways a catcher can help a pitcher get to that level of conviction. It starts with setup, umpire respect and management, and confidence in blocking and catching skills (Jim Leyland, a former catcher as well as future HOF manager, used to say the [Mets](#) staffs of the mid-to-late '80s were not only talented, they were unafraid to throw their filthiest breaking balls with a runner on third because Gary Carter would always catch or block them in the dirt). I remember Johnny Bench and Tom Seaver delivering a supporting tutorial on the personal elements of creating that conviction in the lobby of the Otesaga Hotel in Cooperstown based on Ausmus' assertion.

Now, in first place in mid-August coming off a season when the Rays reached the World Series, Cash and Snyder praise Zunino for what Snyder says "is his ability to build relationships with pitchers. They know he is unselfish; catchers have to be unselfish. They trust him. The catcher's job is the pitcher, and he is always about the pitcher first."

Just as when Eddie Perez caught Greg Maddux, he made certain the game was in Maddux's control at Maddux's chosen pace. So he got the ball back to Maddux in two seconds, as requested, allowed Maddux to signal his own pitches and even change his mind in mid-delivery if he noticed some change in the hitter's approach. Thus Perez set up in the middle of the plate on most every pitch, ready to shift or lunge.

Through last weekend, the Rays led the American League in fielding independent pitching despite the loss of Morton, Snell and, partway through this season, potential Cy Young Award winner [Tyler Glasnow](#). The Giants have been bunched in with the Dodgers and [Brewers](#) atop National League staffs in that statistic. Unlike the "name" starters on those other two staffs, the five primary San Francisco starters are named Gausman, DeScafani, Wood, Cueto and Webb, who sound as if they should have an office on California Street.

The Giants' catchers are [Buster Posey](#) and [Curt Casali](#), the latter of whom made history by catching shutouts in five consecutive starts, from five different pitchers. They are, as Zaidi says, pitchers' catchers, and when Posey retires, it is entirely possible he takes a place in Cooperstown. In the first three-quarters of the season, Posey started 72 games, Casali 40; in the game today, a "backup catcher" is as important as a starter.

"They work very well with all the pitchers," says Zaidi. "They are familiar with them, the pitchers are familiar with Buster and Curt. They are very good at presentation, not only of the game plan, but the target. They're smart, and fully understand the synchronization that goes into preparation, and they are both exceptional at being able to adjust on the fly. The familiarity the pitchers have with them makes them comfortable when Buster and Curt ad-lib, and go with a sixth sense, which each clearly has.

"What a catcher has to do is understand, 'what does the pitcher need?' That can be a number of things, change in plans, a pat on the back, a way to relax."

Just like Bench did in Seaver's first start as a Red in 1977, when, two batters into the game, he sensed Seaver was on edge — so he walked out to the mound, stared him in the eye, asked, "are you *trying*?" and as the catcher walked back to behind the plate Seaver started laughing. He allowed one hit the rest of the way.

"We emphasize to our young catchers like [Joey Bart](#) and [Patrick Bailey](#) the importance of understanding what each pitcher may need," says Zaidi. "This is a game played by humans."

[Mark Buehrle](#) won 214 games and says he never studied a game plan or shook off a catcher's sign. "I concentrated on execution and let others think," he said. Chris Sale learned from Buehrle. "If I stood out there on the mound and tried to remember what I was supposed to throw to a hitter, I'd be standing there trying to think, not throw," Sale once said. "I let the catcher make the decision and I try to execute the pitch." Sale always credits his catchers and teammates.

[Jon Lester](#) is closing in on 200 wins and has three World Series rings, and has never forgotten the work Varitek and [David Ross](#) did with him. Oh yes. Now he has [Yadier Molina](#).

There are lots of numbers out there for people who believe that players are just the sum of those numbers and that all thought must be quantified. On Baseball Prospectus, the framing leaders are J.T. Realmuto, [Sean Murphy](#), [Max Stassi](#) and [Jose Trevino](#). The blocking leaders are [Jacob Stallings](#), Realmuto, [Tucker Barnhart](#) and [Yan Gomes](#).

The Dodgers believe Will Smith is in the Realmuto class, and people in the organization remember that when he came up from the minors in 2019 — known for being a converted infielder — he absorbed everything at every meeting and sought out every piece of advice he could find. The Astros trust in Martin Maldonado. Padres GM A.J. Preller has traded for [Austin Nola](#) and [Victor Caratini](#), pitcher-first catchers, and Nola was their postseason guy last October.

[Omar Narváez](#) has made himself into the catcher Brewers pitchers trust. [Austin Barnes](#) is to Smith what Casali is to Posey. There is a strong feeling that [James McCann](#) is a big reason Mets pitching has held together despite the losses of [Jacob deGrom](#) and [Noah Syndergaard](#).

As one American League club development leader says, “the more we know about game planning, the more we know about data and how it evolves, the more complicated it has gotten to develop catchers. The college game doesn’t develop catchers, or the mentality to relate to pitchers or make adjustments to the game plan — because they can’t do that from the bench. They call every pitch, and it can take a long time to get a young catcher — even if he has great feet, hands, arm, whatever — to understand all that the job entails because they don’t do it in college, because the college game is about the coaches and the program, not the education of the kid.”

In January 1989, I sat in the bowels of Dodger Stadium, watching every pitch of Orel Hershiser’s masterful Game 2 shutout of the Oakland A’s in the 1988 World Series with the catcher from that game, Mike Scioscia, for a Sports Illustrated piece on how that game was called. As I rode back to my hotel, I was struck by the realization that Scioscia never talked about himself; it was only about Hershiser, the A’s hitters, the home plate umpire. In my Boston days, I once did the same with Rich Gedman, who also never talked about himself. I wish I could have been wired into nine innings of Steve Carlton pitching to Tim McCarver, Bob Lemon to Jim Hegan or Pete Vukovich to Ted Simmons, for what would have been a three-hour graduate school course.

We get to this time and think about Urías leaping into the arms of Barnes, or [Madison Bumgarner](#) doing the same with Posey, or of Brad Lidge sliding to [Carlos Ruiz](#) — speaking of catching a great breaking ball. Wise men tell us that as the light shortens, it’s all about the pitching, but, in reality, in so many ways pitching is about collaboration, and about the men armed with the tools of ignorance, for whom each day’s three-and-a-half-hour, 188-pitch workday is all about the pitcher.

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES – BECAUSE YOU CAN’T GET ENOUGH OHTANI

Is Shohei Ohtani ‘the New Babe Ruth,’ or Something Entirely New?

The two-way star for the Los Angeles Angels draws countless comparisons to the Yankees legend, but their paths are fairly different.

“The 21st century Babe Ruth.” “The modern-day Babe Ruth.” “The greatest two-way player since Babe Ruth.”

When reaching back through history for comparisons to Shohei Ohtani, who hit his [40th home run of the season](#) on Wednesday, fans and sportswriters tend to find just one: Babe Ruth. One of the greatest sluggers in baseball history, of course, Ruth started his career as a first-rate pitcher. So Ohtani, the two-way sensation for the Los Angeles Angels, is simply Ruth reincarnated, right?

It is not quite that simple.

For three seasons, from 1915 to 1917, Ruth was a full-time starting pitcher for the Boston Red Sox. While he occasionally got a pinch-hit appearance, and wowed people with his power, pitching was his job.

He was 23-12 with a league-leading E.R.A. of 1.75 in 1917 and was 24-13 the next year. But while the Sox, who won World Series titles in 1915, 1916 and 1918, had to be happy with his pitching, Ruth's hitting was starting to attract a lot of attention. In 1917, he hit .325 with some extra-base power. And Ruth himself wanted to focus more on hitting.

And that is where the comparison to Ohtani begins.

In terms of true two-way play, Ruth's most Ohtani-like seasons were 1918 and 1919. His pitching load was cut roughly in half, to 34 combined starts over two seasons compared with 78 in the two previous years, and he played in the outfield (and occasionally first base) on other days. He went from about 150 plate appearances a season to 382 in 1918. In 1919, he was essentially a full-time position player, with 543 plate appearances.

It quickly became clear that his true value to the team came as a hitter.

In 1918, he had a career high on-base plus slugging percentage of .966 with 11 home runs, which led the majors in that [radically different era](#). (In a take that didn't age well, [a New York Times headline said](#), "Ruth headed for extra base record which may stand for years to come.") In 1919, the team ratcheted back his pitching, shutting him down for the most part by mid-June, and he upped his O.P.S. to 1.114 and his home runs to 29. At the same time, he was still a competent pitcher, with E.R.A.s of 2.22 and 2.97.

Ohtani's 2021 doesn't match up with any of those seasons.

After working through arm injuries in previous seasons, Ohtani is on pace to make about 24 starts this year, fewer than Ruth as a full-time pitcher but more than in Ruth's part-time seasons. And Ohtani is on track for more than 600 plate appearances, which is more than Ruth had in any of his pitching years. Though in fairness to Ruth, Ohtani is almost exclusively used as a designated hitter, thus he doesn't have the additional fielding burden that Ruth did.

Ohtani's pitching numbers — 8-1 with a 2.79 E.R.A. — are near the top of the league, as Ruth's were in his full-time pitching years. As a hitter, Ohtani leads the majors in homers and the American League in slugging percentage, a Ruthian feat for certain.

While Ruth would quite likely have been capable of doing full-time duty as a pitcher and hitter, he never got the chance: His days as even a part-time pitcher came to an abrupt end in 1920.

The cash-poor Red Sox, weary of Ruth's contract demands, [sold him to the Yankees](#) in an infamous deal. By then, Ruth's batting had overshadowed his pitching, and the Yanks put him in the outfield for good. He made just five token pitching appearances in his 15 years with the club. (For the record, he was 5-0 in them.)

From his first year as a full-time outfielder with the Yankees, he revolutionized hitting, slugging 54 homers in 1920. His O.P.S. was 1.379, mouthwatering in any era. He had become the greatest hitter the game had ever known, and his pitching career slipped away to a footnote.

In the nearly 100 years between the careers of Ruth and Ohtani, the National and American leagues offered shockingly little in terms of players who excelled at pitching and hitting, and none who did both at the same time. But the Negro leagues [did offer a few standouts](#), in part because they had smaller rosters and tighter budgets. Bullet Joe Rogan regularly hit .300 and had an E.R.A. in the 2s as a starter, outfielder and second baseman for the Kansas City Monarchs. Martin Dihigo was a star at any position he played, including pitcher.

But with databases of those leagues' statistics still being built out, Ohtani is constantly compared to Ruth. And it is Ruth's offensive explosion in 1920, when he went exclusively to hitting, that raises the question of whether Ohtani could improve if he stuck to one lane.

In modern sports there is a tendency to push back at versatility: For pro stars, "How good could Bo Jackson have been if he hadn't played football as a 'hobby'"; or even for children, "If your kids are going to get really good at soccer they need to join a year-round traveling team and drop basketball and lacrosse." The Hall of Fame pitcher John Smoltz [suggested earlier in the season](#) that Ohtani should consider pitching exclusively.

But could there realistically be much of an upside to a specialist Ohtani? He is already hitting and pitching extremely well. Losing 40 homers (and maybe 50 by the end of the year) doesn't seem like a smart move, and would one of the best pitchers in the league really get a lot better by dropping the four or five at-bats he takes on his off days?

It is also not 100 percent clear that Ruth's drastic improvement was entirely, or even partly, because he stopped pitching. He was 25 in 1920, about the age when player stats often improve significantly. And led by Ruth, hitting in baseball was changing quickly. More batters abandoned the traditional contact-based approach to hitting, seeking the long ball even if it meant more strikeouts. One would guess that Ruth would still have clobbered a lot of home runs in the 1920s if he had been sent out to pitch every few days.

The other trouble with comparisons is that they don't work as well with the all-time greats. It's easy to find five players similar to a merely good player like, say, B.J. Surhoff or Josh Reddick. Finding someone who's a lot like Willie Mays or Roger Clemens is pretty much impossible.

But the comparisons between Ohtani and Ruth do underscore something quite remarkable: Players like them don't come along very often.

JAYSON STARK OF THE ATHLETIC

When did [Rays](#) dynamo [Brett Phillips](#) realize he'd become a modern-day Babe Ruth/Lou Gehrig. But I'd estimate the correct answer there would be "never."

Then again, if that guess is right, he shares that take with pretty much every other living American. But the reason we have such a thing as a Weird and Wild column, friends, is so we can report that if you'd never previously thought that Brett Phillips had much in common with Ruth and Gehrig, well, that would be a mistake! Now here comes the part where we prove it.

BABE PHILLIPS? Over the last 23 days, our man Brett Phillips has been kinda busy. First, he had to work three grand slams in 19 plate appearances into his busy schedule. Then, on Monday, he did [this even Weirder and Wilder thing](#).

So that's three grand slams and an inside-the-park homer, all between July 29 and Aug. 16. Incredible. Doesn't that feel like it ought to be some sort of record? Hey, matter of fact, it's a really cool record.

According to our amigos from STATS Perform, Phillips is merely the first player in history with three slams and an inside-the-parker in any span of 30 days or less – even including hitters who cheated by having one of the slams be an actual inside-the-park slam.

So who held the old record, you ask? Oh, only Babe Freaking Ruth! In 1929, the Babe went: July 3 slam, July 15 inside-the-parker, Aug. 6 slam, Aug. 7 slam. So that's 36 days, which is amazing and all. But of course, he's no Brett Phillips!

BRETT GEHRIG? Now back to those three slams in 19 plate appearances. STATS also did the math on that – and found just two other players in history who launched three grand slams within a span of 20 plate appearances in the same season.

14 Jim Northrup, 1968 [Tigers](#)
19 Brett Phillips, 2021 Rays
20 Lou Gehrig, 1931 [Yankees](#)

In other words, what do we now know about Lou Gehrig? He, too, was no Brett Phillips!

BRETT MCCOVEY? All right, one more thing that has nothing to do with any Yankees legends. To find the last hitter before this week who had even hit two slams, plus an inside-the-parker, in the same calendar month, you'd have to drop another Hall of Fame name: Willie McCovey did that for the [Giants](#) in September, 1967, according to STATS.

So there you go. Brett Phillips – the same man who showed up at the plate in the ninth inning of a World Series game last October and [did something that hadn't been done](#) since Kirk Gibson – is now channeling his inner Ruth and Gehrig pretty much every time he plays. And you shouldn't be surprised to learn he had a few highly entertaining thoughts on that. Here's our conversation, edited slightly for brevity and clarity.

Weird and Wild: Three slams and an inside-the-park homer in less than 30 days. You're the first player in the history of baseball to do that. And the guy whose record you broke? How about Babe Ruth.

four weeks ago, four RBIs was the most you'd ever had in any big-league game. And now you've gotten four on one swing three times. You don't have to be the best player to do things like this. I think in other sports, it's tougher to be a bench guy and, in football or basketball, set records that have been (there) for 50 or 100 years. ... But that's what makes baseball so special, is that you can have a guy like Brett Phillips, who comes off the bench and gets to play once or twice a week, and does something that Lou Gehrig or Babe Ruth did.

Despite that cornfield he's so renowned for strolling out of, would Shoeless Joe have even recognized this game? Barely! Did you know that...

- In 13 seasons, he never once played in any game in which eight home runs (or more) were hit? But there were eight in this game.
- Also in those 13 seasons, there are no "known" games (accounting for sketchy play-by-play data) in which the White Sox took a lead into the ninth and then gave up two home runs? But the White Sox did that in this game, then won anyway.
- There were definitely no big-league home runs (or any other kind of hits) launched in Iowa in Shoeless Joe's time – but then there were none in California, either? Well, the first big-league homer in the history of Iowa was smoked in this game (by [Jose Abreu](#)).
- And only once in those 13 seasons was there a two-homer game by a "Judge," by which we mean a hitter named Judge, not Judge Landis or William Howard Taft or any other "Judges" of that ilk. And that happened on Aug. 6, 1920, when Joe Judge went deep twice against the Browns. Yes, [Aaron Judge](#) homered twice in this game.

Tim Anderson of the White Sox ended the Iowa game with a home run. So what was so familiar about that? Oh, only that it was the 15th walkoff home run ever hit by the White Sox against the Yankees. And who hit the first? A fellow named Shoeless Joe Jackson (on July 20, 1919).

Here's something you don't see every century. It was eye-popping enough that Votto collected his 2,000th hit in the seventh inning Monday. But that wasn't even his Weirdest and Wildest feat of that inning.

The Reds then kept batting and batting in the seventh – for 41 minutes and 38 seconds, according to the calculations of Bally Sports Ohio's Joel Luckhaupt. And so, on the way to an eight-run inning, the latest member of the 2,000 Hit Club was invited to bat again – and got his 2,001st hit in the same inning. In answer to your questions about that ...

- The last man to get hit No. 2,000 (or 3,000 or 4,000) and also get another hit in the same inning, according to STATS: Eddie Mathews, for the [Braves](#) against the [Phillies](#), on June 15, 1965 (also 2,000 and 2,001).
- The last man to get any kind of "000" hit in the middle of a multi-hit inning: That would be another Red, Sean Casey, who fired up hits No. 999 and 1,000 in the same inning on Aug. 5, 2004.

Meanwhile, in other Joey Votto news...

He hit a pop-up!

But not just any pop-up. An actual game-ending pop-up, last Saturday in a loss to the Phillies. And how Weird and Wild was that? According to our friends at sportradar.com, it's only the third game-ending pop-up this guy has hit in 15 seasons. Then again, it's also only the 23rd pop-up out he has hit total in all those seasons – during which he has put over 5,000 balls in play.

So how Weird and Wild is that? Well, [Jose Altuve](#) – who I bet you think is probably vaguely Joey Votto-like in his bat-to-ball and pitch-recognition skills – has hit 26 pop-up outs just this year. That should give you an idea.

Dodgers catcher Will Smith hit a home run in all three games of a three-game series at Citi Field.

So how could I not investigate: Who's the last [Dodgers](#) catcher to hit a home run in all three games of any series in New York? And the very cool answer to that question, according to baseball-reference.com/Stathead is...

Roy Campanella!

Did it in a three-game series against the [Pirates](#) on May 30-31, 1955 – when the Dodgers were still playing in Brooklyn

But the more I thought about Ohtani's eighth-inning rocket into the seats of Comerica Park, the Weirder and Wilder it got. If only because:

It was the eighth inning ... oh, and also because he was still pitching.

So how long has it been since an American League starting pitcher hit a home run in the eighth inning of a game in an AL park, in a game in which he did what Ohtani did (pitch at least eight innings and earn a win)? How about 50 years ago this month. So not even in the final season of the pre-DH era.

Last to do it: Dave McNally, for the [Orioles](#), off Floyd Weaver of the [Red Sox](#), on Aug. 28, 1971, at old Memorial Stadium.

CRUZ CONTROL – When Nelson Cruz thumped two homers for the Rays on Tuesday, here's one of many things that got my attention: He has now hit two home runs (or more) in a game for five different teams (Rays, [Twins](#), [Mariners](#), Orioles, [Rangers](#)).

- Only other active player who can say that? Justin Upton. Who else?
- The all-time record holder for that sort of thing? Well, it wouldn't be in your top 100 guesses. It's Mike Cameron! Who did it with eight teams (White Sox, Reds, Mariners, [Mets](#), [Padres](#), [Brewers](#), Red Sox and [Marlins](#)). No kidding.
- And while you'd probably guess that somebody like Gary Sheffield or Jim Thome would be next in line, you'd be wrong again, because of course you would. The group at seven: Jeromy Burnitz, [Mark Reynolds](#) and that well-traveled Reggie Sanders. Amazing.

The Orioles have lost 15 games in a row. So that's not good. But even worse, they've been outscored in those games, 138-42! That's a minus-96 run differential if you're adding along at home (or even if you're not). And you know how hard it is to run up a minus-96 run differential in not much more than two weeks?

The Yankees haven't had a minus-96 run differential (or worse) over a full season in 30 years (since a minus-103, by Kevin Maas' 91-loss 1991 Bronx Bummers). But even worse ...

The last team to rack up a run differential of minus-96 (or worse) over any stretch of 15 games, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, was Jersey Bakely's legendary 1899 Cleveland Spiders. They put up a minus-110 over their last 15 games that season. Yes, minus-110.

And don't ask how things went after that, if only because there was no "after that." They lost 50 of their last 51 to end that season – and then disbanded the franchise.

The catchiest pitching matchup of the year unfolded Saturday in New York and the Mets vs. the Dodgers.:

Walker versus Buehler.

Or, if you prefer, Taijuan versus Walker.

Whatever, it was [Taijuan Walker](#) and Walker Buehler heading for the mound, not just to engage in baseball but to inspire Weird and Wild tidbits galore. Thanks to ace baseball-reference intern Jeremy Frank ([@MLBRandomStats](#)) for diving in on this. He found:

- 41 other times we've had one of these same-name matchups since 1901.
- Four meetings of Cole (Gerrit) versus (Cole) Hamels, which accounted for almost all of these Name Game duels in the last three decades.
- And only one other instance involving any active pitcher: Ross (Tyson) versus (Ross) Stripling on July 12, 2018.

Thinking about Padres rookie Tyler Gilbert throwing a no-hitter in his first big league start. Greg Maddux, Steve Carlton, Roger Clemens, Tom Glavine, [CC Sabathia](#), Zack Greinke and John Smoltz—20 Cy Young awards, 7 Hall of Fame plaques, 4363 games started and not one no-hitter.

MOORE OR LESS – There's nothing new anymore about seeing a starting pitcher get the hook in the middle of a no-hitter. Heck, when it happened to the Phillies' [Matt Moore](#) last Saturday, he was the *eighth* pitcher to exit a no-hit bid this year in the sixth inning or later. So here's the extremely Strange But True part.

A) Moore threw six hitless innings. Then B) he batted for himself *after* those six hitless innings. Then C) he came out of the game *before throwing another pitch*.

OK, so he was only allowed to bat so he could lay down a bunt. But still. How Strange But True is that?

Glad you asked. It's so strange that, according to STATS, it was only the second time in the modern era that any starter twirled six hitless innings (or more), then made it into the batter's box, then watched somebody else on his team throw the next pitch. The other?

It was the always-innovative Greg Maddux, on Aug. 3, 2006, for the Dodgers. Also fired six hitless innings. Then was sent up to hit by Grady Little with two outs and nobody on in the top of the seventh in Cincinnati. Grounded out to end the inning. Then was replaced by [Joe Beimel](#). Grady-ball at its finest!

TRIPLE THREATS – I know the Mets don't get many of any kinds of hits these days. So this might seem nitpicky. Still, you know how hard it is to go 68 games in a row without hitting *any* triples, as the Mets just did?

Just so we put in perspective exactly how bizarre that is, you should know that back in 1912, Ty Cobb once had 20 triples *all by himself* in a span of 68 games.

But then, on Monday, just one game after the Mets had broken the 2016 Orioles' modern record for most consecutive games without a trifecta, they finally broke that streak. But was that the Strange But True part? Nope. Because the Met who finally hit a triple was none other than [Pete Alonso](#).

And what's so Strange But True about that? Oh, only that the guy who hit this triple hadn't hit *any* triples in his previous 1,156 trips to the plate, over the last 812 days, dating back to May 27, 2019, because of course!

Let's recap the fabulous Rays career of reliever [Evan Phillips](#). Scarfed up by the Rays earlier this month after hanging out at the Orioles' Triple-A outpost in Norfolk all year. Pitched in one game for the Rays – and saved it – because Rays. Then got designated for assignment and claimed by the Dodgers this week.

So has *that* ever happened? According to STATS, since the dawn of the modern save rule in 1969, just five other pitchers appeared in one game for any team in a season – and saved it.

Rick Waits, 1973 Rangers

Randy Lerch, 1976 Phillies

Don Carmen, 1983 Phillies

Joe Nathan, 2015 Tigers

Aaron Slegers, 2019 Rays

But what do those pitchers have in common with Evan Phillips (who was dumped by the Rays and claimed by the Dodgers)? That would be nothing! One of them (Nathan) got hurt. The others spent the rest of that season in the minors. So how many other pitchers have ever passed through a team in midseason, saved the only game they pitched in and then moved on to another team? None.

Finally, how Strange But True was the Yankees' 8-6, 11-inning win over the [Royals](#) on Aug. 9? So Strange But True that I even emerged from vacationing to tweet about it! And why was that? Possibly because ...

- The Yankees became the first team in the history of the current save rule to blow a save *in four consecutive innings* and still win!
- And as loyal reader/Royals fan Rany Jazayerli tweeted at me that day, this was the first game ever in which two teams combined to score in *none* of the first 12 half-innings but then *all* of the last 10 half-innings.
- But especially this: In the last 100 years, only two teams had ever scored in the seventh, eighth, ninth, 10th and 11th innings of any game. And then (with some minor assistance from the zombie runners), we had two teams do that *in the same game*. Which honestly makes zero sense.

JOE POSNANSKI OF THE ATHLETIC

YOU HAVE HEARD ME PRAISE THE ATHLETIC OFTEN. THEN SENT ME 5 FREE ONE MONTH PASSES AS A COME ON TRYING TO SCORE MORE SUBSCRIBERS—EMAIL ME IF YOU'D LIKE ONE.

The Wait for Perfection Goes On a Little Longer

I had not noticed this at all, but today marks *nine years* since King Félix Hernández threw MLB's last perfect game. There have been so many no-hitters — more this year than any other in baseball history — that I just hadn't thought about the fact that nobody has thrown a perfecto since 2012 (when three different pitchers threw perfect games).

That nine-year gap is actually a very long one by recent standards. Looking back over the last 40 years:

- Len Barker threw one in 1981.
- Mike Witt threw one in 1984.
- Tom Browning threw one in 1988.
- Dennis Martinez threw one in 1991.
- Kenny Rogers threw one in 1994.
- David Wells threw one in 1998.
- David Cone threw one in 1999.
- Randy Johnson threw one in 2004.
- Mark Buehrle threw one in 2009.
- Dallas Braden and Roy Halladay threw perfectos in 2010.
- Philip Humber, Matt Cain and King Félix threw them in 2012.

So this is quite a long time between perfect games.

Shohei and Tell

OK, look, it isn't as if Shohei Ohtani has been underpublicized. He has gotten plenty of press. He was the focal point of the Home Run Derby and the All-Star Game. He has been written and talked about countless times. Everybody knows he's a big deal.

That said, I want to just say two things.

1. With his eight innings against Detroit today — when he allowed just one run — Ohtani is now 8-1 with a 2.79 ERA and he has 120 strikeouts in 100 innings. The league is hitting .190 against him.
2. He homered in the eighth inning, and that was [his 40th home run](#), which leads all of baseball by five homers. He also leads the American League in slugging by more than 40 points.

I say those things because it doesn't matter how much you say about Ohtani ... it isn't enough. What he is doing now is not humanly possible. I know people love to compare him to Babe Ruth, but the comparison isn't real. Ruth really only had one year where he was *sort of* an

everyday pitcher and everyday player, and that was in 1919, when he did set the MLB record with 29 home runs but he wasn't pitching all that much or all that well. His 9-5 record and 2.97 ERA look good now, but this was Deadball, and that ERA was roughly league average. Ruth did lead the league with 11 homers in 1918, but he was more of a part-time player and though he pitched well, his best pitching days were behind him.

No, if you want to compare Ohtani to anyone, I think it might be worth comparing him to [Sammy Baugh](#), who during the war years was probably both the best offensive *and* best defensive player in the fledgling NFL. But even that, well, it was the war years and it was the fledgling NFL.

There simply isn't a precedent for what Ohtani's doing, for someone being not just a good pitcher but a great one, not just a good hitter but the likely league MVP.*

**My friend Tom Shieber at the National Baseball Hall of Fame brings up a great piece of trivia: Ohtani could very well become the first pitcher in MLB history to win the MVP award without winning the Cy Young. This is fascinating on any number of levels; Ohtani is the first person to come along who I think makes a compelling argument that pitchers SHOULD NOT win MVP awards. This is because if he ever swept the Cy Young and MVP — and at this point, should we even doubt he could do this? — he would become the first player in baseball history who truly earned both awards separately. And at the point, what would be the point in ever giving a pitcher the MVP award for ONLY PITCHING?*

It's something you just have to say out loud again and again just to believe. A pitcher leads the league in homers. A slugger is an ace for his pitching staff. It's all so ludicrous and wonderful.

Fernando Tatis Jr. of the Padres has played only 93 games so far this year because of various injuries and still leads the National League in both home runs and stolen bases. Willie Mays led the league in homers four times and in stolen bases four times, but never in the same year. He certainly *could* have led the league in both, particularly in 1955 when he hit 55 homers and finished second in the league in stolen bases with 24. Mays finished one stolen base behind Milwaukee's Bill Bruton, but stole his bases at a much higher success rate — if he had wanted to steal a few more bases, he could have. But it wasn't a big deal to him.

Anyway, Tatis is [a unicorn, an absurdity](#). He's hitting .299/.374/.615 with 51 homers and 35 stolen bases and 134 runs scored per 162 games.

[illegible]

AUGUST 15, 2021

Zack Wheeler retired 22 straight batters last Sunday vs. the Mets. The last Phillies pitcher to set down that many hitters in a row was Roy Halladay, who accomplished the feat during his perfect game on May 29, 2010.

Who was the last White Sox pitcher to lead the AL/NL in strikeouts?

I guessed a lot of names—Wilbur Wood, Gary Peters, Jack McDowell, Carlos Rodon, Chris Sale. No, I did not come up with Ed Walsh (255 in 1911). Walsh has 3 of the top 4 strikeout seasons in White Sox history. Sale had 274 K's in 2015 but did not lead the league. Walsh led the majors in 1908 with 269. A Hall of Fame right hander, Walsh went 195-126 over 14 years. **His career ERA was 1.82. He threw 57 shutouts and was MVP runner-up twice.**

This week we witnessed the first Major League game ever played in Iowa. The record for most career wins by a pitcher born in Iowa is Bob Feller, who was born in Van Meter, Iowa, and won 266 games during his Hall of Fame career.

Pat Hoberg, a native of Urbandale, Iowa, was the home plate umpire.

Wednesday Adam Wainwright of the Cards threw a shutout in a 4-0 win over the Pirates at PNC Park on just 88 pitches and with two hits and an RBI of his own. It was the Georgia native's 27th career complete game (most among active pitchers) and his third of the season; it was his 11th career shutout (his first since 2016); and it was his first career with less than 100 pitches.

Look who won 8 straight and 10 out of 13. The Phillies seem to have saved their season. At the start of July, they were 37-41, in fourth place and given a 9 percent chance to make the playoffs. At the end of July, they had lost back-to-back games to the lowly Pirates and were still two games below .500. Now? Philadelphia's postseason odds have jumped to 60.1 percent. They were half that a week ago.

Mike Trout recently turned 30. He has a 1.002 career OPS. Two players this century have surpassed Trout's OPS through their age-30 seasons--Albert Pujols (1.055) and Todd Helton (1.041).

Two interesting items from last night's Yankees-White Sox broadcast. The White Sox are + 128 in run differential. The Yankees are + 17. Chicago will lean on their bats in this one. The White Sox are hitting .249, which ranks 7th-best in MLB. The Yankees are hitting .237, which ranks 21st.

CORBIN BURNES

[Corbin Burnes](#) of the Brewers did exactly what a pitcher is supposed to do after being spotted a seven-run lead before he throws a single pitch.

He filled the zone with strikes.

Burnes [matched an AL/NL record](#) by striking out 10 consecutive Cubs during one particularly dominant stretch of a 15-strikeout, eight-inning masterpiece Wednesday at Wrigley Field, where he joined Tom Seaver and Aaron Nola in MLB's record books and the Brewers breezed to a [10-0 win](#).

Seaver, pitching for the Mets, struck out 10 straight Padres on April 22, 1970, for a record that stood more than 51 years. That is until this season, where it's already been matched twice. Nola, pitching against Seaver's former team, whiffed 10 straight Mets on June 25; now Burnes has joined him, getting 10 consecutive strikeouts -- all swinging -- from the start of the second inning through the first out of the fifth on a hot and humid night on Chicago's North Side.

Burnes' first 14 pitches of the night were strikes. The strikeout streak was pitching at its finest. Four of the 10 strikeouts came on cutters, the pitch that has transformed Burnes from one of the National League's most hittable pitchers in 2019, before he created that offering in the Brewers' pitching lab out of the natural movement on what had been a four-seam fastball. Three of the strikeouts were on sliders. Two were on curveballs. One was a changeup. Of the 10 strikeout victims, four never saw a ball during their at-bat.

Burnes matched his career high with strikeout No. 13 in the sixth inning, then set a career high with his 14th strikeout in the seventh -- he became the first Brewers pitcher with that many K's since Mike Fiers at Wrigley Field on Aug. 14, 2014. When Burnes got strikeout No. 15 with his 99th and final pitch in the eighth, he had the second-most strikeouts in 53 years of franchise history, trailing only [Ben Sheets' 18 strikeouts](#) on a memorably sunny Sunday in Milwaukee in May 2004.

Brewers manager Craig Counsell was the Brewers' shortstop that afternoon behind Sheets.

Burnes' final line: Eight innings, four hits (two of which stayed on the infield), no walks, 15 strikeouts. Of his 99 pitches, 74 were strikes. Baseball-Reference has data going back to 1901 and there are only 54 performances of 15 or more strikeouts with no walks, including Burnes and the Mets' Jacob deGrom this season.

Burnes was the first opponent to strike out 15 Cubs since Chicago's World Series curse was still a thing. Chris Sale whiffed 15 while pitching for the White Sox on Aug. 16, 2015.

It's not the first time that Burnes has made strikeout history this season. He started the year with [58 strikeouts before issuing his first walk](#), breaking Adam Wainwright's modern AL/NL mark for a starter and Kenley Jansen's modern record for any pitcher.

TYLER GILBERT AND ANOTHER NO-NO

A year ago, with the Minor League season canceled, [Tyler Gilbert](#) was working as an electrician [with his father](#) to make ends meet in Northern California while also throwing bullpens when he could to try to stay in shape.

On Saturday night at Chase Field, the D-backs left-hander etched himself into the record books as he threw a no-hitter in his first big league start in a 7-0 victory over the Padres.

Gilbert allowed three walks in the game, all to leadoff hitter Tommy Pham, while striking out five and throwing 102 pitches.

Gilbert, 27, became just the fourth player to throw a no-hitter in his first career start. [The last pitcher to do it was Bobo Holloman](#) in 1953. The other two happened before 1900.

It was the [third no-hitter in D-backs history](#). Randy Johnson threw a perfect game in 2004 against the Braves, and Edwin Jackson no-hit the Rays in 2010. Both were on the road, so Gilbert has the distinction of being the first D-backs pitcher to throw a no-hitter at Chase Field.

There have been eight Major League no-hitters this season, matching 1884 for the most in a year in American League/National League history. Not among the eight is Madison Bumgarner's seven-inning complete game with no hits allowed on April 25.

It's worth noting that 1884 was before the mound was even moved to its current distance, something that happened in 1893. (please see below for info on arriving at 60 feet 6 inches).

Gilbert originally came up in the Phillies' organization before being dealt to the Dodgers in February 2020. The D-backs selected him in the Triple-A portion of the Rule 5 Draft in December.

After making three relief appearances for the D-backs, including his big league debut Aug. 3, Gilbert was named to start Saturday's game after the D-backs removed Caleb Smith from the rotation.

It was catcher Daulton Varsho's 28th career start behind the plate. Their 27 combined starts at pitcher/catcher respectively are the third-fewest entering any no-hitter in the Modern Era (since 1900), according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Only Kent Mercker/Javy Lopez (20 in 1994) and Don Wilson/Dave Adlesh (25 in 1967) had fewer.

This was also Gilbert's first complete game at any professional level. His previous career high in innings pitched came as a member of the Phillies organization with the Lakewood BlueClaws, when he tossed eight innings on July 9, 2016.

D-backs. They entered the game 43 games under .500, which is the worst mark ever by an NL team entering a no-no, according to STATS. The only AL team to be more games under .500 entering one was the A's in 1916, who were 25-91 before Bullet Joe Bush's no-hitter on Aug. 26 against the Indians.

There was a 29-win difference between the Padres and D-backs entering the game. That's the fifth-largest such difference between the team that was no-hit and the team to throw the no-hitter in the modern era (since 1900), according to Elias.

The Padres made hard contact against Gilbert, notching 10 hard-hit batted balls (95+ mph exit velocity), with the hardest being a 112.2 mph lineout from Manny Machado. Those 10 hard-hit batted balls are the second-most by any team that has been no-hit in a game tracked by Statcast (since 2015). The Brewers had 11 hard-hit batted balls against Alec Mills on Sept. 13, 2020, in his no-hitter.

Joe Musgrove [threw the first no-hitter in Padres history](#) on April 9, and now the team has been no-hit this season, too. They're the first team since the 2015 Cubs to be no-hit and throw a no-hitter in the same season, and the sixth since 2010, along with the 2014 Phillies, 2013 Giants, 2012 Mariners and 2010 Rays.

Speaking of Musgrove, he was the Padres' starter in this game, meaning he's now been on both ends of a no-hitter this year. He's the 12th pitcher to both throw a no-hitter and have one thrown against him in a season, according to Elias, and the first since Jake Arrieta in 2015.

ROOKIE NO HITTERS (because I love lists)

24 big leaguers have accomplished the feat. Here is the list since 1955:

Chris Heston, June 9, 2015 Giants at Mets, 5-0

Clay Buchholz, Sept. 1, 2007 Red Sox vs. Orioles, 10-0

Anibal Sanchez, Sept. 6, 2006 Marlins vs. D-backs, 2-0

Bud Smith, Sept. 3, 2001 Cardinals at Padres, 4-0

Jose Jimenez, June 25, 1999 Cardinals at D-backs, 1-0

Wilson Alvarez, Aug. 11, 1991 White Sox at Orioles, 7-0

Mike Warren, Sept. 29, 1983 Athletics vs. White Sox, 3-0

Jim Bibby, July 30, 1973 Rangers at Athletics, 3-0

Steve Busby, April 27, 1973 Royals at Tigers, 3-0

Burt Hooton, April 16, 1972 Cubs vs. Phillies, 4-0

Vida Blue, Sept. 21, 1970 Athletics vs. Twins, 6-0

Don Wilson, June 18, 1967 Astros vs. Braves, 2-0

Bo Belinsky, May 5, 1962 Angels vs. Orioles, 2-0

MVP AFTER BEING TRADED? (from MLB.COM)

Since 1931, the BBWAA has voted each year on Most Valuable Player Awards, one per league. In that span, each winner has had at least this one season trait in common: every winner played

for just one team that year. We have never seen a player win MVP honors in a year where he changed teams in season, playing for multiple franchises.

Since 1931, the BBWAA has voted each year on Most Valuable Player Awards, one per league. In that span, each winner has had at least this one season trait in common: every winner played for just one team that year. We have never seen a player win MVP honors in a year where he changed teams in season, playing for multiple franchises.

Here are the eight players to finish top-four in MVP voting in seasons where they played for multiple teams, in reverse chronological order.

2008 Manny Ramirez, Dodgers: 4th, traded from Red Sox

With BOS: 100 games, .299/.398/.529, 20 HR, 68 RBI

With LAD: 53 games, .396/.489/.743, 17 HR, 53 RBI

Ramirez's run after the Trade Deadline in 2008 is one of the great midseason acquisition stat lines of all-time. In just 53 games with the Dodgers, he maintained a .396 average and slugged .743, helping propel the team to a NL West title. They'd been two games behind the D-backs entering August, before he made his debut to start the month. Pujols won the NL MVP that year with 369 vote points, but Ramirez was fourth with 138, behind Ryan Howard (308), and Ryan Braun (139), each of whom played at least 148 games for their respective teams.

By the way, votes are sealed before the playoffs begin, but Ramirez continued his torrid pace in the postseason for the Dodgers, hitting .520 in 36 plate appearances in the NLDS and NLCS, with four home runs.

2003 Shannon Stewart, Twins: 4th, traded from Blue Jays

With TOR: 71 games, .294/.347/.449, 7 HR, 35 RBI

With MIN: 65 games, .322/.384/.470, 6 HR, 38 RBI

Stewart's campaign from the moment he joined the Twins in '03 encapsulates the 'most valuable to his team' part of many MVP debates. Through July 16, the day the trade was completed, the Twins were 44-49, with a minus-35 run differential and in third place in the AL Central. With Stewart, they climbed atop that division, winning it by four games and ending up outscoring their opponents by 43 runs. Stewart led the way, being the best leadoff hitter in the AL by both batting average and on-base percentage down the stretch. He finished fourth, with 140 vote points, behind Alex Rodriguez (242), Carlos Delgado (213) and Jorge Posada (194).

1993 Fred McGriff, Braves: 4th, traded from Padres

With SD: 83 games, .275/.361/.497, 18 HR, 46 RBI

With ATL: 68 games, .310/.392/.612, 19 HR, 55 RBI

When the Braves acquired McGriff, they were 53-41, nine games behind the NL West-leading Giants in, of course, the pre-Wild Card Era. With him in tow, the team went on to win 104 games, finishing a game ahead of the Giants for that spot in the NLCS against the NL East winner. McGriff finished fourth with 177 vote points, behind Barry Bonds (372), Lenny Dykstra (267) and David Justice (183).

1984 Rick Sutcliffe, Cubs: 4th, traded from Indians

With CLE: 15 starts, 5.15 ERA, 58 K

With CHC: 20 starts, 2.69 ERA, 155 K

Sutcliffe is the only pitcher to win the Cy Young Award in a season where he pitched for two teams, and so it figures that he got MVP consideration, too. After 15 starts with a 5.15 ERA for the Indians, he was traded to the NL and the Cubs in June, where he put together a standout second stint of the year, with a 2.69 ERA and 16-1 record in 20 starts, in which the Cubs went 18-2. Before Sutcliffe's first start, the Cubs were 34-29, two games behind and in third place in the NL East. They went on to win the division by six and a half games. Sutcliffe's teammate Ryne Sandberg won NL MVP with 326 vote points, but Sutcliffe finished fourth with 151 behind Keith Hernandez (195) and Tony Gwynn (184).

1957 Red Schoendienst, Braves: 3rd, traded by Giants

With NY: 57 games, .307/.337/.476, 9 HR, 33 RBI

With MLN: 93 games, .310/.348/.434, 6 HR, 32 RBI

The Braves were already leading the NL when they acquired Schoendienst, but with him, they turned a game a half lead over the Reds into an eight-game end-of-season lead over the Cardinals to reach the World Series. Though it wouldn't count for voting, the team went on to win the World Series against the Yankees in seven games, too. Schoendienst led the Majors in hits in '57, with 200. He finished third in MVP voting with 221 vote points, with teammate Henry Aaron (239) winning and Stan Musial (230) finishing second.

1956 Sal Maglie, Dodgers: 2nd, purchased from Indians

With CLE: 2 games (0 starts), 3.60 ERA

With BRO: 28 games (26 starts), 2.87 ERA

The 39-year-old Maglie didn't spend much time with Cleveland before joining the Dodgers, but he did appear for both clubs, making this list and being the only player to finish as high as second in such a season. Maglie's acquisition by the Dodgers was notable at the time as the hurler had begun his career with the Giants and been on that side of the rivalry, including starting the famous Game 3 between the two clubs for the 1951 pennant, which ended with Bobby Thomson's Shot Heard Round the World. Dodgers fans warmed up to Maglie in '56, though, and he nearly became the first Cy Young winner to pitch for two teams, too. In the first year of the award's existence, as an MLB-wide honor, he finished second behind teammate Don Newcombe. He was second behind Newcombe for MVP as well.

1951 Minnie Minoso, White Sox: 4th, traded by Indians

With CLE: 8 games, .429/.529/.571, 0 HR, 2 RBI

With CHW: 138 games, .324/.419/.498, 10 HR, 74 RBI

After excelling in the Pacific Coast League after a brief intro with the Indians in 1949, Minoso made the Indians out of Spring Training in '51 but was behind Al Rosen at third base and Larry Doby, Dale Mitchell and Bobby Kennedy for any outfield spot. Thus, a trade made sense, and in April he was sent to the White Sox in a three-team deal. There, the hitting he'd shown in the PCL, and previously with the New York Cubans, flourished. He led the Majors with 14 triples and led the AL with 31 stolen bases, demonstrating his speed. He finished second for AL Rookie of the Year behind Gil McDougald and fourth for MVP behind Yogi Berra, Ned Garver and Allie Reynolds.

1945 Red Barrett, Cardinals: 3rd, traded by Braves

With BSN: 9 games (5 starts), 4.74 ERA

With STL: 36 games (29 starts), 2.74 ERA

This season by Barrett came before the Cy Young Award existed, so his efforts for a Cardinals team that finished three games behind the Cubs for the pennant were best honored, awards-wise, in the MVP voting. Even as an in-season acquisition, Barrett threw 246 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings for the Cards, most on the team, with a team-leading 29 starts. He led the NL in complete games with 24 that season, leading in wins, with 23, as well. He finished third in the voting behind Phil Cavarretta and his former Braves teammate Tommy Holmes.

BRYCE HARPER

For almost a decade, Harper was the very definition of hype. Cover of Sports Illustrated at 16. First pick in the draft at 17. Called "the best prospect since Mickey Mantle" by scouts. Signed

with Washington for \$10 million just 26 seconds before the signing deadline. Rushed through the minor leagues. Rookie of the Year at 19. All-Star his first two seasons. Most famous player in baseball, even though his first three seasons were not exactly earth-shattering.

And then, in 2015, he was earth-shattering, otherworldly. It was one of the great seasons of the last quarter-century — .330/.460/.649, 42 homers, 118 runs scored, league-leading 198 OPS+, MVP award; first of many MVP awards, we were told.

And then injuries and a bad run. But...

In 2019, he hit 35 homers, drove in 114 runs, vastly improved his defense, posted 4.5 wins above replacement ... but he still wasn't voted to the All-Star team. He led the league in walks during the pandemic season and played some of his best baseball since his glory days in Washington, but nobody really talked about it.

And this year, he's fully back, playing fabulously. He's hitting .305/.416/.568, he's stolen 12 of 13 bases, he's hit home runs in each of his last two games and has catapulted the Phillies into first place in the murky National League East. He is a viable MVP candidate for the first time since he won the MVP as a 22-year-old

He's still only 28 years old, he works hard at the game and always has, and he has posted compelling numbers even when he wasn't playing up to everybody's expectations. For instance, he recently hit his 250th home run. That made him just the 22nd player in baseball history who hit homer No. 250 before he turned 29 years old. The list of 21 includes some of the greatest players in the history of the game — Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Ken Griffey Jr., Mickey Mantle, Mel Ott, A-Rod, Trout, Johnny Bench — as well as a few sluggers who sort of faded afterward (Darryl Strawberry, [Blue Fielder](#), Andruw Jones, Juan González), but it's rarified air and tells you what is still possible for Harper.

TIGERS PROSPECT TORKELSON GOES 7 FOR 7 WITH 3 HRS IN TWIN BILL

Baseball's [No. 2 prospect](#) Spencer Torkelson went a combined 7-for-7 with three home runs and a double while outfielder [Riley Greene](#) ([No. 13](#)) added two blasts of his own as Double-A Erie swept its twin bill from Altoona with wins of 15-1 and 6-0 at UPMC Park.

The 2020 No. 1 overall pick got Erie's day started in the first inning of Thursday's opener with a two-run homer, his 17th of the season and 12th in 47 games since a promotion to Double-A in mid-June. Torkelson then singled twice in a 10-run third-inning outburst, while Greene provided the biggest blow of the frame with a grand slam to right field. It was the 13th homer in 80 Double-A games this season for Greene, the fifth overall pick in 2019.

Torkelson added a two-run double in the sixth to finish Thursday's first game 4-for-4 with three runs scored and four RBIs, boosting his Double-A OPS to .915. Greene went 2-for-4 with two runs and four RBIs, lifting his mark to .869.

VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR

It's been 100 years since the first [MLB](#) game broadcast on radio, since Harold Arlin, the Westinghouse engineer turned world's first radio broadcaster, sat in a box seat at Forbes Field Aug. 5, 1921, and called the Pirates' 8-5 win against the [Phillies](#) over the KDKA airwaves.

TONY GWYNN

40 years ago it started in Walla Walla, Washington. Tony Gwynn was in the Northwest League for less than two months, but what a period it was. He hit .331/.406/.512 with 12 homers in 42 games before he was promoted to Double A. The next year Gwynn was in the big leagues for good, the first of 20 seasons, all with the Padres. 3,141 hits, career .338 average, then off to Cooperstown.

BO BICHETTE

Bichette has tiptoed off the base, eyes honed in on the pitcher, and then taken off for a steal 17 times. He has yet to be caught *once*. Bichette is one of four players who had stolen at least 10 bases without being caught (Gregory Polanco 13-for-13, Amed Rosario 12-for-12, Nicky Lopez 10-for-10), but Bichette's head start makes him the most likely to join a club that you might not have had any idea was this small:

AL/NL players with 20+ steals, 100% success rate

Stat available back to 1951

- 1) Chase Utley (2009): 23-for-23
- 2) Alcides Escobar (2013): 22-for-22
- 3T) Quentin Berry (2012): 21-for-21
- 3T) Kevin McReynolds (1988): 21-for-21
- 5) Paul Molitor (1994): 20-for-20

Seven of Bichette's thefts came on the first pitch of an at-bat, but he also has five steals on the third pitch and one apiece on the fourth, fifth and seventh pitches. Per Statcast, Bichette's secondary leads have ranged from as close as 18 feet off first base (shorter than the MLB average of 22 feet on successful steals) ... The secret here might just be Bichette picking his spots well and surprising the defense. Eight of his first 17 steals came without a throw.

FIELD OF DREAMS – SOME MOVIE INSIDER INFO

You won't be able to see them, but Matt Damon and Ben Affleck are some of the extras in attendance for the game at Fenway Park.

What was the date of the actual game that Ray and Terence saw at Fenway Park? Thanks to the intrepid work of [Flip Flop Fly Ball's Craig Robinson](#), we know the answer: May 16, 1988. It's the only game that year that Jody Reed, Marty Barrett, Wade Boggs, Dwight Evans and Mike Greenwell -- who you can see on Ray's scorecard -- took up the first five spots in the lineup for the Red Sox at home against the A's.

Terence Mann, played by James Earl Jones, was originally supposed to be the reclusive author J.D. Salinger. However, the producers changed the character after Salinger threatened to sue. The working title of Kinsella's novel was "The Kidnapping of J.D. Salinger."

Though the movie was based on W.P. Kinsella's novel, "Shoeless Joe," and initially shared the same name, the final title is much closer to Kinsella's preferred name for the book. [His novel was nearly titled](#), "Dreamfield."

The film was nominated for three Academy Awards -- Best Original Score, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Picture. In 2017, Field of Dreams was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant."

WOULD YOU HAVE GUESSED ON OPENING DAY?

The Giants have the best record in baseball

The Major League home run leader... is a pitcher! Ohtani

[Zack Wheeler](#) is a leader in the NL Cy Young race

[Joey Votto](#) and [Buster Posey](#) both have a National League MVP case

[Albert Pujols](#) plays for the Dodgers

MENDOZA LINE POWER

The record for most home runs in a season batting under .200 is held by Mark Reynolds (32 homers, .198 batting average in 2010 with Arizona).

AND THEN THERE IS MIKE ZUNINO

Rays catcher Mike Zunino is batting .209, with this week (featuring three straight games with a homer, including Friday) representing the first time since July 4 that his average snuck above the Mendoza Line. He is also, per FanGraphs, the second-most valuable contributor (by [WAR](#)) to a club that has surged back into first place in the American League East, one year after he hit .147 but helped power the Rays to the World Series. Zunino appeared in his first All-Star Game last month (and launched an impressive opposite-field homer, as you might recall).

Zunino is out to prove that a sub-.200 hitter can hack it in today's game, and so far he's doing a convincing job. In fact, Zunino could soon lay claim to the Modern Era's [second-most valuable sub-Mendoza season](#) by any AL/NL player, trailing only ... himself. Back in 2014, Zunino hit .199 but finished as a fairly robust 4-win player, per FanGraphs. Zunino has already accrued 3 fWAR in '21, slotting this season in second on the all-time list if his average lands below .200. Zunino, the Rays and the club's fans will all be rooting for him to get a hit every time up from here until October. But for the rest of us, his season becomes way more interesting if he falls a little *under* his current pace.

And while Zunino makes as little contact as anyone in baseball, almost no one maximizes the contact they *do* make more than him. Entering Saturday, Zunino was slugging a scorching .963 on balls he put in play (including homers), which [ranked only behind](#) Shohei Ohtani (1.004), the AL MVP Award frontrunner. Per Statcast's [contact leaderboard](#), Zunino is tied with Ohtani for the highest average exit velocity on fly balls and line drives (100.8 mph). *No one* has [barreled](#) a higher rate of their balls in play.

Zunino whiffs about 40% of the times the bat leaves his shoulder. But when bat meets ball, it tends to go very, very far. His 24 homers account for more than 40% of his total hits (50), putting him on pace to be just the [fourth player with that kind of distribution](#).

AL/NL players with $\geq 40\%$ of single-year hits as HRs, since 1901

Min. 50 total hits

Mark McGwire -- 5 times (1995, 1998-2001)

Barry Bonds -- 1 time (2001)

Joey Gallo -- 1 time (2017)

5 Teams outscored, yet still qualified for the postseason (excludes teams in shortened seasons).

2007 D-backs (-20 run differential)

90-72 record (won NL West)

What a strange year this was. Arizona was coming off three straight losing seasons, having gone 76-86 in 2006, with a -15 run differential. The '07 D-backs were outscored by five additional runs, yet not only made the playoffs but finished with the best record in a weak NL field. Manager Bob Melvin's club went 32-20 in one-run games and 22-12 in games started by ace Brandon Webb, while getting big seasons from relievers such as closer José Valverde (47 saves) and Brandon Lyon. That was enough for the D-backs to win the NL West by one game over the Rockies and Padres, who then met in a [memorable tiebreaker](#) for the NL Wild Card. Colorado won that and went on to sweep Arizona in the NLCS.

2005 Padres (-42 run differential)

82-80 record (won NL West)

Excluding shortened seasons, only the 1973 Mets have made the playoffs -- much less won their division -- with this few victories in the Divisional Era (since 1969). Yet even going 82-80 was a minor miracle for the Padres, who hold the record for the lowest run differential of any postseason qualifier. Take out a fantastic May (22-6, +43), and San Diego went 60-74 and was outscored by 85 runs in the other five months of the season. Yet the Bruce Bochy-managed Friars still won a soft NL West by five games before exiting October via an NLDS sweep at the hands of the Cardinals.

1997 Giants (-9 run differential)

90-72 record (won NL West)

What is it about the NL West that makes for run-differential magic? In any case, this season might have been karmic justice for Dusty Baker's Giants, who only four years earlier had [missed the postseason](#) despite a 103-59 record in the final pre-Wild Card season. The club had tough times from 1994-96, losing 94 games in that third year, before embarking upon a [worst-to-first renaissance](#) under first-year GM Brian Sabean. With Jeff Kent joining the Barry Bonds Show and lefty Shawn Estes having a career year (19-5, 3.18 ERA), the Giants finished two games ahead of the Dodgers in the division before being swept by the Marlins in the NLDS. One big key: an 11-3 record in extra-inning games, driven in part by the NL's top offense in "late and close" situations.

1987 Twins (-20 run differential)

85-77 record (won AL West)

The Twins only had the fifth-best record in the AL, but fortunately for them, the top four teams all were in the East. Minnesota eked out an AL West title by two games over Kansas City, on the

strength of an enormous home-field advantage at the Metrodome. Really, the Twins were two different teams. The road version went 29-52 (-83 run differential); the home version went 56-25 (+63). With a lineup featuring Kirby Puckett and Kent Hrbek and a rotation fronted by Bert Blyleven and Frank Viola, the Twins became the only team on this list to go all the way, pulling out a seven-game World Series triumph over St. Louis.

1984 Royals (-13 run differential)

84-78 record (won AL West)

This was another unbalanced season in the AL, whose top five teams all were in the East. Meanwhile, the Royals won the West by three games over the Angels and Twins, thanks to a late-season surge. After a 61-64 start (-38) left it five games behind Minnesota, Kansas City closed at 23-14 (+25) -- only to suffer a three-game ALCS sweep against Detroit. A year later, however, the Royals went all the way.

1981 Royals (-8 run differential)

50-53 record (won AL West in 2nd half)

This season should get an asterisk because of the strike that shortened the schedule and [split it into two halves](#). And it really was a tale of two halves for the Royals. Before the work stoppage, they went 20-30 (-49) and finished in fifth place. After it, they went 30-23 (+41) and finished one game ahead of the A's, who nonetheless swept them in a three-game ALDS matchup.

LIST OF THE WEEK—CAREER HRS HITS AS A...

YANKEES

Ruth	659
Mantle	536
Gehrig	493
DiMaggio	361
Berra	358
ARod	351
Bernie Williams	287
Posada	275

Jeter	260
Nettles	250

RED SOX

Williams	521
Ortiz	483
Yaz	452
Rice	382
Evans	379
Ramirez	274
Vaughan	230
Doerr	223
Foxx	222
Petrocelli	210

DODGERS

Duke Snider	389
Hodges	361
Eric Karros	270
Campanella	242
Cey	228
Garvey	211
Matt Kemp	203

Furillo	192
Piazza	177
Pedro Guerrero	171

METS

Strawberry	252
Wright	242
Piazza	220
Howard Johnson	192
Kingman	154
Beltran	149
Michael Conforto	126
Lucas Duda	125
Todd Hundley	124
Kevin McReynolds	122

CARDINALS

Musial	475
Pujols	445
Ken Boyer	255
Jim Edmonds	241
Ray Lankford	228

McGwire 220

Hornsby 193

Jim Bottomley 181

Simmons 172

Yadier Molina 168

HOW BASEBALL SETTLED ON 60 FEET, 6 INCHES

(a lot of experimentation and strikeouts along the way)

Starting last Tuesday, something new was afoot -- or, rather, a foot -- in the independent Atlantic League. There -- and, for now, only there -- one of baseball's two most sacred spans will be expanded in the name of exploration.

Say it with us: 61 feet, 6 inches.

That dimension sounds so strange, doesn't it?

The mere utterance of the number 61 conjures up memories of Maris and McGwire, not mounds. In this context, it feels so foreign, so unfamiliar, so blasphemous. Wasn't the distance of "60 feet, 6 inches" between the pitching rubber and the back tip of home plate commanded somewhere in the Old Testament or the Dead Sea Scrolls? Why mess with this measurement?

Basically, blame it on the K rates.

"You have to start with the recognition that the pitcher-batter relationship dynamic is a little bit out of balance right now," MLB rules consultant Theo Epstein told MLB Network in April, "and that we should look for ways to restore some equilibrium to that."

The strikeout rate in MLB this season, as of this writing, is just shy of 24%. A generation ago, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, that number was more typically in the neighborhood of 15%.

That's a gigantic jump. A recent crackdown on sticky substances has already affected the equilibrium Epstein mentioned, but MLB remains open to other potential means of ensuring more balls get put in play.

Studies by the American Sports Medicine Institute demonstrated no meaningful differences in measures of rotational motion or acceleration for pitchers throwing from distances as far as 63 feet, 8 inches. So there is scientific reason to believe this change will not pose a meaningful increase in injury risk to pitchers. That's why MLB determined the pitching distance adjustment to be a worthwhile experiment.

And to reiterate, that's all this is -- an experiment in an unaffiliated league that has become MLB's partner in monitoring the effects of rules tweaks. The 61-foot, 6-inch distance will have to pass the test in York (the Pennsylvania home of the Atlantic League's Revolution club) long before it is ever considered in New York.

(Baseball's other sacred measurement -- 90 feet between the bases -- remains intact, though a season-long experimentation with larger bases at the Triple-A level does actually shorten that span by 3 inches.)

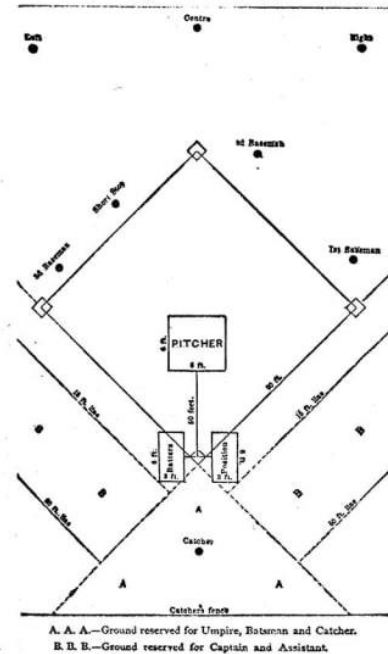
So that explains why this is happening. But you are forgiven if you're having trouble adjusting to the idea of a different distance.

Odd and unwieldy though it may be when compared to other, simpler sporting standards such as the 100-yard football field or the 10-foot-high basketball hoop, the measurement of 60 feet, 6 inches is as basic to baseball as the stitches themselves. It has been the decreed distance since 1893, which makes it a longer-lasting core component of baseball than ... the baseball's core component (the cork center wasn't added to the baseball until the early 1900s).

But of course, baseball wasn't birthed in 1893. How, then, did 60 feet, 6 inches come to be the standard length between pitcher and hitter?

As is often the case with baseball history, the answer is, um, lengthy.

Correct Diagram of a Ball Ground.



1881 Spaulding Guide's diagram of a ball "ground"

Thinking inside the box

The center of the mound was not always 60 feet, 6 inches from the back of the plate because there was not always a mound and there was not always a plate.

The Knickerbocker Rules -- the first surviving rules for the sport we know and love today -- were codified in 1845 and make no mention of the pitching distance. Back then, "home base," where the batter stood, was a circular-shaped piece of stone or metal, and there was but one rule pertaining to the pitcher:

"The ball must be pitched, not thrown, for the bat."

That's revealing wording, deferential as it is to the hitter, particularly with the use of "for the bat." It was not the goal of the pitcher to throw strikes or for the batter to avoid them, because strikes were still 13 years away from their existence. The goal for both sides, rather, was for the ball to be put in play. Pitchers were required to deliver the ball underhand.

Essentially, they gave the batter something juicy to hit, then ducked for cover.

It was not until the Baseball Convention of 1857 -- a meeting of 16 New York City area clubs -- that an official pitching distance was set. That same meeting was the first to establish the 90-foot distance between basepaths with which we are obviously familiar, but the pitching distance was set at a less-familiar 45 feet. The pitching area was marked by a 12-foot-long line,

with the center of the line marked by a fixed circular iron plate. Pitchers were allowed to roam around, as long as the ball was delivered from behind the 12-foot line.

In 1863, a pitcher's box was effectively created with the addition of a second 12-foot line, 48 feet from home base. The pitcher, therefore, had to operate within that 3-foot space from front to back.

Around this time, though, the relationship between pitcher and hitter was beginning to change. A woefully underappreciated pioneer named James Creighton, who pitched for several Brooklyn ballclubs, was a big reason why that once-productive partnership was breached.

The Creighton effect

"James Creighton's baseball career was like a nuclear explosion," writes Thomas W. Gilbert, author of "How Baseball Happened." "It didn't last long, but afterward the world was never the same."

From 1858 until his untimely death at age 21 in 1862, Creighton, who was reputed to be a superb cricket player, employed a swift pitch with an imperceptible snap of the wrist. It was not unlike a bowler's delivery.

"He pitched with a planted back foot, which was an innovation at the time," says official MLB historian John Thorn. "He used body torque to come flying forward and impart spin to the ball. It was technically illegal, because you could not snap your wrist in 1860. But no one caught on to him. He had movement as well as speed."

Though some opponents accused Creighton of cheating, the net effect of his unusual style was that he became widely imitated.

So Creighton, ultimately, is the reason pitchers and batters work in opposition, not in tandem. Called strikes were instituted in 1858, called balls in 1863. And as many a Creighton disciple descended upon baseball in the years to come, it eventually became necessary, in the 1880s, to establish a defined strike zone

Where once games were high-scoring affairs decided by the respective defense's ability to corral balls in play (in the 1860s, games typically featured around 35 combined runs), now the game began to center around the balls and strikes and the battle that exists between pitcher and hitter.

And as that became the case, a 45-foot gap was no longer enough.

Push 'em back

The exact dimensions of the pitcher's box changed here and there in the 1860s and 1870s, but, through 1880, the front line was always 45 feet from home base. By that point, though, the high-scoring games of old had given way to an offensive morass. Between 1877 and 1880, the National League batting average fell from .271 to .245, with the number of strikeouts nearly tripling thanks to an increase in pitch speed and movement.

Any of this sound familiar?

Then, as now, the powers that be considered changes to the dimensions to impart more offensive action. In 1881, it was Harry Wright, the so-called "Father of Professional Baseball" and organizer of the Cincinnati Red Stockings, who successfully proposed pushing back the pitching distance to 50 feet. Though offense experienced a brief uptick, wily pitchers still found ways to befuddle batters. For one, pitchers' motions by this time had crept up, first to sidearm stylings and then, inevitably, to the overhand tosses that were finally, fully permitted in the National League in 1884.

But there were other, inventive means of inducing outs. The most glaring example of this was a fella named Daniel A. Jones. In a very brief Major League career that took place entirely in 1883 with the Detroit Wolverines of the National League and the Philadelphia Athletics of the American Association, Jones made a (nick)name for himself – "Jumping Jack" – with a distinctive delivery in which he would leap skyward prior to producing the pitch.

"He is a tall, good-looking, finely-built fellow, a thorough gentleman and all that," wrote the Sporting News, "but when he wants to add pace to his ball he jumps fully two feet with every delivery. It is a very funny act, and last week, in Cleveland, as he jumped the crowd hooted."

Lest "Jumping Jack" have a Creighton-like impact and compel a generation of pitchers to jump around like mad, something had to be done to keep pitchers grounded (literally).

So in 1887 came a new dictum: Pitchers had to have their back foot in contact with the *back* line of the pitcher's box, which by this point sat 5 1/2 feet behind the front line. If you're scoring at home, that means pitchers were now required to throw from a measurement of 55 feet, 6 inches from the now-square-shaped home base (the pentagonal shape was not introduced until 1900).

That 1887 season was significant for a couple other changes: Batters were allotted *four* called strikes, and walks were counted as hits.

Naturally, those changes resulted in a ridiculous – and roundly criticized -- increase in offensive numbers. The leaguewide batting average rose from .246 to .325.

Even "Jumping Jack" must have thought that was a big leap.

Famous Amos

Sanity prevailed in 1888 with the return to three-strike strikeouts and walks going back to their usual status. But that meant that offensive numbers, even with hitters ostensibly aided by the 55'6" pitching distance, continued to wane (the league average plummeted to .239).

A hugely important pitching figure at this time was Amos Rusie, an Indiana native known as "The Hoosier Thunderbolt." He was the classic example of a hurler who threw the ball at tremendous speed and had absolutely no idea where it was going. From 1890 to 1894, Rusie is credited with five straight seasons in which he walked an astounding 200 batters or more.

"He was big in the shoulders and just reared back and fired," Thorn says. "Batters must have been frightened for their lives."

The National League needed a solution for Rusie and for the continuing decline in batting average.

What was the answer? Move the pitchers back *another* five feet -- to 60 feet, 6 inches. That's what happened in 1893. The pitcher's box was replaced with a 12-inch-by-4-inch slab, and, as with the back line of the box, the pitcher was required to place his back foot upon it.

(You've possibly read or heard that the plan was for the pitching slab to be an even 60 feet from home, but a groundskeeper misread the blueprints and accidentally placed it another 6 inches further. Like so many fun stories, that one is total bunk.)

The effects of the 1893 change were immediate. The league batting average jumped from .245 to .280. The league strikeout rate dropped from 8.4% to 5.2%.

As for Rusie, he kept walking dudes at roughly the same rate, but his strikeout rate declined significantly.

With that, the equilibrium, as Theo Epstein would one day come to call it, was successfully amended. And though there have been other points when offense needed ignition (most notably after the 1968 Year of the Pitcher, at which point the mound was lowered), we've stuck with that pitching distance ever since.

So that's the convoluted story of how we got to the mandated measurement with which we are so familiar. And as the Atlantic League takes a literal step back in order for the game to possibly take a step forward, the history of 60 feet, 6 inches is worth keeping in mind.

"It was a human decision," Thorn says. "And the prior distances of 55 feet, 6 inches or 50 feet or 45 feet were all human decisions made to balance the offense and defense in the game so that it would produce a pleasing entertainment product. That's what this is all about. Baseball is not the 100-yard dash. In baseball, we move the tape. We do what we need to create entertainment."

WHO IS WORSE? POSITION PLAYERS PITCHING OR PITCHERS HITTING?

To assess how today's pitcher hitters and position-player pitchers stack up, we have to focus on recent seasons, because pitchers have stunk much more at hitting, and position players have pitched much [more often](#), over time. In the first year of the pitch-tracking era, only 40 pitches were thrown by position-player pitchers, according to [Baseball Savant](#). Through Wednesday's games, Triple-Ps were on pace for 1,368 pitches, which would be a bit below the 2019 record of 1,547. The usage of position-player pitchers spiked in 2018, so we can call 2018 to 2021 the modern pitcher hitting/position-player pitching era. Notably, as more and more hitters have moonlighted as pitchers, their average velocity has fallen; despite Brett Phillips pumping [94 mph heat](#), the average pitch thrown by a position-player pitcher this year has flown [70 mph](#), down from well over 80 a decade ago. Even the offerings classified as "fastballs" are [down a few ticks](#) from their highs, though the difference between the average fastball speeds of position-player pitchers and the league as a whole ([5.1 mph](#)) is approximately the same as the difference between the average exit speeds of pitcher hitters and the league on non-bunt batted balls ([4.8 mph](#)).

Entering Thursday, pitcher hitters excluding Ohtani had produced a 2018–21 slash line of .118/.150/.150 (.300 OPS), with a 43.4 percent strikeout rate, a 3.2 percent walk rate, and 58 homers in 13,587 plate appearances. Abysmal! In the same span, position-player pitchers (again excluding Ohtani) had *allowed* a slash line of .340/.410/.674 (1.084 OPS), with a 6.0 percent strikeout rate, a 9.3 percent walk rate, and 90 homers in 1,221 plate appearances (oh, and a 9.21 ERA). Also abysmal! But which is worse?

At Baseball Savant, we can search for the "sum run value" produced by players—the number of runs better or worse than league average they are. If we tally the total run values generated by pitcher hitters and position-player pitchers since 2018, then divide those numbers by their total plate appearances, we can compare the two groups on a rate basis. Here's what [we get](#): Pitcher hitters have produced -.146 runs per plate appearance. (Negative numbers are bad for hitters, because they're trying to score runs.) Position-player pitchers have yielded .123 runs per plate appearances. (Positive numbers are bad for pitchers, because they're trying to *prevent* runs.) So while both have been horrendous, pitcher hitters have been *horrendouser*.

(To put those stats into perspective: The full-time hitter with the worst total run value this season, the Pirates' Kevin Newman, has been worth [-.072](#) runs per PA. The pitcher with the worst total run value, the Rangers' Mike Foltyniewicz, has cost his team [.055](#) runs per PA. So the absolute dregs of the "real" hitters and pitchers are still more than twice as good as the *average* position-player pitcher and pitcher hitter, respectively.)

The further back we go, the less impotent pitcher hitters and position-player pitchers look relative to the league, though they've both been atrocious for ages. But the gap in runs per PA between the two groups persists through the entirety of the 2015 to 2021 Statcast era (-.137 vs. .112) and the 2008 to 2021 pitch-tracking era (-.131 vs. .102). These are much smaller samples than those amassed by legitimate major league hitters and pitchers in the same spans, but they're still plenty large enough to conclusively declare position-player pitchers the better of two terrible choices. (Well, *almost* conclusively—more on that in a moment.)

Run values seem somewhat abstract, but we can convey the same information in a more familiar way. Since 2018, pitcher hitters have allowed a [.447 wOBA](#), 130 points worse than the [.317](#) league average. Pitcher hitters have produced a [.137](#) wOBA, 180 points worse than league average. That also supports the finding that pitcher hitters are the pits. So do the results in the few head-to-head confrontations (if we can [call them that](#)) between Triple-Ps and pitcher hitters (including Freeman and Bradley). In the same four seasons, position-player pitchers have faced pitcher hitters [36](#) times. If the two groups were evenly matched, we would expect the showdowns between them to yield a wOBA right around league average. Instead, it's significantly lower: .241 (or .245 in 41 PA dating back to 2015). In other words, position-player pitchers had the upper hand, performing even better than one would expect from the respective groups' overall stats.

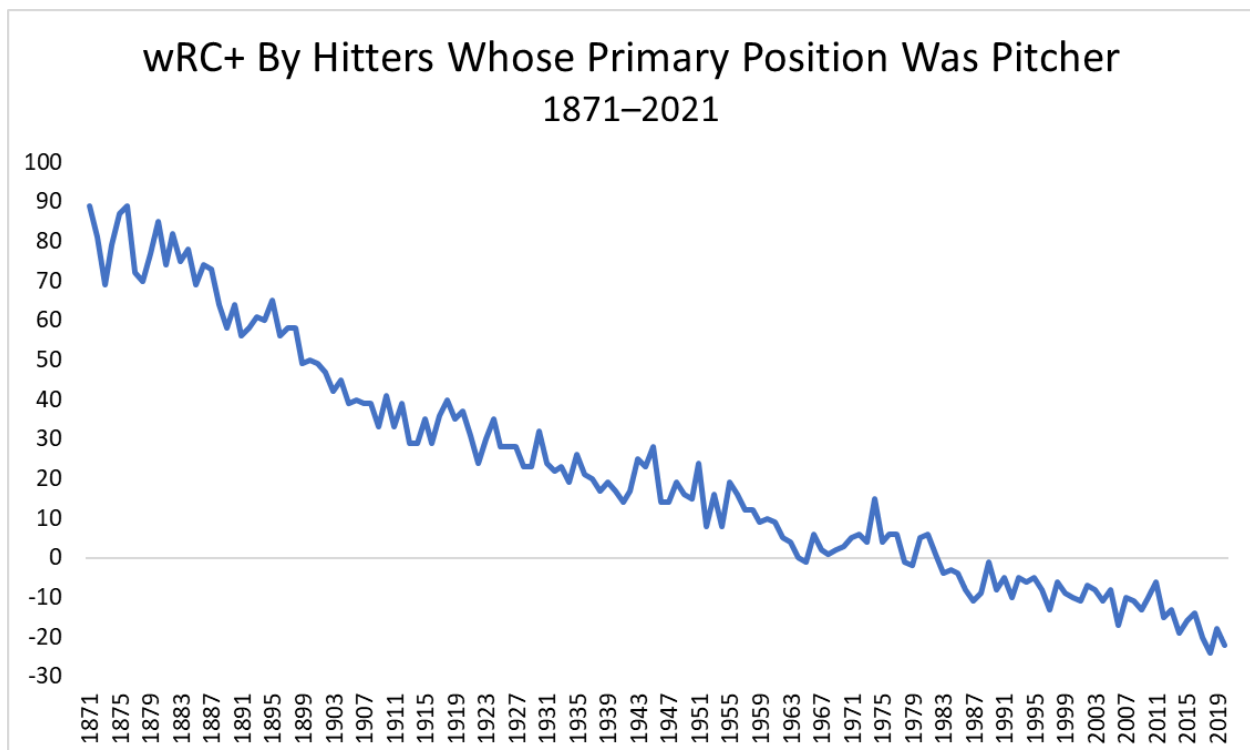
Now, here's the caveat: Even though it's no fun to be cannon fodder, there is one way in which position-player pitchers kind of [catch a break](#). Because they typically pitch in blowouts, they're often facing below-average batters who may not be trying as hard as usual, whether in deference to unwritten rules or because they can't psych themselves up in situations where they're winning or losing by a bunch of runs and facing a pitcher so bad it's almost embarrassing to beat him. When hitters are trying their hardest, they don't typically walk away laughing after striking out, as Freddie Freeman did when he went down hacking against Anthony Rizzo this April. Nor do right-handed hitters ordinarily bat lefty, as Javier Báez [has done](#) three times against position-player pitchers. (He's doubled and flied out twice.)

Then again, pitcher hitters have it easy too, because pitcher *pitchers* [tend to phone it in](#) when facing their counterparts. They throw more fastballs, take off some speed, and catch their breath before running the gauntlet of the top of the order. So neither the (unspeakable) stats of position-player pitchers nor the (even uglier) lines of pitcher hitters reflect how horrible both would be if they faced the same circumstances as "normal" pitchers and hitters.

So, as one last check, we can limit our samples to higher-leverage situations—those where the go-ahead run is at the plate or on base, or the tying run is at the plate, on base, or on deck. These samples are much smaller, because managers are liable to pinch hit for pitchers in important spots, and position players pitch in moments that matter only if all other options are exhausted. However, we can assume that when these cursed scenarios occurred, the pitcher hitters' and position-player pitchers' opponents were actually giving their all.

The verdict: In these higher-leverage circumstances dating back to 2008, position-player pitchers have allowed [.029](#) runs above average per PA (again, positive is bad), and pitcher hitters have coughed up [-.037](#) runs per PA (negative is bad). Even though one would assume that the Triple-Ps and pitcher hitters who encountered these crucibles were slightly less inept, on the whole, than their peers, both groups' results were way worse than the collective stats from all situations. However, pitcher hitters declined in crunch time to an even greater degree. That cinches it: Pitcher hitters lose this contest between incapable players, though it's tough to say anyone wins.

From an analytical standpoint, one of the few perks of pitcher hitters' ineptitude is that their anachronistic pursuit provides a control group that allows us to gauge how much the quality of the league has [improved](#). To paraphrase [Wooderson](#): Other hitters get better, while pitcher hitters stay the same (and suffer for it).



It's semi-intuitive that pitchers would find themselves on such a steady downslope, and that position-player pitchers would be a tad less bad. While both are performing a function they aren't specifically paid or trained for, pitching partly depends on traits that position players *are* selected for—arm strength and arm accuracy—whereas skill at hitting is largely unrelated to proficiency at pitching. In the DH era, some pitchers can make it all the way from middle school to the majors [without having to hit](#) in between, but almost all hitters have to be able to throw. There's a big difference between throwing and pitching (let alone pitching *well*), but it's not nearly as large as the gulf between hitting and pitching.

Plus, position-player pitchers have no choice but to throw the ball, in contrast to pitcher hitters, who can and often do decide not to swing. Bradley's Bartleby-esque, injury-related refusal to swing in June resembled Robert Gsellman's in [2016](#), Jacob deGrom's in [2018](#), or Taijuan Walker's [this May](#). Every so often, standing still at the plate pays off for a pitcher—see the great 2011 [clash](#) of José Ceda and Santiago Casilla—but in most cases, the result is what one would expect. More and more pitchers seem to be concluding that if there's a good chance they're going to go down on strikes regardless, they might as well do it without [hurting themselves](#) swinging. This season, 20.6 percent of pitcher plate appearances haven't featured a single swing—a rate almost four times as high as position players' 5.6 percent—and 6.1 percent haven't featured a swing *or* a bunt attempt, roughly double the average rate 15 years ago.

For some, the memories of Bartolo Colon [carrying his bat](#) to first base and [hitting a homer](#) make all the forgettable pitcher plate appearances worthwhile. For them, baseball's commitment to the bit of bad at-bats is one of the sport's sweet eccentricities, along with its irregular playing surfaces, its uniformed managers, its aversion to clocks, and its insistence on the defense controlling the ball. But if pitcher hitters and, eventually, position-player pitchers go the way of bare-handed fielders, underhand pitchers, and helmetless hitters, at least we won't be left without a resolution to baseball's great debate. Yes, Virginia, hitters who pitch are probably worse at their second jobs than any other pro players are at any aspect of their sport. Except for pitchers who hit.

Thanks to Lucas Apostoleris of Baseball Prospectus and Kenny Jackelen of Baseball-Reference for research assistance.

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AUGUST 8, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. Declaring the Yankees dead may have been a bit premature. One third of the season left. Enjoy.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Joey Votto homered in 7 straight games last week. Other Reds with home run streaks:

Ken Griffey Jr. 5 consecutive games 2003

Johnny Bench 5 consecutive games in 1972

Tony Perez 4 consecutive games 3 times

Frank Robinson 4 consecutive games 3 times

Joe Morgan 3 consecutive games 3 times

Pete Rose 3 consecutive games 1969.

Most career home runs without a walk-off homer--Norm Cash (377 HR)

Bo Bichette became just the third Blue Jays shortstop ever to hit 20 or more home runs in a season. He joined Troy Tulowitzki (24 in 2016) and Tony Batista (26 in 1999).

[Kris Bryant](#)'s third-inning [homer in his Giants debut](#) on Sunday not only sparked a lead-changing rally against the Astros, it made history.

Bryant, [traded by the Cubs](#) before Friday's Trade Deadline, was one of three former North Siders to go deep in the first game they played after being dealt.

Yankees first baseman [Anthony Rizzo](#) (on Friday) and Mets shortstop [Javier Báez](#) (Saturday) also introduced themselves to their new clubs with homers, making the trio the first in AL/NL Modern Era history to all go deep in their debuts with a new team after playing on the same club earlier that season, according to STATS.

Rizzo was one of those guys, acquired from the Cubs on July 29 to help bring some left-handed balance to the Yankees' lineup. All he did in his first six games is slash .400/.519/.850 with three home runs and six RBIs, becoming the first player in franchise history to drive in a run in each of his first six games with the team.

He's still a teenager, but on the diamond Mariners prospect [Noelvi Marte](#) is all grown up.

MLB's [No. 82 overall prospect](#) produced one of the best offensive performances in the Minors this season, blasting three homers and driving in nine runs during a 4-for-5 night as Low-A Modesto fell to Stockton, [16-15](#), in a wild affair at Banner Island Ballpark.

The offensive outburst was notable for more than just the obvious. The 6-foot-1, 181-pound shortstop surpassed his long ball total and equaled his RBI output from the entire month of July when he amassed 114 at-bats and appeared in 26 games.

The last MLB player with at least 4 hits, 5 runs, 3 HRs and 9 RBIs in a game--the Nationals' Anthony Rendon (6 hits, 5 runs, 3 HRs, 10 RBIs on 4/30/17).

Astros player has hit the most home runs all-time against the Dodgers--Jeff Bagwell (26 homers)

Albert Pujols smacked two bases-loaded hits last weekend to give him 80 for his career, four behind Derek Jeter for fifth all-time in AL/NL history. Eddie Murray holds the record with 95. Pujols has 3291 career hits. He trails Willie Mays by two hits to move into 12th place all time.

Rookie right-hander [Luis Gil](#), who was summoned from Triple-A Scranton to start in place of Cole and tossed six scoreless innings in a 13-1 thrashing of the [Orioles](#) at Yankee Stadium. Gil became the first Yankee to record six scoreless innings in his major-league debut since Sam Militello in 1992, according to ESPN Stats & Info. He also became just the second Yankees pitcher since 2019 to make his major-league debut as a starter. The other was Deivi García in 2020.

Joey Votto led the NL in on base percentage 7 times.

White Sox rookie catcher **Seby Zavala** hit three home runs from the No. 9 spot in the order on July 31. He's only the seventh player in history to accomplish that.

Barring rainouts (or a work stoppage), March 31, 2022, will be the first time since April 10, 1968, that every team opens the season on the same day.

Yankees pitchers **Luis Gil**, **Brody Koerner**, and **Stephen Ridings** made their MLB debuts against the Orioles on Tuesday. It was the first time New York had three pitchers debut in the same game since Sept. 26, 1950, when **Lew Burdette**, **Dave Madison**, and **Ernie Nevel** debuted against the Washington Senators.

You can't make this stuff up. Righthander **Janson Junk** was one of the prospects the Yankees traded to the Angels to land lefthander **Andrew Heaney** at the deadline. The Angels assigned Junk to the Double A Rocket City Trash Pandas. So Junk is now Trash

JD MARTINEZ

J.D. Martinez had a slash line of .328/.401/.583 through the end of May. That prompted suggestions the Sox would be wise to renegotiate Martinez's contract and eliminate his right to opt out after the season.

Martinez went on to hit .243/.303/.476 with nine home runs over his next 53 games. So much for that.

Martinez, who turns 34 on Aug. 21, is signed for \$19.35 million for 2022. As good as he has been, there is little chance of an aging designated hitter getting anything close to that in free agency.

It's possible, probable even, that baseball will have a universal DH next season. But Martinez's opt-out decision comes a few days after the World Series and a new collective bargaining agreement won't be in place by then based on the pace of talks.

Martinez isn't going anywhere either way unless Bloom somehow finds a trade partner.

YOUNGSTERS

Fun fact: The youngest player in baseball (that would be the Rays' [Wander Franco](#)) was born on March 1, 2001, one month before the oldest player in baseball (that would be [Albert Pujols](#)) made his Major League debut.

I was playing golf with a baseball fan this week and discussing how many great young players there are right now in MLB (when I was a kid the greats like Gibson, Mays, Mantle, Aaron, Clemente, Seaver, Kaline, Yaz, Marichal, Banks all seemed older—there wasn't the same celebration of kids).

Age 22: Vladimir Guerrero Jr., 1B, Blue Jays, Juan Soto OF Nationals, Fernando Tatis Jr. ss
padres

23: Ronald Acuña Jr., OF, Braves

24: Rafael Devers, 3B, Red Sox

25: Cody Bellinger, OF, Dodgers

26: Shohei Ohtani, DH/SP, Angels, *Walker Buehler, RHP, Dodgers; Corbin Burnes, RHP, Brewers; Shane Bieber, RHP, Indians*

27: Josh Hader, LHP, Brewers, Francisco Lindor, ss Mets

28: Mookie Betts, OF Dodgers, *Bryce Harper, OF, Phillies; José Ramírez, 3B, Indians; Trea Turner, SS, Dodgers; Xander Bogaerts, SS, Red Sox; Brandon Woodruff, RHP, Brewers*

OLD guys rock too

Age 41: Albert Pujols, 1B, Dodgers

40: Nelson Cruz, DH, Rays

39: Adam Wainwright, RHP, Cardinals

38: Yadier Molina, C, Cardinals, Miguel Cabrera, Tigers 1B/DH

37: Zack Greinke, RHP, Astros, Joey Votto 1B Reds

RIP JR

JR Richard died this week. Richard joined Larry Dierker, Joe Niekro and Nolan Ryan, to form a few of the best rotations in club history.

The No. 2 pick in the 1969 MLB Draft by Houston, Richard spent all 10 major-league seasons with the Astros, going 107-71 with a 3.15 ERA in 238 games (221 starts). He struck out 1,493 in 1,606 innings.

Richard won the ERA title with a 2.71 mark in 1979, and he earned his first All-Star appearance in 1980 before suffering a career-ending stroke in July 1980. He was inducted into the Astros' Hall of Fame with 2019's inaugural class.

Richard had a 107-71 record with a 3.15 ERA and 76 complete games for the Astros. He won 18 or more games in four straight seasons (1976-79). In '78, he became the first Astros pitcher to reach 300 strikeouts in a season with 303, a record he broke the following season with 313 strikeouts.

On the Astros' all-time lists, Richard ranks tied for second in career ERA (3.15), third in strikeouts (1,493), fourth in complete games (76), fifth in wins (107) and fifth in shutouts (19).

On Sept. 5, 1971, in San Francisco, Richard made his Major League debut and struck out 15 Giants (including Willie Mays 3 times) in a complete-game win. Richard bounced between the

Minors and Majors the next three years before making the rotation in '75, going 12–10 with a 4.39 ERA. For the next 5 1/2 seasons, he was a dominant pitcher, winning 20 games in 1976, leading the Majors in strikeouts in 1978-79 and in ERA in '79.

He won 20 games in '76 and established himself as one of the most intimidating arms in the game with his size and triple-digit fastball. He won 18 games in each of the next three years, finishing in the top five in Cy Young Award voting twice.

PAT TABLER—MISTER BASES LOADED

Pat Tabler played for five teams during a dozen-year big league career. Known for his clutch hitting, he hit nearly .500 in the majors with the [bases loaded](#).

After growing up in the [Cincinnati](#) area, Tabler was selected by the [New York Yankees](#) in the first round of the [1976 amateur draft](#). After reaching the [AAA](#) level in their chain, he was dealt to the [Chicago Cubs](#) during the [1981](#) season and made his big league debut later that year. Early in [1983](#), he was traded across town to the [Chicago White Sox](#), who in turn sent him to the [Cleveland Indians](#) for [Jerry Dybzinski](#) just prior to [Opening Day](#).

Tabler hit .291 for the Indians in [1983](#) while playing mostly in left field. The following year, [1984](#), he hit 10 home runs while splitting time between first base, third base, and the outfield. He was Cleveland's primary first baseman in [1985](#), and went 6-for-7 with 15 [RBIs](#) when the bases were loaded. He hit .326, fourth-best in the [American League](#), in [1986](#). The following summer, [1987](#), he hit .307 with a career-best 11 homers and 86 RBI while splitting time between first and designated hitter, and he played in the [All-Star Game](#) for the only time in his career.

Tabler was traded to the [Kansas City Royals](#) for [Bud Black](#) during the [1988](#) campaign, and just over two years later, he was dealt to the [New York Mets](#) for [Archie Corbin](#). He signed with the [Toronto Blue Jays](#) prior to [1991](#) and spent two seasons with the club, mostly seeing action as a [pinch hitter](#). He made two plate appearances for the Jays in the [1992 World Series](#), which were the final at-bats of his playing career.

Tabler amassed an incredible record with the bases loaded. He had 43 hits in 88 at bats for a .489 batting average in this situation. Breaking it down another way, he came to the plate 109 times with the bases loaded in his career: he had 43 hits, 11 walks, 1 hit by pitch, 9 sacrifice flies, and reached on error twice. That amounts to a 60.6% chance that at least one run scored when Tabler came to bat.

DOWN THE STRETCH THEY COME

The 2002 Oakland A's famously won 20 consecutive games from Aug. 13 to Sept. 4, erasing a 4 1/2-game deficit and creating a 3 1/2-game lead in the AL West. Corey Lidle went 5-0 with a 0.20 ERA for the A's that August? Corey Lidle was the A's fourth starter that season and went 5-0 with a 0.20 ERA that August, with three of those wins coming during Oakland's 20-game win streak. Lidle finished his nine-year MLB career with 82 wins and a 4.57 ERA. Hudson also went 5-0 for the Athletics with a 1.80 ERA in six starts that August.

The 2013 Los Angeles Dodgers were 9 1/2 games out of first place on June 22. They ended up winning the NL West by 11 games. They took control by going 42-12 in July and August, the best 48-game stretch since the 1942 Cardinals.

In 1942, the Cardinals went 41-7 over a 48-game stretch, one of the most dominant runs in baseball history. The Cardinals finished with 106 wins and won the National League by two games. They defeated the Yankees in the World Series, and pitcher Mort Cooper was named NL MVP after winning 22 games with a 1.78 ERA.

The 1978 Yankees were 14 games back in mid-July before a remarkable finish to the second half. The Yankees made the playoffs after defeating the Red Sox in a one-game playoff thanks to Bucky Dent's heroics. Billy Martin famously resigned as manager that summer. Dick Howser served as manager for one game, but Bob Lemon was manager as the Yankees made their run to the World Series crown. Lemon remained manager in 1979 before George Steinbrenner fired him in June. He was replaced that year by none other than Billy Martin. Lemon returned to manage the Yankees late in the 1981 season.

Player hit a record 39 home runs for his team after the 81-game mark in 1999, but his team still finished in fourth place. Who was it--Mark McGwire broke Roger Maris' home run record in 1998 when he finished with 70, but he also hit 65 homers — including 39 in the second half — in 1999.

Ken Griffey Jr.'s return from a wrist injury helped spark a tremendous second half from the 1995 Seattle Mariners, erasing an 11-game August deficit and making the postseason for the first time in franchise history.

Jay Buhner hit a team-high 40 home runs and finished fifth in AL MVP voting that year while Randy Johnson won the Cy Young Award. Buhner had three 40-homer seasons in the 1990s and finished his career with 310 homers.

On Sept. 3, 2011, the Red Sox were projected to have a 99.6 percent chance of making the postseason. But the "chicken and beer" Red Sox became the first team in MLB history to have a nine-game lead in September and still miss the playoffs. What team beat the Red Sox on the last day of the season to seal Boston's postseason fate?

The Orioles beat the Red Sox 4-3 after a blown save by Jonathan Papelbon. The Rays beat the Yankees on Evan Longoria's walk-off home run to overtake Boston for an AL wild-card berth.

The 1964 Phillies were already selling World Series tickets before a dreadful 2-10 finish cost them a 6 1/2 game lead in the National League. The infamous collapse earned what nickname?

"The Phold of '64" is the godfather of September collapses. The Phillies lost 10 consecutive games, starting with a 1-0 loss to the Reds on Sept. 21, dubbed "The Curse of Chico Ruiz." Ruiz stole home with two outs and Frank Robinson at the plate in the sixth inning.

Orel Hershiser threw an MLB record 59 consecutive scoreless innings from Aug. 30-Sept. 28, 1988, for the Dodgers. If you count the postseason Hershiser's streak went to 67 innings before he surrendered a run to the Mets in Game 1 of the 1988 NLCS. Hershiser had a 1.05 postseason ERA and won World Series MVP honors. His regular-season streak could have continued had he not allowed a run to the Reds in the first inning of his 1989 season.

Vladimir Guerrero Sr. won the MVP and led his team to its first division title in 18 years after hitting .500 with six home runs in his team's final eight games of September.

Guerrero went 15-for-30 with six home runs, 11 RBIs, six walks and zero strikeouts in the final eight games of the 2004 season. He earned MVP honors after hitting .337 with 39 home runs for the season. Guerrero's Angels won 92 games and lost to the Red Sox in that year's ALDS.

What it means to be in first place (or not be there) from MLB.com

Let's take a look at what it means to be [in first place](#) in a division entering August and what the playoff field may look like.

Since 1996 -- the first full season with at least one Wild Card in each league after the '95 campaign was limited to 144 games due to the players' strike that began in 1994 -- 106 of 144 eventual division champions held at least a share of their division lead entering August 1. That's 74 percent of division winners.

And of course, the season didn't start until late July last year, so those numbers are through 2019. The last time we played a full season, in 2019, all six of the division winners held at least a share of that lead entering August. The Yankees, Twins, Astros, Braves and Dodgers each held outright leads. The Cardinals, who won the NL Central, were tied with the Cubs for the division lead entering August. But St. Louis went 34-21 down the stretch, third-best in the NL from Aug. 1 onward, while the Cubs went just 27-28, and the Cards won the division. The Cubs ended up finishing third in the division and missing the playoffs, with the Brewers, who faced the eventual World Series-champion Nationals in the NL Wild Card Game, in second.

The 2019 season was just the fourth time in this span that all six division winners held at least a share of that lead entering August, and it hadn't happened in a while. The other seasons where it occurred were 1999, '97 and '96.

Since 1996, 14 of the 24 World Series winners, excluding 2020 since the season had just began, led their divisions entering August, but the most recent in that span did not: the 2019 Nationals. Before them, the most recent World Series winner without at least a share of first place in its division entering August was the 2014 Giants, who trailed the Dodgers by three games entering August and went on to make the playoffs via the Wild Card.

What about the potential comebacks? Just one team has gone on to win the World Series after being below .500 entering August -- the 1914 Boston Braves, who were 44-45. The lowest winning percentage entering August to win the World Series in the Divisional Era (since 1969) was .528 (57-51) by the 2011 Cardinals.

And if we look at simply making the playoffs? The lowest winning percentage for a team entering August that went on to make the playoffs in a non-strike-shortened season was .436 (44-57) by the 1973 Mets, who went on to win the National League pennant and showed everyone that 'Ya Gotta Believe.' (Again we are excluding 2020 with both of these notes).

This year's leaders and competition

Of this year's current division leaders entering August, each has had at least a share of that lead entering August (again excluding 2020) since 1996 before. The Rays, who have a half-game lead over the Red Sox after a win Saturday, last led entering August in 2008.

The Mets, who currently lead the NL East, haven't led entering August since 2007, when they would go on to miss the playoffs despite a seven game lead with 17 games to play.

The White Sox last led entering August in 2012, when they went on to finish in second place behind the Tigers. The Brewers last did it in 2014, when they went on to finish in third place. The Giants were last in this spot in 2016, when they went on to be the second Wild Card spot. This is the fourth straight full season that the Astros have led the AL West entering August.

What's next?

October is drawing closer -- and fast -- but there's still baseball left to be played. But fans of the six division leaders can take some comfort in knowing that historically, almost three quarters of those teams have gone on to win their divisions. And for fans of teams that aren't in a division lead, there's still plenty of hope -- while 74 percent of these teams go on to win their divisions, that means 26 percent do not, too. Now, we all get to watch and see what happens.

CLOSING IN

Miguel Cabrera needs 54 hits to reach 3,000 (and move into 34th place all time).

Joey Votto needs 14 hits to reach 2,000.

Nelson Cruz needs 127 to reach 2,000.

Buster Posey, Bret Garner, Ian Desmond, Mike Trout, DJ LeMahieu, Carlos Santana and Charlie Blackmon are all with in 100 hits of reaching 1,500.

MORE WHILE LOOKING AT ALL TIME CAREER HITS LEADERS

Did you know that Julio Franco (2586 hits) had more career hits than Reggie Jackson (2584), Ernie Banks (2583) and Manny Ramirez (2574)?

Jeff Kent (2461 hits) had more than Mickey Mantle (2415), Sammy Sosa (2408) or Ryne Sandberg (2386)?

Chilli Davis (2380 hits) had more than Carlton Fisk (2356), Jim Thome (2328), Jeff Bagwell (2314) or Kirby Puckett (2304)?

Marquis Grissom (2251 hits) had more than Mie Schmidt (2234), Willie Stargell (2232), Joe DiMaggio (2214) or Willie McCovey (2211)?

As Miguel Cabrera gets closer, remember only six players — Henry Aaron, Willie Mays, Eddie Murray, Rafael Palmeiro, Albert Pujols, and Alex Rodriguez — have reached the 500/3,000 double.

Within that group, Aaron (.305) and Mays (.301) are the only career .300 hitters.

Cabrera, a .311 career hitter, could go hitless in 350 at-bats and maintain a .300 average.

FROM JOE POSNANSKI OF THE ATHLETIC

Why are the [Blue Jays](#) underperforming?

You probably know that the Houston Astros have the best run differential in the American League at +150. This is logically matched up with the Astros also having the best record in the American League, even after their loss to the Dodgers today.*

**[Max Scherzer](#), in his Dodgers debut, threw seven innings, allowed two runs, struck out 10 and it seemed to me, just looked utterly at home in a Dodgers uniform. There were so many moves made at the crazy trade deadline — and it looks like, despite my doubts, new Yankee Anthony Rizzo has taken on the spirit of Babe Ruth — but I have to believe that when the postseason comes around, Scherzer will be the most important acquisition of them all.*

Do you know who has the second-best run differential in the league?

Well, you do if you read the subhead — it's the Toronto Blue Jays at +111.

And yet, the Blue Jays are in fourth place in the American League East.

What gives? The Blue Jays are underperforming their run-differential by eight wins — they *should* be leading the American League East.

So what's the problem? Well, it seems to me that there are a couple of things. For one thing, in games decided by two runs or less, they have the worst record in the American League at 14-25. (By contrast, the Yankees have the best record in baseball in games decided by two runs or less.)

But they have won 12 games by eight runs or more, most in baseball. With the extraordinary power the Blue Jays have — they lead baseball in home runs as you might expect for a team with Vlad Guerrero Jr., [Marcus Semien](#), [George Springer](#), [Bo Bichette](#), [Randal Grichuk](#) and [Teoscar Hernández](#) — this team can really run up the score. They have scored three or fewer runs in only 35 games this year, the lowest total in baseball.

But can their pitching staff — particularly their bullpen — hold together close games? So far you would have to offer a decisive “no.” They are 12-38 in games where they score four runs or less, and that puts them down with the worst teams in baseball. They are only 8-7 when scoring five runs. This is a team that needs to score six runs or more to feel good about their chances of winning, and that's not a plan for success.

Moooooooooooooooookie!

[Mookie Betts](#) is, in some ways, an odd superstar. In 2016, he finished second in the MVP voting and was just wonderful in all ways — he hit .318/.363/.534, hit 31 homers, scored 122 runs, led the league in total bases, stole 26 bases and was caught just four times, played otherworldly defense in right field at Fenway Park, made his case as alternate choice for best player in baseball behind [Mike Trout](#).

Then in 2017, he was just ... good, you know? Still played the unreal defense. Still ran the bases brilliantly. But his batting average and slugging percentage tumbled, he seemed to lack aggression at the plate, he had trouble against right-handed power pitchers — it was just kind of strange.

In 2018, he was even better than he had been in 2016, he was as good as any player has been since Barry Bonds broke baseball, he hit .346, slugged .640, stole 30 bases, led the league with 129 runs, was Clemente in right field, led the [Red Sox](#) to a World Series title that nobody saw coming, beat out Trout for the MVP ... just incredible. But then came the playoffs, and he couldn't buy a hit.

Then in 2019, he was ... well, sure, he was still amazing, still led the league in runs, still finished eighth in the MVP voting, but again, it was weird. He went through a six-week stretch leading up to July 4 when he couldn't hit anything, he had a weird thing about hitting lefties, his slugging percentage tumbled more than 100 points.

He was traded to Los Angeles, of course, and finished second in the MVP voting in the shortened 2020 season, but even that season was a bit off. The left-handed pitching thing

seemed to become a real mental block. Then he was incredible in the playoffs, seemingly making decisive plays every game.

And then, this year, I don't know exactly how you describe it. On June 12, he was hitting .248/.362/.435, with just six homers and six stolen bases.

And since then, he's hitting .322 and slugging .687 and crushing home runs and doubles and making great plays at whatever position you put him ([even second base](#)) and looking again like the best player in the game.

I mean, yes, you expect all players — even great players — to have good stretches and rough ones, that's just how baseball works. But it's different with Betts because his good games are impossibly good (his six three-homer games are tied for the all-time record), and when he's struggling he's still really good because he helps a team in so many ways with his defense, his arm, his baserunning, etc. There really isn't anyone like him.

JAYSON STARK

Max Scherzer wasn't merely "an All-Star." He was the pitcher who *started the All-Star Game*. And how many times, in the history of all-stars, has the pitcher who started the All-Star Game ever gotten traded?

Right. That would be none. Until last week.

10 ALL-STARS JUST GOT TRADED! I'm still trying to digest this, too. The All-Star Game was July 13. The trade deadline was 17 days later. And in those 17 days, an unfathomable 10 players who made the all-star team got moved to a new address:

Pitchers: Scherzer, [Craig Kimbrel](#), [Kyle Gibson](#).

Position players: Turner, [Kris Bryant](#), Nelson Cruz, [Joey Gallo](#), [Adam Frazier](#), [Kyle Schwarber](#), [Eduardo Escobar](#).

So how many other deadlines have featured that many of that season's All-Stars getting traded? Yep. That would be none, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. And ohbytheway, we can thank the [Nationals](#) for all of these tidbits — since they just became the first team in history to trade three guys who had made the All-Star team *that month*.

THE METS' GOLDEN SHORTSTOP COLLECTION! There's an excellent chance you recall that back in January, the [Mets](#) traded for a fairly renowned shortstop named [Francisco Lindor](#). Then last

week, with Lindor hurt, the Mets traded for another shortstop you may have heard of, Javy Báez.

So how many teams have ever traded for two Gold Glove shortstops to play on the same team in the same season? That would be zero, according to STATS.

And the only close calls weren't very close. Gene Mauch's 1969 Expos scarfed up two one-time Gold Glove shortstops — Maury Wills and Bobby Wine — in the expansion draft. And Jim Hendry's 2004 [Cubs](#) signed two former Gold Glovers — Rey Ordóñez and Neifi Pérez — to minor-league deals *after they'd gotten released*.

So does that seem like the same thing? Let's go with: No!

THE PADRES JUST TRADED FOR THE HIT KING! Adam Frazier was leading the major leagues in hits for the [Pirates](#) – and then he got traded, at the deadline, to the [Padres](#). If you're thinking that can't happen much, it's because that doesn't happen much.

According to Elias and [MLB.com](#)'s ever-inquisitive Sarah Langs, there have only been two other times since 1900 that the guy leading the whole sport in hits got traded in midseason:

Willie McGee, 1990 (Cardinals to A's)
Red Schoendienst, 1957 ([Giants](#) to [Braves](#))

THE YANKEES' FRONT LINE MIGHT BE BIGGER THAN THE KNICKS! Finally, the Yankees may not be big on facial hair, but they're huge fans of, um, hugeness. They just traded for [Rangers](#) hulkster Joey Gallo. And that meant that last Friday and Saturday, they could start these three outfielders against the [Marlins](#):

[Giancarlo Stanton](#) (LF): 6-foot-6, 245 pounds
[Aaron Judge](#) (CF): 6-7, 282 pounds
Gallo (RF): 6-5, 250 pounds

It took some (ahem) oversized research from YES Network's James Smyth to nail this down. But that made the Yankees only the second team in the modern era to start three behemoths who were all 6-foot-5 or taller in the same outfield. The other: The 2016 Cubs rolled out [Jason Heyward](#) (6-5), [Dexter Fowler](#) (6-5) and Kris Bryant (6-5).

But the Yankees collectively out-heighted them, 19 feet, 6 inches to 19-3. So Stanton, Judge and Gallo are, officially, the tallest outfield of modern times. But also...

The heaviest!

How many other teams have started an outfield in the same game in which everybody in the group weighed 245 or more? Despite the best efforts of Adam Dunn and his hefty friends on

the 2014 White Sox, that answer, according to baseball-reference/Stathead, is none! So who's the heavyweight outfield champion of the world? *Theeeee* Yankees win.

In other major deadline news, here's this indispensable travel note:

Some guys (like Max Scherzer) get traded and have to transport themselves to the other side of the country. But we just saw three other deals at this deadline in which the players who got traded only had to transport themselves *to the other side of the ballpark* – because their old and new teams were playing each other at the time. Very convenient.

Those three deals were: Astros-Mariners ([Kendall Graveman](#), [Abraham Toro](#), [Joe Smith](#)) ... Indians-White Sox (César Hernández) ... and Cardinals-Twins (J.A. Happ, [John Gant](#)).

The Miggy-napolis 500

I don't know why we're not spending more time talking about this. But one of the greatest right-handed hitters who ever lived is about to join the 500-Homer Club. And that would be [Miguel Cabrera](#), naturally. You were expecting maybe Hernán Pérez?

So somebody ought to point out how special this is. I thought I'd volunteer.

IN 500-HR CLUB, AVG. AS HIGH AS MIGGY

Ted Williams, .344
Babe Ruth, .342
Jimmie Foxx, .325
Manny Ramírez .312
Miguel Cabrera .311*

IN 500-HR CLUB, ONCE WON A TRIPLE CROWN

Ted Williams
Mickey Mantle
Frank Robinson
Jimmie Foxx
Miguel Cabrera

And since the 3,000-Hit Club will be coming right up for this guy...

.300 AVG, 500 HR, 3,000 HIT CLUB

Henry Aaron, .305/755/3,771
Willie Mays, .302/660/3,283
Miguel Cabrera .311/TBD/TBD

Miguel Cabrera is walking with legends, ladies and gentlemen. Let's not take that for granted.

LIFE'S A BENCH – Mets super-sub [Brandon Drury](#) may not have won the player-of-the-month award for July. But he was definitely the benchwarmer of the month.

He only started two games all month. But it was the games he didn't start that caught my attention – because all he did was *bat 1.000*. Yes, he went 7 for 7 in games he didn't start! That's 4-for-4 as a pinch-hitter, 3-for-3 after entering games as a sub. And that felt like the kind of thing that can't possibly have happened, right?

Wrong! According to STATS, there was actually one other bench basher in the modern era who matched this feat. It was (who else?) Debs Garms of the 1941 Pirates. He also went 7-for-7 that July in games he didn't start – and hit .414 (12-for-29) in games he did start. In all months not known as "July" that season, he hit .212.

Hey, one more thing! The last Met to go at least 7-for-7 in any stretch in games he started was the late, great Rusty Staub, who ripped off an 8-for-8 streak in 1983.

THE RIZZ KID – How 'bout [Anthony Rizzo](#)'s first week as a Yankee, huh? Could write a whole column just about that. But let's stick with this:

In his first series with the Yankees, he started games hitting *first* and *fourth*. You think there wasn't some Weirdness and Wildness involved in that?

- How many other players since 1901 have done that in their first series after joining any team in midseason? Right you are. That would be nobody, STATS reports. Just him.
- How many other men have done that in their first series with the Yankees at any point in a season? That would be one – Roger Maris, in their first series of the year in 1960.
- And how many players in the modern era have hit first and fourth in their first series for any new team, even to start a season? Rizzo is the ninth, astonishingly enough. But it's quite the eclectic list.

Simmy Murch (St. Louis Cardinals), 1904
Tom Catterson (Brooklyn Superbas), 1908
Joe Schultz (Brooklyn Robins), 1915
Milo Allison ([Cleveland Indians](#)), 1916
Nemo Liebold ([Boston Red Sox](#)), 1921
Roger Maris (New York Yankees), 1960

[Adam Jones](#) ([Arizona Diamondbacks](#)), 2019

Yandy Díaz ([Tampa Bay Rays](#)), 2019

Anthony Rizzo (New York Yankees), 2021

(Source – *STATS Perform*)

In other words, this happened once in 98 years – but then three times just since 2019,

CHICAGO IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR – STATS also tells us that there had never been a team in the modern era that traded three different players away and had to watch *all* of them hit a home run in their first game with a new team. But then Rizzo homered in his first game with the Yankees...and Baez homered in his first game with the Mets...and Kris Bryant homered in his first game as a Giant. Which got me to thinking – of this list:

Homered for the Cubs and Yankees in the same year: Matt Lawton (2005), Alfonso Soriano (2003), [Glenallen Hill](#) (2000), Rey Sánchez (1997) and ... Anthony Rizzo (2021). What? No [Joe Girardi](#)?

Homered for the Cubs and Mets in the same year: [Rene Rivera](#) (2017), Brian McRae (1997), Lance Johnson (1997), Manny Alexander (1997) and ... Javy Báez. What? No Dave Kingman?

Homered for the Cubs and Giants in the same year (since 1901): Neifi Pérez (2004), Héctor Cruz (1978), Len Gabrielson (1965) and ... Kris Bryant. What? No [Shawon Dunston](#)?

speaking of Yan Gomes...

IT'S A YAN-DERFUL LIFE – As we were saying ... Yan Gomes! So how about this:

Gomes' last start as a National (Thursday): Hits a home run.

Gomes the next day: Gets swept up in that Nats Everything Must Go sale, gets traded to Oakland.

Gomes' first start with the A's (Sunday): Also hits a home run!

So imagine how rare it must be for any catcher to do that – hit a home run two starts in a row, but *for two different teams* in the same season? I imagined. And way too many minutes of feverish research later, at least I could tell you just how rare it is.

Say hello to the last man to do it: Charles Johnson, for the [Orioles](#) and White Sox, in 2000 – on *those exact dates* (July 29 and Aug. 1) ... because baseball!

JOEY'S EXTRAORDINARY PLAYLIST – Life gets incredibly entertaining when Joey Votto decides to hit a home run every darned day. And hopefully, you noticed that that just happened.

Between July 24-30, Votto ripped off a memorable streak of home runs in seven straight games for the [Reds](#). You need to know more, right? I can help with that:

He was singled out! Votto's streak included this fascinating mix:

7 games, 9 homers, 0 any other kind of hits.

So that made him the first man in history to have a seven-game hitting streak with that many home runs and no other hits. Only Ken Griffey Jr. ever had a longer streak with no hits not called "homers." That was eight games, with eight home runs, from July 20-28, 1993.

OK, here we go, since I took 45 minutes of my supposedly valuable life to find this: FWIW, since Griffey's streak, there have been a mind-blowing 7,750 opposite streaks of Votto's. By which I mean:

7 games or more, a hit in all of them ... but no home runs.

Chicago Fire! But here's the best part. In the middle of that streak, Votto went into Wrigley Field and launched a home run in all four games of a four-game series. And who else has done that, you ask? Oh, [Matt Carpenter](#) in 2018 ... and High Pockets Kelly in 1924.

But you know who has never done it, according to Stathead? Would you believe ... the Cubs! By which I mean ... any Cub. Not Ernie Banks. Not Sammy Sosa. Not Ron Santo. Not Andre Dawson. Not the Bryzzo Corp. But Joey Votto just did that, because ... baseball!

Even Stranger But Truer, however, is this recent exhibition of...

SCHROCK AND AWE – Last Sunday in New York, a Reds first baseman had a 5-for-5 game. And considering how hot Joey Votto is, there should have been nothing Strange But True about that. Except for this:

It wasn't Joey Votto!

No, this 5-for-5 game was by [Max Schrock](#), because of course it was. He became the fifth Reds first baseman in the last 50 years to have one of those 5-for-5 days. The others might sound familiar: Tony Perez, Johnny Bench, Pete Rose and Sean Casey. But who's not pictured?

Joey Votto!

THREE'S COMPANY – The Cubs and White Sox have both been playing baseball in Chicago for the last 122 seasons. You know what they'd never done until last weekend?

Have a player – any player – step up and hit three home runs in a game, one for each of those teams, on back-to-back days.

And then, when it finally happened, it was courtesy of...

- [Seby Zavala](#) (zero previous career homers), last Saturday for the White Sox?
- And [Rafael Ortega](#) (six previous career homers *for five teams*), Sunday for the Cubs?

Wait. What? Those were the two guys who did this?

Never hit three in a game for the White Sox: Jim Thome, Magglio Ordóñez, Carlos Lee, Jermaine Dye, many more where they came from.

Never hit three in a game for the Cubs: Anthony Rizzo, Javy Báez, Ryne Sandberg, Ron Santo and, hey, just pick your favorite Cub!

And oh yeah, there's also this: *The White Sox and Cubs won neither of those games!*

- Teams in the previous 100 years that lost a game in which a player with fewer than 10 career home runs hit three in a game – one! (That was the 1994 Tuffy Rhodes Cubs). H/T STATS.
- Teams from one city that did that just last weekend – *two!*

NORTHERN EXPOSURE – It's Season No. 2 in the so-far excellent Blue Jays career of [Hyun-Jin Ryu](#) (16-7, 3.03 ERA in the AL East). But it also has had this unique plot twist:

This man made 32 starts for the Blue Jays before ever starting a game in the city where they actually play!

So when he finally started *in* Toronto on Tuesday, it was another excuse for me to fire a question at STATS that would chew up far too sizeable a chunk of somebody's previously enjoyable day. Didn't this have to be a record for most starts in modern history by any pitcher, for any team, before he got to start a game in the park where his team normally plays what we customarily refer to as "home games?"

And the correct answer is: Of course it is!

The previous record, STATS reports, was only 12, by Phil (The Vulture) Regan. He joined the [Tigers](#) in July of 1960 and started 12 games – in Baltimore, Washington, Boston, New York, Chicago, Kansas City and Los Angeles – before ever starting one in Detroit. No idea how that happened. And I'm pretty sure neither does the Vulture. But at least customs wasn't involved.

LEST WE FORGET – So ... [Jon Lester](#)'s first start as a Cardinal went well.

Lester's first seven hitters faced, Tuesday against the Braves: Walk, homer, single, single, single, walk, single (but no outs).

Ouch! So now let's guess how many times in Lester's first 439 career starts – for the Red Sox, Cubs and Nationals – that the first seven hitters reached base against him.

If you guessed "zero," you win!

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

AUGUST 1, 2021

Good morning baseball fans. If you are into it, what an exciting trade deadline. Lots of trade stuff below. Have an excellent week.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Miguel Cabrera hit 3 HRs this week including career numbers 496 and 497 in the tigers Thursday win over the orioles. The 38 year-old first baseman also has 2941 career hits.

Walter Johnson was the first pitcher to 3,000 career strikeouts (The Big Train's career wrapped in 1927 with 417 wins, 110 shutouts and 3509 strikeouts). It took until 1974 and Bob Gibson for another pitcher to reach 3,000 K's.

The only two players with at least four hits and at least two home runs over their first two games playing for the Yankees--Roger Maris (1960) and Anthony Rizzo (2021)

When the Dodgers acquired Max Scherzer they now have two pitchers with three Cy Young Awards (Clayton Kershaw is the other). Only one other team has had two pitchers with three Cy Young Awards appear for them in the same season--1986 White Sox (Steve Carlton and Tom Seaver, although they were never on the roster at the same time)

The only future Hall of Famers to make their big league debut as teammates in the same game as pitcher and catcher? April 14, 1925 Lefty Grove on the mound and Mickey Cochrane catching for the Philadelphia A's.

Seven Father/son combos Nolan Ryan struck out:

Dick Schofield and Dick Jr.; Maury and Bump Wills; Hal and Brian McRae; Tito and Terry Francona; Ken Sr. and Ken Griffey Jr.; Sandy Alomar Sr. and Roberto Alomar; and Bobby Bonds and his son Barry.

Ron Hassey caught Dennis Martinez' perfect game against the Dodgers on July 28, 1991. Hassey also caught Len Parker's perfect game for the Indians in 1981. He is the only catcher to catch two perfect games.

When Martinez pitched the 13th perfect game in MLB history at Dodger Stadium he became the first pitcher born outside the U.S. to toss a perfect game in major league baseball.

Only five pitchers to win 20 games in final MLB season---Mike Mussina Yankees 2008, Henry Schmidt Red Sox 1903, Eddie Cicotte White Sox 1920, Lefty Williams White Sox 1920, and Sandy Koufax Dodgers 1966.

Pitcher with the most seasons with 200+ innings pitched and 200+ strikeouts since 2000--Justin Verlander (9 such seasons)

First Mariners player to lead the American League in stolen bases was Harold Reynolds, who swiped 60 bases in 1987

Three shortstops in AL/NL history to hit 30 or more home runs in a season at age 22 or younger-
-Alex Rodriguez, Gleyber Torres and Fernando Tatis Jr.

According to Vegas Sports Information Network favorites lead underdogs this season 883-637 (58.1%).

VOTTO

Instead of a record-tying eighth consecutive game with a home run Saturday, [Joey Votto](#) of the Reds had to settle for an extremely hard-hit and very long single vs. the Mets in the top of the eighth inning. The first baseman finished 1-for-5 without a homer. The Reds had won five of the seven games Votto had homered in, including the previous four in a row.

Votto had homered in 7 straight games, falling one short of the MLB record.

The first baseman hit a homer in his seventh consecutive game to help power the Reds to a [6-2](#) victory over the Mets on Friday at Citi Field.

The record of eight consecutive games with a home run is shared by Ken Griffey Jr. (1993), Don Mattingly (1987) and Dale Long (1956).

In the last month, Votto is hitting .348/.460/.793 with 11 homers in 92 at-bats.

The last time a player homered in six straight games came during the 2019 season, the Cardinals' Paul Goldschmidt.

ZAVALA

[Seby Zavala](#) is known more for his defense and game-calling behind the plate than his prodigious output with the bat. But in Saturday night's [12-11 loss to the Indians](#) at Guaranteed Rate Field, the White Sox catcher showed there's quite a bit of power in his repertoire as well. Zavala hit three home runs, one to each field, becoming the first player in American League or National League history to hit his first three career homers in the same game.

Zavala homered in the third off Cleveland starting pitcher Triston McKenzie, blasting a Statcast-projected 411-foot drive to center field. He connected on his first career grand slam in the

fourth on a 377-foot drive to left, again off McKenzie, drawing a curtain call from the fans. Zavala then started a two-run seventh-inning rally with a 369-foot home run to right off reliever Bryan Shaw.

That's 1,157 feet of homers for an individual who was 5-for-40 to start his Major League career and 4-for-28 since joining the White Sox this season.

Zavala became the 17th player in White Sox history to hit three homers in a game, taking place for the 18th time, and first since José Abreu hit three at Wrigley Field on Aug. 22, 2020. Zavala also became the first White Sox catcher to homer three times in a game, and was the first catcher overall to do so since the Yankees' Kyle Higashioka on Sept. 16, 2020 vs. Toronto.

Zavala's six RBIs matched Craig Grebeck (April 30, 1992 vs. Texas) for the second most by a White Sox No. 9 hitter, trailing only Charles Johnson, who recorded seven RBIs on Sept. 2, 2000 vs. the Angels.

Should we worry about Gerrit Cole and other pitchers whose home run rates are trending the wrong way?

After seeing tons of taters leave the yard in 2019 and 2020, the relative dearth of long balls earlier this season had us wondering how to evaluate this year's stats. That turned out to be not as much of a problem as it appeared to be two or three months ago. Things seem a little more normal lately — that is, if normal is defined as what we had been seeing over the previous two seasons. In 2019, hitters averaged 1.40 home runs per nine innings (HR/9), and in the shortened 2020 campaign, that ratio dipped only slightly to 1.34. Through the end of May, hitters were launching just 1.16 HR/9.

Since then, hitters have collectively put up a 1.32 HR/9. I had just assumed that this was an artifact of warmer weather and batted balls traveling farther and faster. That hasn't actually been the case, though. As shown in the table below, as the rate of home runs started to pick up in June, the major league average barrel rate stayed roughly the same, as did the average exit velocity on fly-balls and line drives (EV FB/LD). So far in July, barrel rates and EV FB/LD have actually decreased slightly, and a minor uptick in average fly-ball distance from June has been reversed.

Month	HR/9	Barrel%	EV FB/LD (mph)	Avg. FB dist. (feet)	FB%	K%
April	1.17	8.4%	93.5	318	35.7%	24.4%
May	1.15	7.9%	93.1	316	35.5%	24.0%
June	1.32	8.0%	93.3	320	35.7%	23.2%

July 1.32 7.5% 92.4 317 36.7% 22.

If hitters aren't actually hitting the ball harder or farther, then they must be hitting more of them higher, right? That doesn't appear to be the explanation either, as fly-ball rates remained steady throughout June, even as HR/9 was starting to rise. The fly-ball rate across the majors has ticked up by a percentage point from June to July, but that could just be noise from a sample of plate appearances from the last three-and-a-half weeks.

What has changed over a nearly two-month period is the strikeout rate. It appears that hitters are whacking more homers because they are making more contact in general. That combination of increased contact and more frequent homers means more robust hitter stats, but it's also a double whammy for pitchers. That would not necessarily be a good thing for hitters or a bad thing for pitchers if these changes were distributed equally, but of course, they have not been. A handful of pitchers are providing exaggerated examples of the twin trends of more contact and more dingers.

The table below includes every pitcher who has met each of three criteria: 1) threw at least 30 innings in April and May and at least another 30 innings since June 1; 2) has a HR/9 that is at least 0.50 higher in June and July than it was in April and May; and 3) has an xFIP no higher than 4.50 since June 1.

Of the 16 pitchers who made it into this table, only [Gerrit Cole](#), [Julio Urías](#), [Kevin Gausman](#) and [Brandon Woodruff](#) have posted a strikeout rate since June 1 that is more than three percentage points lower than the one they had going into June.

Name	Apr/May HR9	June/July HR/9	HR/9 Diff	Apr/May K%	June/July K%	K% Diff
Johnny Cueto	0.41	2.27	1.86	20.0%	21.8%	1.8%
Nick Pivetta	0.67	2.01	1.34	26.3%	27.0%	0.7%
Gerrit Cole	0.64	1.82	1.18	36.9%	30.8%	-6.1%
Yu Darvish	0.81	1.84	1.03	30.0%	27.4%	-2.6%
Aaron Nola	0.96	1.98	1.02	28.1%	30.2%	2.1%
Adbert Alzolay	1.63	2.56	0.93	26.3%	24.1%	-2.2%
Dylan Cease	0.70	1.58	0.88	30.3%	28.8%	-1.5%
Chris Bassitt	0.64	1.50	0.86	26.1%	23.4%	-2.7%
JT Brubaker	1.63	2.41	0.78	23.6%	25.0%	1.4%
Kevin Gausman	0.51	1.23	0.72	30.9%	27.5%	-3.4%
Casey Mize	1.09	1.75	0.66	20.1%	20.3%	0.2%
Brandon Woodruff	0.38	0.98	0.60	31.8%	28.6%	-3.2%
Kyle Gibson	0.45	1.03	0.58	20.1%	20.8%	0.7%

Jon Gray	0.89	1.45	0.56	19.5%	26.3%	6.8%
Nathan Eovaldi	0.15	0.65	0.50	22.8%	24.5%	1.7%
Julio Urias	1.07	1.57	0.50	28.3%		

Of this foursome, the magnitude of the change has been the most concerning for Cole. Through the end of May, Cole had a 36.9 percent strikeout rate that was bested only by [Jacob deGrom](#), [Freddy Peralta](#) and Carlos Rodón, and he had given up only five home runs in 70.2 innings. Those trends went a long way towards securing a 1.78 ERA and an 0.83 WHIP for the Yankees' ace. The 30.8 percent strikeout rate he has put up since June 1 is the highest for any pitcher on the above list, but in combination with a 1.82 HR/9, Cole has only been able to muster a 3.98 ERA. Cole's 1.14 WHIP over his last nine starts is not bad, but it may be regression-bound, as he has been aided by a .268 BABIP over that stretch.

If you're thinking, as I did, that the recent erosion in Cole's skill profile has something to do with the banning of some sticky substances, it's not clear if that explains his recent downturn. Cole has lost 215 rpm of average spin on his four-seam fastball since June 1, but several pitchers with declining K-rates have had little to virtually no loss of spin. For example, Woodruff and Urias have lost fewer than 50 rpm in average spin rate on their four-seamers, and Gausman's has barely budged, dipping from 2284 rpm in April and May to 2279 rpm in his nine starts since.

Regardless of the reasons behind the decline, Cole is still striking out enough batters to render his HR/9 ratio irrelevant to start/sit decisions in fantasy baseball. With an xFIP (3.56) and SIERA (3.41) in the mid-3.00s since June 1, he is still a must-start pitcher, even if he something less than dominant. The same is true for Gausman and Woodruff, whose HR/9 ratios are still relatively modest.

Urias' strikeout rate and HR/9 have both moved into worrisome territory. His final start of May, in which he gave up seven runs (six earned) over five innings against the [Giants](#), actually had some encouraging signs (such as 12 swinging strikes in 82 pitches), but he has not been the same since. Over his last nine starts, Urias has induced whiffs on only 9.6 percent of his pitches, and hitters have made contact with 88.8 percent of the in-zone pitches they have swung at. That's actually a bigger concern than the spike in home runs against the lefty, as he has compiled a favorable 4.8 percent barrel rate and a 90.7 mph EV FB/LD during this recent span. Lately, Urias has a plate discipline profile that is similar to [Merrill Kelly](#)'s. That's not necessarily bad, but it's not what you expect from a pitcher who is rostered in just about every league.

[Yu Darvish](#), [Adbert Alzolay](#) and [Chris Bassitt](#) have not seen their strikeout rates fall as precipitously, but the more modest decline coupled with large increases in HR/9 make each of these pitchers worth a closer look. Darvish still has a healthy 27.4 percent strikeout rate over his last nine starts, but 10 home runs yielded over 49 innings have left him with a 4.78 ERA in those outings. He has not lasted six innings in any of his last three starts, so if he struggles in a home start against the [Rockies](#) this Saturday, it may be time think about sitting him in shallower

fantasy formats. We are already at that stage with Alzolay, given his 5.59 ERA and 13.0 percent barrel rate over his last eight starts, and a rough two-start week against the [Reds](#) and [Nationals](#) may make him too risky even in deeper 12- and 14-team leagues. Bassitt's home run problem has only been acute in July, as he has coughed up six homers in 23.1 innings this month. That is not to say that fantasy managers shouldn't be keeping Bassitt on a short leash, given that 11 of the 69 batted balls (15.9 percent rate) he has allowed in those starts have been barrels. As a merely average strikeout pitcher, he cannot afford to be giving up this extreme level of hard contact.

Note: Season-to-date stats are from all games played through Sunday, July 25.

JOE POSNANSKI

GALLO TO THE YANKEES

OK, I want to throw a few names at you. Babe Ruth. Jimmie Foxx. Duke Snider. Mickey Mantle. Dick Allen. Willie Stargell. Mike Schmidt. Dale Murphy. Bo Jackson. Sammy Sosa. Jim Thome. Ryan Howard. Mike Trout. Aaron Judge. There are probably a few things that connect them all, but there's one in particular.

All of them led the league in strikeouts.

The numbers have grown, of course — Ruth led the league with 90 or so strikeouts while Judge struck out more than 200 times — but the point is that strikeouts have *always* been nothing more than collateral damage for some of the best players in baseball history.

All of which brings us to Texas' Joey Gallo. He figures to be in the news over the next few days as contenders decide whether or not to deal for him. Gallo might very well lead the American League in strikeouts this year — it looks like it will come down to him and Oakland's Matt Chapman. He's likely to strike out 200 times again this year (he struck out 207 times in 2018). And because of that, his batting average — currently at .222 — is likely to stay very low.

And yet, Gallo is really having a fantastic season.

How fantastic? Well, because he leads the American League in walks, and because he continues to hit home runs, and because he is [playing Gold Glove defense](#) and because he has been good on the bases (six stolen bases, zero caught stealing), he is among the league leaders in WAR. This is someone who can make a difference for a team.

Gallo's curse is that because of the strikeouts, because of his extreme flyball swing (he has hit into only nine double plays in his *entire career*), because he hardly ever hits any doubles (six so far this year) — but mainly because of the strikeouts — it's difficult for people to see just how

valuable a player he is. But, as shown above, strikeouts have always been a part of the story of many really good players.

DISTURBING SIGN

Regional sports tv networks—only 5 baseball teams have ratings better than 2019 (Padres, Tigers, White Sox A's, Giants).

What strikes me about this is, simply, that every time people have pointed out baseball's obvious signs of trouble — attendance has been flat and even declining over the last 20-plus years, national ratings for the World Series and All-Star Game and other jewel events seem to set record lows every year, bizarre baseball blackouts are turning off countless would-be fans, the minor-league system is a mess, poll after poll shows baseball is simply not drawing younger people, etc. — the baseball people point to the local television numbers, which have been robust. As long as people watch games on local television, things will be OK.

Across all of baseball those numbers are not just falling but cratering. As one television executive told me, the regional sports networks are in a decline that isn't likely to change direction any time soon. There might be other ways to make up for lost viewership, but the regional networks have been the money trains that have kept baseball vibrant. It isn't like baseball is dying or anything like that, but without robust local television numbers, the sport will have to answer two serious and extremely difficult questions: How are people going to watch it, and who is going to pay for it?

VOTTO

Votto led the National League in on-base percentage seven times. I always bring this up with Tony Gwynn because he's one of the [greatest hitters in baseball history](#) and he won eight batting titles ... but do you know how many times he led the league in on-base percentage? Once, in 1994, the strike season.

DODGERS

When they get healthy, they will have the 2020 World Series MVP (Corey Seager); 2019 NL MVP (Cody Bellinger); the 2018 AL MVP (Mookie Betts); two legitimate candidates for 2021 NL MVP (Max Muncy and Trea Turner); the 2011, 2013 and 2014 NL Cy Young winner (Clayton Kershaw); the 2012 AL Cy Young winner (David Price); the 2013 AL and 2016 and 2017 NL Cy Young winner (Max Scherzer); a potential 2021 NL Cy Young Winner (Walker Buehler); plus all the hardware that veterans like Albert Pujols, Justin Turner and Kenley Jansen bring.

This is arguably the greatest collection of talent ever gathered on one team.

JAYSON STARK

Only one pitcher with as many Cy Youngs as Max (three) has *ever* been traded in the middle of any season while he was still in his 30s. And it was...

Tom Seaver!

[Mets](#) fans can go on to the next item here. But for those sticking with me, Seaver was 32 when the Mets sent him to the [Reds](#) at the old June 15 trade deadline in 1977. And how'd that go?

Again, Mets fans might want to go catch some Netflix before this next sentence. But everyone else should know that Seaver then went 14-3, with a 2.24 ERA, the rest of the way. That's how it went. The Reds missed the pre-wild-card playoffs. But is it safe to say it wasn't his fault?

Other three-time (or more) Cy Youngs who got mixed up in some sort of midseason trade:

- A washed-up Steve Carlton (four Cys at the time) got peddled from the [Indians](#) to the [Twins](#) on July 31, 1987, at age 42 — and went 1-5, 6.70 for the eventual Series champs, who shrewdly thought better of letting him go near a mound that October.
- Greg Maddux (four Cys) was 40 when the [Cubs](#) traded him to the [Dodgers](#) on July 31, 2006. Crafty as ever, Maddux went 6-3, 3.30 and helped the Dodgers make the playoffs as a wild-card team. That trade will come up again later in this column!
- Randy Johnson (five Cys, eventually) had only won one Cy Young when the [Mariners](#) dealt him to Houston hours as the 1998 deadline was closing in. That only turned into *one of the great deadline deals ever*. The Unit made 11 starts for the [Astros](#) — and went 10-1, with a 1.28 ERA. Then free agency loomed. The rest is, um, [Diamondbacks](#) history.

TORO, TORO, TORO — Moving along here, let's review [Abraham Toro](#)'s bizarre week:

Monday: HR for the Astros against the Mariners

Tuesday: HR for the Mariners *against the Astros*

Wednesday: HR for the Mariners against the Astros 2.0

Wait. What? Thanks to a little Weird and Wild deadline action, this man just hit a home run in all three games of a three-game series — *for both teams*? Who does that, you ask? C'mon, folks. *Nobody has ever done that!* Ever.

We ran this past our friends at STATS Perform. Here's what they reported:

- Toro is the first player in the history of Weirdness, Wildness and also baseball who ever homered in back-to-back games of any series – for each team.
- He's also the first player to homer even once for each team in the same series, let alone twice for one of them.
- And he's only the second player ever to homer for and against the same team *in the same week*. The other: Jermaine Dye – for/against the Royals/A's, six days apart, in 2001.

40 IN, 40 OUT – The [Rays](#), man. On back-to-back days last week, they traded *for* Nelson Cruz (age 41) and traded *away* [Rich Hill](#) (age 41). And you don't see that much. Our friends at STATS dug into this. And in the age of reliable transactions data (1995-now), here are the only teams they found that traded for and away players in their 40s during the same season:

2003 Yankees—acquired Jesse Orosco, traded Jesse Orosco

2006 Dodgers—acquired Gregg Maddux, traded Sandy Alomar Jr.

2021 Rays – acquired Nelson Cruz, traded Rich Hill

40 IS THE NEW 20 – This hasn't happened yet, but get ready, because it's coming. One of these days, Cruz and [Wander Franco](#) (still 20 years old, for the rest of this season) are going to hit home runs in the same game. And if you're wondering, as I was, how many times in history a 20-year-old and a 40-something-year-old have homered for the same team in the same game...

I can help with that! But only because of this incredible work from Kenny Jackelen, [sports-reference.com](#):

20-YEAR OLD & 40+-YEAR-OLD TEAMMATES HOMERING IN SAME GAME

Sept. 26, 2012 ([Orioles](#)): [Manny Machado](#) (20) and Jim Thome (42)

Sept. 14, 1990 ([Mariners](#)): Ken Griffey Jr. (20) and Griffey Sr. (40)

May 14 & 26, 1970 ([Giants](#)): Chris Speier (20) and Willie Mays (40)

April 19 & 27, 1958 ([Giants](#)): Orlando Cepeda (20) and Hank Sauer (41)

HAPPY GALLO-WEEN – So [Joey Gallo](#) is a Yankee. That'll be fun for all kinds of reasons. But here's one:

Joey Gallo in 2017 and 2018: hit 40+ HR for Texas

Joey Gallo in 2020: won a Gold Glove for Texas

And now the complete list of outfielders who have ever done both, in any season, as [Yankees](#):

Mickey Mantle
Roger Maris

Heard of 'em?

THE 100-460 CLUB

First, here's how Shohei's week went at his usual hangouts – the mound and the batter's box:

Monday: Throws a pitch 100 mph against the [Rockies](#) (OK, technically 99.7)

Tuesday: Hits a 463-foot home run against the Rockies (not in Coors)

Here it comes, the complete list of all humans in the Statcast era who have thrown a baseball 100 miles per hour off the mound and also hit a baseball 460-plus feet in the same year:

Shohei Ohtani

Ohtani also stole a base and drove in a run.

Last AL pitcher with SB, hit, run and RBI in a game in an AL park: Luis Tiant, for the Twins, on April 26, 1970 (went 3 for 4 that night – in a game started by Mickey Lolich). That was 51 years ago!

Here's the Weirdest and Wildest part of the Cleveland baseball team's name change last week:

This franchise has been known as the Indians for the last 107 seasons. So when they switch last names, they'll break the all-time record for most consecutive years before changing team names (but not changing cities) – *by almost a century*.

Team name changes

Cleveland Indians	Guardians	107 (1915-21)
Brooklyn Robins	Dodgers	18 (1914-31)
Cleveland Naps	Indians	12 (1903-14)
Tampa Bay Devil Rays	Rays	10 (1998-2007)
New York Highlanders	Yankees	10 (1903-12)

WATCH THIS NO-HITTER DISAPPEAR – Did you know the [Red Sox](#) haven't been no-hit in Fenway Park since 1958. But there they were in the eighth inning Sunday, getting no-hit by the Yankees and [Domingo German](#). Until...

It took them just *six hitters* to go from hitless – and down, 4-0 – to *leading*, 5-4. And so I wondered: Any chance that was some kind of record, for no-hitters and leads that large both disappearing that fast?

So here goes. According to STATS, this was the 15th time since 1974 that any team took a no-hitter and a lead into the seventh inning or later – and found itself losing an inning later. But it was only the second time any team had reenacted this particular Yankees horror show: *No-hitter, four-run lead, poof!*

The other: June 13, 1979, A's vs. Indians. Mike Norris takes a no-hitter and 4-0 lead into the eighth. And then...triple, single, single, single, three-run homer. Which means the A's had actually outdone the Yankees in the Fastest No-Hitter Disappearing Act competition, by going from up four runs to down 5-4 *in five hitters*. I promise that's a record that can't ever be broken. Do the math.

THAT BALL'S OUTA HERE – AND SO IS THAT ONE! I know it feels like every night, some position player winds up on somebody's pitcher's mound. So apparently, it's up to us Weird and Wild detectives to make sure all of these appearances don't just blend into each other like so much box-score rubble. Well, here's a big one:

Last Saturday, in a 15-3 wipeout against Atlanta, the [Phillies](#) decided they needed to get five outs from [Ronald Torreyes](#). Which led to this;

8th inning: [Austin Riley HR](#)

9th inning: [Joc Pederson HR](#)

So how many "true" position players have served up long balls in two different innings? I went back 70 years. I could only find two others.

[Daniel Descalso \(July 17, 2018\):](#) [Carlos González](#) (4th), [Germán Márquez](#) (5th)

[Larry Biittner \(July 4, 1977\):](#) Larry Parrish (8th), Andre Dawson (9th)

You're welcome!

THE TONY AWARD – Could you tell that Tony La Russa [got a little irritated](#) with plate ump John Libka's strike zone last Saturday?

I'm not sure what went through your mind when Libka tossed the [White Sox'](#) venerable Hall of Famer, but here's what went through mine: Is it possible he was the oldest manager ever to get ejected?

Thanks to the fabulous Retrosheet ejection logs, I can report that answer is ... no! Naturally, that was all Jack McKeon's fault. Check out this colorful Weird and Wild leader board:

Oldest ejections in MLB history

Jack McKeon 80 yrs, 9 mos. Aug. 24, 2011

Tony La Russa 76 yrs, 9 mos. July 24, 2021

Casey Stengel 74 yrs, 10 mos. April 21, 1965

Johnny Cueto's first career stolen base. And here's my only disappointment: He wasn't even close to the oldest pitcher (35 years, 158 days) to steal his first base.

Amazingly, the oldest in the wild-card era was the one, the only El Duque! He was 40 years, 313 days old when he stole *third* on Aug. 20, 2006, for the Mets, for his first career SB. Then he liked that so much, he swiped two more bases the next year, at age 41. So Johnny, don't stop at one!

SIX OF ONE, HALF-DOZEN OF THE OTHER – You've gotta love [Liam Hendriks](#). What a warrior. No endless succession of cheap, three-out saves for him. Last Sunday, he racked up his second *six-out save* of the season – which caught my attention if only because *he's also leading the league in saves!*

Last league leader in saves who also had multiple saves of six outs or more? That would be a guy you might have heard of ... named John Smoltz (who had three of them in 2002).

ALL THEIR EXCESS LIVES IN TEXAS – With some minor assistance from the all-star break, the [Rangers](#) just ripped off a stretch with zero games won between July 9-27. That's two and a half weeks. Even the [Tigers](#) won seven games while the Rangers were winning no games.

Along the way, while losing 12 games in a row, the Rangers somehow went 99 consecutive innings without holding a lead, the longest streak since 1900. And after they finally took a lead last Sunday, they gave it back *four hitters later*, because baseball.

But hey, we digress, because incredibly, they're not even the first team this year to go at least 18 days between wins. They can thank the Diamondbacks, who went winless for almost three weeks while losing 17 straight between June 1-21 – and didn't even have an all-star break they could blame it on.

So what was the last year in which two teams went that many days without winning? How about ... 1906!

Moose Grimshaw's 1906 Red Sox lost 20 games in a row, from May 1-24. And Cozy Dolan's 1906 Boston Braves lost 19 in a row *almost simultaneously*, from May 17-June 8. I hope the postgame *chowda* was hot in those Boston pubs, at least.

IN AND OUT BURGERS OF THE WEEK – It's rare enough when any team hits back-to-back homers in which one of them stays inside the park and the other one goes outside the park. But here's what made Tuesday's [Bryce Harper/Andrew McCutchen in-and-out burgers](#) in Philadelphia the Strangest But Truest Inside/Outside Back-to-Backers in nearly a century:

They were hit by two former MVPs!

And if you think it's some sort of fun-filled trip through baseball-reference/Stathead to find the last time that happened, just try it yourself sometime.

I gave it a go, then waved the white flag and asked the fabulous folks at baseball-reference if there was some magic formula I was missing. It would be many, many hours later before they reported back. But what they unearthed was pretty astonishing.

Here's to the diligence of their star intern, Jeremy Frank ([@MLBRandomStats](#)), for unearthing the last time this was known to have happened. Which was May 19, 1929, involving two guys you may be familiar with, named...

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig.

In a game against the Red Sox at Yankee Stadium, Ruth pounded an (ahem) Ruthian shot over the right-field fence off Boston starter Jack Russell. Then Gehrig fired one into the legendary left-center field gap, where the fence sat a tidy 490 feet from home plate, and turned that into an inside-the-park classic. I just hope all those folks in the Bronx knew how Strange But True that thing was they'd just witnessed.

I should probably mention here that 1929 was before the invention of the current MVP awards handed out by the BBWAA. But do we care about that right now? That's a no!

CHICAGO FIRE – [Joey Votto](#) had himself a week, right? More on that next week. But we wouldn't want to overlook this:

Joey Votto (not a Cub) at Wrigley Field this week: 6 HR
[Jason Heyward](#) (definitely a Cub) at Wrigley this year: 5 HR

THE WELCOME MATZ – And now this eminently Mets-ian moment in Strange But Trueness....

[Pete Alonso](#) in [Steven Matz](#) starts for the Mets: zero two-homer games.

Pete Alonso in Steven Matz's first start *against* the Mets (last Friday): yep, two home runs!

STRANGE BUT TRUE BOX-SCORE CLASSIC OF THE WEEK – Has there ever been a blown save quite like [Daniel Bard](#)'s fascinating ninth inning last Friday in Dodger Stadium? It went kinda like this

Single, single, wild pitch, walk, walk, strikeout, strikeout, strikeout.

WHAT'S UP WITH THAT? Correct answer: There has never been a blown save that followed that exact roller-coaster plot line. But since the dawn of the modern save rule, I did find two other blown saves that included two hits, two walks, three strikeouts and a wild pitch:

Victor Zambrano (Rays) on June 26, 2001: Strikeout, single, wild pitch, triple, walk, walk, walk, strikeout, strikeout.

Ron Davis (Twins) on April 20, 1986: HBP, double, intentional walk, strikeout, walk, strikeout, single, walk, single, strikeout, walkoff homer (split over the eighth and ninth innings).

A LIONS-VIKINGS GAME BUSTED OUT! Finally, if this was an ordinary week in an ordinary year, I might have cranked out an entire column on that wildness that erupted Wednesday afternoon at Target Field: Tigers 17, Twins 14, Fred Cox missed field goal at the gun. But hey, it's Deadline Week. No time for that. So just a few things you need to know:

- **No one-run innings!** These teams scored 31 runs – and there were no one-run innings? Thanks to loyal reader Jon Weisman for wondering the last time that happened. And gracias to my friend, Doug (Kernels) Kern for the answer: July 29, 1934: Tigers 16, White Sox 15.

- **The team that lost hit seven homers!** That would be the Twins. Over the last 16 seasons, 52 other teams had hit at least seven homers in a game. They'd gone 50-2. Over the previous 25 seasons, 75 teams had hit at least seven homers in a game. They'd gone 72-3. Over the course of baseball history, 116 teams had hit at least seven homers in a game. They'd gone 112-4. What separates these Twins from all of those teams is: They hit seven *and gave up zero homers* – and still lost. How many teams had ever done that? Not a one, says STATS.

- **The team that lost hit four homers in an inning!** The Twins also smoked four home runs just in the eighth inning of this game – and were still trailing after all four of them. Only one other AL team in the last 25 years has pulled that off, according to [sportradar.com](#): Five years ago, on Sept. 21, 2016, the Rays hit four in the third inning, all off [Masahiro Tanaka](#) of the Yankees – but only turned a 7-0 game into a 7-4 game.

- **Not to mention ...** The Tigers scored 17 runs *while hitting no homers*. They hadn't done that since 1961....The Twins had two different six-run innings *and lost* – for the first time in the history of the Twins/Senators franchise, according to Doug Kern....And maybe strangest of all, the Tigers' box score doesn't contain a single zero, in the AB-R-H-RBI columns next to the name of *any* position player. They hadn't done that in any game since 1929 – and *no team* had done it, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, since the Angels, on Sept. 14, 1978.

Batting	AB	R	H	RBI
Akil Baddoo LF	5	1	2	1
Derek Hill CF	6	2	3	2
Robbie Grossman RF	4	2	1	1
Eric Haase DH	3	3	1	3
Jeimer Candelario 3B	5	2	2	3
Zack Short SS	5	1	1	2
Willi Castro 2B	4	2	2	2
Harold Castro 1B	4	2	2	1
Grayson Greiner C	3	2	2	2

LIST OF THE WEEK – HOW MANY OF THE 50 PLAYERS WITH 4500 OR MORE TOTAL BASES CAN YOU NAME?

Aaron 6856

Musial 6134

Mays 6080

Pujols 6017

Bonds	5976
Cobb	5854
ARod	5813
Ruth	5793
Rose	5752
Yaz	5539
Murray	5397
Palmeiro	5388
Frank Robinson	5373
Beltre	5309
Griffey Jr.	5271
Winfield	5221
Ripken Jr.	5168
Speaker	5101
Gehrig 5	060
Cabrera	5057
Brett	5044
Ott	5041
Foxx	4956
Jeter	4921
Ted Williams	4884
Wagner	4870
Molitor	4854

Kaline 4852

Reggie Jackson 4834

Manny Ramirez 4826

Dawson 4787

Ortiz 4765

Chipper Jones 4755

Beltran 4751

Sheffield 4737

Yount 4730

Hornsby 4712

Biggio 4711

Banks 4706

Sosa 4704

Al Simmons 4685

Thome 4677

Baines 4604

Billy Williams 4599

Cap Anson 4592

Henderson 4588

Frank Thomas 4550

Tony Perez 4532

Mantle 4511

Vlad Guerrero Sr. 4506

THE DAY BEFORE THE TRADE DEADLINE MLB.COM RAN A COUPLE OF FUN PIECES

5 buzzer-beater Deadline deals

Is there anything better than your team grabbing a superstar at the last minute?

Zack Greinke to the Astros in 2019

The Astros were gathered in the visiting clubhouse at Progressive Field about three hours before Wednesday's game against the Indians, minutes before the 4 p.m. ET Trade Deadline hit. They were refreshing their phones and staring at the TVs, eager to find out the latest trade news.

Word had it that Astros GM Jeff Luhnow had reached out to D-backs GM Mike Hazen about acquiring Zack Greinke the day before, hoping to add him to a superstar rotation already featuring Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole. But Arizona wanted four of the Astros' top 30 prospects in return, and Luhnow didn't want to give up that much. Neither side would budge.

And then, about 35 minutes before the Deadline, talks picked up again, and not until minutes *after* the 4 o'clock hour did the world find out that Luhnow gave in to the D-backs' demands. Greinke was officially an Astro and his new rotation-mates were shocked, while also incredibly pleased.

"There was some hooting and hollering," said right-hander Gerrit Cole, who is friends with Greinke. "It was like 4:08, I think, is when it broke and [then-manager] A.J. [Hinch] came in with a [huge] smile. We were very excited."

Greinke went 8-1 down the stretch and helped his new team get to its second World Series in three years.

Yu Darvish to the Dodgers in 2017

For weeks leading up to the 2017 Deadline, the Dodgers were the frontrunner to add Yu Darvish to their rotation. Clayton Kershaw was suffering from a bad back, and L.A. needed another superstar to pick up the slack if it wanted to win its first title in more than 30 seasons.

But then, because Dodgers GM Farhan Zaidi didn't want to give up top prospects Alex Verdugo and Walker Buehler to Texas, Darvish at Dodger Stadium seemed less likely just hours before 4 o'clock.

Ten minutes before the Deadline, even Darvish tweeted who his team still was.

Even 10 minutes after, [nobody was sure what had happened](#). That's when official trade reporting czar Ken Rosenthal dropped the bomb.

[Baseball Twitter nearly broke](#), Zaidi didn't [have to give up](#) either Verdugo or Buehler in the deal and Darvish helped the Dodgers get to their first Fall Classic since 1988.

Yoenis Céspedes to the Mets in 2015

You probably remember, but the 2015 trade season was a wild one for the Mets. Looking to add some outfield power for the stretch run, the team *thought* it had a deal in place to get Carlos Gómez for Wilmer Flores and Zack Wheeler on July 29. Everyone believed it to be set in stone. I mean, [just ask Flores](#).

But Gómez's physicals weren't up to par and the trade fell through.

The Mets were now in a bind with not much time left and still in need of an outfielder. GM Sandy Alderson found out the Tigers were making Yoenis Céspedes available on the 31st, but in exchange, Detroit wanted Luis Cessa and top pitching prospect Michael Fulmer. Alderson didn't want to give up Fulmer and apparently spent most of the afternoon on Deadline day trying to convince the Tigers to take someone else.

Mets fans, famous for being beside themselves, were beside themselves.

Finally, [Alderson acquiesced](#) to the Tigers' demands.

"Twenty minutes before 4 [p.m.], we said, 'OK, we'll give you Fulmer and Cessa,'" and the deal went through just a few minutes before the Deadline.

Céspedes went on a tear for the Mets in the second half, hitting 17 homers in 57 games. The team reached its first World Series in 15 years but lost to the Royals in five games.

David Price to the Tigers in 2014

The Deadline on July 31, 2014, was another eventful one, with [many deals](#) happening right at 4 p.m. ET. The biggest? A tall, left-handed starter who moved from Tampa Bay to Detroit.

David Price had been in the Tigers' sights for a while, but talks apparently [didn't really get going](#) until around 1 p.m. ET on the 31st, when then-Rays GM Andrew Friedman called then-Tigers GM Dave Dombrowski.

"That's when everything started to move real quickly," according to Dombrowski.

Dombrowski says the GMs went into [great detail](#) about who or what would be involved, putting fanbases in total suspense. And then, 13 minutes before 4, it was Rosenthal again.

He Tweeted --A three-team deal involving the Rays, Tigers and Mariners.

Where was Price that afternoon? Waiting by his phone? Nervously pacing back and forth in his bedroom? No, he was golfing.

Price went 4-4 with a 3.59 ERA the rest of the way, helping Detroit win its division and get its fourth postseason berth in four years.

Jake Peavy to the White Sox in 2009

This one probably isn't as well known -- maybe because the White Sox didn't end up making it to the postseason that year? But on July 31, 2009, the Sox were 2 1/2 games out of first place and they needed another top of the line starter to complement Mark Buehrle. Cy Young Award winner Jake Peavy was that man.

The problem? White Sox GM Ken Williams had already tried to trade for Peavy earlier that year, but Peavy [didn't want to leave San Diego](#). Talks rekindled on the day of the Deadline, with apparently not many other people within the Chicago organization knowing.

["Mere seconds"](#) before the cutoff, a deal was in place between Williams and Padres GM Kevin Towers: Clayton Richard, Aaron Poreda, Dexter Carter and Adam Russell for Peavy.

Fans were blown away.

Funny enough, not even White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen was informed of the pending transaction.

"I was shocked," [Guillen said](#). "We got better and now we got one guy we wanted for a long time."

Although Chicago missed the playoffs, it was no fault of Peavy's. The 28-year-old went 3-0 in three starts while putting up a miniscule 1.35 ERA.

BEST DEADLINE ACQUISITIONS BY TEAM

Orioles -- 1988: Brady Anderson (and Curt Schilling) from the Red Sox: The Orioles gave up Mike Boddicker, but they got their starting center fielder (and franchise staple) for the next decade. They also got a hard-throwing right-hander in the deal, but they never quite figured out what to do with him and ended up sending him to Houston, along with Steve Finley and Pete Harnisch for Glenn Davis.

Rays -- 2018: Austin Meadows, Tyler Glasnow and Shane Baz from the Pirates: The Ben Zobrist trade in 2006 is a solid runner-up. But the Rays seeded the soil for their next big run of contention by trading Chris Archer, who they were eager to move anyway, for a future All-Star outfielder, a key starter and a top prospect. This isn't the only reason the Rays have had so much success since then. But it's a big one.

Red Sox -- 1997: Jason Varitek and Derek Lowe from the Mariners: Never underestimate a contending team that desperately wants a closer. The Red Sox took advantage of the Mariners' thirst for Heathcliff Slocumb and ended up bringing in two of the key players of their 2004 breakthrough ... and, essentially, franchise legends.

Yankees -- 1995: David Cone from the Blue Jays: It's possible that the Gleyber Torres for Aroldis Chapman swap with the Cubs in 2016 may pass this. For now, getting a New York legend who would end up winning three World Series and throwing a perfect game in exchange for Mike Gordon, Jason Jarvis and Marty Janzen is pretty tough to beat.

Indians -- 2008: Michael Brantley from the Brewers: CC Sabathia was one of the hottest pitchers in baseball when the Indians sent him to the Brewers, who very much reaped the benefits in Sabathia's two months in Milwaukee. But the Indians got one of their best players over the next decade in return, which seems more than worth it in every way, considering they were not going to re-sign CC.

Royals -- 2015: Johnny Cueto from the Reds: The Royals made two major deals at the 2015 Deadline, bringing in Ben Zobrist from Oakland and Cueto from Cincinnati. Zobrist ended up being a linchpin for the World Series win that year, but Cueto was brilliant in the playoffs, winning the decisive game of the AL Division Series and two-hitting the Mets in Game 2 of the World Series.

Tigers -- 2011: Doug Fister from the Mariners: The Tigers infamously traded John Smoltz for Doyle Alexander at the 1987 Deadline, though people forget that Alexander did go 9-0 down the stretch for them and made the All-Star team the next year. As for Fister, he was so good for the Tigers down the stretch (1.79 ERA in 70 1/3 innings) that he helped win them a division title. The best player the Mariners got back was pitcher Charlie Furbush.

Twins -- 1989: Rick Aguilera and Kevin Tapani from the Mets: Frank Viola, who also pitched for St. John's University in Queens, N.Y., had long been lusted after by the Mets. The Twins ended up with two key pieces for their World Series win in 1991, still their most recent title.

White Sox -- 2017: Eloy Jiménez from the Cubs: This happened a little more than two weeks before the Deadline (July 13), but we are counting it anyway. Every time Jiménez hits a home run in the Crosstown Classic, the Cubs will have to remember they gave him up for José Quintana. The White Sox also got Dylan Cease out of the deal, too.

Angels -- 2008: Mark Teixeira from the Braves: Teixeira was a free agent to be, and the Angels got him for a light return -- Casey Kotchman and Stephen Marek. Teixeira was fantastic for the Angels down the stretch, but they still lost to the Red Sox in the ALDS. Teixeira left for the Yankees in the offseason, but there was still good news to come: The compensation pick the Angels received for Teixeira leaving ended up becoming Mike Trout.

Astros -- 1998: Randy Johnson from the Mariners: It would be a tough choice between this and the Carlos Beltrán trade a few years later ... but the Beltrán one happened in June. This one was right at the Deadline -- arguably *after* the Deadline -- and Johnson was incredible after the trade, going 10-1 with a 1.28 ERA. The Astros still lost to the Padres in the NLDS, though, and they paid a fairly steep price, giving up right-hander Freddy Garcia, shortstop Carlos Guillen and lefty John Halama.

Athletics -- 2008: Josh Donaldson from the Cubs: There would end up being a later, much less-heralded deal involving Donaldson, this time him leaving, but in 2008, giving up Rich Harden and Chad Gaudin to the Cubs got the A's a future superstar.

Mariners -- 1998: Jay Buhner from the Yankees:

Rangers -- 2007: Elvis Andrus, Neftalí Feliz, Matt Harrison and Jarrod Saltalamacchia from the Braves: Mark Teixeira makes it on this list twice, this time with the original trade that sent him to Atlanta and, ultimately, helped construct key pieces of a team that went to the World Series in 2010-11.

Braves -- 1987: John Smoltz from the Tigers: This one will live on forever as the potential perils of trading away unknown prospects for short-term relief, though as noted above, Doyle Alexander was great down the stretch for Detroit and an All-Star in 1988.

Marlins -- 2003: Ugueth Urbina from the Rangers: Urbina may have had an unpleasant post-baseball career life, but he was absolutely instrumental to the Marlins' last World Series victory. Though the Marlins gave up a pretty big name to get him: Adrián González.

Mets -- 2015: Yoenis Céspedes from the Tigers: Remember, if Wilmer Flores [had not cried out on the field](#) (and ended up not being traded), this deal might never have happened. It ended up with the Mets in the World Series.

Phillies -- 2009: Cliff Lee from the Indians: Every team in baseball desperately wanted Lee at the time, but the Phillies got him, and he helped get them to the World Series (though they did give up Carlos Carrasco as part of the trade). They traded him to the Mariners that offseason ... but Lee signed back with them anyway as a free agent after the 2010 season.

Nationals -- 2017: Sean Doolittle and Ryan Madson from the A's: For a while, this was just known as the trade that let Blake Treinen get away. But as it turned out, Doolittle and Madson

were key for a team that had constant bullpen woes, and Doolittle helped them win a World Series in 2019.

Brewers -- 2015: Josh Hader from the Astros: This was another aftereffect of the Flores non-trade. When Carlos Gómez did not end up being traded to the Mets, the Brewers sent him to the Astros ... and got maybe the best reliever in their history in return.

Cardinals -- 1997: Mark McGwire from the A's: Seriously, can you name any of the players the Cardinals gave up for Big Mac? Eric Ludwick, T.J. Mathews and Blake Stein. Meanwhile, the Cardinals changed the course of their franchise's history, and all told, are still enjoying benefits of this trade today.

Cubs -- 2013: Jake Arrieta from the Orioles: This was actually made at the beginning of July, stretching the definition a bit (and feel free to choose the Chapman trade if you want, though you probably shouldn't since he almost blew the 2016 World Series), but with this trade, the Cubs found the ace who would end up being vital to their resurgence ... and ultimate World Series title.

Pirates -- 1986: Bobby Bonilla from the White Sox: The Pirates gave up Jose DeLeon, a good pitcher, but they got a key bat for some of their best teams over the next five years and a guy who helped them win two division titles.

Reds -- 1977: Tom Seaver from the Mets: This was back when the Deadline was on June 15, and it happened on that date. The trade is more infamous in Mets lore, but Seaver won 75 games in six seasons with the Reds, finishing in the top four in Cy Young voting twice and throwing his only career no-hitter in 1978. The players sent to the Mets? Doug Flynn, Steve Henderson, Dan Norman and Pat Zachry.

D-backs -- 2000: Curt Schilling from the Phillies: The goal of this trade was to get the D-backs into the postseason in 2000. That did not work. But it sure did pay off in '01. The D-backs gave up Omar Daal, Nelson Figueroa, Travis Lee and Vicente Padilla, and they didn't miss any of them.

Dodgers -- 2008: Manny Ramirez from the Red Sox: This one sure felt like an earth-shaker at the time, and Ramirez was an absolute monster down the stretch for Los Angeles, turning the whole town into Mannywood. Don't worry about what happened after that. Just enjoy that ride. The best player the Dodgers gave up in the three-way trade was third baseman Andy LaRoche. He was a big prospect at the time, but he never panned out.

Giants -- 2012: Hunter Pence from the Phillies: Pence played for many teams and made some great memories with each, but he'll always feel most like a Giant. He ended up being exactly what this World Series-winning team most needed. And he helped them win another one in 2014. The Giants gave up a trio of players to get Pence, with Nate Schierholtz being the most notable name.

Padres -- 1996: Greg Vaughn from the Brewers: The Padres did make the playoffs in 1996, though Vaughn wasn't a big part of it. It was in '98, when he hit 50 homers and helped lead the team to the World Series, when San Diego truly reaped the rewards of this deal. The most notable player San Diego gave up? Lefty Ron Villone.

Rockies -- 2017: Jonathan Lucroy from the Rangers: Looking for their first playoff appearance since 2009, the Rockies desperately needed catching help at the 2017 Deadline, and Lucroy provided it at a very low cost. The veteran, who had struggled with Texas that year, hit .310/.429/.437 the rest of the way and also smacked two doubles and drove in a run in Colorado's NL Wild Card Game loss to Arizona.

Trades came at a breakneck pace as the Deadline drew closer, with a whopping 27 -- involving 77 players (including players to be named) -- being completed on Friday alone.

- In all, 149 players were traded across 56 total swaps from July 15-30, beginning with Joc Pederson moving from the Cubs to the Braves on July 15.
- Nobody stood on the sidelines completely. All 30 teams made at least one trade since July 15.
- Seven teams in total made at least five trades by the Deadline, with the Cubs leading the way by completing eight deals after falling out of contention. The Pirates made seven; the Braves, Nationals and Rays all made six trades apiece; and the Yankees and Blue Jays both made five trades.
- Quantity is one thing, but quality is another. This Deadline had both. Check out this potential lineup, rotation and back-end bullpen you could make out of all of the players who changed teams over the past couple of weeks.

2B [Trea Turner](#) (Dodgers)

LF [Adam Frazier](#) (Padres)

CF [Starling Marte](#) (A's)

RF [Joey Gallo](#) (Yankees)

DH [Nelson Cruz](#) (Rays)

3B [Kris Bryant](#) (Giants)

1B [Anthony Rizzo](#) (Yankees)

SS [Javier Báez](#) (Mets)

C [Yan Gomes](#) (A's)

SP [Max Scherzer](#) (Dodgers)

SP [José Berríos](#) (Blue Jays)

SP [Kyle Gibson](#) (Phillies)

SP [Rich Hill](#) (Mets)

SP [Andrew Heaney](#) (Yankees)

RH RP [Craig Kimbrel](#) (White Sox)

LH RP [Brad Hand](#) (Blue Jays)

There were 10 players traded this year who were 2021 All-Stars: Gallo, Cruz, Gibson, Frazier, Eduardo Escobar (Brewers), Kyle Schwarber (Red Sox), Scherzer, Kimbrel, Turner and Bryant. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, 2021 will now set a record for having the most All-Stars suit up for multiple teams in the same year.

- Per STATS, Scherzer, Turner and Schwarber -- all dealt by the Nationals -- make up the first trio of teammates to be traded midseason during the year they were All-Stars.
- Seven of the 10 teams in playoff position as of Friday added at least one 2021 All-Star to their roster, and nine of the 10 added a player who has been an All-Star at some point.

The Red Sox (Schwarber), White Sox (Kimbrel), Rays (Cruz), Brewers (Escobar), Giants (Bryant), Dodgers (Scherzer and Turner) and Padres (Frazier) got players who were All-Stars this year. The A's (Marte) and Mets (Báez) traded for past All-Stars.

- The Astros, who lead the AL West, are the only current playoff team that didn't make such a move.
- How about future All-Stars? Four of MLB Pipeline's [Top 100 overall prospects](#) were traded, in two deals. The Blue Jays traded Austin Martin (No. 16) and Simeon Woods Richardson (No. 68) to the Twins in the trade that [got them Berríos](#), and the Dodgers traded Keibert Ruiz (No. 41) and Josiah Gray (No. 42) in their [blockbuster for Scherzer and Turner](#).

The Dodgers' trade for Scherzer means they now have four Cy Young Award winners (Scherzer, Clayton Kershaw, David Price and Trevor Bauer) *and* four MVPs (Kershaw, Mookie Betts, Cody Bellinger and Albert Pujols), although Bauer is currently on administrative leave, with his future on the team in doubt.

When Scherzer makes his first start for L.A., the Dodgers will become the first team ever to have four MVPs and four Cy Young Award winners play a game for them in the same season, per Elias. Of course, this isn't a new record. The Dodgers were already the first team to have three of each even before they got Scherzer.

By adding Scherzer to a rotation that already included Kershaw and Price, the Dodgers now have three of the top 10 active pitchers in wins, strikeouts, starts, innings and pitching [WAR](#).

- With Scherzer and Turner, the Dodgers will also have 17 players who have been All-Stars appear for them in 2021. In the last decade, the only team to have more All-Stars in one season was the 2012 Yankees, who had 18, per ESPN Stats & Info.

- The Dodgers' 17 All-Stars are also the second-most they've ever had in one year. There were 21 All-Stars on the 1941 Brooklyn Dodgers, who won the NL pennant.

The Yankees' [trade for Gallo](#) gives them three of the 15 MLB players who have hit at least 40 home runs in a season since 2017. Gallo hit 41 homers in '17 and 40 in '18, Aaron Judge hit 52 in '17 and Stanton hit 59 in '17.

Gallo, Judge, Stanton and Gary Sánchez also hit some of the biggest home runs of any slugger. Only nine players in baseball have hit a home run 490-plus feet since Statcast started tracking in 2015, and those Yankees are four of them. That group has also accounted for six of the 12 total 490-footers hit MLB-wide in that time. In terms of exit velocity, the Stanton/Judge/Gallo trio is responsible for 63 of the 155 home runs (41%) hit at least 115 mph during that time.

- After the Gallo trade, the Yankees started all three of their sluggers in the outfield on Friday night at Miami, with Stanton (listed at 6-foot-6, 245 pounds) in left, Judge (6-7, 282) in center and Gallo (6-5, 250) in right. All other MLB teams combined have had only one other position player (Cleveland's Franmil Reyes) listed at 6-foot-5 or taller and 245 pounds or heavier who's appeared in a game this season.

While the White Sox are leading the AL Central, the fourth-place Cubs executed a long-rumored sell-off of their pending free agents. The 2016 champs made the most trades of any team, with eight, including stars Bryant, Rizzo, Báez and Kimbrel. Add in Trevor Williams (Mets), Ryan Tepera (White Sox), Jake Marisnick (Padres), Andrew Chafin (A's) and Pederson (Braves), and Chicago sent nine players to seven different contenders over the past week. (That doesn't even count recent former Cubs such as Schwarber and Jon Lester, who also got traded.)

The Cubs' [trade of Báez to the Mets](#) reunited Puerto Rico's double-play combo from the 2017 World Baseball Classic: Báez and Francisco Lindor. In WBC '17, Lindor played shortstop for the Puerto Rican team that made the championship game, and Báez played second base.

Another fun fact: The winning pitcher for Team USA in that championship game that beat Puerto Rico? Mets starter Marcus Stroman. The closer for Team Puerto Rico in the tournament? Mets closer Edwin Díaz.

The [MLB](#) season has passed the halfway mark and teams are gearing up for the stretch run. Clubs in contention were looking for those missing pieces, while teams well out of the race were building for the future. It was a busy trade deadline — the Cubs and Nationals parted ways with beloved players [Kris Bryant](#), [Javier Báez](#) and [Anthony Rizzo](#), while other big names, like [Trevor Story](#), stayed put.

Our national experts [Ken Rosenthal](#), [Jayson Stark](#), [Jim Bowden](#) and [Keith Law](#) worked the phones, and our local beat writers had the pulse on what every team is planning. *The Athletic* tracked all of the major news and transactions. Here they all are — how did your team do?

FRIDAY, JULY 30

Braves trade for Pirates closer Richard Rodríguez, OF Jorge Soler

The Braves landed one of the most coveted closers on the market, **Richard Rodríguez**, from the [Pirates](#) with just minutes to go until the deadline. In exchange, they are sending pitcher [Bryse Wilson](#) and prospect [Ricky DeVito](#) to Pittsburgh. Rodríguez has a 2.82 ERA and 14 saves in 38 1/3 innings this season. He has 33 strikeouts and walked five. In seven starts, Wilson has a 4.83 ERA in 31 2/3 innings pitched, with 21 strikeouts and eight walks. In 20 1/3 innings at the High A level, DeVito has a 2.66 ERA with 27 strikeouts and seven walks.

Atlanta also added another outfielder, trading for the [Royals'](#) Jorge Soler, and he's been hot lately: six homers, .389 OBP and .900 slugging percentage in his past nine games (36 plate appearances). Going to the Royals in the deal: right-handed pitching prospect [Kasey Kalich](#), a fourth-round pick in 2019 and a top-30 Braves prospect who has a 3.26 ERA in 20 appearances at High-A Rome with 35 strikeouts and 17 walks in 30 1/3 innings.

Tony Watson traded to Giants

Reliever Tony Watson is reuniting with the Giants. For the [Angels](#) this year, the 36-year-old owns a 4.64 ERA in 33 innings pitched, with 25 strikeouts, 14 walks and 12 holds. He spent three seasons with the Giants, from 2018 to 2020, then left as a free agent, eventually signing with the Angels. In return, the Angels get pitcher [Sam Selman](#) and pitching prospects Ivan Armstrong and [Jose Marte](#).

Rays acquire Jordan Luplow, DJ Johnson from Cleveland for Peyton Battenfield

Cleveland shipped outfielder Jordan Luplow and reliever D.J. Johnson to Tampa for pitching prospect Peyton Battenfield. Battenfield owns a 2.14 ERA between High A and Double A this season, with 95 strikeouts in 67 1/3 innings. Luplow is slashing .173/.331/.769 in 98 at-bats with 31 strikeouts, 21 walks and seven home runs. Johnson has only pitched 1 2/3 innings this year at the major-league level, but in his career has a 4.91 ERA over 33 innings with 36 strikeouts and 21 walks.

Red Sox acquire Hansel Robles, Austin Davis

The Red Sox beefed up the middle of their bullpen in a pair of trades that brings back veteran Hansel Robles from the [Twins](#) and young left-hander Austin Davis from the Pirates. Robles has had an up and down season with the Twins, posting a 4.91 ERA in 44 innings but converting 10 of 12 save chances. He struggled in 2020 with the Angels but had a 2.48 ERA in 71 appearances for them in 2019. The Red Sox are sending minor-league right-hander [Alex Scherff](#) to Minnesota. Scherff has a 2.45 ERA in 29 1/3 relief innings between High A and Double A this season. Davis has only 10 major-league appearances (all this season) and a 5.59 ERA in 9 2/3

innings in those outings. In his minor-league career, he has a 2.97 ERA in 336 1/3 innings with 360 strikeouts. He was a 2014 12th-round pick of the Phillies. The Red Sox are sending infielder [Michael Chavis](#), once a top prospect, to the Pirates for Davis. He's hit only .234 in 168 big-league games but has a career .796 OPS in 446 minor-league games.

Phillies reunite with shortstop Freddie Galvis

Looking to upgrade their infield defense, the Phillies have re-acquired infielder [Freddie Galvis](#) from the [Orioles](#). They are reportedly sending pitching prospect Tyler Burch back to Baltimore. Galvis is currently on the injured list but is close to returning. Galvis has a .720 OPS in 72 games this season. He began his career with the Phillies and should improve their defense up the middle. Burch is a 23-year-old right-hander who has a 3.99 ERA in 29 1/3 relief innings at High A this season.

Padres acquire Jake Marisnick from the Cubs

The Padres didn't end up making any huge trades at the deadline but picked up a useful outfield bat in Jake Marisnick from the Cubs. They are reportedly sending pitching prospect Anderson Espinosa to Chicago. Marisnick is batting .227 with a .731 OPS this season but he has a .872 OPS against left-handed pitching. Espinosa was once one of the top pitching prospects in baseball, but he's had Tommy John surgery twice and has a 5.02 ERA in 28 2/3 innings as a 23-year-old in High A.

Brewers trade for reliever John Curtiss

The Brewers added reliever John Curtiss in a deal with the [Marlins](#) that sends catching prospect [Payton Henry](#) to Miami. Curtiss has been excellent this season, posting a 2.48 ERA in 40 innings with a 40:9 K:BB. He was with Tampa Bay in 2020. Henry is batting .297 with a .762 OPS in 49 games split between Double A and Triple A this season.

Cleveland trades Phil Maton, Yanier Diaz to Houston for Myles Straw

The [Astros](#) improved their bullpen earlier in the week with the addition of [Kendall Graveman](#) and Yimi García. Now they have added right-hander Phil Maton from Cleveland, as well as prospect [Yainer Diaz](#). In return, the [Indians](#) receive center fielder Myles Straw. Maton has a 4.57 ERA in 41 1/3 innings for Cleveland this season, but he's struck out 61 and allowed just four home runs. Straw, one of the fastest players in the big leagues, is batting .262 with 17 stolen bases in 98 games for the Astros this season. He has a career .334 OBP and 33 stolen bases in 196 games. Diaz is currently hitting .314 in Low A. He's a career .326 hitter in four minor-league seasons. This is his first at a full-season level.

Blue Jays get Joakim Soria from the Diamondbacks

The Blue Jays bolstered their late-inning bullpen arsenal with the addition of veteran right-hander Joakim Soria from the Diamondbacks. The Blue Jays are sending two players to be named later to Arizona. Soria, who has experience as a set-up man and a closer, has a 4.30 ERA and six saves in 29 1/3 innings this season. He's pitched in the postseason for four different teams in his 14-year career.

Jon Lester headed to St. Louis from the Nationals

The Nationals sell-off continues, as they have [traded](#) left-hander Jon Lester to the Cardinals for outfielder [Lane Thomas](#). Lester, in his first season with Washington, has a 5.02 ERA in 75 1/3 innings this season. He brings significant postseason experience for a [Cardinals'](#) club looking to get back into the NL Central race. Thomas has appeared in 84 games for the Cardinals over the past three seasons and is a career .172 hitter in 122 at-bats.

Yankees acquire starter Andrew Heaney from Angels

The Yankees have acquired lefty **Andrew Heaney** and cash from the Angels for two pitching prospects, [Janson Junk](#) and **Elvis Peguero**. In 18 starts this season, Heaney has a 5.27 ERA with 113 strikeouts and 31 walks in 94 innings pitched.

Giants acquire Kris Bryant from Cubs

After seeing the [Dodgers](#) acquire [Max Scherzer](#) and [Trea Turner](#), the Giants have answered with a blockbuster acquisition of their own, picking up third baseman / outfielder **Kris Bryant** from the Cubs. Bryant joins a first-place team and can fill in at third base while [Evan Longoria](#) continues to recover from injury and move to the outfield once Longoria returns. Bryant is a free agent at the end of the season. The return for the Cubs is outfielder [Alexander Canario](#) and pitching prospect [Caleb Kilian](#).

Phillies to acquire Kyle Gibson and Ian Kennedy from Rangers

The Phillies are set to acquire starter **Kyle Gibson**, reliever **Ian Kennedy** and pitching prospect [Hans Crouse](#) from the Rangers, according to *The Athletic's* Matt Gelb. In return, the Rangers will get pitcher [Spencer Howard](#) and prospects [Kevin Gowdy](#) and [Josh Gessner](#). Gibson is in the midst of a breakout season, with a 2.87 ERA in 113 innings in an All-Star season, while Kennedy has been a solid closer with a 2.51 ERA and 16 saves. Howard was a second-round pick in 2017 and has a 5.81 ERA in 52 2/3 career major-league innings. Crouse, who goes to the Phillies, was selected in the same round as Howard in 2017. The 22-year-old currently has a 3.35 ERA in 51 Double-A innings. Gowdy was a second-round pick in 2016 out of high school and is currently pitching in High A, while Gessner, a native of Australia, is pitching in the Florida Complex League. The Rangers are also sending cash in the deal.

Twins to trade J.A. Happ to the Cardinals for John Gant, prospect — Sources

The next starter moving on from the Twins is **J.A. Happ**, who will be going to St. Louis, *The Athletic's* Ken Rosenthal has confirmed. The Twins are including cash in the deal, Rosenthal says. MLB.com's Mark Feinsand was first with the deal. In return, the Twins are getting right-handed pitcher **John Gant** and left-handed pitching prospect **Evan Sisk**.

A's to acquire Josh Harrison and Yan Gomes from Nationals

Infielder [Josh Harrison](#) and catcher [Yan Gomes](#) are on the move. In a deal first reported by ESPN's Jeff Passan and confirmed by *The Athletic's* Ken Rosenthal, they're headed to Oakland. In return, the A's are reportedly set to receive three prospects — catcher [Drew Millas](#) and pitchers **Seth Shuman** and **Richard Guasch**. All three prospects are currently playing at the High-A level for the A's. Millas and Shuman were 2019 draft picks, while Guasch signed as a free agent out of Cuba in July 2018.

Harrison gives the A's a versatile bat who should see time at second base and in the outfield for the A's. He's currently batting .294/.366/.434 with six home runs in 320 at-bats. Gomes, a left-handed hitter, will share time behind the plate with [Sean Murphy](#) and could see some at-bats at DH and as a pinch-hitter. Gomes is batting .271 with nine home runs this season.

Mets acquire Javier Báez and Trevor Williams

The Mets have acquired second baseman **Javier Báez** and starter **Trevor Williams**, along with cash, from the Cubs for outfield prospect [Pete Crow-Armstrong](#). Báez, the 2020 NL Gold Glove winner at short, swings a lot, he strikes out a lot, and he seldom walks, says *The Athletic's* Tim Britton. But when he does make contact it is often very hard. Williams has a 5.06 ERA in 58 2/3 innings this season with 61 strikeouts. Crow-Armstrong was the Mets' first-round draft pick last year and No. 5 on the Mets' top 30 list, per MLB Pipeline.

White Sox acquire Craig Kimbrel from the Cubs

The White Sox have acquired closer **Craig Kimbrel** from their crosstown rivals, the [Chicago Cubs](#), according to *The Athletic's* Jim Bowden and Ken Rosenthal. Kimbrel would join a White Sox bullpen that already includes All-Star closer [Liam Hendriks](#). USA Today's Bob Nightengale reports the Cubs will receive second baseman [Nick Madrigal](#) and reliever [Codi Heuer](#). Madrigal is out with a season-ending hamstring injury but is a career .305 hitter in 200 MLB at-bats. Heuer has a 5.12 ERA in 38 2/3 innings for the White Sox this season.

Brewers acquire Daniel Norris from Tigers

The Brewers have picked up left-hander **Daniel Norris** from the Tigers for right-handed pitching prospect [Reese Olson](#), a source confirms to *The Athletic's* Cody Stavenhagen. Norris has a 5.89

ERA in 36 2/3 innings with 40 strikeouts this season. Olson has a 4.30 ERA as a starter in 69 innings for High-A Wisconsin this season.

Braves acquire Eddie Rosario from the Indians, Adam Duvall from Marlins

The Braves are picking up outfielder **Eddie Rosario** from the Indians in exchange for veteran infielder [Pablo Sandoval](#). Rosario is on the injured list and is expected to miss a few more weeks. The Indians are sending cash along with Rosario to Atlanta.

The Braves have also re-acquired outfielder **Adam Duvall**, sending the Marlins catching prospect [Alex Jackson](#). Duvall has hit 22 home runs and has a .755 OPS this season. Jackson has a 1.060 OPS in Triple A and has appeared in 10 big-league games this season.

Blue Jays land José Berríos

Hours before the Blue Jays play their first game in Toronto since 2019, the team has acquired José Berríos from the Twins, *The Athletic's* Ken Rosenthal is reporting. In return, the Twins will get two of Toronto's top prospects — [Austin Martin](#) and [Simeon Woods Richardson](#), ranked at Nos. 2 and 4 by MLB Pipeline, respectively. In 20 starts this season, Berríos has an ERA of 3.48, with 126 strikeouts and 32 walks in 121.2 innings pitched. Martin, 22, was the No. 5 pick in the 2020 draft and is hitting .281 this season with a .424 OBP at Double A. Woods Richardson, acquired by the Jays in 2018 as part of a trade for [Marcus Stroman](#), is 2-4 with an earned-run average of 5.76 in 11 starts, also at Double A.

The Athletic's Dan Hayes [says](#) that once the Twins realized they weren't going to sign [Byron Buxton](#) to an extension, they started fielding offers for Berríos and found a team to meet their high asking price in Toronto.

THURSDAY, JULY 29

Daniel Hudson traded to the Padres

The Nationals have struck again; reliever Daniel Hudson is heading to the Padres in exchange for [Mason Thompson](#), a right-handed pitching prospect ranked No. 9 in the Padres system, according to MLB Pipeline, and shortstop Jordy Barley. Hudson was placed on the COVID-19 IL earlier Thursday as the Nationals dealt with an [outbreak of the virus](#). In 32.2 innings this season, he has a 2.20 ERA, 48 strikeouts and seven walks. Thompson, who is 23, is 4-3 with a 5.34 ERA in 24 games at the Triple A level this season. Barley hit .240 with 31 walks, 82 strikeouts and 33 stolen bases in 61 games at Low A so far this year.

Kyle Schwarber dealt to the Red Sox

The Nationals have traded outfielder Kyle Schwarber to the Red Sox in return for right-handed pitcher [Aldo Ramirez](#), the team has confirmed. Schwarber had a [historic hot streak](#) in the month of June but has been sidelined with a right hamstring strain since July 3. He slashed .253/.340/.570 with 25 home runs 53 RBIs in 72 games so far this season. Ramirez, 20, is the No. 19 prospect in the Red Sox system per MLB Pipeline. He is currently on the injured list, but in eight starts this season at Low A, he has a 2.03 ERA with 32 strikeouts and eight walks in 31 innings pitched.

Dodgers land Max Scherzer and Trea Turner

The blockbuster of the trade deadline is official. The Dodgers are receiving **Max Scherzer** and **Trea Turner** from the Nationals, who will get catching prospect [Keibert Ruiz](#), right-handers [Josiah Gray](#) and [Gerardo Carrillo](#), and outfielder [Donovan Casey](#).