

SUNDAY BASEBALL TIDBITS

OCTOBER 2020

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

RIP Bob Gibson

So it was just last week that I wrote about my baseball card heros from when I was a kid are dying off and then Bob Gibson dies. One of the players I most respected.

Gibson, who came to be known as “Hoot” or “Gibby,” followed up a 19-win season in 1964 by winning Games 5 and 7 in the World Series against the Yankees (the latter on two days’ rest) to claim the Series MVP honor. Three years later, he’d claim that prize again -- this time winning Games 1, 4 and 7 against the Red Sox. All three wins were complete games, as Gibson allowed just 14 hits and five walks while striking out 26, and he even homered in Game 7.

Still, the 1968 season is remembered as Gibson’s very best. He was the face of the “Year of the Pitcher,” posting a Major League-best 1.12 ERA with 268 strikeouts, 13 shutouts, 15 consecutive winning decisions and a stretch of 95 innings in which he gave up just two runs. He won both the Cy Young and the MVP Award that year, and he led a season so uniquely dominant from the pitching perspective that MLB took the bold step of lowering the mound the following year.

There would be another Cy Young in 1970 and a no-hitter against the Pirates in ’71. Gibson continued a stretch of nine seasons in which he won a Gold Glove, and he was proficient enough at the plate to hit 24 career home runs, plus two in World Series play, and have 30 career games in which he drove in more runs than he allowed. By the time his career ended in ’75, he had accumulated 251 wins and 3,117 strikeouts with a 2.91 ERA across 3,884 1/3 innings pitched. He was a nine-time All-Star.

Gibson highlights from The Athletic

1) “I was awed”

Oct. 2, 1968

Gibson delivered a breathtaking regular-season performance, which included 13 shutouts in 34 starts and a 1.12 ERA -- a Major League record for the live-ball era (since 1920). He would earn the National League Most Valuable Player Award and the NL Cy Young Award. Gibson proceeded to outdo himself in Game 1 of the World Series against the Detroit Tigers, amassing 17 strikeouts to break Sandy Koufax’s 1963 Series record of 15 while issuing one walk and

yielding five hits in St. Louis' 4-0 victory. It was Gibson's sixth of seven consecutive complete-game World Series triumphs, encompassing the '64 and '67 Fall Classics. Detroit's Denny McLain, who finished 31-6 in the regular season, freely admitted feeling overmatched. "I was awed," said McLain, as Roger Angell of The New Yorker reported. "I was awed."

2) "A commitment to his heart"

Oct. 15, 1964

Gibson's pitching line -- five runs allowed on nine hits in Game 7 against the Yankees -- was his worst in World Series competition. Nursing a 7-3 lead, the right-hander surrendered ninth-inning homers to Clete Boyer and Phil Linz. But, summoning all of his resolve, he sandwiched strikeouts of Tom Tresh and Johnny Blanchard around Boyer's homer before ending the Series by inducing Bobby Richardson's pop-up to second base. Cardinals manager Johnny Keane had a reliever warming up, but he wanted Gibson to finish the game. "I had a commitment to his heart," Keane said.

3) A significant season

1968 and beyond

Here's a quick factual look at Gibson's astounding 1968 season:

- He completed 28 of 34 starts and was never removed from a game in the middle of an inning.
- He finished 22-9 and absorbed those defeats primarily because he lost three 3-2 decisions and endured a pair of 1-0 setbacks.
- Though he dropped five of his first eight decisions, his ERA was 1.52 at that juncture.
- He went 6-0 in June and July, completing all 12 starts and compiling an 0.50 ERA in each month.

Gibson was at the forefront of a Major Leagues-wide pitchers' takeover. Whether they were that much better than hitters at that point (Carl Yastrzemski won the 1968 American League batting title with a .301 average), the lords of baseball decided to jump-start offenses by lowering the mound five inches and reducing the height of the strike zone from a batter's armpits to the top of the jersey lettering. Many experts believe that Gibson's dominance was at least partly responsible for these changes.

4) Excellence in triplicate

Oct. 4-12, 1967

Which of Gibson's three complete-game victories over the Boston Red Sox in the 1967 World Series proved most essential? Was it Game 1, when he and the Cardinals prevailed, 2-1, and halted the momentum of a sky-high Boston club that emerged from a four-team race to win the

pennant on the regular season's final day? Could it have been his five-hit, 6-0 shutout in Game 4, which gave the Cardinals a 3-1 edge in the Series and enabled them to fend off the Red Sox, who won the next two games? Wait -- it had to be the World Series-clinching Game 7, which featured Gibson's commanding three-hitter that paced St. Louis' 7-2 triumph, right? With Gibson involved, they're all big games.

5) Monumental milestone

July 17, 1974

Gibson continued to set himself apart from even the greatest of pitchers. He became the second pitcher in Major League history, after Walter Johnson, to strike out 3,000 batters. At the time, Gibson was the only National Leaguer to achieve this status. Cincinnati's Cesar Geronimo was the strikeout victim who ushered Gibson into history.

6) Confidence builder

Oct. 12, 1964

This game, more than any other, convinced the Cardinals that they could outclass the star-studded, tradition-rich Yankees in the World Series. As usual, Gibson stood at the forefront of the effort in Game 5. He worked all 10 innings of the 5-2 victory, yielding six hits and zero earned runs while striking out 13. The outcome gave St. Louis a 3-2 Series lead.

7) You're pulling my leg

July 15, 1967

Gibson's focus on the mound was known to be unshakable, and this moment cemented that notion. Pittsburgh's Roberto Clemente christened the fourth inning by hitting a line drive off Gibson's right leg for a single. Nobody suspected that the baseball's impact had caused a fracture. Gibson faced three more batters, walking two and retiring Bill Mazeroski on a fly ball, before he left the mound. Soon, it was discovered that Gibson had sustained a broken fibula above his right ankle, and his legend grew.

8) A pair for an ace

1970 season

The rule changes that Gibson had at least partially prompted after the 1968 season didn't seem to affect him. His ERA soared by more than a run over the previous year, yet it remained admirable at 2.18, which complemented his 20-13 record. Gibson was even better in '70, finishing 23-7 to win his second NL Cy Young Award. His win total was a personal best and matched San Francisco's Gaylord Perry for the league lead in that category.

9) Achieving the inevitable

Aug. 14, 1971

With his combination of stuff, savvy and intimidation, Gibson was always a threat to pitch a no-hitter. He fulfilled this expectation against the Pittsburgh Pirates in an 11-0 rout. Gibson struck out 10 batters, including Willie Stargell three times.

10) It's never too late

Game 162: 1964-65, '69

Gibson had a penchant for late dramatics -- really late, such as the last day of the season. In the 1964 season finale, with the Cardinals needing a victory to clinch the pennant, Gibson pitched four effective innings of relief, despite having thrown eight innings two days earlier, and received the decision in St. Louis' 11-5 win over the Mets. In '65, one victory shy of logging his first 20-win season, Gibson threw a stifling complete game against Houston in Game 162 to reach the milestone.

Gibson closed with a rush once more to amass 20 wins in 1969, though this was an extended finishing kick. Owning a 16-11 record with six starts left, he threw a complete game in each one while earning the four wins that got him to 20. The last one came in the season-ender against Philadelphia, a 12-inning affair which the Cardinals captured, 3-2. Many players would have been mentally through the ballpark exit before the game even started. Not Gibson, who regarded winning 20 games as his duty.

Worth reviewing. 1967 World Series against the Red Sox. Gibson threw three complete-game victories, giving up three runs and striking out 26.

Trivia--Whose 1.60 ERA led the American League in 1968, the year Bob Gibson's 1.12 mark led the National League--Cleveland's Luis Tiant.

Want to feel old?

Roberto Clemente got his last hit 48 years ago.

Lets Talk Shutouts

Just nine pitchers have thrown multiple shutouts in a single postseason. Who was the most recent to do it? Madison Bumgarner (2014 NL Wild Card Game and World Series Game 5)

Career shutouts

110	Walter Johnson
90	Pete Alexander
79	Christy Mathewson
76	Cy Young
69	Eddie Plank
63	Warren Spahn
61	Nolan Ryan
61	Tom Seaver
60	Bert Blyleven
58	Don Sutton

Active leaders

15	Clayton Kershaw
13	Bartolo Colon
11	Felix Hernandez
10	Adam Wainwright
9	Justin Verlander

- 8 Johnny Cueto
- 8 Derek Holland
- 7 Cole Hamels
- 7 Corey Kluber
- 7 Anibal Sanchez

I'm guessing Walter Johnson's record is safe.

More Trivial Stuff

Who holds the record for most wins as a relief pitcher in a single postseason, with five? The Angels' Francisco Rodriguez (2002: 2 ALDS wins, 2 ALCS wins, 1 World Series win)

Three players share the record with 8 home runs in a single postseason: Barry Bonds (2002), Carlos Beltrán (2004) and which active player? The Twins' Nelson Cruz (2011, when he was with the Rangers)

Gio Urshela's game two grand slam made him the third Yankee to hit post season go ahead grand slam along with Gil McDougald and Tino Martinez.

Appreciating that expanded playoffs added opportunities

All time post season games played

Derek Jeter 158

Jorge Posada 125

Bernie Williams 121

David Justice 112

Manfred Ramirez 111

Yadi Molina 100

Tino Martinez 99

Mariano Rivera 96

Kenny Lofton 95

Chipper Jones 93

Interesting suggestion in the (usually obnoxious) comments that run next to streaming games on bilasport.net on reddit. Should pickoff throws be included in pitch count?

Before Clayton Kershaw, who was the last left-hander to strike out 13 or more in a postseason game? Cliff Lee (13 K's for the Rangers vs. the Yankees, 10/18/2010)

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HOF Obit of the week – Joe Morgan

22 seasons

Back to back NL MVP 75-76

10 x all-star including 8 in a row

5 x gold glove

.271/.392/.427 with 268 home runs, 1,133 RBIs, 689 steals and 1,650 runs

Among second basemen, he leads all-time in plate appearances (11,069), stolen bases (678) and runs scored (1,625).

In the modern history of baseball, dating back to 1901, Morgan's 16.5% walk rate comes in 9th among all players with at least 6,000 plate appearances.

Look at his peak years 1975-1976

The 1975 Reds -- the Big Red Machine -- are in anyone's conversation for the greatest team in history. Having lost the World Series in 1970 and '72, the '73 Reds lost to the Mets in the NLCS, and the '74 team finished second in the pre-Wild Card era to a 102-win Dodger team, despite winning 98 games of their own.

But that '75 team, the one that won 108 games, swept the Pirates in the NLCS, and beat the Red Sox in seven games in one of the most thrilling World Series ever, was the peak. They had three Hall of Famers in the lineup (Morgan, Tony Pérez, and Johnny Bench), would have had a fourth (Pete Rose) if not for his own self-destructive actions, and were led by a Hall of Fame manager, Sparky Anderson.

Chief among them was Morgan, who won the NL Most Valuable Player Award that year with 21 of 23 first-place votes -- Rose took the other two -- by putting up a season that looked like this:

- .327/.466/.508
- 169 OPS+
- 17 home runs
- 67 stolen bases

122 walks

27 doubles, 6 triples

- A Gold Glove, his third in a run of five straight
- 11 WAR

The 169 OPS+ was the [best in baseball](#) that year, and the 67 steals were third-most. That 11 WAR, by FanGraphs' reckoning, is [one of the 25 greatest seasons of all time](#), behind a bunch of years from players who need only be identified by their first names: Babe, Barry, Mickey, Stan and so on.

The next year, 1976, another MVP season and another World Series title, was arguably better. Though the WAR wasn't quite as high due to lesser ratings from the prehistoric defensive metrics of the time, Morgan hit for more power (27 homers, a 1.020 OPS) and still stole 60 more bases.

It was, according to MLB.com's Andrew Simon, [the only season in the history of baseball](#) where a hitter scored 100 runs, drove in 100 more runs, walked 100 times and stole at least 50 bases.

More Post Season Stuff

Jose Altuve now has 16 career postseason home runs. He trails all-time leader for post season HRs by a middle infielder -- Derek Jeter (20)

Jose Altuve during the regular season: 194 chances, zero throwing errors. Most chances of any 2B in baseball without a throwing Error. Jose Altuve in game 2 versus Rays: 2 throwing errors on first 2 chances.

Jeter holds the rookie record for hits in a single postseason--22 hits in 1996.

Game 5 of Astros-Braves. First time in post season history a team hit lead off and game ending HRs. George Springer hit first pitch out and Carlos Correa hit the game winning walk off. (Oddly enough, Correa has two walk-off homers in just 61 postseason games, but zero game-ending dingers in 604 regular-season ones.) The only players with more career postseason RBIs than

Correa are Bernie Williams (80), Manny Ramirez (78), David Justice (63), Derek Jeter (61), David Ortiz (61) and Albert Pujols (54), with Pujols being the only active player among that group. No other player in postseason history has collected more than 35 RBIs before turning 27.

Of the 39 teams to have faced a 3-0 hole, manager Dusty Baker's Astros club is only the ninth to survive to see a Game 5 and the fourth to reach Game 6. After Friday's win, Houston joins the 2004 Red Sox as the only teams to make it to Game 7 after dropping the first three games of a series. Boston finished the job with a 10-3 victory over the Yankees in the ALCS finale, before going on to sweep the Cardinals in the World Series.

Christian Pache was a silver lining as the Braves dropped their first game of the 2020 playoffs against the Dodgers. He joined Joe Blanton (2008), Melvin Mora (1999), Don Gullett ('75), Mickey Lolich ('68), Frank Demaree ('32) and Rosy Ryan ('24) as the only players to hit their first homer in the postseason. Of that group, he is just the third non-pitcher, joining Mora and Demaree.

Pache homered a month shy of his 22nd birthday, making him one of four players in Braves history to belt a postseason home run at 21 years or younger. Only teammate Ronald Acuña Jr., Brian McCann and Andruw Jones -- Pache's mentor -- were younger.

Looking deeper into baseball history, Pache is the fifth-youngest center fielder to go yard in the playoffs -- older than just Acuña, Jones, Bryce Harper and Hall of Famer Mickey Mantle.

The last National League squad to come back from losing the first two games in a best-of-7 to win the series--the Mets in the 1986 World Series.

Worst winning percentage, World Series teams. If the Astros made it they would have had the record.

2020 Astros*	29-31 .483
1973 Mets	82-79 .509 Lost WS

2006 Cardinals 83-78 .516 Won WS

1987 Twins 85-77 .525 Won WS

All-time post season complete game shut outs:

Christy Mathewson 4

Whitey Ford 3

Madison Baumgarner 3

Three Finger Brown 3

Josh Beckett 3

Clayton Kershaw post season 11-12. Greg Maddux post season 11-14. But much of Maddux's trouble was at least partially related to defense; he gave up 25 unearned runs in the postseason, by far the most of any pitcher in baseball history.

Check out this team

Spokane Indians of the Pacific Coast League were bursting at the seams with talent in 1970. They were guided by a fiery manager in Tommy Lasorda, who had already managed many of the team's future stars in the lower level of the Dodgers' system. Lasorda presided over a team that included future big-league regulars Steve Garvey, Bill Russell, Davey Lopes, Bill Buckner, Charlie Hough and a plucky little shortstop named Bobby Valentine, who, at .340, led the league in hitting.

Those on the Indians in 1970 played in parts of 217 seasons in the big leagues. The average major-league career of their starting eight position players lasted 14 years. Better still, the players accounted for 21 All-Star selections and 23 World Series appearances. Three players — Garvey, Russell and Lopes — were key pieces to the Dodgers' rejuvenation in the 1970s, when they advanced to the World Series in 1974, 1977 and 1978 before winning it all in 1981.

Yankee Catchers

Elston Howard — 1492 games with Yankees, first black MVP (1963), 161 HRs, 12x all-star, 4 x world series champion. Also invented the batting doughnut.

Jorge Posada — 1829 games, 275 HRs and 1065 RBIs, 5x all-star, 4x world series champion, in 2003 became second Yankee catcher to hit 30 HRs (Berra). Just 5th catcher in MLB history with at least 1500 hits, 350 doubles, 275 HRs and 1500 RBIs. Only catcher to ever hit .330 with 40 doubles, 20 HRs and 90 RBIs.

Thurman Munson — 1423 games, .292 career average with 701 RBIs and 48 stolen bases, 7x all-star, 2 x world series champion, 3x gold glove, first Yankee captain since Lou Gehrig, first player to be college all American to then be rookie of the year, MVP, gold glove and world series champion. Hit .357 in 30 career post season games with 22 RBIs, 24 baserunners caught stealing.

Bill Dickey — 1789 games, .313 career average with 202 HRs and 1209 RBIs, 11x all-star, 8x world series champion, in 1931 did not allow a passed ball in 125 games, 24 RBIs in 38 post season games.

Yogi Berra -18 years with Yankees, 2116 games, .285 career average with 358 HRs and 1430 RBIs, 18x all-star, 10x world series champion, 3x MVP, caught 173 shutouts, led AL in games/putouts/assists 8x, more HRs than strikeouts 5 seasons,

In contrast, Jake Gibbs played 538 games in 10 years (all with the Yankees), .233 average with 25 HRs, 146 RBIs. Let's not get started on Gary Sanchez.

Miscellaneous Yankees stuff

- Roy White and Babe Ruth are tied for all time caught stealing at 117.
- Derek Jeter stole more bases as a Yankee (358) than Rickey Henderson (326).
- Mariano Rivera appeared in 1115 games, more than twice runner-up Dave Righetti with 522.
- Top Four in Strikeouts—Pettitte 2020, Ford 1956, Guidry 1778, Sabathia 1593.
- Alfonso Soriano holds the team single season at bats record with 696 in 2002
- Steve Sax has the team single season singles record with 171 in 1989.
- In Ron Guidry's awesome 1978 season he threw 9 shutouts and he struck out 248.

More Great Stuff from The Athletic-Joe Posnanski: post-season highlights how much the game has changed.

Let's start with this: There are, I believe, two dominant forces pulling at Major League Baseball. Actually, it's the same two forces that pull at the NFL and NBA and NHL and all spectator sports.

There's the pull of competition.

And there's the pull of entertainment.

Sometimes, the two forces pull in the same direction. In the 1980s, NFL teams started realizing they would be more effective offensively by throwing the ball. You know, in the 1970s, teams

ran the ball about 60 percent of the time — it wasn't until 1989 that NFL offenses, for the first time, threw the ball more than they ran it. Teams now throw the ball 55 percent of the time.

And while I'm sure there would be some old-school, smashmouth dissenters, most of us would agree that throwing the ball is more exciting.

But here's the thing: Even though these pulls sometimes go the same way, they are entirely independent of each other. Coaches didn't have their teams throw the ball more often to be more exciting. They did it because they realized they *had* to do it to win. Football coaches, with rare exceptions like the old Cleveland Browns coach Sam Rutigliano* would happily and enthusiastically ban all excitement out of football the way people in the "Footloose" town banned dancing ... if they could just win games without it.

**Rutigliano had his team — with quarterback Brian Sipe — throw the ball all over the field because, as he said, "anything else would be excessively boring." He was a character.*

You can't blame coaches for this at all. Entertainment is not really in their job description (except maybe for soccer coaches in Brazil). They do not generally get fired, canned or sacked for having a boring team. No, they get fired, sacked and canned for having a losing team. That is the unforgivable sin, and so they will focus their energies on finding ways to win. If that happens to make the game more exciting, OK, fine. If it happens to make the game more tedious, boring, uninteresting, well, that's OK, too.

So who is looking out for keeping our sports entertaining? Ah, that is the question of the day.

When I was growing up, there were a number of baseball tenets — best practices, you might call them — that now seem silly, obsolete or quaint depending on your viewpoint. Here are a few.

- Put the ball in play. Strikeouts hurt the ballclub.
- A starting pitcher's job is to finish the game.
- Driving the ball up the middle is the surest way to get a hit.
- The triple is the most exciting play in baseball.
- Be aggressive on the basepaths even if it leads to some outs; aggressiveness goes hand-in-hand with winning.
- Don't swing for the fences.
- Pitcher wins and RBIs are the name of the game.

- Great defense up the middle wins championships.
- Command is what makes a great pitcher ... not velocity.
- Working out too much will reduce flexibility and hurt a ballplayer.

I could keep going for a while but 10 seems like a good round number. Every single one of these tenets — and these were foundational principles of baseball when I was growing up — has been shelved.

Tenet 1 (Put the ball in play): Hitters are striking out almost twice as often as they did in the 1970s (and more than twice as often as they did in the 1950s, and three times more often than they did in the heyday of [Walter Johnson](#), [Pete Alexander](#) and [Lefty Grove](#)). Yes, part of this is that pitchers are now throwing obscene stuff, unimaginable stuff, but I'd argue a bigger part is that teams have come to accept strikeouts as an acceptable cost for trying to drive the ball in the air. They have figured — rightly, I'm afraid — that choking up and shortening up to put the ball in play is a losing strategy.

Tenet 2 (Starters finish games): Starters basically never finish games. Oh, every now and again it might happen, and it's a bit like seeing a phone booth in the wild or seeing a commercial that isn't for GEICO. But we're now through the looking glass on this one; forget completing games. If a starter goes seven innings in the postseason, that's considered a Juan Marichal-like marathon performance.

Look: There have been 40 postseason games so far. That's 80 starts. It goes without saying that none of them were complete games, not even Kershaw's masterful performance against Milwaukee. But of those 80, more than half were fewer than five innings. Only 10 percent of them went seven innings.

Again, the strategy seems sound to me. You'd certainly rather have a fresh arm throwing 97 mph out of the bullpen for an inning than try to stretch your starter (who was max effort from the opening pitch).

Tenet 3 (Hit the ball up the middle): It is still jarring to see balls that are smashed up the middle turned into easy outs. But that's simply a part of baseball now. Teams are smartly using defensive data to pinpoint where hitters are most likely to go, and defenses have mostly taken away the middle alley. There are some who would like to institute a rule preventing teams from shifting; I'm not one of those people. To me, that would artificially prevent teams from setting up their best defenses. But I cannot lie that, visually, it's hard to get used to this game.

Tenet 4 (The triple is the most exciting play in baseball): The triple is dead. There were fewer triples hit this year per game than at any point in baseball history — and there have been just six triples hit in the 40 postseason games so far. (Cody Bellinger has two of them!) It just doesn't make sense to go for the triple now and potentially get yourself thrown out. Teams

aren't interested in playing small-ball now — it doesn't make strategic sense — and a home run will score you from wherever you happen to be on the bases.

Tenet 5 (Be aggressive on the basepaths): Following in line with the triple, teams are also not stealing bases or trying to stretch singles into doubles. Again, when you run the numbers, the cost versus reward isn't worth it. There have been 25 stolen bases in 40 postseason games — Houston has just one stolen base all postseason, Tampa Bay just two.

Tenet 6 (Don't swing for the fences): This went out the window years ago. Hitters are obviously swinging for the fences in virtually every at-bat and on virtually every count. It's obvious why. Teams that hit more homers are 27-2 in these playoffs. Teams are scoring about 50 percent of their runs on home runs. The home run has been hugely important in the game ever since the days of Babe Ruth but it is now the end-all; and the better pitchers get, the more important the home run becomes as the idea of stringing three or four or five successful at-bats together grows increasingly less likely.

Tenet 7 (Wins and RBIs are the name of the game): The pitcher win is basically dead now. Heck, like we just said, most starters in this postseason haven't even pitched long enough to *qualify* for the win. And while we still keep track of RBIs, it no longer has the same cache inside the game. These have been replaced with more revealing — and, for many, more complicated and elusive — metrics.

Tenet 8 (Great defense up the middle wins championships): Teams rarely will play defense-first players. You have to hit — probably with some power — to get into a big-league lineup now. Look at the four shortstops in the playoffs. The Dodgers' Corey Seager slugged .585 this year while being about league average at short. Atlanta's Dansby Swanson is a very good defensive shortstop but it was his bat that got him picked first in the draft and he posted a career-high 110 OPS+ this year. Houston's Carlos Correa is 6-foot-4, 220 pounds and was supposed to redefine what a shortstop could do at the plate; he struggled for much of this year offensively but he's shown some offensive force in the postseason. And Tampa Bay's young Willy Adames hits with power.

None of these guys is defense-first. Could you win now with a light-hitting [Ozzie Smith](#) or, even more, a no-hit Mark Belanger at shortstop or second base? It's a theoretical question: We won't find out anytime soon.

Tenet 9 (Command trumps velocity): That idea is gone. Sure, you will still hear people around baseball talk about the importance of command. But teams are not building pitching staffs — particularly bullpens — around command. Teams are throwing four, five, six, seven pitchers at

opponents every game, all these pitchers throw hard, all of them have exploding breaking balls, all of them are only out there to get out a small handful of hitters.

Tenet 10 (Working out too much is bad for baseball): Ha ha. OK, moving on.

Obviously, there is a good reason why each and every one of these baseball principles — once so fundamental to the game — have been dropped in the trash bin. But those reasons have nothing to do with entertainment value. They are all about winning. Is it a more fun game to watch with fewer balls in play, with starting pitchers exiting early, with designer defenses for every hitter, with triples and stolen bases gone, with home runs ubiquitous, with comfortable old stats being rendered meaningless, with everybody throwing super fast and swinging for the fences? I'm not asking that question rhetorically. I'm asking it for real. The game has evolved without any concern for fun.

Of course, I'll love baseball no matter what. But I know other people who do not. I hear from them often. They usually can't describe why the game isn't as much fun for them. They just say that it doesn't feel like the same game. They're not wrong.