

SUNDAY BASEBALL TIDBITS

SEPTEMBER 2020

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

Brief piece this week as I am in transit between NC and Maine.

One subscriber reacted to last week's Tom Seaver tribute to say "what about Bob Gibson?" He also mentioned Gibson was a tough sob.

Years

Seaver 20 Gibson 17

W/L

Seaver 311-205 Gibson 251-174

ERA

Seaver 2.86 Gibson 2.91

Post Season

Seaver 3-3, 2.87 era, **Gibson 7-2, 1.89 era**

Strikeouts

Seaver 3640 Gibson 3117

Complete games

Seaver 231 Gibson 255

Shutouts

Seaver 61 Gibson 56

So he raised a very good point, especially when you look at post season performance.

Lou Brock

Led the league in stolen bases all but one year from 1966 to 1974 and retired with a record 938 stolen bases. Only the inimitable Rickey Henderson has surpassed him.

Brock finished his career with more than 3,000 hits, more than 1,600 runs scored and was elected to the Hall of Fame on the first ballot.

In 1967, he was the first player to hit at least 20 homers and steal at least 50 bases in a single season. He hit better than .300 eight times as a Cardinal, including a .304 average in his final season, when he played 120 games, stole 21 bases and reached 3,000 hits in his age-40 season. Brock led the Majors in runs scored twice, and in 1968, he led the Majors in doubles (46) and triples (14). He finished in the top 10 of NL MVP Award voting five times, including a runner-up finish in '74.

Brock was at his best in the postseason, hitting .391 -- second only to Pepper Martin (.418) in franchise history -- with 34 hits in 21 World Series games. He also stole a record 14 bases in his three World Series.

Between 1966 and 1974, the only player besides Lou Brock to lead the National League in stolen bases was Bobby Tolan, CIN (57 in 1970)

Serious At Bat

[Matt Wieters](#) kept swinging and swinging and swinging. [Caleb Thielbar](#) kept pitching, pitching and pitching some more.

The Cardinals catcher and Twins reliever engaged in an epic battle in the third inning of [St. Louis' 6-4 win](#) in the second game of Tuesday's seven-inning doubleheader. With the bases loaded and two outs, Wieters fouled off 14 pitches in a 19-pitch at-bat before Thielbar got him to fly out to the center-field warning track, ending the inning and escaping the jam after the Cards went up 5-2 in that inning.

Longer at bats

1. Brandon Belt, 1B, SF vs. Jaime Barria, RHP, LAA

April 22, 2018: 21 pitches, flyout

Lasted 13 minutes

2. Ricky Gutierrez, SS, HOU vs. [Bartolo Colon](#), RHP, CLE

June 26, 1998: 20 pitches, strikeout swinging

3-T. Matt Wieters, C, STL vs. Caleb Thielbar, LHP, MIN

Sept. 8, 2020: 19 pitches, flyout

Wieters was the last of eight straight Cardinals hitters that came to the plate with the bases loaded against Twins pitchers, and he put a long exclamation point on the end of a five-run third inning. This 19-pitch battle shattered the previous high for deliveries in any bases-loaded at-bat on record.

3-T. Kevin Bass, RF, HOU vs. Steve Bedrosian, RHP, PHI

July 23, 1988: 19 pitches, flyout

Bedrosian blew a two-run lead in his eighth-inning relief appearance, but ended the Astros' rally by retiring Bass after a 19-pitch battle. The Astros went on to win in walk-off fashion on a wild pitch.

More Tidbits

Roberto Clemente won 12 Gold Glove Awards, tied for most Gold Gloves with Willie Mays

The only Giants player with more than one batting title is Barry Bonds (.370 in 2002, .362 in 2004)

Yankees fastest to 50 HRs and 100 BBs: Ruth, Judge, Maris, Arod and now Luke Voit.

First pitcher to win a Cy Young Award in both leagues was Gaylord Perry (won AL in 1972 with Cleveland, won NL in '78 with San Diego).

Aroldis Chapman has the record for fewest innings in a season with 100 strike outs (106 K's in 54 innings for the Reds in 2014)

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No Hitter

Over his nine historic innings, Alec Mills of the Cubs struck out five and walked three in a 114-pitch performance. The five strikeouts were the fewest in a Cubs no-hitter since Ken Holtzman had none against the Braves on Aug. 19, 1969.

Mad Max

Last Sunday against the Braves at Nationals Park, Max Scherzer passed Hall of Famer Sandy Koufax when he reached his 98th career game with 10-plus strikeouts. The hurling right-hander hit double digits in just the fifth inning of the Nats' 8-4 loss. He trails:

Nolan Ryan 215

Randy Johnson 211

Roger Clemens 110

Pedro Martinez 108

Old Guys

I mentioned Nelson Cruz recently--the year he turned 40, has been his best yet: tied for the Major League lead with 16 homers, to go with his 32 RBIs and .323/.414/.652 slash line. No hitter who's turned 40 in a season has ever led the league in dingers. His late-career 1.066 OPS [is up there](#) with Barry Bonds, Ted Williams and Hank Aaron. He's a frontrunner for the AL MVP.

How about Indians reliever Oliver Perez, age 39. 14 1/3 IP, 1.26 ERA, 0 homers allowed and a miniscule 0.977 WHIP.

Adam Wainwright of the Cards at age 39 He's 4-1 with a 2.91 ERA. His 1.014 WHIP is at a five-year low.

Darren O'Day with the Braves at age 37 - with the Braves, has been one of his finest: The [submarining](#) righty is 3-0 with a 0.69 ERA, 18 strikeouts, four walks and zero home runs allowed. He's given up just ONE earned run in 13 innings.

Which two players share the record for most home runs by a right-handed hitter in his age-40 season or older--Dave Winfield (26 HRs at age 40 for the Blue Jays in 1992) and Hank Sauer (26 HRs, also at 40, for the Giants in 1957)

Yankees Turnaround

Yankees back to back explosions versus Blue Jays.

It marked the first time in franchise history the Yankees have hit at least six homers in back-to-back games.

The Yankees' seven homers were their most ever at the current Yankee Stadium, which opened its gates in 2009.

Kyle Higashioka, even though he started his MLB career 0-22 (longest such streak for a position player in Yankee history) hit 3 HRs in a game for the first time.

Gerritt Cole notched his 100th career win.

Cole and Higashioka and Aaron Hicks played on the same team in high school.

Speaking of 100 wins, Whitey Ford at 100-36 had the fewest losses ever at the time of his 100th win.

The we go to the next night.

Boom. Voit crushed his Major League-leading 20th home run as the Yankees became the first team in history to hit six or more homers in three consecutive games. New York set a big league record with 19 homers in a three-game span, completing a series sweep of Toronto. [Brett Gardner](#), [DJ LeMahieu](#) and Voit all homered on consecutive pitches in the fourth inning from right-hander Chase Anderson. After an out, Stanton and [Gleyber Torres](#) followed with back-to-back blasts, marking the seventh five-homer inning in Major League history and the first since the Nationals enjoyed one on July 27, 2017.

It was the first time the Yankees -- that celebrated franchise of Ruth, Gehrig and Mantle -- have tallied five homers in a frame. The Bombers' fourth-inning blasts traveled a combined 2,005 feet, according to Statcast.

Bieber K's

Shane Bieber of the Indians recorded his 100th strikeout of the season in just 62 1/3 innings. That is the fewest innings that it has taken any starting pitcher to reach the 100-K mark since 1900.

Here's a look at the hurlers Bieber topped:

Max Scherzer: 63.0 IP in 2018

Gerrit Cole: 65.0 IP in 2019

Kerry Wood: 65.2 IP in 2001

Entering Friday night, the 25 year old Bieber led the Majors in strikeouts per nine innings (14.67) and strikeout percentage (42.9 percent).

In all 10 of his starts this season, Bieber has fanned at least eight batters, which is the most to start a season in Indians' history. It's also the second most consecutive starts with at least eight strikeouts to start a season since at least 1901, trailing only Randy Johnson, who did so in 15 straight starts in 2000.

Cooperstown-bound

Hats off to Albert Pujols as he passed Willie Mays on the all time HR list.

Only Barry Bonds (762), Hank Aaron (755), Babe Ruth (714) and Alex Rodriguez (696) hit more homers than Pujols.

It's another major accomplishment for the 20-year veteran. He's [already reached 3,000 hits](#) and is the lone player to ever [join the 650-homer, 650-double club](#).

He also passed Craig Biggio for fifth on the all-time double list this season and passed Rodriguez [on the career RBI list](#).

A few Rod Carew highlights

1977 he hit .388, highest since Ted Williams hit .388 in 1957.

1969 he stole 2B, 3B and home in the same inning. That has happened 41 times in MLB history.

1985 reached 3,000 hits, ended his career at 3,053.

1972 won AL batting title without hitting a HR—first time that happened since 1918.

1991 elected into HOF after hitting .300 in 15 straight seasons. Of Carew's 353 career stolen bases, 17 were thefts of home, including seven in 1969 -- one short of the single-season record Ty Cobb established in 1912. He also won seven American League batting championships, including six in seven years between 1972-78.

Did you know?

My guess was Rollie Fingers but the last Brewers pitcher to win a Cy Young Award was Pete Vuckovich (1982). Fingers won AL Cy Young and MVP in 1981.

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Skipper Exit

Ron Gardenhire's engine can run hot during the middle of action. He retires with 84 career ejections, seventh all-time. He is in elite company in that regard, trailing only Bobby Cox, John McGraw, Leo Durocher, Earl Weaver, Frankie Frisch and Tony La Russa on the all-time ejections list — a testament to both longevity and intensity. Gardenhire retires with a 1,200-1,280 career managerial record, one that fell under .500 only because he accepted the challenge of managing the rebuilding Tigers. Before this job, Gardenhire spent 13 seasons managing the Twins. He led the Minnesota teams of the 2000s to six postseason appearances,

More great stuff from Jason Star of theathletic.com

MVP Candidates

Yes it hasn't been a full season but note Jose Abreu of the White Sox could lead AL in hits, RBIs and slugging. Only two players in AL history to do that won MVP—Yaz in 1967 and Jim Rice in 1978.

Abreu went into Thursday with more RBIs (57) than games played (56) — a feat achieved by just four other qualifying hitters in the last 50 years: Manny Ramírez (twice), Juan González (twice), Kirby Puckett (1994) and George Brett (1980). And in 2020, those RBIs still matter, even if the length of this season didn't match the length of those seasons.

If he wins MVP Abreu José Abreu — No. 79 in your program — would have the highest jersey number of any MVP in baseball history.

Freddie Freeman of the Braves is a leading MVP contender in the NL. If Freeman and Abreu win, it would be only the third time the MVP in each league played first base for a living. The other years: 1994 (Frank Thomas, Jeff Bagwell) and 2006 (Justin Morneau, Ryan Howard).

Shane Bieber of the Indians

THE 1.63 ERA — You're looking at the lowest ERA by any qualifying AL starter since baseball lowered the mound in 1969. Previous low: 1.74, by Pedro Martínez in 2000.

THE 14.2 K/9 — You're looking at the greatest single-season strikeout rate by a qualifying starter in history. The old record, of 13.8 by Gerrit Cole, held up for one whole year.

THE .167 BATTING AVERAGE — Back in the day, pitchers were the only guys who batted .167. This year, Bieber turned the entire sport into a bunch of .167 hitters. That tied Pedro Martínez's 2000 season for lowest opponent average in the AL since the lowering of the mound.

THE .444 MISSING AVERAGE — We're talking 122 strikeouts, but just 46 hits, in 275 at-bats. There has never been a starting pitcher whose opponent "missing average" was nearly 300 points higher than his opponent batting average — but I guess there is now.

How Bad is the Phillies bullpen?

7.17 bullpen ERA and .958 opponent OPS? Trails only those immortal 1930 Phillies (8.01), a team that played in a park (Baker Bowl) with a right-field fence that was 280 ½ feet from home plate!

- This crew's 1.83 WHIP and .320 opponent average? Both the worst by any bullpen since Cuddles Marshall's 1950 St. Louis Browns (1.97 WHIP, .326 AVG)!
- That .958 opponent OPS? Creeping dangerously close to the all-time record, again set by those 1930 Baker Bowl Phillies!
- Oh, and that .563 slugging percentage this bullpen has given up? Also by far the worst *in the history of baseball!* (Next-worst? That .539 SLG by the 1930 Phillies.)
- They've served up 41 home runs in 177 innings! That works out to an unfathomable 2.08 per every nine innings they've pitched — by far the worst rate of any bullpen in history. (Next closest: 1.73, by the 2019 Orioles.)
- And one more thing about those 41 homers. That's more home runs allowed by the bullpen than Phillies *starters* have given up (38) — in 119 more innings!
- More blown saves (13) than saves (11). This is a team that has lost 14 games it led by at least two runs (most in baseball), seven it led by at least three runs (most in baseball) and four it led by at least four runs (yep, most in baseball).

Finally, though, there's this:

JOE DIMAGGIO'S CAREER: .325/.398/.579

ALL HITTERS VS. THIS PHILLIES BULLPEN: .320/.395/.563

Devin Williams, Brewers Rookie Reliever

94 Batters faced

52 Strikeouts

6 Hits!

So wait. This guy has struck out 55.3 percent of all the hitters he's pitched to? In answer to your questions, of course that's the highest percentage of all time — and allows Williams to join Aroldis Chapman and Craig Kimbrel as the only pitchers ever to whiff more than half the hitters they faced in any season.

But then there's this part. *More than eight times as many strikeouts as hits?*

Williams gave up an earned run in his second appearance of the season. Since that outing, he's faced 81 hitters: 48 strikeouts, 4 hits, 0 earned runs.

More Managers

Kevin Cash. He has the best winning pct. In the history of the franchise. Since Cash moved into this team's managerial office, more *former* Rays managers or coaches (Maddon, Rocco Baldelli) have won a manager-of-the-year award than the current Rays manager.

Yes, even though Cash has won more games over the last six seasons than any AL manager except Terry Francona, he has never won a manager-of-the-year award.

Think Don Mattingly faces challenges as Marlins skipper? Try 170 roster moves — in two months. The Marlins once made 40 roster moves *in a week*. And it made at least one move every day *for 28 consecutive days* at one point,

Career HRs

Career HR numbers that surprised me—I would have guessed less for each of these:

Brett Gardner 129

Neil Walker 149

Alex Gordon 190

Andrew McCutcheon 241

Jay Bruce 318

There are five active players with more than 350 career HRs

Albert Pujols 662

Miguel Cabrera 484

Edwin Encarnacion 424

Nelson Cruz 417

Ryan Braun 351

And if you are looking to the future, Mike Trout is at 301.

Yankees Stuff

Backup catcher Erik Kratz (age 41) is the first Yankee position player to pitch twice in a season since Rick Cerone in 1987.

Yankees have allowed at least 11 runs in 4 games this season. 3 of the 4 games have come vs Blue Jays in Buffalo.

Only Pirates and Red Sox have more errors than the Yankees this season.

Rays, White Sox and Jays are the only AL teams the Yankees have never faced in the post-season.

Last pair of teammates to led MLB in average and HRs—1959 Milwaukee Braves Hank Aaron .355 and Eddie Mathews 46 HRs. LeMahieu and Voit have a shot.

LeMahieu will become the first player since Ed Delahanty in 1902 to win a batting average title in both leagues -- LeMahieu hit .348 for the Rockies in 2016 to win the National League batting crown. the last Yankee to win an American League batting title was Bernie Williams (.339 in 1998)

Before they lost last Sunday the Yankees tied their franchise record for consecutive victories against the Red Sox with their 12th. That dates back to the 2019 season. New York also has won 17 of its past 18 games against Boston. 8-0 loss to the New York Yankees on Saturday at Fenway Park.

Boston was shut out for the first time in 2020.

Gary Sanchez 'leads' the Yankees with 16 outs that were hit 100 mph or more. (he is hitting .143 with 10 HRs).

Going into the final weekend of the regular season the Yankees are 1-12 in games that they did not hit a HR.

Ferguson Jenkins, HOF Pitcher

He logged 284 wins, 267 complete games, and 3,192 strikeouts. In his Cy Young year of 1971 Jenkins' 325 innings ranked only third behind Mickey Lolich's 376 and Wilbur Wood's 334. But his 30 complete games led the majors. 24-13, 2.77 era. He also batted .243 with 28 hits, 6 HRs, 20 RBIs.

Wild 2020 Stats from MLB.com

.821 -- Twins' home winning percentage (23-5), which would be the best all time, depending on how they fare at Target Field against the Reds this weekend. The best home team of all time was the 1932 Yankees, who went 62-15 for an .805 winning percentage.

.733 -- The Dodgers' road winning percentage (22-8). With their road slate complete, this mark stands third all time, behind only the .797 road winning percentage of the 1906 Cubs and the .740 mark of the '09 Cubs.

As for their overall body of work, the Dodgers entered Thursday with a .696 winning percentage (39-17) that would rank 11th in the modern era (going back to 1901), and, in a normal year, would be a 113-win pace.

Speaking of the Dodgers, this was their MLB-leading 107 home run tally, entering Thursday. Their rate of a home run every 17.9 at-bats would surpass last year's Yankees (18.3) for best ever. But to really put the Dodgers' output in perspective, consider this: The 1988 World Series championship team hit just 99 home runs in 162 games.

.200 -- Road winning percentage for the Pirates (5-20) and the Rangers (6-24) -- tied for the sixth-lowest in the modern era and the lowest since the 1945 Philadelphia A's put up a .171 mark.

The Rangers' status is cemented. In fact, the club only won four games outside the state of Texas (and two of those wins were in Coors Field).

.411 -- Winning percentage for the Nationals, entering Thursday. Barring a weekend surge, they will finish with the second-worst winning percentage for a defending World Series champion. Only the 1998 Marlins (.333) were worse.

If the Nats and Astros both finish with losing records, it would mark just the fifth time that has happened to both World Series participants from the previous year. The others: 1965 (Cardinals and Yankees), '67 (Orioles and Dodgers), '86 (Royals and Cardinals) and '94 (Blue Jays and Phillies).

.920 -- The Padres' slugging percentage with the bases loaded. Not a big surprise if you saw the Friars hit a [grand slam in a record four straight games](#) in August, but still surprising from a historical perspective. This is the highest such slugging percentage of all time, surpassing the 2006 Indians' .737 mark (the year Travis Hafner tied Don Mattingly's single-season record with six grand slams). Colorado's .769 slugging percentage with the sacks full also surpasses that record. Like so much else in this crazy season, these outputs are inflated by the smaller sample. But you have to admit that "Slam Diego" (the Padres have seven of the 42 grannies hit this year) does have a nice ring to it.

8 -- Number of qualified hitters who entered Thursday with a batting average below the so-called "Mendoza Line" of .200. This would be the most in modern baseball history. The season was abbreviated, the pitchers were ahead of the hitters after a quick Summer Camp and MLB, in general, has seen batting average fall precipitously in recent years.

Still, that you could fill out almost an entire lineup of guys with Bob Uecker-esque averages (Evan White, Joey Gallo, Bryan Reynolds, Kyle Schwarber, Max Muncy, Matt Olson, Carlos Santana and Javier Báez) is alarming. Even in the Deadball Era, the most sub-.200 averages any season produced was five (in 1904, '08, '09 and '17).

340 -- Nick Madrigal's batting average with two strikes, entering Thursday. Prior to his August arrival, the White Sox No. 3 prospect had a reputation for basically never striking out, and he has lived up to it. He has more multi-hit games (10) than strikeouts (seven).

13-0 -- The White Sox record on days the opposition starts a left-handed pitcher. Has a team ever gone undefeated against pitchers of either hand? If you answered "no," we've got to *hand* it to you. Per the Elias Sports Bureau, the previous best winning percentage against pitchers of either hand came when the 1895 Brooklyn Bridegrooms went 8-1 against lefties. In the modern era, the best record was the 1941 Reds' 12-2 mark against lefties.

2 -- Consecutive years in which the Yankees' DJ LeMahieu and the White Sox Tim Anderson will finish first and second (in some order) in the race for the American League batting title. When's the last time the same two hitters finished in the top two in consecutive seasons? That would be 1956-57, with two dudes named Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams. If the 2020 order is the same as in '19 (Anderson first, LeMahieu second), it will be the first time that happened in consecutive years since 1914-15 with Ty Cobb and Eddie Collins.

Yadi (from vivaelbirdos.com)

Yadier Molina got his 2,000 hit this week. For a catcher, it's a feat much rarer than 3,000 hits for a position player. Ted Simmons, Yogi Berra, [Mike Piazza](#), Gary Carter and Johnny Bench all had 2,000+ hits in their career. They did not, however, hit 2,000 while playing as a catcher. In fact, here are the all-time leaders as a catcher, and the only three above 2,000:

Ivan Rodriguez 2,749

Jason Kendall 2,160

Carlton Fisk 2,145

[Yadier Molina](#) currently ranks 4th on that list with 2,000. Only 21 of those hits will have come at any position other than catcher (1B, DH and PH). That's just 1%. Even compared to Pudge, Kendall and Fisk, no player has ever hit that plateau and logged a higher percentage of their hits as a catcher.

So while we should celebrate Yadi's 2,000th career hit, the more significant milestone will come if (and let's be honest, when) he plays next season and logs that 2,000th hit as a catcher.

If we're going to look at career production, it makes sense to consider postseason as well. Here's where Yadi ranks among these peers in terms of postseason hits:

Rodriguez 39

Kendall 11

Fisk 14

Molina 95

Any way you slice it, Yadi is entering elite company. There are 32 players in the vaunted 3,000 Hit Club. Yadi is about to become one of only nine catchers with 2,000 hits at any position, and very soon to become one of just four with 2,000 as a catcher.

[Yadier Molina](#)'s stats have reached historic proportions. 2022 games. 381 doubles, 7 triples and 160 HRs to go with the 2,000 hits. 9 time all-star, 9 gold gloves.

Even when we think we are considering catchers among their peers, often we are not. Consider some of the others who have been considered the Best Catcher in the National League during [Yadier Molina](#)'s tenure. [Buster Posey](#) has played 24% of his games at a position other than catcher. [Willson Contreras](#), while still just 28-years-old, has already played 11% of his games elsewhere on the field.

[Yadier Molina](#) is doing something we have almost never seen before. And in an era when Load Management for catchers is becoming more of a thing, it's something we may never see again.

Good stuff from [baseballegg.com](#)

The Baseball Cards from my Childhood are Dying Off

When Whitey Ford made his first major league start his manager was a man who had played against Babe Ruth.

It's been nearly a century since that manager, Casey Stengel, met Ruth in the World Series. It's been more than half a century since Ford tossed his last pitch as a Yankee. Six years later, Whitey was elected to the Hall of Fame. All these years later, the 91-year old Ford is the oldest-living Hall of Fame player.

In the last few days, two beloved Hall of Famers have passed away: Tom Seaver and Lou Brock. Their loss, a gut punch to the baseball community, underscores the sad fact that time marches

on. Baseball is (too rapidly) losing stars from one of their greatest generations. The players born after World War I and before World War II are leaving us.

In April, we lost Al Kaline, who seemed as if he would put on a uniform every spring until the end of time. “Mr. Tiger” started his pro career in 1953, days after his high school prom. He spent the next six-plus decades personifying Detroit baseball, and served as one of the game’s most admirable representatives.

Baseball doesn’t produce pillars like Kaline, Seaver, and Brock anymore. Three franchises, the Tigers, Mets, and Cardinals, were blessed with those icons for decades as part of their heritage. Even St. Louis fans born in the 1990s knew the class and dignity of Mr. Brock, who exemplified competitive fire and sportsmanship. But where are baseball’s Brock’s and Tom Terrific’s now?

Since 2015, when we lost legends from the sport’s two most important cities (Ernie Banks and Yogi Berra), baseball has suffered a succession of losses, stripping the game of an important senior class. Here’s a list of the Hall of Famers who died since 2015 (not all were born between 1918 and 1941?):

2020

Al Kaline
Tom Seaver
Lou Brock

2019

Frank Robinson

2018

Willie McCovey
Red Schoendienst

2017

Jim Bunning
Bobby Doerr

2016

[Monte Irvin](#)

2015

Ernie Banks
Yogi Berra

Banks was “Mr. Cub,” Berra was Yankee superstar emeritus and lucky charm, a link to when the team was winning World Series nearly every autumn. [Bobby Doerr](#), born in the shadows of the First World War, was the last living member of the Hall who had played in the 1930s. [Frank](#)

[Robinson was a giant](#), shoulders broad enough to carry the history of multiple franchises, namely the Reds and Orioles.

Now, with the deaths of three Hall of Famers in five months, it's a reminder that an era of baseball is coming to a close.

In Baltimore they have Brooks Robinson, in Boston is Carl Yastrzemski, Chicago still has Billy Williams, and Atlanta and San Francisco have twin icons: Hank Aaron and Willie Mays, all legends born between 1931 and 1939.

We must be sure to cherish these legends as long as we can, lest we run the risk of forgetting an era when baseball faced several changes, including desegregation of the major leagues, expansion, and the rise of the player union.

Sandy Koufax has been a Hall of Famer longer than any other man, elected in 1972 when he was 36 years old. Now 84, Koufax looks like a man thirty years younger, still trim and handsome. Born in 1935, he represents the generation of great players who navigated the post-WWII era. Folks called it baseball's "golden era" with Willie, Mickey & The Duke, as well as Robin (Roberts), (Warren) Spahn, and Koufax. Once a young legend, Sandy is now a senior statesman.

Baseball changes, time marches on. That's inevitable, but it's not easy to see baseball lose great men like Brock, Kaline, and Seaver. Let's hope 2020 is done delivering sad news.

More from theathletic.com

Pujols and Griffey Jr.

From 2001-2010 – his first 10 years in the big leagues – Albert Pujols was far and away the best player in baseball. Obviously, those years do include Cartoon Barry Bonds, who had a five-year stretch where he essentially broke baseball, and they also include some incredible Alex Rodriguez seasons, some incredible Ichiro seasons and so on.

But year after year after year after year, Pujols just did Pujols things. He hit .331/.426/.624 over those 10 seasons, *always* hit .312 or better, *always* hit 32-49 homers, *always* drove in 100 runs (usually 120-plus), led the league in runs scored five times, won two Gold Gloves and really should have won several more, was a plus base runner even though he lacked speed and so on and so on.

In his first 10 years, Pujols had 81.4 WAR.

By contrast, in Mike Trout's first 10 years, he has 74.4 WAR.*

**No, that's not a fair comparison, because Trout only played 40 games his first season and has only played 51 games this season, but it still should give you an idea just how good Pujols was if you are too young to remember.*

In Ken Griffey's first 10 years, he was a phenomenon. He was The Kid, the coolest guy in sports, led the league in homers four times, won the Gold Glove every season, did things that blew your mind. There are those who will tell you that WAR has never done The Kid justice, but he still had 66 WAR those first 10 seasons and, like Pujols and Trout, had already locked in his place in Cooperstown.

Then, after 10 years, Pujols and Griffey both went into nasty declines. They each spent one more season with their hometown teams, Pujols with the Cardinals and Griffey with the Mariners. They then switched leagues and were never quite the same again.

Griffey was a bit better:

Pujols after switching leagues: .257/.313/.449 with 217 homers and a 109 OPS+

Griffey after switching leagues: .262/.355/.493 with 232 homers and a 117 OPS+

But both lost all their defensive value, all their baserunning value, they basically became mistake hitters whose main utility was running into a few home runs. Each had a 40-homer season in their decline phase and a couple of 30 homer seasons. Pujols had four 100-RBI seasons while Griffey had three All-Star appearances. But it was clear that neither was the same.

And at the very end, Griffey had five seasons from 2006-2010 where he was essentially a replacement-level player.

Exactly 10 years later, Pujols is in his fifth straight season where he has essentially been a replacement-level player.

I bring this up mainly to ask a question: How will Pujols be remembered? Griffey, perhaps because of his charisma and style, is essentially remembered for his youth. It's like the last 10 or so seasons of his career never happened. When I listed Griffey as the [48th greatest player in baseball history](#) – which I had thought was pretty good – many people lost their minds. They were sure he was a *top ten* player, maybe a *top five* player, and they just didn't care about the second half of his career.

Will it be that way for Pujols? I sense that it won't. Pujols was, in my mind, an even better player than Griffey over his first 10 years. But I sense that his decline resonates with people more than Griffey's did. Maybe that isn't true. Maybe when his Hall of Fame time comes around, people will only remember Pujols' greatness. I hope so.

More Tidbits

The Twins enter their final game of the regular season with a 24-6 home record, which translates to an .800 winning percentage. So when they play the Reds at Target Field today, a victory would mean setting a new single-season record for best home winning percentage. If the Twins do win, they'll finish with an MLB record .806 winning percentage at home for the year, which would break the 1932 Yankees' record by .001 -- that club posted an .805 winning percentage at Yankee Stadium.

The Dodgers enter play today with a win-loss record of 42-17, which translates to a .712 winning percentage, guaranteeing they will eclipse the franchise's all-time single-season record of .682 (1953).

The Dodgers launched 57 home runs in August to set a new NL record with three homers against the Rangers at Globe Life Field on Aug. 30 -- Corey Seager and Will Smith went deep before Cody Bellinger hit the record-breaking homer to eclipse the 1999 Reds (56 homers in September of that year).

D-backs right-hander Zac Gallen set a new MLB record by giving up three earned runs or fewer in his first 22 career starts dating back to his big league debut in 2019. That surpassed the 21 straight by Aaron Sele from 1993-94.

Brewers closer Josh Hader set a record by recording 12 consecutive hitless appearances to open the season. That broke a record previously held by the Tigers' Justin Wilson (2017), the Phillies' Scott Aldred (1999), and the Reds' John Franco (1987).

Marlins made the playoffs. Last time they made the post season third baseman Mike Lowell (32 HRs, 105 RBIs) led the team in HRs and RBIs back in 2003.