

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

10.31.2021

Good morning baseball fans. A long issue this morning to celebrate the World Series. Apologies for the delay--power outage thanks to serious winds here in Maine--whitecaps on the water out my window.

WORLD SERIES NOTES

The Braves became the 47th team to take a 3-1 lead in a best-of-seven World Series -- an advantage that 40 of the previous 46 (87%) turned into a title. In a stunning span of just five pitches in Game 4, they turned a 2-1 deficit into a 3-2 lead with back-to-back HRs from Jorge Solar and Dansby Swanson. Swanson and Soler were the first Nos. 8 and 9 hitters to hit back-to-back homers in the World Series.

Braves starter Dylan Lee had never started a MLB game. He got just one out. And his team won. From 1933 until this game, teams whose starters got one out or none in a World Series had won three times *in nearly nine decades*. And no team had won a game like that in 40 years, since the 1981 [Dodgers](#) survived a Bob Welch start in which he got no outs.

For two years, right-hander [Cristian Javier](#)'s slider has been a fierce weapon for the Astros. On Saturday night, it was the pitch that put Houston's championship dreams in jeopardy.

Javier served up back-to-back home runs by Dansby Swanson and Jorge Soler with one out in the seventh inning, turning a one-run Astros lead into a one-run deficit. He'd faced 37 hitters in this postseason. He'd allowed zero runs. In his postseason career, he'd faced 75 hitters — and allowed one home run.

Soler's go-ahead blast came on a hanging 2-1 slider, which came as somewhat of a surprise. Javier had thrown 809 sliders since the start of 2020 and allowed home runs on only two of them.

To add to the unlikely nature of the comeback, Javier held right-handed hitters to a .587 [OPS](#) during the regular season, but it was two righties who delivered the crushing blows against the 24-year-old pitcher.

The back-to-back homers – the first in Braves postseason history – marked the first time in this World Series that the lead had changed hands.

Before Jorge Soler last night, for the last player to hit a go-ahead pinch-hit homer in the World Series you'd have to go back to the Blue Jays' Ed Sprague (Game 2 of the 1992 World Series)

Entering the 2021 World Series, only 14 teams out of 90 have come back to win a best-of-seven series after dropping three of the first four contests. (scroll down for summary of the teams that came back from 3-1 post-season deficits).

Atlanta's Jorge Soler set some sort of weird record by becoming the first player to ever lead off a World Series with a home run.

Game 2 gave us something we had not seen in 1,097 days: A giddy home crowd celebrating their team winning a World Series game.

It had been since Oct. 26, 2018 -- the legendary 18-inning game at Dodger Stadium that ended with a Max Muncy walk-off homer against the Red Sox's Nathan Eovaldi -- that a team won in its own park at the World Series.

Game 3 and Ian Anderson being pulled with a no-hitter. Only Derek Lowe (2010 NLDS Game 4) and Bill James (1914 World Series Game 2) have had longer postseason no-hit bids (both 5 1/3 innings) for the Braves. Anderson's no-hitter through five innings matched two of Tom Glavine's postseason no-hit bids (1995 World Series Game 6 and '98 NLDS Game 2).

Record for longest no-hit bid by a rookie in a postseason game? The Cardinals' Michael Wacha (7 1/3 innings in Game 4 of the 2013 NLDS vs. the Pirates).

Anderson became the youngest pitcher to not allow a hit in the first four innings of a Series game since Ralph Branca for the Dodgers in the 1947 Series against the Yankees at age 21.

Anderson has posted a career 1.26 ERA over his first 35 2/3 postseason innings. That mark is tied for second best in a player's first eight career postseason starts since earned runs became an official stat in both the AL and NL in 1913. Orlando Hernández had a 1.22 ERA at that point, while Cliff Lee's ERA was also 1.26. Orel Hershiser at 1.52 and Stephen Strasburg at 1.55 round out the top five.

Astros game 3 starter Luis Garcia became the first rookie in Series history with multiple strikeouts in each of the first three innings.

The only player to homer from both sides of the plate in two postseason games--Bernie Williams (1995 ALDS Game 3 and 1996 ALDS Game 4).

Insightful description of game 1 from the great former KC Star baseball writer Joe Posnanski (I just received my signed copy of his great new book *Baseball 100*—put it on your holiday wish list. Great bios of the best 100 players of all time).

A parade of pitchers, some nice defense, some sloppy defense, an ugly injury to Atlanta starter Charlie Morton, and brief respites of hitting artistry by Michael Brantley, who never gets enough credit as far as I'm concerned.

That's just not enough entertainment for four hours and six minutes of ball even for the most passionate of fans.

Tough out after tough out, from Altuve to Brantley to Bregman to Alvarez to Correa to Tucker to the league's batting champion, Gurriel. The Astros scored the most runs in baseball this year, they had averaged more than six runs per game in the postseason, and the Braves' pitching staff is stretched pretty thin after the loss of their ace, Charlie Morton.

Through Friday's game 3-- Altuve gets on base this offseason, the Astros win. And when he doesn't get on base, the Astros lose. It's quite stark. He's hitting .303 in the nine games the Astros have won and he has scored an astonishing 16 runs in those nine games.

In the Astros' five losses? He's 0-for-18.

Travis d'Arnaud — for his many strengths as a player — had thrown out 8 of the last 58 base runners that have tried to steal against him in the regular season, and in the post-season he had thrown out (this seems almost impossible to believe) one out of 32 runners attempting to steal. But d'Arnaud has gone 5-for-12 with two homers through the first four games of the World Series.

Yankees at Athletics, 24-May-1928, first game of a doubleheader.

Yankees starting lineup included Lou Gehrig at 1B, Tony Lazzeri at 2B, Leo Durocher at SS, Babe Ruth in LF, Earle Combs in CF, Miller Huggins managing, and Waite Hoyt pitched in relief. That's seven.

For the A's, the lineup had Tris Speaker in CF, Ty Cobb in RF, Mickey Cochrane catching, and Lefty Grove pitching. Later in the game, Eddie Collins, Jimmie Foxx, and Al Simmons each pinch-hit. And of course, Connie Mack was managing. Eight for the Athletics.

Among the umpires, Tommy Connolly umpired 1B and Bill McGowan was at 3B. Two more future HOFers.

$7 + 8 + 2 == 17$ future Hall of Famers.

The Yankees won the game, 9–7.

Who hit the first pinch-hit home run in World Series history? Yogi Berra (Game 3 of the 1947 World Series).

Pitcher has the lowest career World Series ERA (minimum 20 innings)? Madison Bumgarner (0.25)

Eleven teams won more games than Atlanta this season, including the Toronto Blue Jays and the Seattle Mariners, who did not qualify for the American League playoffs.

Before he left with a broken leg, Charlie Morton was the 9th oldest pitcher to start a world series game 1. Morton has pitched in 3 of the last 5 World Series—2017 Astros, 2019 Rays, 2021 Braves.

Among players with at least 400 plate appearances during the regular season, Martín Maldonado ranked dead last among catchers with a .172 batting average — and second last among all batters. A 27th round draft pick and late bloomer, Maldonado made his major league debut with the Milwaukee Brewers when he was 25. Long known for his defense (his nickname is Machete because he cuts down base runners) rather than his offense (he has a career .212 average), he has bounced between five major-league teams. But since 2018, he has spent most of his time with the Astros, crouching behind the plate for four straight playoffs runs.

M.L.B. has had 14 different teams win championships since 2000 — more than the other major American men's sports. The turn-of-the-century Yankees (1998-2000) are the last team to win consecutive [World Series](#). Since then, 14 different franchises have worn the crown, with [Atlanta](#) trying to become the 15th. There have been 12 different champions in the N.F.L. and the N.H.L., and 10 in the N.B.A.

2021 Atlanta Braves - This was a team that didn't spend one day — *not one* — above .500 until its 111th game of the season. World Series teams follow all sorts of paths. They don't follow that path. Not until this team, at least.

No World Series team in the history of baseball had ever gone as many games into a season without ever having a winning record as this team went. And it's not even close.

MOST GAMES BEFORE HOLDING WINNING RECORD, WORLD SERIES TEAMS

2021 Braves: 111

1914 Braves: 91

1979 [Pirates](#): 43

1985 Cardinals: 41

This year's Braves were only 52-55 heading into action on August 3. By this point, Atlanta had already lost [Ronald Acuna Jr.](#) and [Mike Soroka](#) to season-ending injuries, and [Marcell Ozuna](#) was away from the team (and soon to be put on administrative leave by the league) due to domestic violence charges.

However, the Braves were far from done. An aggressive trade strategy saw outfielders [Joc Pederson](#), [Adam Duvall](#), [Jorge Soler](#), and future NLCS MVP [Eddie Rosario](#) all added prior to the trade deadline, and Atlanta went 36-18 the rest of the way. A lackluster NL East undoubtedly helped, but the Braves kept it going into October, defeating the Brewers in the NLDS and then ousting the defending champion Dodgers in the NLCS. That last win was particularly sweet for Atlanta, considering the blown 3-1 lead against Los Angeles in the 2020 League Championship Series.

JOCTOBER

The Braves' [Joc Pederson](#) is slugging .586 this postseason and making his mark in more ways than one. First, there were the pinch-hit homers in Games 1 and 3 of the National League Division Series against the Brewers -- both off Adrian Houser -- which made him the third player in history with two in a single postseason series *and* tied the record for a postseason career.

Of course, another big reason for the JOctober term is Pederson's familiarity with the postseason. Entering the World Series, he's played 74 career postseason games, with 64 of those coming with the Dodgers from 2015-20. That means he won a World Series title with the Dodgers a year ago. Now, with the Braves in the Fall Classic, he has a chance at a rare feat: winning the World Series in back-to-back seasons with different teams.

How rare is it? Glad you asked. Only eight players in MLB history have won a World Series in back-to-back seasons with two different teams, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Here, winning the World Series is defined as playing at least one postseason game for the champs.

Ben Zobrist: 2015 Royals, 2016 Cubs

Zobrist was a midseason acquisition for the Royals in '15, arriving in a trade with the A's that sent Sean Manaea to Oakland. In 16 postseason games for Kansas City, he hit .303 and slugged .515 as the club won in five games over the Mets. When he hit free agency that offseason, Zobrist signed with the Cubs. The Cubs made it to the playoffs, and Zobrist got off to a slow start, but heated up in the Fall Classic. He hit .357 in the series, including delivering the go-ahead RBI in the top of the 10th inning in Game 7, and won World Series MVP honors.

Jake Peavy: 2013 Red Sox, 2014 Giants

Peavy was traded midseason to the team that went on to win the World Series *twice*. Talk about a successful stretch. In July 2013, he was sent to the Red Sox from the White Sox in a three-team trade. Peavy started a game per round for the Red Sox in the playoffs, and the team won the World Series over the Cardinals. The next July, the Red Sox sent him to the Giants, where he posted a 2.17 ERA in 12 starts down the stretch after starting the season at 4.72 in 20 starts for Boston. Peavy made four postseason starts across the NL Division Series, NLCS and World Series, and yet again, his team won it all -- this time with the Giants beating the Royals.

Ryan Theriot: 2011 Cardinals, 2012 Giants

Following the 2010 season, the Dodgers traded Theriot to the Cardinals. He appeared in 12 games that postseason across the three rounds, as the Cards beat the Rangers in the World Series. In free agency that offseason, he signed with the Giants. Yet again, he found himself on a team making a deep October run. He hit .300 in 11 postseason plate appearances for the Giants across the three rounds, and ended up a champion yet again as the team beat the Tigers. Pretty good results for what ended up being the final two years of his career.

Jack Morris: 1991 Twins, 1992 Blue Jays

Entering the 1991 season, Morris signed as a free agent with the Twins. He made five starts in

the postseason for the club, culminating in his 10-inning shutout of the Braves in Game 7 of the World Series to seal the Twins' title. Morris earned World Series MVP honors for his efforts, which also included starts of seven and six innings in the Fall Classic. That offseason, he signed as a free agent with the Blue Jays. Though his October magic didn't quite carry over into '92, he made four starts during the run and won a second consecutive title as the Jays beat the Braves.

Don Gullett: 1976 Reds, 1977 Yankees

Gullett actually won three straight World Series, as the Reds won in '75 and '76, but the years of note to us here are '76 and '77, as those were consecutive years with different teams. In '76, Gullett made one start per round, allowing one run in eight innings in the NLCS and one run in 7 1/3 innings in the World Series, as the Reds beat the Yankees. As a free agent in the offseason, he went and joined the Yankees. That October, he yet again found himself in the playoffs, this time making three postseason starts as the Yankees beat the Dodgers in the World Series.

Bill Skowron: 1962 Yankees, 1963 Dodgers

Skowron also won three straight World Series, but since '61 and '62 were both with the Yankees, we'll focus on just the latter two. In '62 he played for the Yankees as they beat the Giants in the Fall Classic. After the season, the Yankees traded him to the Dodgers. And when the playoffs came around again, he was yet again in the World Series -- this time facing his former team in the Yankees. And Skowron was a champ yet again, as the Dodgers swept.

Clem Labine: 1959 Dodgers, 1960 Pirates

In 1959 for the Dodgers, Labine pitched in one game as Los Angeles beat the White Sox in the World Series. The following June, the Dodgers traded him to the Tigers, who released him in August. After being released, he signed with the Pirates, who won the pennant. Labine pitched in three games in the World Series as the Pirates defeated the Yankees.

Allie Clark: 1947 Yankees, 1948 Indians

In Clark's first year in the Majors, his Yankees made the World Series and won it all, with Clark appearing in three games as they beat the Dodgers. Following the season, the Yankees traded him to the Indians. That worked out well for Clark, as the Indians won the pennant and beat the Braves in the World Series. Pretty good for the first two years of Clark's MLB career.

GO FIGURE

Mitch Williams is the only player in MLB history to record a save without throwing a pitch. On April 28, 1989, he entered the game against the San Diego Padres with a 3-1 lead and two outs in the ninth inning. Williams picked off the Padres' [Carmelo Martínez](#) at second base to end the game. Also known as "Wild Thing", Williams lifetime stats show that he gave up more walks than hits although it is doubtful that he alone holds this distinction.

JAYSON STARK

The reign of offensive terror Rosario inflicted on the Dodgers over the last five games of this NLCS is the stuff of October legends. This dude reached base in *16 of his last 24 trips to the dish!*

Single
Single
Single
Single
Single
Out
Walk
Out
Walk
Homer
Triple
Single
Out
Homer
Out
Single
Double
Out
Single
Out
Homer
Walk
103 mph out

PLAYERS WITH 13 HITS AND .667+ OBP OVER ANY 5 POSTSEASON GAMES*

Rosario and Will Clark of the 1989 Giants. That's it.

Only two other players have ever gotten 13 hits or more (forget the walks/OBP) over *any* five-game span within a single postseason. Hideki Matsui (2004) is one. Kiké Hernández, naturally, is the other — *just last week*.

- Among hitters who have gotten at least 24 plate appearances over any five-game postseason span, only one other man has ever reached base 16 times or more. That was the great Edgar Martinez in 1995 (12 for 27, with six walks).

- Over this full series, Rosario wound up with 14 hits. That's more than any player in history over any series of six games or shorter. The old record was 13, by Will Clark, in that five-game NLCS in 1989.

- And here's one more. Rosario's outrageous .560 batting average in this series is the third-highest in history by anyone in any series with at least 25 trips to the plate. The only two better? [David Ortiz](#)'s still incomprehensible .688 in the 2013 World Series and Edgar's .571 in the Mariners' epic 1995 ALDS against the [Yankees](#).

Braves left-handed cult hero Tyler Matzek. I said then he was the feel-good story of this series. He's now the couldn't-feel-better story of this series.

Two years ago, he was pitching for the fabled Texas AirHogs in the independent American Association, trying to find a path back to the big leagues. But by last night things had changed slightly. Meaning ...

He was merely *the single most pivotal pitching figure in this game, this series and possibly the whole darned postseason*.

Seventh inning. Dodgers had climbed to within 4-2. Runners on second and third. Nobody out. And here came Tyler Matzek. For two astonishing, career-defining innings.

Four-pitch strikeout of [Albert Pujols](#)

Four pitch strikeout of Stephen Souza Jr.

Three-pitch strikeout of [Mookie Betts](#)!

End of seventh inning

Three-pitch strikeout of [Corey Seager](#)

Two Charmin Ultra Soft-contact ground balls

End of eighth inning

For a man trying to savor every moment of his baseball reincarnation, this was as beautiful and joyous as it gets.

"I felt great in that moment," Matzek said. "I felt comfortable. Years ago, I would have been super-anxious, freaking out. Who knows where the baseball would have gone. (But tonight) I felt confident and felt calm and felt in control of the situation. And I can't help but thank all the guys who have helped get me to that situation."

Mookie Betts has been a Dodger for two seasons now. Never, at any point in either of those two seasons, had he struck out on three pitches with two runners in scoring position. So that explains the John Travolta "Saturday Night Fever" moves Matzek flashed after that whiff.

It wasn't easy to be the Dodgers

I can't let this column go by without a salute to the Dodgers. Imagine winning one World Series, coming back the next year and winning 112 games (counting the postseason) ... *and all it got you was a trip home for the winter.*

I don't want to be the guy saying, "That's not fair," because in sports, that trip to the fair is never guaranteed. But I do want to be the guy who says this:

No defending World Series champ in history ever was forced to navigate a more difficult path back to the Series than this team. Here's what I mean:

The stretch drive: I still can't believe these Dodgers went 42-13 from Aug. 1 to the finish line *and still couldn't catch the [Giants](#)*. But that was the deal. They had to grind it all the way to the finish line, and all it got them was a trip to ...

The wild-card game: Which they had to play despite winning 106 games ... and got matched up with a Cardinals team that had just won 17 games in a row in September ... and needed a walk-off [Chris Taylor](#) homer just to survive and advance to ...

Five classic, grueling NLDS games against the Giants: Incredible to be this good, and still get stuck playing 107-win team *in the Division Series* ... without having home-field advantage ... and having to win two elimination games in a row — in two different cities — just to stay alive to ...

Fly across four time zones for the NLCS: Where once again, the Dodgers would *not* have home-field advantage, despite winning 18 more games than the Braves team they played ... where all their aches, pains and injuries — to the likes of [Clayton Kershaw](#), [Max Muncy](#), [Justin Turner](#) and [Max Scherzer](#) — would finally catch up with them.

I've looked long and hard at this. I'm convinced that no defending champs in the history of this sport ever had that many hazards dumped all over the road in front of them. And only one other team is even in the argument:

The 2012 Cardinals: It was improbable enough that the Cardinals wrote one of the greatest comeback scripts in sports history to win the 2011 World Series. But the 2012 team might have had even a tougher ride: Won the wild-card game on the road (in Atlanta) in the famed Infield Fly Rule Game ... Then needed another miracle comeback to upset the 98-win [Nationals](#) in the Division Series ... Then took a three-games-to-one lead in the NLCS over the Giants team that was in the middle of its three-titles-in-five-years run — only to lose Games 5, 6 and 7.

That's a fairly similar path to the one this Dodgers team took. But ...

Those Cardinals earned that path. They "only" won 88 games that season. And they wouldn't have been playing in October at all without the addition of a second wild-card team *that year*. They weren't a 106-win juggernaut whose obstacle course stemmed just from the misfortune of landing in the same division as a 107-win juggernaut.

So here's to the Dodgers. How will we remember them now? As the Best Team the Wild Card System Could Detour, I guess.

FREDDIE'S FOUR-FOUR CLUB — Last Saturday, in Game 1 of this NLCS, Freddie Freeman struck out four times. That was weird. Exactly one week later, in Game 6, he did something completely different: He *walked* four times.

So I said to myself: I wonder how many players have ever had a four-walk game and a four-whiff game in the same postseason series. Then, luckily, I also said that to the great Sarah Langs, [MLB.com](#)'s go-to source for vital postseason info of all sizes and shapes. Within minutes, she had our answer.

- How many other players have ever done that in the same series? That would be none.
- How many other players have ever done that in the same postseason? That would also be none.
- How many other players have ever even done that in the postseason over their whole career? That would be just one: [Chase Utley](#).

Freeman started this series by going 0 for his first 8, with seven strikeouts. He finished it by reaching base in 12 of his last 19 trips to the plate — because he's Freddie Freeman!

THE .500-.500 CLUB — Ready for my favorite Weird and Wild note that didn't quite happen? Until the ninth inning of the final game of this NLCS, *two* different players were hitting .500 (or better) in the same series. And that's a thing that doesn't just happen in any old series, you know.

Eddie Rosario, as I mentioned, held up his end. Chris Taylor came to the plate in the final inning, with 10 hits in 20 at-bats in the series, meaning he was at .500 on the button ... until he struck out against Will Smith, at least. Which dropped him to "only" .476.

If he'd just stayed at .500 ... this would have been only the second postseason series ever in which a guy on each team hit .500 (or better) in at least 20 trips to the plate. It would have joined the 1989 NLCS I mentioned earlier, when Will Clark (.650) and Mark Grace (.647) actually founded the .600-.600 Club.

But if we lower the bar to .476 ... then this group gets slightly more populated, according to Sarah Langs. It doesn't change the Hitters on Both Teams list. But we need to add one set of teammates who did it in the same series: [David Freese](#) (.545) and Albert Pujols (.478) both joined that Weird and Wild .476-.476 Club in the 2011 NLCS for the Cardinals. And it's a good thing they did, if I recall!

WALK THE WALK — THRICE! — Poor [Alex Vesia](#). In his final appearance of what was otherwise a spectacular postseason, he got waved into Game 6 on Saturday with two outs and nobody on in the sixth inning — *and walked all three hitters he faced!*

But guess what? That wasn't even the Weird and Wild part. Where this got amazing was that he walked all three hitters he faced *and didn't allow a run* (thanks to [Blake Treinen](#)).

According to Craig Muder, director of communications for the Hall of Fame, only one other pitcher in history has ever entered any postseason game, faced three hitters, walked them all but didn't give up a run: [Rockies](#) reliever Ryan Speier, in Game 1 of the 2007 World Series, against Julio Lugo, [Jacoby Ellsbury](#) and [Dustin Pedroia](#). Of course, unlike Vesia, Speier walked in three of *other* people's runs!

WHAT A SERIES! — Had this Series gone seven games, it coulda been a classic. Still, it goes down as an all-time Weird and Wild Classic! Why? Oh, just because ...

- The Dodgers lost games started by Max Scherzer, Walker Buehler and Julio Urías. (Those three went 43-7 for the Dodgers this year. 43-7!)
- The Braves' two losses were in games started by [Max Fried](#) and [Charlie Morton](#). (Fried hadn't lost a game in three months. Morton is Mr. October!)
- We had a rarified three-homer game — *and it was by Chris Taylor!*
- The Braves won two games (Game 1 and 2) in which they held a lead *for a total of five batters* — all of them in the first two innings of Game 1 ... after which they won two games in which they held a lead for zero batters in 16 innings!
- Both teams lost a game in which they hit a two-run homer ... *in the top of the first inning*.
- And Eddie Rosario, who hadn't previously established his place as The Greatest Hitter We've Ever Seen, had himself two four-hit games ... *in a span of three games*. Which apparently is hard, since in the history of postseason baseball, nobody had ever done it before.

MORE FROM JAYSON

Ian Anderson was the 21st starting pitcher in World Series history to spin a no-hitter through the first five innings. Guess how many of the first 20 got taken out of their games? Zero is the correct guess, as if you didn't know. So what happened to the other 20 who got to stay in? Let's look.

LOST IN THE SIXTH: Like Tom Glavine, who allowed a single to the very first hitter he faced that next inning, 11 of those 20 couldn't find a way to navigate their no-hitters through the

sixth inning. So even back there in yesteryear, if those managers had just believed in data instead of weird stuff like history and ace starters, they'd have known that the sixth inning is the time and place where most World Series no-hit bids go to die.

LOST IN THE SEVENTH: Two of those 20 — Jerry Koosman in 1969 and Ed Reulbach in 1906 — survived the sixth inning but then saw their no-hitters disappear in the seventh.

LOST IN THE EIGHTH: Five more pitchers had their no-hit dreams crushed in the eighth inning — and only one pitcher besides Larsen (Jim Lonborg, in 1967) has even made it that far *in the last 89 years*. The other four in this group: Red Ruffing (1942), Monte Pearson (1939), Burleigh Grimes (1931) and Herb Pennock (1927).

LOST IN THE NINTH: So if you're subtracting along at home, you know that leaves only one of our 20 no-hit dream-chasers who met with heartbreak in the ninth. That was Bill Bevens (1947). He got one out away, then lost the no-hitter *and* the game. He's still way too renowned for that.

So just one man on that list made it to the finish line. You know his name. You can't ever forget his name, since Don Larsen stands alone. He has stood alone for the last 65 years. And after Game 3 in Atlanta on a damp Friday in October, we came to understand once and for all that Don Larsen is a lucky man — *because now he'll stand alone forever*.

In the century-plus history of the Braves, only one other man had ever hit a go-ahead home run in the seventh inning or later of any World Series game. And no Brave had ever hit a *pinch* homer that late in a World Series game. Then again ...

Only three other players have ever hit a pinch homer that gave their team the lead in the seventh inning or later of any World Series game, for any team. It's quite a list:

Dusty Rhodes ([Giants](#)), Game 1, 1954 (10th inning)

Kirk Gibson ([Dodgers](#)), Game 1, 1988 (9th inning)

Ed Sprague ([Blue Jays](#)), Game 2, 1992 (9th inning)

And now ... Jorge Soler, a man who had gone six years without a pinch homer of any kind.

This was the stuff of Ruth and Gehrig! Any World Series home run is a memory for a lifetime. But the moment always makes the memory. So try to grasp hitting these home runs in these moments:

The first half of a back-to-back set to *tie* a World Series game ... the second half to *win* that World Series game. You can only dream those moments. And before Swanson and Soler, only two other sets of teammates had ever lived that dream:

1928 [Yankees](#) — Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig
1981 [Dodgers](#) — Pedro Guerrero and Steve Yeager

And now ... Jorge Soler and Dansby Swanson. Wow.

But wait. Those other sets of legendary back-to-backers didn't include any pinch home runs ... or a pitcher who hadn't allowed a run in a month ... or two men hitting at the very bottom of their lineups ... or a game that had begun with their starting pitcher getting just one out.

It wasn't exactly Morris versus Smoltz

Was this the Weirdest and Wildest starting-pitching matchup in World Series history? How could it not be? Is anything else even close?

In one corner, starting for the Astros: [Zack Greinke](#), former Cy Young Award winner, a man with 508 regular-season starts.

In the other corner, starting for the Braves: Dylan Lee, whose credentials could be summed up this way: proud owner of precisely *two* regular-season major-league innings, plus another eight outs in this postseason, but *zero* major-league starts.

Our friends from STATS Perform encapsulated the Weirdness and Wildness of that matchup this way:

CAREER INNINGS (including postseason)

Greinke: 3,219 IP

Lee: 4.2 IP

Innings gap: 3,214.1 IP!

So is that a record? No, it's not, actually. But it *is* the biggest disparity in innings between two World Series starters since Game 3 of the 2008 World Series, when Jamie Moyer ([Phillies](#)) had rolled up 3,445 more innings than [Matt Garza](#) ([Rays](#)).

Nevertheless, this story doesn't end there, because ...

- Greinke became just the sixth starting pitcher in this century to start a World Series game after pitching at least 3,000 regular-season innings. The others: Roger Clemens (2005), Kenny Rogers (2006), Curt Schilling (2007), Moyer (2008) and [Tim Hudson](#) (2014).

But here's a serious question: Will Greinke also be the last to do it? At the rate of innings starters are allowed to pitch now, wouldn't they have to pitch more seasons than Nolan Ryan to even get close to 3,000 innings?

- Lee became the first pitcher ever to start a World Series game before he'd started a regular-season game. Think *he'll* be the last? I'll guess no!
- As Joe Sheehan put it in his pregame newsletter, this was a matchup so bizarre that Greinke came into this start with more Cy Young Awards (one) than Lee has starts (none) — in a World Series game!
- Lee was never supposed to stick around long in this game. But he only lasted four hitters and one out because of this messy little factoid: Of his 15 pitches, only *five* were strikes. That's the fewest strikes thrown by any starting pitcher in any World Series game in the pitch-count era, now in its 34th season.
- And finally, how about this: When Lee (two regular-season innings) exited this game, he was replaced by a pitcher ([Kyle Wright](#)) who pitched just 6 1/3 regular-season innings in the big leagues this year. And I don't know how you think at times like that. But I can tell you how I think.

Hmmm, I wonder. Doesn't that have to be a record for fewest combined major-league innings by the first two pitchers for any team in any World Series game ever? Whereupon I fire that question at my amigos from STATS and learn ... heck yeah, it's a record. Here's that unreal leaderboard (not counting games from the 60-game 2020 season):

2021 game 1 Braves Dylan Wright 2.0 innings and Kyle Wright 6.1 – 8.1 combined innings.

1945 game 6 Tigers Virgil Trucks 5.1 and George caster 67.0 – 72.1 combined innings.

2013 game 2 Cards Michael Wacha 64.2 and Carlos Martinez 20.1 – 85 combined innings.

THE GREINKE GAME FOUR HIT — It was the first hit by any American League pitcher since [Corey Kluber](#) singled at Fenway in Game 4 of the 2016 World Series. It's been a rough five years in between! In that intermission between the Greinke hit and the Kluber hit, 15 AL starters headed for the plate — and went an attractive 0-for-22, with 13 strikeouts.

IT'S GETTING WORSE! — Actually, that 0-for-22 stat makes AL pitchers look like they've been better hitters in these World Series games than they've truly been in real life.

AL pitchers since 2011* — 1-for-55 (.018)

AL pitchers since 2000* — 7-for-114 (.061)

*(*not including Greinke)*

Then again, National League pitchers haven't quite reminded anybody of [Juan Soto](#), either.

NL pitchers since 2011 — 3-for-52 (.058)

LAST WORLD SERIES EXTRA-BASE HIT BY AN AL PITCHER — [Cliff Lee](#) (double vs. [Tim Lincecum](#)), Game 1, 2010.

LAST WORLD SERIES RBI BY AN AL PITCHER — Andy Pettitte (RBI single vs. [Cole Hamels](#)) in Philadelphia, Game 3, 2009.

LAST WORLD SERIES WALK BY AN AL PITCHER — [Pedro Martinez](#) (against Kiko Calero), Game 3, 2004.

LAST WORLD SERIES MULTI-HIT GAME BY AN AL PITCHER — Chad Ogea (single and double vs. Kevin Brown), Game 6, 1997.

LAST AL PITCHER ALLOWED TO BAT FOUR TIMES IN ONE WORLD SERIES GAME — David Cone in Atlanta, Game 2, 1999.

LAST WORLD SERIES HIT BY AN AL PITCHER AGAINST THE BRAVES — Also David Cone (as a Blue Jay), a two-hit game, Game 2, 1992.

And since the Braves have yet another bullpen game planned in Game 5, file this away, just in case ...

LAST WORLD SERIES HIT BY A RELIEF PITCHER — [Yusmeiro Petit](#), Game 4, 2014. And the last by an AL relief pitcher? Al Leiter (a double) in the famous 15-14 game in Philadelphia, Game 4, 1993.

The Braves are shutout machines!

Game 3 was their third shutout in this postseason. But they also threw four shutouts in last year's postseason. So if you're adding along at home, you can probably guess what that means:

They just became the first team ever with seven shutouts over two back-to-back postseasons.

Pretty cool feat. But of course, two of those shutouts came last year in that best-of-three wild-card round, which didn't exist in any year other than 2020. So I ruled that wasn't fair to all the other pitching staffs in postseason history.

Instead, let's do it this way: That was the Braves' seventh shutout in 25 postseason games over the last two years. That's been done just four other times. And it turns out that seven isn't even the Braves' record.

MOST POSTSEASON SHUTOUTS, 25-GAME SPAN

2012-16 Braves: 8

2020-21 Braves: 7

2010-14 Giants: 7*

1996-99 Yankees: 7

1958-62 Yankees: 7

*(*2012-16 Giants also did this, with most of those overlapping.)*

Last week we re-printed a piece from mlb.com about the argument that this Astros infield could be one of the best all time. Here is some more from Jayson Stark.

1. The Four October Horsemen

[Jose Altuve](#) ... [Carlos Correa](#) ... [Alex Bregman](#) ... [Yuli Gurriel](#).

There has never been an October infield like them. You know that, right? On Wednesday night at Minute Maid Park, they made that official, by setting a record that no one seemed to notice but us eagle eyes at Weird and Wild World HQ. But more on that in a moment.

Clearly, some people will look at these four men — today, tomorrow, forever — and only hear trash cans banging, only look for hidden buzzers rattling. The Four October Horsemen in that Astros infield know they can never make all that baggage and all those suspicions disappear. So it seems they've given up even trying. Good idea.

But have you noticed that all the boos never seem to make them go away? Every darned October, they're right back on this same postseason stage, exactly where we found them last year and the year before that and the year before that and the year before that.

I got to thinking about that again Wednesday night as I watched Game 2 of this World Series. I've seen this show many times before. But every time I see it, there's plenty to think about.

I watched Jose Altuve launch his 22nd postseason home run. That's the second-most in the history of baseball — hit by a guy who stands 5-foot-6. If you think that's all about secret buzzers, you've watched too many James Bond movies. (He hit his 23rd on Saturday night).

I watched Yuli Gurriel, reigning AL batting champ, lash his 16th hit of this postseason and the 67th of his career. Only three first basemen in history have more postseason hits than Gurriel has: [Albert Pujols](#) (87), Tino Martinez (83) and Steve Garvey (75).

I watched Carlos Correa get another hit. His next RBI will be the 55th of his postseason career. Just five players in history have more: Bernie Williams (78), Manny Ramirez (75), [David Ortiz](#) (60), Derek Jeter (58) and David Justice (58).

I watched Alex Bregman knock in the first run of the night. This is his 14th postseason series. He's driven in at least one run in 12 of them.

Jose Altuve ... Carlos Correa ... Alex Bregman ... Yuli Gurriel.

While you've been booing, they've been carving a place in history that is going to be hard for any infield, now or 200 years from now, to top.

Wednesday night, in their 41st postseason win as a group, they all played in their 69th consecutive postseason game together. I find that mind-blowing. You know how many infields have ever done that? Right. None. But that's not even the new news here.

What if we just ignore the positions they play? You know how many sets of four teammates — *at any position* — have ever played that many postseason games together? Yep. That, too, is none.

I asked my friends at STATS Perform to look at this Wednesday. There was a reason for that.

In Game 2 of this World Series, these four Astros — Altuve, Correa, Gurriel and Bregman — set a record I once thought would never be broken.

MOST POSTSEASON GAMES STARTED TOGETHER BY FOUR TEAMMATES

69 — Jose Altuve, Carlos Correa, Yuli Gurriel, Alex Bregman (2017-21 Astros)

68 — Derek Jeter, Bernie Williams, Tino Martinez, Paul O'Neill (1996-2001 [Yankees](#))

The good news, if you worship those four Yankees, is that those four have still *played in* (as opposed to *started*) more games together than this Astros foursome (71-69). The bad news is that by the end of this World Series, that won't be true anymore, either.

But in other news, if we're just talking about four infielders, nobody else is even in the same area code.

MOST POSTSEASON GAMES STARTED TOGETHER BY FOUR INFELDERS

65* — Jose Altuve, Carlos Correa, Yuli Gurriel, Alex Bregman (2017-21 Astros)

40 — Steve Garvey, Davey Lopes, Bill Russell, Ron Cey (1974-81 [Dodgers](#))

*(*Gurriel started four games in the outfield in 2017)*

You can hoot at them all you want. None of that is changing. So we're all going to have to grapple with what to make of these dudes for the rest of their time, the rest of our time and the rest of all time. That's complicated. So I asked [Dusty Baker](#), a man who played with that great Dodgers infield and now manages this Astros infield, to tell us what he sees.

“They expect good things to happen, and they expect to play well,” Baker said of his Four October Horsemen. “They expect to do good. I found that out last year. We had some guys struggling, and they said, ‘Well, wait till the playoffs,’ and we barely squeaked in. They said, ‘Hey, man, we’re going to turn it on in the playoffs.’ ... You don’t find many players like that, where they have the ability or the mindset or the mind control to do it.”

I then asked his second baseman if he has thought about this infield’s place in history.

“I think sometimes we fit each other, seeing stuff like everything we’ve been through, everything we accomplished together,” he said. “Before we start this World Series, we were a little impressed about making the third appearance in the last five years and playing so many games together. Because Yuli, Alex, Carlos and I, we played a lot of games together, and that means a lot. We don’t talk about history because there’s a lot of great infielders, great players. Maybe one time we will ... You never know. But I’m happy to get to play with those guys and just keep winning games.”

Four years after the 2017 cheating scandal that set their world on fire, they won another postseason baseball game Wednesday night. If they win three more over the next week, I guess we’ll have to meet back here again and *really* decide how history will judge an infield like none we’ve ever seen before.

2. Freddie’s life-changing RBI

It was the top of the eighth inning Tuesday when Freddie Freeman hit a fly ball that will change his life. Take a look at it now. Might as well. Nobody stopped the game when it happened. Nobody stepped in to deliver this historic baseball to the authenticators. Nobody made much of it at all, in fact — except, once again, those of us at Weird and Wild World HQ.

Not pictured is how delighted Freeman himself was. But that was only because he’d just driven in a valuable insurance run in the Braves’ 6-2 Game 1 win. The Braves first baseman made it clear Monday, before this World Series started, that he wasn’t thinking at all about any of his personal history. So I guess we’ll just have to think about it for him.

So what was the big deal about that RBI, on the Freddie Freeman Personal History He Doesn’t Want to Think About scale? I can help with that. Here’s what Freeman’s career stat line looked like before that signature swing of the bat.

Career regular-season Freddie RBIs — 941
Career World Series Freddie RBIs — 0

Now here’s why that sacrifice fly changed everything. Before that wave of his bat, only eight players in the World Series era (1903-2021) had more career regular-season RBIs — all for one team — than he had, while also owning zero World Series RBIs. Curious about the rest of that list? I was. So here you go.

Player/team/RBI/World Series wins

Ernie Banks	Cubs	1,636	0
Jeff Bagwell	Astros	1,529	0
Jim Rice	Red Sox	1,451	0
Edgar Martinez	Mariners	1,261	0
Luke Appling	White Sox	1,116	0
Don Mattingly	Yankees	1,099	0
Lou Whitaker	Tigers	1,084	0
Joey Votto	Reds	1,065	0

top five are all Hall of Famers. I know quite a few intelligent fellow humans who think the last three names deserve to be Hall of Famers, too.

But when a guy plays all those years for only one team, becomes the face of that franchise, spends his whole career reaching for those World Series stars and never grabs them, it leaves a void. On Tuesday in Houston, Freeman became a franchise icon who will never have to experience that void. He then added an RBI single to his collection Wednesday to keep the numbers in that column spinning.

So now that he's off the hook, here are the active players with the most RBIs for only one team, who have never had the World Series moment that Freeman had Tuesday:

Joey Votto	Reds	1,065	0
Mike Trout	Angels	816	0
Kyle Seager	Mariners	807	0
Jose Abreu	White Sox	788	0

The Astros did something Wednesday that seemed pretty normal, but has been anything but lately: They won a baseball game at home (normal) *in the World Series* (weirdly not so normal).

Until this game, teams had mysteriously lost 10 consecutive World Series games in their home park. And that's just bizarre. Heck, the last time any team won a World Series game in its home park, it took that team *18 innings and 7 hours and 20 leisurely minutes to do it*.

That was the 2018 Dodgers, in the unforgettable (unless you nodded off) [Game 3 of that World Series](#) against the [Red Sox](#). Whereupon those Dodgers never won again, and unleashed the absurd Curse of Max Muncy, a.k.a. Curse of the World Series Home Teams.

The Astros certainly have done their share to spread that curse throughout our land. But I'll get to that in a moment. First, let's look at why this home-team debacle makes no sense at all.

Home World Series teams over last 5 postseasons: 9-18 (.333 win pct.)*

Home World Series teams over last 10 postseasons: 22-28 (.440 win pct.)*

*(*2020 postseason, all at neutral sites, not included)*

Now contrast that mess with how home teams fared before that.

Home World Series teams from 1903-1999: 172-128 (.573 win pct.)

Home World Series teams from 2000-2011: 43-22 (.662 win pct.)

In other words, what the heck? But frankly, a lot of that is the fault of the Astros. And not just these Astros. Since moving into Minute Maid Park in 1999, the Astros had played 10 World Series games before Wednesday night. Their record in those 10 games: 2-8!

They went winless in two home games in their 2005 sweep by Ozzie Guillen's White Sox. But the absurdity really kicked in with the 2019 World Series, when an Astros home team that had been historically great at home all season (60-21) then lost *every one* of its four home games in that World Series against a [Nationals](#) team *that also lost every home game in that World Series*.

So had the Astros lost again Wednesday, they would have become the first team to lose six World Series home games in a row since the 1961-72 [Reds](#). But after the Game 2 win that finally put an end to all of these streaks, Altuve was asked: "Did it seem crazy to you that you had lost five straight World Series games here?"

"I think that's the thing about baseball," he said. "Nothing is guaranteed."

Yeah, that's one thing about baseball anyway. But here's another thing about baseball. And you've heard it here before:

Baseball. Makes. No. Sense!

4. Party of Four

Welcome to the part of this column where you think we're done, except no, we're not. So stick around for these four fun little Weird and Wild odds and ends that didn't fit with the rest of this opus. You won't regret it!

THE ASTROS DON'T BEAT YOU. THEY CRUSH YOU — This was the Astros' eighth victory of this postseason. We can sum up those victories up this way: *These guys don't want no stinkin' drama!* Here are the scores of those eight wins:

7-2
5-0
9-1
9-2
5-4
10-1
9-4
6-1

Well, it's not often you see any team rampage through the postseason quite like that. I asked my friends at STATS to look at all the previous teams that won at least eight games in one postseason. Then they broke down those wins. Check this out.

MOST RUNS PER GAME IN POSTSEASON WINS

Team/runs per game/runs/wins

2007 Red Sox	8	88	11
1993 Blue Jays	7.8	62	8
2002 Angels	7.7	85	11
1987 Twins	7.6	61	8
2021 Astros	7.5	60	8

Team/run differential/wins/diff per game

2007 Red Sox	66	11	6.0
1996 Braves	53	9	5.9
2021 Astros	45	8	5.6
2010 Rangers	41	8	5.1

World Series. those 2007 Red Sox won the

So what have we learned? At their best, these 2021 Astros look unstoppable. But as a wise Altuve once said ... *nothing is guaranteed*.

WORTH THE WAIT — As Braves reliever [Jesse Chavez](#) jogged in from the bullpen in the sixth inning Wednesday, my friend Tyler Kepner, of The New York Times, knew exactly what he was watching.

20 pro seasons, 9 mlb teams, 511 mlb games. Finally in a world series.

These are all the teams Chavez pitched for on the road to his World Series debut. What a list!

[Pirates](#)

Braves

[Royals](#)

[Blue Jays](#)

A's

Blue Jays

Dodgers

[Angels](#)

[Rangers](#)

[Cubs](#)

Rangers

Braves

So that's nine teams — including the Braves, Blue Jays and Rangers *twice*. So I had to know. How many pitchers in history have pitched for nine different teams before their World Series debut?

Player/debut/teams

Mike Morgan 2001 WS G1 12

Octavio Dotel 2011 WS G1 12

Arthur Rhodes 2011 WS G1 9

Jesse Chavez 2021 WS G2 9

Another Braves reliever made his World Series debut right before Chavez showed up, by the way. That was left-hander [Dylan Lee](#). So those two guys had a lot in common, except for one thing: Dylan Lee's first game in the big leagues was *four weeks ago*. And Jesse Chavez's first game in the big leagues was *in 2008!*

BREAKING LEG UPDATE DEPT.! — It was yesterday in this Weird and Wild column that I made the mistake of mentioning that, hard as we tried, we couldn't find another example of a pitcher before [Charlie Morton](#) who was tough enough to throw 16 pitches and face three more hitters after taking a rocket off his ankle *that broke his leg*.

But I'm a lucky guy, because I always have readers who will set me straight. And here's what I learned from those readers: I owe a deep apology *to the late Bob Gibson*.

In case there was any doubt that Gibson was the toughest human of his era, this dispatch from July 15, 1967, ought to dispel it. It wasn't a World Series game. But otherwise, it turns out, Charlie Morton was just reenacting another one of Bob Gibson's most legendary moments!

Thanks to loyal reader Jamie Wachter for being the first to alert me.

Bob Gibson pitched to three batters in 1967 with a broken leg after getting hit by a Clemente line drive ...

THE TRIPLE THREAT — Finally, weird things happen inside your brain when you find yourself writing *Weird and Wild* columns at 4 a.m. Here's the weird thing that happened to me Tuesday: I forgot about [Yordan Alvarez](#)!

On the surface, Air Yordan may never be confused with [Dee Strange-Gordon](#). But he just did something no other active hitter has done: *He whacked a triple for the Astros in back-to-back postseason games* (ALCS Game 6, World Series Game 1). Which is interesting for all sorts of reasons, but especially this:

YORDAN ALVAREZ TRIPLE BREAKDOWN

Games/at bats/triples

Regular season	144	537	1
Postseason	30	97	2

[Ezequiel Carrera](#)
(2016) was the last to do it. Four players did it in the first World Series ever played alone (1903).

But when a guy who only has one career regular-season triple then hits a triple in *two postseason games in a row*, there's only one possible explanation, right?

Baseball!

And the home of the Braves

You know what happens when you harken? Sometimes it's hard to stop. So we need to harken just a little longer, because that Tom Glavine game connects even more *Weird and Wild* dots.

Can we start by considering what could have happened Friday if Travis d'Arnaud hadn't homered in the bottom of the eighth to give the Braves a second run, and if [Will Smith](#) hadn't

given up a second [Astros](#) hit in the ninth? Then we would have had this, in the Braves' last two World Series home victories:

2021 Game 3 — Braves 1, Astros 0 ... Braves win a one-hitter.

1995 Game 6 — Braves 1, Indians 0 ... Braves win a one-hitter.

Awww, man. We were all set up to pull this off, too — an eerie instance of Atlanta World Series symmetry. But nope. It's always disappointing when real life doesn't cooperate with our favorite epic notes. But since it didn't, let's move along to ...

26 YEARS BETWEEN HOME WORLD SERIES WINS? — Think about this. It's hard to fathom. Between the night Tom Glavine's Braves won that 1995 World Series and Friday, the Braves won *no* World Series games in Atlanta — *for 9,497 consecutive days*.

That would be incomprehensible enough no matter what franchise we were talking about. [Cubs](#). [Red Sox](#). Hanshin Tigers. Just feels like 9,497 days is a long time. But here's why it's even more unreal:

THE TURNER FIELD DROUGHT! — The Braves spent 20 seasons playing baseball at Turner Field (1997-2016). They won *zero* World Series games there, even though Glavine, Greg Maddux and John Smoltz all started there in a World Series along the way, to no avail.

That's a lot of Cy Young Award-winning artistry that went to waste. But hang with us. Here comes the most mind-boggling part of all. In those 20 seasons, the Braves made it to the postseason *in 12 different seasons*. And they still never won a World Series game in their home park? C'mon. How was that even possible?

The more I thought about that this week, the more I thought it had to be a record. So I asked my friends at STATS Perform. And it's a record, all right, because of course it is.

Braves	12 seasons	Turner Field
Brewers	6	Miller Park
Astros	6	Astrodome
Orioles	5	Camden Yards
Rockies	5	Coors Field
Nationals	5	Nationals Park

THE BRAVES' WORLD SERIES SIX-PACK — My friend, Mike Ferrin, of MLB Network Radio, brought up this one Friday. When the Braves took the field at Truist Park, it was the *sixth* different park they've hosted a World Series game in. I'm sure you can't name them, so count along with me.

Atlanta — Truist, Turner Field, Fulton County Stadium

Milwaukee — County Stadium

Boston — Braves Field and even Fenway!

Now it helps that the Braves have been around for over a century. It especially helps that they've played in three cities. But Mike and I agreed on this: If it makes for a great note, we don't care!

So perhaps you, too, are wondering: Is six World Series parks a record for one franchise? Once again, my friends from STATS report: Heck, yeah, it is.

MOST DIFFERENT HOME WORLD SERIES PARKS*

Braves 6

Phillies 4

Giants 4

*(*not including 2020 postseason, at neutral parks)*

(Source: STATS Perform)

The Braves have won the World Series at three of those parks (Fenway, County and Fulton County). So would they set another record if they win one at Truist? I know that answer. But you'll have to wait to see if it happens to find out!

Braves 6 parks

Phillies 4

Giants 4

3. The New Mr. October: Ian Anderson!

Hey, it's time to circle back on Ian Anderson, because this is his time of year. And by "this," I obviously mean October.

For one thing, he's done nothing but dominate! Eight starts into his postseason career, Anderson's postseason ERA stands at a spectacular 1.26. And if that seems good, perhaps you'd like some evidence of exactly how good.

Earned runs became an official stat in both leagues 108 years ago. And in all of that time, only one pitcher (El Duque) has rolled up a lower ERA than Ian Anderson after his first eight starts. Here's the list, courtesy of the go-to source for all vital October info, MLB.com's Sarah Langs:

Orlando Hernández	1.22
Ian Anderson	1.26
Cliff Lee	1.26
Orel Hershiser	1.52
Stephen Strasburg	1.55

But that's not all. Ian Anderson is still considered to be "a rookie." Yet *he's already made eight postseason starts?* That's mostly because the rookie rules in that 60-game season of 2020 were, eh, different. So Anderson is more like a redshirt freshman than a "rookie." But whatever. That's not even the point.

The point is, Ian Anderson — "rookie" — has already made more postseason starts in his career than ...

- Sandy Koufax (seven)!
- Nolan Ryan (seven)!
- [Chris Sale](#) (seven)!
- Warren Spahn (six)!
- Don Drysdale (six)!
- Don Larsen (six)! And yes, it's Don Larsen Day here at Weird and Wild World HQ.

If you're thinking, "Yeah, but the "postseason" was a lot different (and shorter) in Larsen's day, Koufax's day, Spahn's day, etc., well, yep. Good point. But as I thought we explained in the last item in this column ... if it makes for a great note, we don't care!

4. Party of Four

We're almost through here. But why would you leave us now, when you can stick around and check out four fun Weird and Wild tidbits that fall into the category of: non-Ian Anderson news!

WE SUSPECT FOUL PLAY! I'm going to hazard a not-so-wild guess that Braves third baseman Austin Riley did something Friday that no one has ever done in World Series history:

Second inning — Catches a [Kyle Tucker](#) fly ball in foul territory *in right field*. (He's the third baseman!)

Eighth inning — Catches a [Jose Altuve](#) foul ball *in short left field*.

Were there shifts involved, you ask? How could there not be shifts involved, I reply. Nevertheless, I want you to consider the degree of difficulty in the same *corner infielder* catching foul balls on the right *and* left side of the diamond. How is that even possible? Easy ...

Baseball! (In 2021!)

HAPPY HALLADAYS — There have been just two no-hitters ever pitched in the history of the postseason. I don't have to fill you in on Don Larsen, right? We're up to speed on him. But who threw the other? That would be the late, great Roy Halladay, in the 2010 NLDS, against the [Reds](#).

And who managed the Reds in that game? A gentleman named ... [Dusty Baker](#) ...

Who is fortunate he didn't just become the first manager in postseason history to have his teams no-hit *twice*!

HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF — Braves reliever [Tyler Matzek](#) carved out a very Weird and Wild place in World Series history Friday, by becoming the fourth *relief pitcher* to give up his team's first hit of the night.

Game 7, 1924 — After the Giants' sneaky John McGraw used a guy named Curly Ogden as the first-ever World Series opener *for one out*, George Mogridge came in and gave up a single to the Senators' Hank Gowdy.

Game 3, 1988 — John Tudor started for the [Dodgers](#), got hurt and had to leave in the second inning. Whereupon Tim Lary replaced him and allowed a single to Glenn Hubbard.

Game 5, 2003 — David Wells started for the [Yankees](#), then didn't feel so good, and exited after one inning. José Contreras relieved him and served up the Marlins' first hit, to Alex González.

Game 3, 2021 — You heard about Ian Anderson leaving, right? A.J. Minter and [Luke Jackson](#) then pitched the sixth and seventh. The Astros were still hitless. Then it was Matzek's turn. And it was he who wound up allowing the Astros' first hit in the eighth.

So I asked Matzek afterward to set the scene and describe life in that Braves' bullpen after they all realized a World Series no-hitter had been left in their hands.

MATZEK: "Well, Luke Jackson didn't know, Minter didn't know. After I got done with my inning, they said, 'Did you know you gave up the first hit?' (I said) 'Yeah, I did know. I paid attention!'"

BASEBALL IS WEIRD — Finally, this is a thing that happened in World Series Game 3 on Friday:

Eighth inning: Braves catcher Travis d’Arnaud homers against the Astros’ [Kendall Graveman](#). And what’s so weird about that, you ask?

Graveman: *Allowed no home runs to right-handed hitters all season!*

D’Arnaud: *Hit no home runs in this, his home park, all season!*

FROM WSJ

My strategy of DVR, start watching at 9:30 pm, fast forward through the endless commercials and mound conferences, doesn’t change the late end times.

The focus in this postseason – and this World Series – should be on Freddie Freeman and Carlos Correa, on the unlikely Atlanta Braves and the powerhouse Houston Astros. With the Astros’ 7-2 victory in Game 2 on Wednesday night at Minute Maid Park, the series is tied at a game apiece as it heads to Atlanta. There is almost certainly compelling baseball to come, and there is time to talk about it.

Plenty. Of. Time.

Show of hands: How many stayed up to watch the conclusion of both Games 1 and 2? For Tuesday’s series opener, that would have meant finally flipping off the television at 12:17 a.m. Eastern time Wednesday, a full 4 hours 6 minutes after the first pitch. For Game 2, that was tightened to 3:11. Enjoy those extra Z’s.

The games are too long. Yes, they’re too slow, and they start too late. But they’re too long.

For those of us who have waked on the couch on more than an occasional October night, that feels true, if only anecdotally. But the math backs it up: Through Game 1 of the World Series, the 31 nine-inning games in this postseason averaged 3:37.

According to data provided by Major League Baseball, that was not only a full half an hour longer than the seemingly interminable regular season average of 3:10 but up from the postseason average of 3:32 last October. The range in the postseason over the past decade has generally been from a low of 3:10 and change to a high of 3:32 and change – until this year.

You still awake?

This matters. It matters for the obvious, evergreen discussion surrounding how baseball can engage younger fans if those younger fans can't stay up late enough to see the sport's most important games. It also matters in personal decision-making on how you spend your time. It's a lot easier to commit to investing in the first at-bat of a game if you have a good idea you will be comfortably awake to see the final out.

Here's a random data point: Tuesday's first pitch was thrown at 7:11 p.m. Central time. At 8:44 p.m., the Astros recorded the last out – of the third inning. Here's another random data point: Of those 31 nine-inning games this postseason, five came in under the regular season average of 3:10 – and eight lasted more than four hours.

Now, for a bit of self-awareness: This can read as a cranky, old-man complaint. It's scientifically proved that staying up past midnight, night after night after night, can cause crankiness. My birth certificate shows I'm old. I get it. Guilty.

But I also counter such accusations with the following: Show me the 10-year-old who's clamoring for a four-hour game. When the main sentiment in the postseason isn't "I hope this game never ends" but rather "When will it finally be over?" then Houston, we have a problem.

Dusty Baker's playing career spanned from 1968 to 1986. In that time, the longest nine-inning postseason game, according to the essential website baseball-reference.com, lasted 3:48. A grand total of four postseason games took as long as 3½ hours.

This October alone, Baker has managed six nine-inning games that took four hours to complete.

"Sometimes it feels slow," Baker said. "But commercial time pays the bills, and that's the reality of it all. You can cut down the commercial time, and then you got to cut down on the amount of money that's passed around."

Well, yes and no. The break between innings – Baker's "commercial time" – is 2 minutes 25 seconds during the regular season, 2:55 in the postseason. So there are nine extra minutes built into postseason games – which isn't insignificant but doesn't account for the half-hour gap between this year's regular season and playoffs.

Still, there's a good notion that MLB could shorten games – in October and over the course of the summer – by tightening the time between innings to, say, a minute and running ads in the broadcast alongside the first minute or so of action. There are ways to both pay the bills and rein in the length of game, and MLB is working on them.

"The length of the games is a major concern," said Bob DuPuy, MLB's president and chief operating officer. "It's a problem, and it's one we have to address."

So . . . wait a minute. DuPuy hasn't worked at MLB since 2010.

(Checks notes.)

Oh, that quote is from a story I wrote during the postseason – of 2007.

“There are things you can do to move the game along,” DuPuy said then. “This is going to be a priority of the commissioner’s office in the offseason.”

And yet, 14 years later, here we are, yawning and blinking our eyes clear.

In an effort to wake my brain, I texted a smattering of executives from various sides of the game Wednesday – club officials, major league officials, agents – asking for tweaks that might have some impact. One suggested seven-inning games, which feels . . . radical. Another suggested regular season series with two seven-inning games and a nine-inning matchup to finish it on, say, Sunday afternoon. One asked for both a deadened baseball and rosters limited to 12 pitchers – which I wholeheartedly endorse because, if there are fewer pitchers to use, each pitcher has to do more and there can’t be as many game-stalling switches.

One official, asked for three tweaks that would help, responded with the following: “1. Pitch timer. 2. Pitch timer. 3. Pitch timer.”

This, too, makes sense. Game 2 moved noticeably more quickly because the starting pitchers – Houston’s José Urquidy and Atlanta’s Max Fried – essentially receive the ball, get set and throw.

But not enough pitchers do, and all of baseball knows it. In the postseason, there are reasons for pitchers to slow the game down. The pressure is amplified. The heart needs calming. Each pitch matters. Inhale. Exhale. More time is needed.

Baseball, though, now has data – encouraging data – that limiting the time between pitches not only shortens the game significantly but also has ancillary benefits. This past summer, MLB experimented with a 15-second pitch clock in the eight-team Low Class A West league. The impact was immediate and obvious. Games were 21 minutes shorter than at the same level in 2019. (Minor league seasons were lost to the pandemic in 2020.) Plus, strikeouts went down and offense went up – and not just homers but balls in play, a crucial element of action that MLB is losing as pitchers and organizations optimize velocity.

(and from a piece in *The Athletic*)

A pitch clock has long been a topic of discussion as well. MLB was pleased with the [use of the clock in the minor leagues](#) this year.

“The data is certainly encouraging, game times in the 2:40s, which is really sort of a nice number when you think about it in comparison to where we’ve been,” Manfred said. “I think maybe more important than that is the people that go and watch the game fell like the pace of the game, the action in the game has really been improved, that it actually alters the requirement of moving along pitching, kind of changes the game, the way it’s played a little bit.”

In the majors, game lengths were at an all-time high in 2021: 3 hours, 10 minutes.

NPR CHIMES IN

I am a financial contributor to NPR but please...

PETA is pitching Major League Baseball to retire the term "bullpen" and use "arm barn" instead. The animal rights group says "bullpen" mocks the misery of animals and devalues players.

In baseball, a bullpen refers to both the group of relief pitchers and the physical area where the pitchers warm up.

To make the point, PETA [Twitter account](#) has at least temporarily changed its name to Arm Barn.

[PETA says](#) that cows and bulls are typically held in bullpens before they are "hung upside down and their throats are slit in the meat industry" and "tormented into kicking and bucking by being electro-shocked or prodded."

"Words matter, and baseball 'bullpens' devalue talented players and mock the misery of sensitive animals," PETA Executive Vice President Tracy Reiman said in a news release. "PETA encourages Major League Baseball coaches, announcers, players, and fans to *changeup* their language and embrace the 'arm barn' instead."

This is happening as the World Series is being played and MLB is facing continuing controversy over Atlanta Braves' fans doing the "Tomahawk chop," [which has received criticism from Native American tribes](#).

PETA's suggestion draws mixed reactions

New York Yankees outfielder Clint Frazier jokingly [advocated for the switch of terms](#) on Twitter, saying "please name it this!!!"

The Tampa Bay Rays joined in and suggested their own term: [Ray Tank](#).

Nicholas Williams of the NFL's Detroit Lions, [chimed in as well](#), tweeting, "lol I talked to the cows they said they don't care."

The origins of baseball's "bullpen" are hazy

There are many hypotheses about where "bullpen" as a baseball term originated, but it's thought to have [first been used](#) to describe where pitchers warm up in the December 1915 issue of *Baseball Magazine*.

At the turn of the century, almost every ballpark had a large bull-shaped Bull Durham tobacco billboard on the outfield wall. Relief pitchers would warm up in the shadow of the bull, and the area eventually became known as the bullpen.

Entering the 2021 World Series, only 14 teams out of 90 have come back to win a best-of-seven series after dropping three of the first four contests.

2020 NLCS: Dodgers over Braves

L.A. had the best record in the Majors in 2020 and swept the Brewers in the Wild Card Series and Padres in the Division Series before running into a stiff test against Atlanta. But the Dodgers never backed down. In the end, this was the fifth best-of-seven series in which a team overcame deficits of both [2-0](#) and 3-1.

Catcher Will Smith was the Game 5 hero, bashing a go-ahead, three-run homer in the sixth inning off the Braves reliever of the same name. In Game 6, series MVP Corey Seager and Justin Turner's back-to-back homers highlighted a three-run first that stood up behind the pitching of Walker Buehler and three relievers. Then, in a thrilling Game 7, the Dodgers had to work from behind again, facing deficits of 2-0 and 3-2 before fighting back. This time it was Cody Bellinger with the big homer, a go-ahead solo shot in the seventh, and Julio Urías went three perfect innings in relief for the win, sending the Dodgers on to face the Rays in the World Series.

2016 World Series: Cubs over Cleveland

Cleveland was familiar with 3-1 deficits, having seen LeBron James and the NBA's Cavaliers come back from a 3-1 hole against the Warriors just a few months prior. But Ohioans would see their club fall on the other side this time around, thanks to a Cubs team that was desperate to end a 108-year championship drought.

Kris Bryant, as he did throughout the 2016 postseason, came up clutch with a homer to wake up the Wrigley Field crowd in Game 5, and Addison Russell's grand slam in Game 6 sent the series to a decisive winner-take-all Game 7. Then, in one of the most memorable Fall Classic contests ever, the Cubs withstood Rajai Davis' dramatic two-run homer off Aroldis Chapman -- and a momentous rain delay -- to pull ahead on Ben Zobrist's 10th-inning RBI double. Mike Montgomery closed out the bottom half, and the "Curse of the Billy Goat" was finally over.

2012 NLCS: Giants over Cardinals

Not only did the Giants come back in this series; they did so with authority. After winning their final three games on the road to defeat the Reds in the NL Division Series, San Francisco outscored St. Louis *20-1* over the final three contests to punch its second World Series ticket in three years. A resurgent Barry Zito pitched into the eighth in Game 5, and Ryan Vogelsong struck out nine in Game 6. Series MVP Marco Scutaro notched three hits in the finale to help San Francisco seal the franchise's first-ever victory in a winner-take-all Game 7.

2007 American League Championship Series: Red Sox over Cleveland

Boston looked to be in fine shape after rocking AL Cy Young Award winner CC Sabathia in Game 1, but Cleveland stormed back for three straight victories to get the city riled up for its first Fall Classic appearance in a decade. Cleveland played the All-American Rejects' hit song "It Ends Tonight" over the loudspeakers before Game 5, but the Red Sox had other ideas. Josh Beckett dominated with 11 strikeouts to send the series back to Fenway Park, where J.D. Drew hit a grand slam to spur Boston to a 12-2 rout in Game 6. Red Sox employees played "It Ends Tonight" again before Game 7, and the home club ended things decisively, 11-2, to punch its second World Series ticket in four years.

2004 ALCS: Red Sox over Yankees

Eighty-six years of Bambino-sized baggage was wiped away over four magical nights in October, starting with Dave Roberts' daring steal and David Ortiz's walk-off homer in Game 4. Ortiz delivered again in a 14-inning marathon the following night to make the Fenway faithful believe, and Curt Schilling's "bloody sock" performance in Game 6 in the Bronx made him a folk hero in Boston. Johnny Damon's Game 7 grand slam seemed to lift whatever burden was left from the Red Sox's shoulders, as the self-proclaimed "idiots" became the first team to erase a 3-0 postseason deficit before sweeping the Cardinals for Boston's first championship since 1918.

2003 NLCS: Marlins over Cubs

Steve Bartman will always be the symbol of this heart-breaking series for the Cubs, but the North Siders had plenty of other chances to claim their first NL pennant since 1945. Beckett, the Marlins' emerging ace, twirled a two-hit shutout in Game 5, and Cubs shortstop Alex Gonzalez's error after Bartman's fateful reach helped the Marlins tie (and eventually win) Game 6. Chicago even held a 5-3 lead through four innings of Game 7, but could not hold on as Florida prevailed despite being outscored by two runs in the series.

1996 NLCS: Braves over Cardinals

The Braves' 1990s run was one of the most dominant by any team, but this series represented one of Atlanta's toughest tests. St. Louis was able to break through against Greg Maddux and Tom Glavine to win three of the first four contests, but -- like the Giants did in 2012 -- the Braves absolutely surged over the Cardinals once their backs were against the wall. Atlanta's three-headed monster of John Smoltz, Maddux and Glavine returned to form, but they didn't need to do all that much as Braves hitters ambushed St. Louis pitchers and outscored the Cardinals 32-1 over their last three victories.

1986 ALCS: Red Sox over Angels

Fatalism was near its peak in Boston when the "cursed" Red Sox quickly fell behind the Halos and appeared on the verge of another postseason exit. The Angels were within one strike of their first pennant in Game 5 before Red Sox center fielder Dave Henderson blasted a dramatic go-ahead grand slam, setting up an eventual 7-6 win in 11 innings. Given new life, Boston pulled away in the final two contests at Fenway Park before heartbreak struck again on a famous grounder through Bill Buckner's legs in Game 6 of the World Series.

1985 World Series: Royals over Cardinals

Kansas City epitomized the phrase "never say die" in 1985, overcoming a 3-1 deficit in the

ALCS before doing it *again* on the biggest stage. The Royals outscored the Cardinals 28-13 in this series, but still needed a controversial call from umpire Don Denkinger to squeak out a 2-1 win in Game 6 and stay alive. K.C. capitalized on its good fortune with an 11-0 blowout of the Cardinals in Game 7, with ace Bret Saberhagen twirling a five-hit shutout to seal the franchise's first World Series championship.

1985 ALCS: Royals over Blue Jays

As mentioned, this Royals club really was a team of destiny. Kansas City took full advantage of the first year of the best-of-seven LCS format, starting with Danny Jackson's eight-hit shutout in a must-win Game 5. George Brett hit his third homer of the series to power the Royals to a 5-3 win in Game 6, and the star trio of Saberhagen, Charlie Leibrandt and Dan Quisenberry helped K.C. close out Game 7 at Toronto's Exhibition Stadium.

1979 World Series: Pirates over Orioles

The 1979 "We Are Family" Pirates were probably one of the loosest World Series champions, with captain Willie Stargell leading a big comeback over a supremely talented Orioles squad. Stargell hit an even .400 with three homers -- including a crucial dinger late in Game 7 -- to become the first player to capture the regular season, NLCS and World Series MVP Awards all in the same season. Pirates pitchers held Baltimore to two total runs over the last three games as Pittsburgh earned its second seven-game World Series triumph over the Orioles in a span of nine years.

1968 World Series: Tigers over Cardinals

If you like vintage pitching performances, this series is for you. Bob Gibson outdueled Denny McLain, baseball's last 30-game winner, in Games 1 and 4 to put St. Louis on the verge of a second straight title, but Mickey Lolich stemmed the tide with his second win of the series in Game 5 in Detroit. McLain came back on two days' rest to nearly twirl a shutout in the Tigers' 13-1 rout in Game 6, setting up a dream winner-take-all matchup between Gibson and Lolich in St. Louis. The aces traded zeroes for six frames before Jim Northrup hit a two-run triple over Curt Flood's head in center field, and that was all Lolich -- also pitching on two days' rest -- would need in Detroit's 4-1 win.

1958 World Series: Yankees over Braves

Hank Aaron and the Braves shocked the Yankees with a seven-game triumph in 1957, and came oh so close to doing it again the following autumn. Warren Spahn and Lew Burdette -- who beat the Yankees three times in '57 -- combined for victories in three of the first four games, but the Yankees finally solved Burdette with six runs off the righty to stay alive in Game 5. Spahn went into the 10th inning in Game 6 before giving up a pair of runs, and Braves pinch-hitter Frank Torre lined out to end the game with Aaron representing the tying run at third base. That was the break the Yankees needed, as Bob Turley pitched 6 2/3 innings of one-run ball in relief and the pinstripes beat Burdette again, 6-2, in Game 7 in Milwaukee.

1925 World Series: Pirates over Senators

The legendary Walter Johnson had finally claimed his first championship with a heroic Game 7 performance in 1924, but his luck ran out in another Game 7 the following year. Monsoon-like rain and heavy fog created perhaps the worst playing conditions of any World Series game in

history, and the Senators' two blown leads didn't do anything to boost Johnson's morale. Kiki Cuyler's eighth-inning, two-run double off Washington's ace erased an original 4-0 deficit for the Pirates, who pulled off the first 3-1 comeback in postseason history.

INTERESTING THINK PIECE FROM MLB.COM

If there's a Big Narrative of this postseason, it is clearly found in the unconventional way that starting pitchers have been used. After all, starters have thrown only 46% of postseason innings, easily a new all-time low. "Openers" are common, and starting pitchers, even accomplished ones, being yanked in the fourth inning is more an expectation than an exception.

That's not exactly the *plan* -- several starters have been injured, or ineffective, and surely the effects of a full season's workload following 2020's shortened year have something to say about all of this -- but there's something different going on, too. It's not just about starters being lifted from games early. It's about them entering late, as relievers, in situations where they would never appear in the regular season, often on their "throw day."

This has come with mixed results, and often a price to pay in the next start, because they're not at full strength -- or so it seems.

"It's just a challenge on your arm," said future Hall of Famer Max Scherzer on the TBS broadcast during the National League Championship Series. "We're so used to going out there and having a routine every five days."

[Scherzer entered in relief](#) to finish out Game 5 of the NL Division Series against the Giants, then lasted only 79 pitches three days later in a 5-4 loss to Atlanta in NLCS Game 2. [He admitted afterwards that](#) his "arm was dead ... I could tell when I was warming up that it was still tired." Worse still, Scherzer was later [deemed unavailable](#) to make his Game 6 start entirely, forcing Walker Buehler to start on short rest in a 4-2 loss that [sent the Braves to the World Series](#).

"There is a cost," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said after Game 2, and he might have learned that lesson in more ways than one. Later in the same game, he brought in starter Julio Urías in the eighth inning. That appearance [did not go well](#); worse, when Urías returned on two days' rest to start [Game 4](#), he clearly didn't have his best stuff and allowed three home runs, putting the Dodgers in a 3-1 series hole.

That all seems bad. But on the other hand, Boston's Nathan Eovaldi also started on two days' rest [on Friday](#) after having appeared in relief, just like Scherzer did, and he was quite effective, allowing just one run while working into the fifth.

So: Is there a cost? How much of one? What does it mean to (potentially) increase your chances in the late innings of one big game while (possibly) injuring your chances in the early innings of a different big game?

To find out what might be ahead, let's look backwards. Let's try to find as many similar instances of a starting pitcher appearing in relief in the playoffs as we can.

1) Is this really happening more often?

You might wonder why we're bothering with this part. You have eyes, you can see it happening right in front of you. *Of course it's happening more.* But is it, really? It depends on how you look at it.

Answering that, in itself, proved tricky. What's a "starting pitcher," anyway? We settled on these three rules, excluding 2020 because the schedule was compressed, there were no travel days and just the general *2020-ness* of it all.

- The pitcher must have A) started at least five games in a season *and* B) started at least 70% of the games they appeared in during that season, to try to avoid openers.
- The pitcher had to have started at least one postseason game after appearing in relief, partially to eliminate the back-end regular-season starters who were never going to be in the playoff rotation anyway, but mostly because the entire point of this is *what happens in your next start?* This also served to eliminate starters who threw the final pitch of their team's season -- like [Madison Bumgarner in 2014](#), or [Charlie Morton in '17](#), or [Chris Sale in '18](#), because there's no "next" anything to worry about after that.
- That post-relief start had to have come on three days of rest or less, because things like Don Robinson (who had made 32 regular-season starts) getting to start on [20 days' rest](#) in the earthquake-delayed 1989 World Series hardly seems to count.

That last bit is somewhat imperfect, because it's not accounting for the added cost of a relief appearance potentially pushing back your start entirely, elevating another pitcher to start instead -- like what just happened to Scherzer -- but that's a little more than we can accommodate for here. (A good example of this was in 1999, when John Smoltz, relieving on a throw day for the second time that October, [retired just one of the five Mets](#) he faced in Game 6 of the 1999 NLCS, then did not start a World Series game until Game 4, a week later.)

Taking all that into account, we were left with 67 pitchers who entered in relief, then started on three days of rest or less immediately after, comprising 80 times. (Rick Porcello somehow did this *four* times over the years.)

It has happened 31 times since 2010. It happened 50 times over the previous century. So yes, it's more, kind of, but it's also a trick question, because there are simply *more playoff games*

now. Before 1969, the league champions went directly to the World Series. The first Division Series came about in 1995, and then the second Wild Card arrived in 2012. There were seven postseason games in 1968, for example. There were 38 in 2017.

So taken as a percentage of all postseason games, is it happening more often? It's only happened in 5% of this year's games, which is not unusual. But it's happened at least once every year for the last 11 (non-2020) postseasons, which is.

(A special note here for the 1985 Kansas City Royals, who were well ahead of their time. They had [five starters](#) make 158 of their starts that season, yet in the playoffs, four of them -- all but ace Bret Saberhagen -- made relief appearances.)

It's not like starters never pitched in relief in the playoffs before 2010, anyway. In 1988, NL Cy Young Award winner Orel Hershisier got the save in [Game 4](#) of the NLCS. Three days later, Dwight Gooden entered to relieve an ineffective Ron Darling in [Game 7](#) ... while Hershisier, on two days' rest, [was pitching a shutout](#). There are similar examples throughout history, it's just that for the first seven decades or so of modern baseball history, the regular-season champs went directly to the World Series. So if this is happening more, it's at least partially because there are more opportunities for it to.

2) Did the starters pitching in relief even help?

They'd better have, right? If you bring your starter in, risking his ability to make a next start at full strength, you'd better hope he's making it worth your effort. For example, it worked out incredibly well in the [2019 NL Wild Card Game](#), when Stephen Strasburg pitched three scoreless innings of relief to follow Scherzer. It wasn't quite so tidy in [Game 4 of the ALCS this year](#), when Eovaldi entered a tied ninth inning and along with Ryan Brasier helped turn a 2-2 tie into a 9-2 Astros victory.

For the most part, though, the answer is: The starters relieving were quite good. Our starters-as-relievers posted these numbers throughout the years:

- 436 PA
- .263 OBP
- .564 OPS
- Only 6 home runs -- and 2 of those came back in the 1923 World Series

It's difficult to know exactly which reliever would have entered instead of that starter on that day, but generally speaking, relievers in the postseason all-time have allowed a .316 OBP and a .685 OPS, so this is better. (As you'd expect; top starters are top starters for a reason.)

More recently, since 2010, (again excluding 2020), it's looked like this:

- 137 PA
- .272 OBP
- .560 OPS
- 2 home runs

All relievers since 2010 have allowed a .305 OBP and a .677 OPS, so our starters have performed quite well.

The recent misadventures of Urías and Eovaldi aside, the starters-as-reliever gambit has generally paid off, which isn't terribly unexpected; after all, the types of pitchers who do this are usually elite names, like Smoltz, or Scherzer, or Strasburg, or Sale, or Noah Syndergaard, or Catfish Hunter or so on.

You might remember Jon Lester in 2017, when the Game 2 starter threw 3 2/3 quality relief innings in [Game 4](#), or Smoltz finishing off [Game 2](#) of the 1999 NLCS, or Hunter replacing Rollie Fingers to finish off [Game 1](#) of the 1974 World Series. You probably *don't* remember Cubs starter Hank Borowy throwing four innings of scoreless relief in [Game 6](#) of the 1945 World Series in between starting Games 5 and 7, but it happened, in a considerably different time.

"It's the playoffs," Scherzer said on the broadcast. "You want to be in those situations. You want to be out there with the ball in your hands. So even though it's a challenge, you welcome it."

3) What have the outcomes of the next start looked like?

What you really care about, though, is what it means for the next start. You care about if using, say, Urías over Justin Bruihl was worth what it cost the Dodgers in his poor start in Game 4.

Remember how we said you didn't remember Borowy? You probably also didn't remember, then, that after those four scoreless relief innings in 1945's Game 6, he started Game 7 on one day of rest ... and promptly [allowed hits to the first three batters he faced](#) before being removed. It was the closest the Cubs would come to a ring for another seven decades.

We don't have velocity or pitch-level data throughout history, but it makes sense enough that an incredibly high-pressure relief appearance is somewhat more stressful than throwing in the bullpen.

"I had no idea I could shut them out on only two days' rest," [Hershiser said](#) about his start against the Mets in 1988. "My mechanics were very bad for about the first two or three innings. Finally I got into a groove and made some adjustments."

This time, we'll look at it differently, because unlike the uncertainty over which reliever a starter might be replacing, here we have a much easier comparison point to make. We can look at our 67 starters on three-days-or-less rest after a postseason relief appearance, and we can compare them to themselves in all other postseason starts.

Starts on three days of rest after a relief appearance:

Innings per start: 5.8

Runs allowed/9: 3.71

All other postseason starts by same pitchers:

Innings per start: 6.0

Runs allowed/9: 4.08

That's all-time, though. If we look just since 2010, the gap does become almost imperceptible. The pitchers on short rest? 4.24 RA/9 over 5.1 innings/start. On regular rest? 4.20 RA/9 over 5.6 innings/start. It might not be better, really not as the all-time numbers would indicate. But it certainly doesn't seem *worse*, does it?

Pitchers who have started after relieving like this go slightly shorter after that quick turnaround, which is expected, and don't allow more runs. That is surprising, though maybe it shouldn't be; there are [tons of examples of great short rest starts](#) throughout history. Eovaldi, as we said, was good on Friday.

Even within our group of pitchers, you can cherry-pick some examples. Take Scherzer, who admitted he felt affected by the maneuver earlier this month. But in 2019, he did something similar, throwing a dominant inning of relief in Game 2 of the NLDS ([striking out the side](#)); then on two days' rest in [Game 4](#), he threw seven one-run innings. In 1997, Denny Neagle threw three innings of scoreless relief in Game 1 of the NLCS, then threw a shutout against the Marlins on three days' rest in [Game 4](#).

It doesn't always work out that cleanly, of course, with massive highs and lows. But in the aggregate, and relatively few examples we have to look at it, it doesn't seem like it's affected these pitchers as much as you would have thought, and the managers get the benefit of their talent in their relief appearances, too.

Importantly, though, remember what we're looking at here. We are *not* looking at "starters on short rest." We are looking at "starters on short rest after a relief appearance," which really means we're looking at only the best starters in the first place.

We can do one more thing, though. Something more telling.

4) When have those starters begun to hit the wall?

Scherzer talked about his arm feeling tired, and it wasn't hard to see it in the data. [You could see it in real time](#), that his velocity had begun to dip. He's also 37, and [only two pitchers have thrown more pitches than he has](#) (more than 43,000) since pitch tracking came online in 2008.

But it's not always about velocity. In fact, in our group of pitchers, looking inning by inning, you can't really see much difference. Instead, it's about something harder to quantify. It's about command, or control. It's about feel.

"I felt like the ball was coming out good, so no issues on that part," [said then-Arizona starter Robbie Ray in 2017](#) after walking four Dodgers, hitting a fifth, and uncorking three wild pitches in Game 2 of the NLDS on two days' rest after relieving. "I was just a little bit all over the place."

Kershaw, speaking after a rough outing on short rest in Game 1 of the 2018 World Series, didn't worry about velocity so much as he did movement. "[The] slider wasn't very good tonight," [he said](#). "'Didn't have the depth, kind of flat in the zone, and they made me pay for it. All the way around, wasn't a great night.'" He allowed 10 hitters to reach in four innings.

So instead of looking at velocity, we'll look for effectiveness. Let's check into inning-by-inning swing-and-miss rate. For this, we'll stick to only appearances since 2010, which leaves us with 20 pitchers who have started a postseason game on short rest after a relief appearance.

Again, these are mostly top guys, like Scherzer, Sale, Roy Oswalt and so on.

For the first three-plus innings, there's really no difference between a short start after a relief appearance and a long one. (That each are lower than the regular season is to be expected, since the quality of hitter you're facing in the playoffs is better.)

But while the regular season swing-and-miss holds steady ... and the regular rest postseason starts decline slightly after the fifth inning ... the short rest starts *collapse*. This is the thing to watch for.

Since only three of our starters failed to complete four innings, that's a reflection of performance, not availability, for the next three innings, though no one has managed to get a single out in the eighth inning in one of these games in years.

So that, maybe, is your takeaway. If you have a top-end pitcher, you might do well to get some outs in relief in a big spot, because that starter is likely better than the reliever you might otherwise use. If you're comfortable with that starter going only four or five innings in their next start, then you might not have lost much. But if you had hopes for going deeper than that, you've probably cost yourself that opportunity.

It doesn't always work out. We just remember those times a lot more than the ones that do.

AND A POINT OF VIEW FROM THE ATHLETIC

Will the 2021 MLB playoffs spell the end of starters pitching in relief?

About a month before the 2014 American League wild-card game, as members of the [Kansas City Royals](#) front office and coaching staff strategized about facing a one-game playoff, they diagnosed a problem with their roster.

“The sixth inning was a little bit of a black hole,” manager [Ned Yost](#) said.

The team was built on preventing runs. The bullpen featured three elite relievers, each assigned an inning. [Kelvin Herrera](#) pitched the seventh. [Wade Davis](#) handled the eighth. [Greg Holland](#) closed the ninth. That left a gap, should starter [James Shields](#) hit the rocks in the sixth. The group scoured the roster and pored over the numbers. The best option for the bridge, they decided, was rookie starter [Yordano Ventura](#).

Ventura had pitched only once in relief in the majors. The team prepped him for the potential role. When the Royals hosted Oakland in the wild-card game, Ventura sat in the bullpen. Yost wanted to use him. When Shields put two runners aboard in the sixth, Ventura stepped into the breach. He came out throwing 99 mph heat ... and promptly served up a three-run homer to Oakland designated hitter [Brandon Moss](#).

Had the Royals not staged an improbable rally, recovering to win and eventually capture the American League pennant, the move with Ventura might have been the defining tactical decision of Yost’s managerial tenure. It might have cost him his job. Instead, it merely gave Yost a unique perspective on a nascent trend in the 2021 playoffs, as [Dodgers](#) manager Dave Roberts and [Red Sox](#) manager Alex Cora attempted to use starters in relief before falling in the respective League Championship Series. Even managers who have used starters in relief in playoff games are wondering why managers keep using starters in relief in playoff games.

“The scenario, for me, was one winner-take-all game,” Yost told *The Athletic* last week while taking a break from organizing a cornhole tournament for a family vacation on a white-sand beach in Florida. “I don’t think I would have ever done that in a five-game or a seven-game series. For me, it was just too valuable to spend an inning in a starter’s arm when I might need him two days down the road. It’s been interesting seeing the way these guys are doing this.”

The phenomenon did not begin this October. The [Rangers](#) tried [Derek Holland](#) in between starts in 2011. [John Lackey](#) handled an inning for Boston in 2013. [Madison Bumgarner](#) emerged from the bullpen, three days after pitching a shutout, to close out Yost’s Royals during the final five innings of the 2014 World Series. Cora leaned on a variety of starters on the way to a championship in 2018. Roberts has made the practice something of a signature during his six consecutive playoff berths.

The strategy may have peaked in 2021. Cora and Roberts saw how consequential the risk can be, even when the potential reward is so tantalizing.

After three solid starts this October, Boston pitcher [Nathan Eovaldi](#) took a loss in Game 4 of the American League Championship Series as a reliever and again as a starter in Game 6. The Dodgers' plans blew up, in part, because they threw [Max Scherzer](#) and [Julio Urías](#) in relief. Urías followed the same script as Eovaldi; he lost an eighth-inning lead in Game 2 and got knocked around in his Game 4 start. The consequences with Scherzer were more dire. He informed the Dodgers he could not pitch Game 6 because his arm felt "overcooked" after three outings in a seven-day window.

Roberts understood the practice was not perfect. He often referenced "the cost" of the move. But what happened with Scherzer surprised him, he said.

"Could I foresee where we're at right now? No," Roberts said before a season-ending loss in Game 6. "But we still have to make the decision that gets us to this point."

Under Roberts' stewardship, the Dodgers had taken these chances before. The risks are twofold. Wrenched out of his comfort zone, the starter might stumble in relief. Or, the interruption of the pitcher's routine might affect his next outing. [Clayton Kershaw](#) experienced both sides of that coin. It is easy to recall how he stumbled in Game 5 of the 2019 National League Division Series against Washington. But there was also a downside to the clean relief innings he threw in the 2016 NLDS and the 2018 NLCS. On both occasions, his body suffered from the sort of fatigue that stopped Scherzer this weekend.

"There's a cost to everything," Kershaw said. "I think in order to have the best success in postseason, you have to try to keep guys as much in their roles as you possibly can. Now, with that said, sometimes you have no other choice, and you have to win the game. I think balancing that as much as you can is really important."

The Dodgers found the right balance only a year ago. A critical element in their championship run was the ability of Urías to steal innings when he wasn't starting. Urías gobbled up the final nine outs in the last game of the National League Championship Series against Atlanta and the final seven outs against the [Rays](#) in the World Series.

In 2021, Urías emerged as a full-time member of the starting rotation. He was less eligible to play the swingman role — which made his disastrous inning against Atlanta more surprising to witness.

[Astros](#) general manager James Click had a quick answer when asked if his organization harbored an overarching philosophy about starters relieving: "No." He noted how much the sport still did not know about the practice.

"I think it's part of a larger trend around the game, that the line between starting and relieving is blurring around baseball," Click said as the Astros worked out at Minute Maid Park to prepare to host Atlanta in Game 1 of the World Series on Tuesday. "In a lot of ways, we are still in an information-gathering stage. I know a lot of people have made comments about (how) Scherzer pitched in relief and how it affected his start, (how) Eovaldi pitched in relief and how it affected his start. I don't know that we have enough examples of that to draw any firm conclusions. We're in the anecdote stage. We're not in the data stage."

How long the industry remains in the former stage, Click continued, depends on what exactly you're looking for.

"If we're talking about the highly granular data, the Trackman data, if there's data that teams have themselves — maybe they're testing guys in the locker room and seeing how they respond and how they are — you might be able to draw some conclusions very, very quickly," he said. "If you're just going to base it on how many runs a guy allowed and how many innings he went — yeah, you're going to need a ton more data."

The process could become refined in the coming years. Or it might be abandoned. The [Braves](#) have not asked a starter to appear in relief. The Astros have more fluid roles. [Zack Greinke](#), a 219-game winner over his 18-year [MLB](#) career, pitched as an opener in the ALCS. [Cristian Javier](#) started nine games in the regular season but now resides in the bullpen. The team has not attempted anything exotic with [Framber Valdez](#), [Luis Garcia](#) or [Jose Urquidy](#).

Yost has watched these playoffs, in bits and pieces, from his farm in Georgia. He retired in 2019. He had grown weary of some of the game's evolution, but he remained supportive of the people in it. Which was why this October's bullpen trend piqued his interest.

Yost stressed that he did not mean to criticize any current manager. He expressed his respect for Cora and Roberts. The trio have combined to win three of the past six World Series. But Yost learned the game in a different era from the one this current crop came up in. He marveled at how the modern manager "exhaustingly searches for the advantage."

"These guys have talked about these scenarios for hours and hours and hours," Yost said. "It's not just 'Oh, hey, let's throw Eovaldi out there.' I'm not privy to all the information and all the data that they have that allows them to be comfortable to make these decisions."

"In a five-game or seven-game series, I don't think anything could make me comfortable to do it. But that's why I'm growing gardens and they're still managing."

AND KEN ROSENTHAL ENTERS THE DISCUSSION

You know what is going to make me scream when the players and owners stage their usual mud fight during labor negotiations? Not if a lockout occurs when the current agreement expires on Dec. 1; I'm pretty much expecting that. No, what will send me over the edge is if the parties get so dug in on economic issues they forget to fix the product, the state of starting pitching in particular.

Let Game 3 of the 2021 World Series stand as the latest example of a sport that has lost its way, valuing efficiency over entertainment almost to the point of absurdity. I say "almost" because what the [Braves](#) did in [removing Ian Anderson from a no-hitter](#) after five innings and 76 pitches on Friday night made sense the way games are currently managed. The strategy worked, too, at least for one night, with Atlanta's four top relievers combining to allow just two hits and [complete a 2-0 shutout](#) of the [Astros](#). Whether it exacts a toll with the Braves planning bullpen games for Games 4 and 5 remains to be seen.

The reasons for pulling Anderson started with the dreaded third-time-through-the-order scenario that teams treat practically as an electric fence, leading to automatic cause for removal with most starters. With the top of the Astros' order due up a third time in the sixth, it hardly mattered that Anderson needed just nine pitches to get through the previous inning. Manager [Brian Snitker](#) congratulated him on a job well done, and the bullpen carousel began.

Anderson threw almost as many balls (37) as strikes (39) so it wasn't as if he was in total command. He also is at 145 1/3 innings for the season after working just 51 in the shortened 2020 campaign. Snitker said, quite accurately, "He wasn't going to throw a nine-inning no-hitter." And against the Astros' offense, the highest-scoring in the majors during the regular season, one slip can snowball. The Astros produced a seven-run inning in Game 4 of the ALCS, a five-run inning in Game 5 and a four-run inning in Game 2 of the World Series.

We get it, all of it. And yet, the trend still stinks. The best starting pitchers — [Max Scherzer](#), [Gerrit Cole](#), [Jacob deGrom](#), etc. — are stars who sell tickets and attract TV viewers, ranking among the top entertainers in the sport. The days they pitch are events. Even casual fans get caught up in their achievements. And yet, the way the game is evolving, the species is becoming virtually extinct, especially in the postseason, when the audiences are largest and the games matter most.

Only 43 percent of the starts this postseason have gone five or more innings, by far the lowest percentage since the start of divisional play in 1969, according to STATS Perform. The rise of "bullpenning," in which teams maximize their entire staffs to win games, is not the sole reason for the decline. As former Astros executive Kevin Goldstein, now with FanGraphs, said Friday night [on Twitter](#), referring to the shortened 2020 season, "2020 was bizarre, '21 is being directly impacted by it, and I think this is more outlier as opposed to saying this is how it is now. I think we'll return to '18-'19 styles (more pen but not this crazy) next year."

Maybe. But I don't trust teams to get there, not when their only mission is to win and the use of one faceless reliever after another, most throwing in the upper 90s with hellacious secondary

stuff, has proven to be effective. No, teams must be forced to change the way they draft, develop and deploy pitching. And the good news — yes, there *is* good news — is that such change is within reach.

The gradual implementation of two new rules, one limiting the size of a pitching staff, the other requiring a team to lose its DH once it removes its starting pitcher, would be the first step. Such rules would need to be negotiated into the new collective bargaining agreement, but the revival of starting pitching would benefit both players, leading to higher salaries for a larger number of pitchers, and owners, improving the product and generating greater interest. Repeat after me: *Everyone would win*. Of course, labor relations in this sport are so contentious, even when the parties share a similar goal, they sometimes find it difficult to agree on how to fulfill it — see, the [universal DH](#).

In the case of starting pitching, a foundation already is in place. Prior to the 2020 season, the league enacted a rule to limit the number of pitchers a club can carry to 13. The rule never went into effect because of the disruption caused by COVID-19, but now that the sport is again playing 162-game seasons, it would be the right place to begin. The parties could agree to reduce the number to 12 in two years, and then 11 two years after that if the desired effect is not taking place. The smaller the staff, the larger the number of innings each pitcher would need to work.

Merely reducing the size of staffs, though, would not be enough. If each club was only permitted to carry say, 11 pitchers, an enterprising team such as the [Rays](#) might train every pitcher to throw only three innings and attempt to navigate each game with only three pitchers. The effect would be counter-productive, which is where [Jayson Stark's proposed double-hook rule](#) — hook your pitcher, then hook your DH — enters the equation.

The double-hook rule is a clear incentive to allow starting pitchers to go deeper in games. Combine it with a restriction on the sizes of pitching staffs, and rosters would start to look different. Teams would use the extra spots for position players and additional bench bats, veteran professional hitters who would fill the void once the DH is out of the game.

The new rules, then, would complement each other nicely. But the sport's mission needs to run deeper. To truly revive starting pitching, teams must shift their entire philosophies, placing a renewed emphasis on developing pitchers rather than throwers. The league could sound the warning this offseason, telling teams to start adjusting the way they draft and develop pitching, or else they will be at a competitive disadvantage as the new rules are phased in.

Teams then would be forced to develop pitchers the way they once did, focusing first on fastball command, then an effective breaking ball, then a changeup and perhaps a sinker — all the weapons necessary for pitchers to retire left-handed and right-handed hitters, work both sides of the plate, get through batting orders a third time, work deep into games.

The trickle-down effect would seep into the amateur system, forcing companies like Perfect Game to emphasize full repertoires and repeatable deliveries rather than just throwing fastballs and spinning breaking balls as hard as possible. Slowly but surely, the game would revert back to its previous form. Only 15 pitchers threw 200 innings in 2019, baseball's last full season before COVID-19. Nearly three times that many, 44, reached that total just 20 years before.

We are talking about a crisis, one both players and owners need to prioritize. The focus of all labor negotiations is economics, and the parties certainly have much to sort out on that front. But an agreement that includes adjustments to the game's economic structure without improvements in the actual product would ring hollow. Let Game 3 of the 2021 World Series be the final example of all that must change. Starting pitching is dead. Long live starting pitching.

MVP FROM A LOSING TEAM

It's been 61 years since former Yankees second baseman Bobby Richardson had a World Series for the ages. Yes, when people think of the 1960 Fall Classic, they think of Bill Mazeroski's Game 7 homer -- the first series-clinching walk-off HR in MLB history -- that gave the Pirates their first championship since '25. But Richardson was the man, and MVP, of that seven-game series, the only player in baseball history to win the award on the losing team.

Richardson set the record for the most RBIs in the series with 12, which still stands today. Former Yankees public relations director Marty Appel calls him every October to tell him that the record is still intact.

"Appel knows that in Sumter, South Carolina, we don't always follow [the record] really close," the 86-year-old Richardson said via telephone. "So he makes sure I know."

Richardson said he sometimes runs into Pirates fans while vacationing on Pawleys Island in South Carolina, and they will tell him that Mazeroski was the MVP.

"It's nothing personal. They are good baseball fans," Richardson said. "The average person doesn't realize [what I did]."

Richardson was awarded a Corvette for winning the MVP, but he traded it in for a Jeep. Richardson had a wife and three children at the time, and he couldn't fit a family of five into that Corvette. But he bought that same Corvette from an Oldsmobile dealership a year later. By the time he bought the car, the driver before him had driven it for 9,000 miles.

Richardson's best performance in the 1960 series was Game 3, when he hit a grand slam against right-hander Clem Labine in the first inning. Before he stepped to the plate, Richardson expected manager Casey Stengel to pinch-hit for him. The skipper often pulled him out of games during the early innings.

“What Stengel would do was holler out, ‘Hold that gun.’ Everybody knew what that meant,” Richardson explained. “It meant come on back and [someone] would hit for you. I was listening for that and I didn’t hear it.

“I was trying to hit the ball on the right side. Labine threw the ball inside. I hit it hard, but while rounding first base, the left fielder, Gino Cimoli, had gone to the fence and he was looking at his glove. I thought he caught it and then I saw the umpire at second base give me the home run sign. Every time I came up to bat, there were men on base that series. I set a record that [has] lasted six decades.”

But being MVP isn’t all he remembers from that World Series. Richardson didn’t like the way Stengel managed that series, and remembers looking at teammates crying in the locker room after Mazeroski ended it. In tears, Mickey Mantle told his teammates, “We were the better team.” After all, the Yankees outscored the Pirates, 55-27.

“Stengel was fired after the series,” Richardson said. “He said he was fired because he was 72 years old. But really he was fired because he didn’t start Whitey Ford [in the first game]. We never understood that. Whitey pitched two shutouts that series. ... I would bet you \$100 that he would have pitched another shutout. He would have been on top of his game for that first game. It had to be something I don’t know about.”

The 1960 Fall Classic wasn’t Richardson's only success. He was in the postseason seven times and posted a career .305 batting average with 15 RBIs in the playoffs. He is proud that he collected seven hits off Cardinals great Bob Gibson in the '64 World Series, “but I made the last out,” Richardson said. And, despite the '60 loss, he is quick to point out he won two World Series, in '61 and '62.

THE PITCHER WHO NEARLY TOSSED A SERIES NO-NO

Bill Bevens was one out away from immortality

There have only been [two postseason no-hitters](#) in baseball's long and glorious history: Roy Halladay -- who shut down the Reds in Game 1 of the 2010 NLDS -- and Don Larsen, who hurled a perfect game against the Dodgers in Game 5 of the 1956 World Series.

“Sometimes a week might go by when I don’t think about that game,” [Larsen said in 2005](#), “but I don’t remember when it happened last.”

Despite the hundreds of postseason games and the all-time greats who have taken the hill, no one else has ever pulled off the feat.

But one pitcher came tantalizingly close, pitching 8 2/3 no-hit innings ... before it all fell apart. This is the story of Bill Bevens' brush with greatness.

Signed by the Yankees in 1937, Bevens' career nearly sputtered and stalled in the Minor Leagues. He was transferred to the Pacific Coast League during World War II to be closer to home in case he was drafted, which ended up not happening since he was 26 years old and married. Brought back to Newark in 1944, Bevens sparkled and later made his big league debut, going 4-1 with a 2.68 ERA. He may not have been blessed with great stuff, but he put together some phenomenal seasons over the next two years, going 29-22 with a 2.84 ERA. He was the Yankees' second-best pitcher behind Spud Chandler.

Then came 1947. Bevens' numbers took a bit of a dip -- his ERA rose to a career-worst 3.82 and he walked as many batters as he struck out -- while the Yankees added Allie Reynolds and rookie Spec Shea, strengthening the rotation on their way to the World Series. It all came down to Bevens starting Game 4 of the World Series against the Brooklyn Dodgers, with the Yankees up 2 games to 1.

Never known for having the best command, few fans would have expected greatness from how his start began. Bevens walked two batters in the first, another in the second and walked another and threw a wild pitch in the third. He pitched his lone 1-2-3 inning in the fourth before two walks and a fielder's choice gave the Dodgers a run in the fifth to cut the lead to 2-1. Still, whenever the Dodgers were able to put the ball in play, the Yankees easily converted them to outs.

Bevens then walked a batter each in the sixth, seventh and eighth -- *and* still the hits column for Brooklyn was a sparkling goose egg. If the game was being played today, there's not a chance he would still be out there. Even Edwin Jackson's [eight-walk no-hitter](#) in the regular season had fans sweating -- and that wasn't a World Series.

With the Yankees still clinging to that 2-1 lead, Bevens came out to finish off the bottom of the ninth and secure his place in history. With just three more outs, he would be the first pitcher to throw a World Series no-no.

Catcher Bruce Edwards, who had struck out in his previous three appearances, hit a deep fly out to left for the first out.

Carl Furillo, naturally, walked.

Spider Jorgensen then popped out to first base for the second out, bringing up the pitcher's spot in the lineup.

Pete Reiser, a former batting champ who had hit .309 during the year, stepped to the plate as a pinch-hitter. After Al Gionfriddo, pinch-running for Furillo, stole second, the Yankees chose the safe move: They gave Reiser an intentional pass – Bevens' 10th walk of the day. (While it's perhaps the least talked about part of this game, Bevens *does* still hold the record for [most walks in a postseason game](#).)

With runners on first and second now, the Dodgers made another move. In place of Eddie Stanky, they called upon 34-year-old Cookie Lavagetto to pinch-hit. Nearing the end of his big league career, Lavagetto had appeared in 41 games that year and racked up only 82 plate appearances. Little did he know he was about to become a hero.

Bevens got a swing and a miss on the first pitch. Two more strikes and the game was over, a World Series victory and a no-hitter -- no matter how sloppy -- in hand.

"High and away" -- that's where Bevens threw the pitch. "That's what my instructions were -- high and away. He couldn't hit away," Bevens said.

But on this day, Lavagetto *could* reach it. He smacked a fly ball out to right field and it dropped in for a double as Gionfriddo and Eddie Miksis, pinch-running for Reiser, raced around the bases to score.

When the ball dropped, Bevens' mood went with it. "[I] felt like a guy who had dropped ten stories in an elevator. My heart and my brains and everything was right down by my spikes."

The game was over, but certainly not how Bevens imagined it. The Yankees had lost, 3-2.

"Those bases on balls," Bevens said in the clubhouse afterward, "sure kill you,"

It was a somber walk back to the clubhouse. The Series was now tied and anyone could take it. Joe DiMaggio tried to soften the blow with some kind words.

"Tough luck, stud," DiMaggio said. "I let you down, but we'll get them tomorrow."

Bevens stayed in the locker room until dark, wanting to avoid any remaining fans or newspaper reporters. When he finally fled the stadium, he grabbed friend and sportswriter Al Lightner and, along with their wives, headed to a bar the Yankees often frequented.

"The owner, he kicked everybody out, pulled the shades down, and we sat there and drank booze until 5 in the morning," [Lightner remembered](#).

Years later, Bevens would look back on his brush with history.

"I guess that's as close as you can get. I was just happy to be there in the World Series," [Bevens said](#).

Bevens and Lavagetto would remain connected by this one moment and big league careers that didn't last much longer. That game-winning double was Lavagetto's final Major League hit before retiring and taking up coaching and, after he pitched 2 2/3 innings in Game 6, Bevens would never step on a Major League mound again. (Fortunately for Bevens, the Yankees won the Series in seven games.)

[He had shoulder issues](#) in camp the next season (some believe it bothered him during the near no-no) and wouldn't try to pitch again until heading back to the Pacific Coast League in 1950. While trying to make a comeback with Cincinnati during Spring Training in 1952, Bevens and Lavagetto got together for a photoshoot -- Bevens pretending to choke the former Dodger with his bat.

For as sad as Bevens was to miss his chance at history, he didn't look back on his career with sadness.

"I wanted three things," [Bevens said in 1990](#), one year before he passed away from lymphoma at the age of 75. "To be a Yankee, meet Babe Ruth and pitch in the World Series. All my dreams were answered."

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

10.24.2021

Good morning baseball fans. Should be an entertaining World Series. Don't bet against Eddie Rosario, Ozzie Albies, Freddie Freeman and the Braves as they head to Atlanta's first World Series since 1999. They looked pretty tough taking down the World Champion Dodgers.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

2021 post-season so far, team that scores first is 24-7.

HRs hit out of Dodger Stadium:

Willie Stargell 1969

Willie Stargell 1973

Mike Piazza 1997

Mark McGwire 1999

Giancarlo Stanton 2015

Fernando Tatis Jr. 2021

Fernando Tatis Jr.'s [two-run shot in the top of the fifth inning](#) off Tony Gonsolin that carried out of Dodger Stadium.

Tatis' drive to the left-center field pavilion hit off the back of the roof and rolled into the plaza, traveling an estimated 467 feet.

It was Tatis' National League-leading 42nd home run of the season as he became only the fifth player in MLB history to hit a ball out of Dodger Stadium. Just another highlight in a super offensive year: top 10 in Total Bases, OPS, Runs scored, RBI, Stolen Bases, Extra base hits.

Eddie Rosario and Adam Duvall became the first pair of Atlanta hitters to slug back-to-back blasts in the postseason since Javy Lopez and Vinny Castilla.2002

Corey Seager now has 7 postseason home runs vs. Atlanta in his career. Who holds the record for most postseason homers vs. one opponent? The Dodgers' Duke Snider (10 World Series homers against the Yankees)

Youngest player to deliver a walk-off hit in the postseason--Marlins' Edgar Renteria, who ended Game 1 of the 1997 NLDS vs. the Giants with a walk-off single when he was 21 years, 54 days old

JIM LEYRITZ — Game 4, 1996 World Series. Two outs in the eighth. [Yankees](#) trailing the Braves in the Series, and four outs from going down, 3 games to 1. Then Leyritz shocks the world with a three-run, game-tying homer off Mark Wohlers. The Yankees win in 10 innings. They never lose again.

He doesn't get enough credit but **BERNIE CARBO** hit the second most memorable home run from the classic Game 6 of the 1975 World Series (AKA, the Carlton Fisk Game). Red Sox four outs away from losing this Series to the Big Red Machine. Carbo launches an electrifying three-run pinch homer off Rawly Eastwick. Sets the stage for Fisk to immortalize himself in the 12th.

Tip of the cap to the Astros who were down 2 games to 1 to Boston, then roared back to win 3 of 4 to make their third World Series in five seasons. The Astros outscored the Red Sox, 23-3, in the final three games, with Boston scoring one run in the final 26 innings of the series. Houston hit .303 in those three games, including .375 with runners in scoring position, while holding Boston to 10 hits in that span.

Astros manager Dusty Baker, who became the ninth manager in history to [win a pennant in both leagues](#) (Giants 2002). Baker -- who was drafted in 1967, played 19 big league seasons, managed another 22 and has been in the game for more than a half-century. Baker is making the most of this opportunity at the ripe age of 72, which will make him the second-oldest manager in World Series history, behind only the Marlins' Jack McKeon, who was also 72 in 2003 but is 196 days older than Baker.

Baker's Giants had Barry Bonds in his prime. The next year, Baker managed Sammy Sosa, Mark Prior and Kerry Wood for the Cubs in October. He later took Joey Votto to the postseason with the Reds in 2010 and '12. And he oversaw Bryce Harper, Max Scherzer and Stephen Strasburg in the 2016 and '17 postseasons with the Nationals.

Because you were wondering, the nine managers to win pennants in both leagues:

Sparky Anderson – Tigers and Reds

Dusty Baker – Giants and Astros

Yogi Berra – Yankees and Mets

Alvin Dark – Giants and A's

Tony LaRussa – A's and Cards

Jim Leyland – Marlins and Tigers

Joe Maddon – Rays and Cubs

Joe McCarthy – Cubs and Yankees

Dick Williams – Red Sox, A's and Padres

RANDOM LIST OF THE WEEK—AL WEST TEAM CAREER HR LEADERS

How would you do if the bet was a beer that you couldn't name the AL west team career HR leaders in order?

Astros	Jeff Bagwell	449
Mariners	Ken Griffey Jr.	417
Rangers	Juan Gonzalez	372
A's	Mark McGwire	363
Angels	Mike Trout	310

WHAT A DUEL

“It was a slider that didn’t do anything!” - Warren Spahn, commenting many years later on the pitch he threw to Willie Mays that ended one of the greatest pitching duels of all time.

It was played on July 2, 1963 at Candlestick Park before 15,921 fans between the Milwaukee Braves and San Francisco Giants. The starting pitchers were Warren Spahn for the Braves and Juan Marichal for the Giants. The Dominican Marichal was a 25-year-old fire-balling right-hander who was having his first great season. Spahn was a crafty 42-year-old lefty veteran who was having the last great year of his Hall-of-Fame career. Both won over 20 games that year, yet neither would not get a single vote for the Cy Young because a lefty named Sandy Koufax.

In July of 1963, the defending National League champion Giants were a powerful team packed with future Hall-of-famers. Their stacked lineup propelled the Giants to the most wins in the National League during the 1960s. The Braves were two-time National League pennant-winners in the late ‘50s (with a World Series championship in 1957), and were still a force to be reckoned with. All four of the National League’s top home run leaders played that night: Aaron (44), McCovey (44), Mays (38), and Cepeda (34). All told, there were seven future Hall-of-Famers on the field: In addition to Spahn and Marichal, Hank Aaron, Eddie Mathews, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, and Orlando Cepeda; plus HOF umpires Ken Burkhart and Jocko Conlon.

The game started at 8:00 and both pitchers appeared to be in great form. It was scoreless through nine and went into extra innings. As the extra frames mounted, neither pitcher showed signs of tiring. In the bottom of the 13th, Giants’ manager Alvin Dark approached Marichal and asked him how he felt. Juan looked out at the “old man” Spahn warming up to pitch the 13th inning and told his manager in no uncertain terms, “See that old guy out there? He’s 42! I’m not coming out of this game until he does or until we win!”

Both pitchers navigated in and out of trouble as the game entered the 15th inning scoreless. Marichal set the Braves down in order in the top of the frame. During the inning, Braves manager Bobby Bragan actually let Spahn bat for himself! Marichal again set down the Braves in the top of the 16th. As he walked off the field, he said to Willie Mays, “Alvin is going to take me out before the old man.” Willie just looked at him and said, “Don’t worry ... I’ll end this thing for you!”

...And so he did. Four hours and ten minutes after it started, the classic pitcher’s duel ended dramatically when Mays laced one of Spahn’s offerings over the fence and trotted around the bases, one of his 660 home runs.

We will never see another pitcher’s duel like this marathon contest again, with the starting pitchers going all 16 innings. Amazingly, Marichal threw 227 pitches that night, and Spahn threw 201! Spahn went 23-7 in 1963 (at age 42) matching Christy Mathewson for most 20 game

winning seasons with 13. He is the winningest lefty in baseball history with a record of 363-245 over his 21-year career; while Marichal, 25-8 in 1963, went 243-142 over his 16 year career.

After the game, Spahn's teammates greeted him with their own tribute. Teammate [Bob Sadowski](#), best described the scene: "When Spahn finally arrived in the dugout after a TV interview, everyone stood, applauded, and lined up to shake his hand. If you didn't have tears in your eyes, you weren't nothing!"

As a side note, the 42 year old [Spahn](#), in his very next start, on July 7, 1963 threw a complete game shutout

BASEBALL QUOTES

A month ago I asked readers for their favorite baseball books and you responded with a terrific list. A subscriber suggested soliciting favorite baseball quotes and offered the following to get us started. Please email me your favorites and I will include them in a future issue.

Tug McGraw's response to grass or artificial turf preference: "I don't know. I've never smoked Astro turf."

But my favorite came from Gene Mauch, of all people. When asked if a young Richie Allen had a difficult time the high fastball: "I don't know. I'm more worried about the fast highball."

RED SOX STUFF

Kyle Schwarber's 430-foot blast to right off Houston starter José Urquidy was the third grand slam of the postseason for the Red Sox, making them the first team in postseason history with that many in a single series. Boston's three grand slams in the ALCS also matches its total from the entire regular season.

With [J.D. Martinez](#) and [Rafael Devers](#) both [hitting grand slams](#) in Boston's Game 2 victory at Minute Maid Park, the Red Sox are now just the fourth team in MLB history with grand slams in

back-to-back postseason games. It's a feat that has only been matched by the 2020 Yankees, 2011 D-backs and 1977 Dodgers.

Also on Monday Red Sox manager Alex Cora picked up his 17th postseason win in 22 games at the helm, the most by any manager in his first 22 games in the playoffs. And it happened [on his birthday](#), no less, making him the second manager in history with two postseason birthday wins, along with Tony La Russa.

Boston finished with 11 hits on the night, marking its sixth straight game in double figures in the hit column. That's the longest streak by any team in a single postseason, breaking a tie at five with the 2004 Astros, '02 Angels and 1989 Cubs.

Here's your daily Kiké Hernández update. With two hits on Monday, he's up to 17 in his last six games. That is, you guessed it, a record for hits in a six-game span in postseason history. The record had been 16, by the White Sox Tim Anderson across the 2020-21 postseasons.

Kyle Schwarber is the second leadoff hitter with a grand slam in a League Championship Series game. The first was Boston's Johnny Damon (Game 7 of the 2004 ALCS).

JUST MAKING THE PLAYOFFS

Teams with the six worst regular-season records to make the postseason in the Wild Card Era. (Note: The Twins won the World Series in 1987 with 85 wins, and the 1973 Mets won the NL pennant with 82 wins. Both of those predate the Wild Card Era, which is why you don't see them on this list.)

5, tie) 2007 Chicago Cubs

Regular season: 85-77, NL Central champion

Winning percentage: .525

Best player: Aramis Ramirez

Postseason result: 3-0 NLDS loss to Arizona

Breakdown: The year after watching their hated rivals win a World Series despite, well, despite being a team that will show up later on this list, the Cubs got aggressive in the offseason, signing Alfonso Soriano, Ted Lilly and Jason Marquis to free-agent contracts and hiring manager Lou Piniella. They still weren't great, but they were improved enough to outlast everyone else in a division where there was only one other winning team, the Brewers, who only won 83. They were immediately blitzed by the D-backs in a three-game sweep. They'd win more games in 2008 and reach the postseason again, but they'd get swept then, too, by the Dodgers ... and wouldn't return until Theo Epstein was in charge in 2015.

5, tie) 2017 Minnesota Twins

Regular season: 85-77, AL Wild Card winner

Winning percentage: .525

Best player: Ervin Santana

Postseason result: Wild Card Game loss to Yankees

Breakdown: The Twins hadn't made the playoffs in seven years, but thanks to a weak Wild Card field, they were able to sneak in. In retrospect, this looks like the first tiny step forward for a team that would make a big leap in 2019, but back then, the Wild Card Game just felt like a happy bonus for an otherwise mediocre team. They were rewarded with yet another loss to the Yankees. The Twins' last four postseason appearances have all ended with losses to the Yanks.

3, tie) 1997 Houston Astros

Regular season: 84-78, NL Central champion

Winning percentage: .519

Best player: Jeff Bagwell

Postseason result: 3-0 NLDS loss to Atlanta

Breakdown: This was actually a much better team than the record indicated. The Astros' [Pythagorean record](#) -- based off runs scored and runs allowed -- was actually 93-69, a full nine games better than their actual record. This team had two Hall of Famers in their prime (Bagwell and Craig Biggio), a top-shelf starter (Darryl Kile) and an elite closer (Billy Wagner). Maybe they just realized they didn't *need* to win that many games: Despite this record, they won the division by five games over the Pirates, who were 79-83. Not that it made any difference: The 101-win defending NL champion Braves swept them in the NLDS.

3, tie) 2008 Los Angeles Dodgers

Regular season: 84-78, NL West champion

Winning percentage: .519

Best player: Manny Ramirez

Postseason result: 3-0 NLDS win over Chicago Cubs, 4-1 NLCS loss to Philadelphia

Breakdown: This was the Mannywood year. The Dodgers traded for Manny Ramirez at the Trade Deadline, and he went absolutely bonkers. His slash line in 53 games with the Dodgers: .396/.489/.743. That was enough to sneak the Dodgers into the playoffs, and they actually won a series over the Cubs, their first postseason victory since winning the 1988 World Series. (It would end against the eventual champion Phillies.) Fun facts with this team: Joe Torre was the manager, and a 20-year-old left-hander named Clayton Kershaw made his debut.

2) 2006 St. Louis Cardinals

Regular season: 83-78, NL Central champion

Winning percentage: .516

Best player: Albert Pujols

Postseason result: 3-1 NLDS win over San Diego, 4-3 NLCS win over NY Mets, 4-1 World Series win over Detroit

Breakdown: It is worth noting that this team -- which had the fewest wins of any World Series

champion --- was looking just fine in mid-September, 11 games over .500, not great, but certainly worthy of a playoff spot. They then lost seven in a row and nearly blew their division. They recovered just in time to limp into the playoffs against San Diego, and then had a truly epic NLCS against a terrific Mets team. The Tigers famously fumbled all over themselves in the World Series -- pitchers made throwing errors in *every single game* -- and the Cardinals had their first title since 1982.

They are still used as a cautionary tale, but also a hopeful one: If those 83-win Cardinals can win a World Series, any team can.

1) 2005 San Diego Padres

Regular season: 82-80, NL West champion

Winning percentage: .506

Best player: Brian Giles

Postseason result: 3-0 NLDS loss to St. Louis.

Breakdown: Other teams on this list were probably a little better than their record. The Padres were worse; their [Pythagorean record](#) was 77-85, and they only had one quality starting pitcher (Jake Peavy). But the rest of the division was worse, much worse: Not only were there no other .500 teams in the NL West, no one even got to 78 wins. They were promptly swept out of the playoffs, like they should have been.

JAYSON STARK

In Game 1, Braves hitters struck out 14 times, walked no times *and they won*. Then Sunday, in Game 2, Braves pitchers walked nine [Dodgers](#) — and hit another one with a pitch — *and they won*.

Wednesday's upside-down game in this upside-down NLCS. The one where the [Braves](#) beat a pitcher (Julio Urías) who hadn't lost a game since June 21. The one where the Braves also hit three home runs off a pitcher (yep, Urías again) who hadn't allowed a three-homer game *in five years*.

The Braves started [Max Fried](#) (8-0, with a 1.47 ERA since his last loss *three months ago*). The [Dodgers](#) started [Joe Kelly](#), whose evening lasted two outs.

Duke Snider never had a three-homer postseason game for the Dodgers. Gil Hodges never had a three-homer postseason game for the Dodgers. Mike Piazza ... Steve Garvey ... Roy Campanella ... Jackie Robinson. Fill in the name of your personal favorite Dodgers legend. Never did that.

But on a balmy Thursday evening at Chavez Ravine, [Chris Taylor](#) hit three home runs in one magical October baseball game. Chris Taylor.

Love that guy. Love watching him. Love the vibe he spreads every minute he's on the field. But he's also a fellow with a lower career slugging percentage (.443) than [Jordan Luplow](#). He's also a fellow who hit three home runs this year *in August and September combined*. And then, in a game that could have ended the Dodgers' season and ended his Dodgers career, he hit three home runs in one game.

This guy went 8 for his last 72 in the final five weeks of the regular season — 8 for 72! He now has nine hits *just in this series* (9 for 17).

He only had one three-homer *week* during the regular season. But Thursday, he became the first player ever to hit three in a game that could have sent his team home to start fixing Thanksgiving dinner.

Willie Mays, Stan Musial and Cal Ripken Jr. hit three postseason home runs combined. *In their careers*. And Chris Taylor just hit three in one night.

The list of other men in history who hit three home runs in a postseason game isn't long. The 10 names on it include Babe Ruth (twice), Reggie Jackson and George Brett. But even they never had a game like this. Four hits ... three homers ... six RBIs. The only two players who ever did that in a postseason game? Albert Pujols ... and Chris Taylor.

THEY DESERVE THEIR OWN RECORD — The record books will tell you that the Dodgers' current streak of winning elimination games is the third-longest streak in history. The 2012-16 [Giants](#) were longer (10 elimination games in a row). The 1985-2014 [Royals](#) (eight in a row) were longer. But in reality, I don't think those streaks belong in the same category as the Dodgers' streak. And here is where the Dodgers really separate themselves from that pack:

They've won all seven of those go-home games just over the last two years. *And that's never been done!*

The previous record for most consecutive elimination games won in a two-postseason period was six — shared by the 2011-12 [Cardinals](#), the 2012 Giants team that eliminated those Cardinals by winning six in a row *in one year*, and the 1985 Royals team that also won six in one year. But for essentially the same group of Dodgers players to fend off winter seven times in a row, over the course of four different rounds of two postseasons? That's amazing. And historic.

Remember that three weeks ago, Taylor also saved the Dodgers' season in the wild-card game, with a walk-off homer against the Cardinals? According to STATS, he is now the first player who ever lived to hit a walk-off home run *and* have a multi-homer game in elimination games. No one else in the history of baseball has ever done both in a career. Chris Taylor has done both *just this month*.

- Also, Taylor hit these three home runs while starting at third base for the injured Justin Turner. And only three other third basemen in history have ever hit three home runs in a postseason game. You've heard of them: George Brett (1978), Adrián Beltré (2011) and [Pablo Sandoval](#) (2012).

Albert Pujols reached base three times — in a win-or-go-home postseason game. It was the first time he'd done that since Game 5 of the 2011 World Series. But that's not all ...

PETE ROSE ALERT: Only one man older than Pujols (41 years, 278 days) has ever had a postseason game in which he reached base at least three times and scored at least two runs. That was Pete Rose, in Game 3 of the 1983 NLCS, for the [Phillies](#) (at 42 years, 176 days old).

22-SKIDOO: This was the 22nd time Pujols has reached base at least three times in a postseason game. Only five other players in history can say that. Here they are.

Derek Jeter, 34
Bernie Williams, 30
Manny Ramirez, 28
Chipper Jones, 27
[David Ortiz](#), 22

But now let's compare Sir Albert with all other active players. He sits atop that mountain top — for now, anyway.

Albert Pujols, 22
[Carlos Correa](#), 18
[Justin Turner](#), 18
[Jose Altuve](#), 17
[Yadier Molina](#), 15

The last team before these Dodgers to get hits from three former MVPs in the same postseason game? How about the 1983 "Wheeze Kids" Phillies, who got five hits from Rose, Tony Perez and Mike Schmidt in Game 3 of the NLCS.

- The last team to get hits from three former MVPs in a postseason *elimination game*? That would be the 1964 Yankees, who got hits from Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris and Elston

Howard *two games in a row* (Games 6 and 7) in the final World Series that group would ever play together.

- What about the only team to get hits from *more* than three former MVPs in the same postseason game? How about those 1982 Angels, who got six hits from Rod Carew, Don Baylor, Fred Lynn and Reginald M. Jackson in Game 3 of the ALCS.
- But finally, just one team in history has ever gotten more *total* hits from former MVPs in any postseason game than the six the Dodgers got in this game — and it happened 50 years ago this month! That was in Game 2 of the 1971 World Series, when the Orioles got *seven* hits from Brooks Robinson (three), Frank Robinson (three) and [Boog Powell](#) (one).

MORE CHRIS TAYLOR

In Game 5 of the National League Championship Series at Dodger Stadium on Thursday, three was the number of the night:

- Three, as in the number [Chris Taylor](#) wears on the back of his jersey
- Three, as in the number of homers Taylor launched to key an [11-2 blowout victory](#)
- Three, as in the number of consecutive wins the Dodgers needed coming into the game to rally from a 3-1 NLCS deficit against the Braves for the second consecutive year

Then there's three-three-three; that is, the time of game (3 hours, 33 minutes) as Los Angeles sent the series back to Atlanta for Game 6 on Saturday.

Taylor is the first player in MLB history to homer three times in a game in which his team faced potential elimination.

Before Taylor, only one player had even gone deep twice and driven in at least five runs in either an LCS or World Series potential elimination game: Johnny Damon, who homered twice and drove in six for the Red Sox in Game 7 of the 2004 ALCS.

- Taylor is the [11th player in MLB history](#) to smack three home runs in a postseason game and the second Dodger. In fact, the Dodgers account for back-to-back entries on that short list. Kiké Hernández -- more recently seen starting for the Red Sox in this postseason -- was the last to do it before Taylor. Coincidentally, Hernández's 2017 effort also came in an NLCS Game 5 -- against the Cubs at Wrigley Field.

Taylor became the first player since Pujols in that Fall Classic to produce at least four hits and at least six RBIs in a postseason game. Omar Vizquel (2001 American League Division Series Game

3), John Valentin (1999 ALDS Game 4) and Will Clark (1989 NLCS Game 1) are the only other players to produce that stat combo.

That makes nine RBIs for Taylor in 2021 potential elimination games alone, and that's already tied with a group of October legends for the third-most elimination-game RBIs by a player in any postseason: Edgar Martinez (1995), David Ortiz (2004) and David Freese (2011). Only Anthony Rendon (10 in 2019) and Valentin (12 in 1999) have tallied more.

Taylor has four home runs in potential elimination games this postseason, the most by a player in a single postseason. And any additional NLCS games as this series continues will be potential elimination, too. Thus, it is worth noting that only eight players in history have hit more than four home runs in a postseason career in elimination games: David Ortiz (six), and Jason Varitek, Mickey Mantle, Delmon Young, Manny Ramirez, Martinez, Miguel Cabrera and Yogi Berra (five each).

Remember, Taylor started this game batting seventh in the Dodgers' stacked lineup. He's the first player to knock three homers from the seventh spot in a postseason game, and he joins Adam Kennedy (ninth spot, 2002 ALCS Game 5) as only the second player with a three-homer postseason game from the bottom third of a lineup.

The only other player to notch at least six RBIs in a postseason game from the bottom third of a lineup is Bobby Richardson, who drove in six for the Yankees from the No. 7 spot in Game 3 of the 1960 World Series.

- Taylor racked up 13 total bases in Game 5 -- three more than he produced in any previous MLB game, in the regular season or postseason. That total broke Hernández's Dodgers postseason record from his three-homer game.
- Taylor had one previous six-RBI game, all the way back on July 15, 2016, against the D-backs -- which was his 11th game in a Dodgers uniform following his trade from the Mariners. And, of course, this was Taylor's first three-homer game in his career.
- Taylor is the sixth player to pile up at least 13 total bases in any postseason game, joining the Giants' Pablo Sandoval (2012 World Series Game 1), the Cardinals' Pujols (2011 World Series Game 3), the Yankees' Hideki Matsui (2004 ALCS Game 3), the Angels' Kennedy (2002 ALCS Game 5) and the Pirates' Bob Robertson (1971 NLCS Game 2). Taylor is the first to do that in a potential elimination game.
- [Taylor's game](#) -- and his postseason in general -- is all the more amazing when you remember how he finished the regular season. Taylor was an All-Star back in July but slumped in August (.666 OPS) and fell off a cliff in September/October (.402), going 7-for-65 (.108 average) with 26 strikeouts over his final 25 games. Even before Thursday night, he already had more hits than that through nine games this postseason (8-for-28). And in Game 5 alone, he matched his homer total from July 31 to the end of the regular season, a span of 155 at-bats.

Of course, Taylor had the signature three-homer game, but, not to be overlooked, teammate [AJ Pollock](#) crushed two of his own. The Dodgers became just the third team in postseason history to have multiple players with multiple homers in the same postseason game, joining the Padres in 2020 NL Wild Card Series Game 2 (Fernando Tatis Jr. and Wil Myers) and the Yankees in 1932 World Series Game 3 (Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig -- the "Called Shot" game for Ruth). The Dodgers' duo is the only one to feature an individual three-homer game within it. In other words, those five home runs by Pollock and Taylor were the most combined by two teammates in a postseason game.

- The Dodgers walloped [five total homers in Game 5](#), tying a franchise record for any postseason game with the five they hit last year against the Braves in Game 3 of the NLCS. Only two teams had previously clubbed five homers in a potential elimination game, and each of them came before the LCS round: The Padres in Game 2 of the 2020 NL Wild Card Series and the A's in Game 3 of the '20 ALDS.

The last player before Chris Taylor to hit multiple home runs in a potential elimination game for his team--The Dodgers' Corey Seager (2 homers in Game 5 of the 2020 NLCS)

ROSARIO

Speaking of hot bats, how about the Braves Eddie Rosario. Wenesday against the Dodgers Rosario started the slugfest with an opposite-field solo homer to lead off the second and then followed that up by cracking a triple in the third, a single in the fifth and a three-run homer in the ninth.

Rosario, a native of Puerto Rico, finished the night with four R.B.I., three runs scored and 12 total bases.

Rosario is just the second player with two 4-hit games in a single postseason series. Which Hall of Famer did it first? The Brewers' Robin Yount (1982 World Series)

Then a 3 run shot in game six Saturday night...

Rosario became the eighth player to win that LCS honor following a midseason trade, joining the Astros' Justin Verlander (2017), the Indians' Andrew Miller ('16), the Giants' Marco Scutaro ('12), the Giants' Cody Ross ('10), the Yankees' David Justice ('00), the Braves' Mike Devereaux (1995) and the A's Rickey Henderson ('89). Atlanta acquired him in a July 30 salary dump from Cleveland, which received Pablo Sandoval in exchange and then released him hours later.

Rosario singled, stole a base and scored in his first at-bat of Game 1 of the NLCS. The real theatrics came later -- a four-hit effort in Game 2 and [a multihomer barrage in Game 4](#). Rosario's three-run shot in the clincher was his 14th hit of the series, matching Marco Scutaro (2012 NLCS), Kevin Youkilis (2007 ALCS), Hideki Matsui (2004 ALCS) and Albert Pujols (2004 NLCS) for the most in a postseason series. Of those five players, only Rosario accomplished the feat in fewer than seven games. He is one of nine Puerto Rican-born players to win a postseason MVP award.

ONE OF THE BEST EVER? ASTROS INFIELD HAS A CASE

Awards, accomplishments continue to pile up for foursome after 5 years together

On Sept. 3, 2016, former Astros manager A.J. Hinch wrote out a lineup card that had [Yuli Gurriel](#) at first base, [Jose Altuve](#) at second, [Carlos Correa](#) at shortstop and [Alex Bregman](#) at third for a game against the Texas Rangers in Arlington. It was the first time the four players all started on the infield together.

The four went a combined 4-for-17 in a 12-4 loss to the Rangers -- a game that dropped Houston 10 1/2 games behind Texas in the American League West. If you're an Astros fan, there was no reason to remember that steamy afternoon at Globe Life Park. But it signaled a start of one of the most memorable runs in club history.

Over the next five years, Gurriel at first, Altuve at second, Correa at short and Bregman at third have represented excellence on the diamond for the Astros, who have reached the AL Championship Series for five consecutive seasons with a core that includes those four on the infield.

When the Astros play the Red Sox in Game 3 of the ALCS tonight at Fenway Park, Gurriel, Altuve, Correa and Bregman will play in their 64th career postseason game together. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, that's the most postseason games played by four teammates at any position in Major League history.

In the Wild Card era (since 1995), Altuve, Correa, Bregman and Gurriel have started 267 games together in the regular season, which is the fifth most in baseball in that span among infielders. Adrián Beltré, Jose Lopez, Richie Sexson and Yuniesky Betancourt of the Mariners lead the way since 1995 with 304 games started together, followed by Robinson Canó, Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez and Mark Teixeira of the Yankees (290), Luis Castillo, Alex Gonzalez, Derek Lee and Mike Lowell of the Marlins (279) and Scott Brosius, Jeter, Chuck Knoblauch and Tino Martinez of the Yankees (268).

Gurriel, Altuve, Correa and Bregman would have to stay together a long time to approach the longevity of the infield that started the most games together in Major League history. Steve

Garvey, Davey Lopes, Ron Cey and Bill Russell started 810 games together for the Dodgers, beginning in 1973.

The accomplishments of the Astros infield are impressive. Altuve is a seven-time All-Star who has won three batting titles, five Silver Slugger Awards, a Gold Glove Award and the 2017 AL Most Valuable Player Award. Correa was the 2015 AL Rookie of the Year, is a two-time All-Star and is the front-runner to win the Gold Glove Award at shortstop this year. Bregman is a two-time All-Star and finished second in the AL MVP Award voting in 2019. Gurriel won the AL batting title this year, and he could also win his first Gold Glove Award at first base.

While Bregman and Altuve are in the middle of long-term deals with the Astros and Gurriel's option for 2022 is a lock to be picked up, Correa is a free agent who figures to be one of the most valued names on the market this offseason. The end of the line could be near for the Astros' storied infield.

IN THIS POST SEASON, PITCHING SIX INNINGS FEELS LIKE A LOT

A good read from Tyler Kepner of NYT. Kepner's excellent book "A History of Baseball in Ten Pitches" was on our best baseball books list last week.

Atlanta's Max Fried has recorded 18 outs in each of his last two starts, standing out in an era of openers, quick hooks and mustachioed middle men.

ATLANTA — There are 38 metal flags running up and down the light poles above right field at Truist Park, saluting standout seasons for the home team. A dozen flags signify titles won before the modern World Series, which seems like résumé padding for the franchise now known as the Atlanta Braves.

But there they are, starting in 1872, when a slim right-hander named Al Spalding started all 48 games for the Braves' ancestors, the Boston Red Stockings of the National Association. He piled up 404⅔ innings that season, and two years later topped 600.

Max Fried is now Spalding's spiritual progeny. On Saturday he worked six innings in the opener of the National League Championship Series, a [3-2 victory](#) over the [Los Angeles Dodgers](#). Fried also worked six innings in the last round, against the Milwaukee Brewers. This is a major accomplishment in the modern playoffs.

"I think six innings in the postseason is huge for a guy, just the energy they expend mentally and physically," Manager Brian Snitker said. "I feel like we have three guys that can do that."

The others are Ian Anderson and Charlie Morton, and the Dodgers have three of their own in Max Scherzer, Walker Buehler and Julio Urias. On the American League side, though, the rotations are falling apart.

The Boston Red Sox and the Houston Astros used eight pitchers apiece in Game 1 of the A.L.C.S., and the [Dodgers](#) used eight on Saturday. That was out of necessity, though, because Urias and Scherzer had just pitched on Thursday to help [close out the Giants](#) in San Francisco.

“Clayton Kershaw would be starting this game; unfortunately, he’s hurt right now,” Scherzer said on Saturday afternoon. “So this isn’t by design. As a whole, we looked to have four starters going into the postseason, but we don’t. And so we’re just trying to navigate this as best as possible.”

The Dodgers have so much depth that three Cy Young Award winners are off the playoff roster: Kershaw is recovering from a forearm injury; David Price was dropped for this round after struggling down the stretch; and Trevor Bauer is under investigation for sexual assault. Each of those pitchers is making more than \$30 million this season.

In Game 1, a collection of mustachioed middlemen followed the opener and throttled Atlanta, which fanned 14 times without a walk. Freddie Freeman, Atlanta’s sunny superstar, whiffed four times against four different pitchers. No matter: Third baseman Austin Riley, who had homered earlier, drilled a game-winning single in the bottom of the ninth.

The game was played crisply, mainly because all those pitchers had good stuff and knew it. They filled up the strike zone, nearly making this the first game in N.L.C.S. history without a walk (alas, the Dodgers drew one in the ninth). There were four stolen bases — even a sacrifice bunt! — and the whole thing seemed shorter than its 3 hours 4 minutes. That is when baseball is at its best.

The A.L.C.S., meanwhile, has been a mess, a bloated double feature with a running time of 495 minutes. Boston’s Chris Sale, who returned from Tommy John surgery in August, has made two playoff starts and gotten nine outs. Besides the Red Sox’ Nathan Eovaldi — a sound bet for five innings, if rarely for six — no starter on either team would be called durable.

Some of this is understandable, natural attrition at the end of a long season that followed a very short one. But part of it is on purpose. Pitchers aren’t supposed to be Al Spalding, or even Al Leiter, anymore.

“You’re limiting even your best to 18 outs now,” said the former pitcher Ron Darling, who is calling the N.L.C.S. for TBS. “So if we lower our expectations from 27 outs, then a four-inning start in the postseason is a very good start.”

Teams focus more intently than ever on matchups, deciding in advance whose pitch mix might disrupt a particular hitter. With so many off-days built into the October schedule, most relievers

are available every game, and managers — with heavy input from the front office — seem eager to deploy them. Even veteran starters understand the difference.

“As players, all we want to do is win, so if you tell us this is going to help us win, yeah, we’re all on board, let’s go for it,” said Scherzer, who allowed one run in the [N.L. wild-card game](#) but was lifted in the fifth inning.

[“To speak on the other side of the coin, from a fan’s perspective and baseball as a whole, if you say: ‘Is this something that we want the game to go into? Do we want to see this in the regular season?’ My answer is no. No, you don’t,” Scherzer said. “You want to see starting pitchers. You want to see starting pitchers pitch deep. I think that’s best for the fans, best for the players, everybody involved. I think that’s how we all envisioned the games.”](#)

[He added: “But when you get down to elimination games, you get into postseason games, you do whatever it takes to win. So, to me, I think this is more of a question in the off-season if we want to address it.”](#)

[Scherzer, who is part of the executive subcommittee for the players’ union, likes the idea of a rule change that could theoretically limit the use of an opener by tying the starting pitcher to the designated hitter. Called the “double hook” by the Hall of Fame writer Jayson Stark, the rule would mandate that a team lose its designated hitter as soon as it pulls its starter.](#)

[The viability of that idea, and others, will be debated during off-season negotiations on a new collective bargaining agreement. But as sensible as the opener can be as a strategy, it is still a jarring innovation.](#)

[Dodgers Manager Dave Roberts, who used Corey Knebel as an opener for Game 5 of the division series and Game 1 of the N.L.C.S., resisted the idea when the Tampa Bay Rays first used it in 2018. Beginning a game with a reliever seemed to be against baseball’s spirit.](#)

[“I hated it,” Roberts said. “It wasn’t baseball. I like to see the starters, and starters go deep. But when you sit in this chair, you’re trying to win games. That’s the bottom line. So it doesn’t matter how appealing it is or what it is. The goal is to prevent runs.”](#)

[The Dodgers have done better than any other team, with a 3.01 earned run average in the regular season and a 2.05 mark across their first seven playoff games. Their problem now is that Atlanta is also rich in pitching. It is a franchise tradition.](#)

[“It’s just kind of the way I was raised in the game,” Snitker said. “I came up with the Braves here and we were all about starting pitching. I don’t know any better.”](#)

[The N.L. teams have the arms to keep this series entertaining — or at least to keep it from morphing into the slog we saw in Houston. Just don’t expect the starters, even the really good ones, to stick around too long.](#)

LOOKING FOR A STAR? CHECK THE DODGERS' BENCH.

Another NYT piece, this by Scott Miller. A look inside the revolving door.

For the Dodgers, deep pockets and extreme ambition make everyone expendable. Just ask players like Kiké Hernández and Joc Pederson, who took their October magic elsewhere.

ATLANTA — The Los Angeles Dodgers are not for everyone. Sometimes, young players need to leave when they become eligible for free agency if they want regular playing time. And sometimes, accomplished players are brushed aside because the Dodgers have the ability and the will to acquire other, more accomplished players.

The Hall of Fame pitcher Waite Hoyt famously said, “It’s great to be young and a Yankee.”

To be young and a Dodger in an era of free agency, analytics, financial largess and sustained winning means sometimes reluctantly shuffling onto the injured list as the club manipulates its roster during the six-month grind of a regular season, or shuttling back to the minor leagues even if you were a contender for the Rookie of the Year Award.

Gavin Lux, who started Sunday’s Game 2 of the National League Championship Series, became familiar with the latter this summer. One of the top prospects in a system that has produced two recent rookies of the year in Cody Bellinger (2017) and Corey Seager (2016), Lux hit .286 with five homers and 19 R.B.I. in May but swooned later in the summer and was not getting the regular playing time he would have in a place like Pittsburgh or Miami, where he might have worked his way out of a slump.

So on Aug. 26, the Dodgers shipped him back to Class-AAA Oklahoma City.

“It’s pretty easy to look around the league and say, like, oh yeah, maybe on this team I wouldn’t have gotten sent down, obviously,” Lux said. “But there’s a lot of really good people here to learn from, a lot of really good players to learn from, and guys who have been around and a lot of superstars, Hall of Famers.

“So for me it’s, like, looking at it as a blessing as opposed to the other way around. And I’m still early in my career, so I’m just a being a sponge and trying to soak up as much as I can from these guys.”

Maybe one day Lux will grow into a mainstay like Seager or Justin Turner — a process that could be accelerated considerably should Seager leave Los Angeles as a free agent this off-season. Or, maybe he will become an October star for the Dodgers and still wind up somewhere else, like a handful of others scattered around this month.

Four years ago, Kiké Hernández belted three home runs for the Dodgers in Game 5 of the N.L.C.S. against the Chicago Cubs, helping push the Dodgers into the World Series against Houston. Hernández became the first player with three homers in a postseason game at Wrigley Field in that stadium's 100-plus years of existence. His seven R.B.I. that night set an N.L.C.S. record.

But his path to regular playing time with the Dodgers was stymied by the team's belief in platooning, and then was cut off entirely by players like Mookie Betts and Bellinger in the outfield and Seager and Max Muncy in the infield. So Hernández signed a two-year, \$14 million deal with Boston as a free agent before the 2021 season. Hernández was one of the offensive stars as Boston took down the Tampa Bay Rays in an A.L. division series, and already has three home runs through two games of the A.L.C.S. against Houston. The Dodgers could see him in the World Series if they and the Red Sox advance.

In his postseason career, Hernández now has a three-homer game, a five-hit game, a seven-R.B.I. game, a pinch-hit homer and a walk-off series-clinching R.B.I. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, no other player in M.L.B. history has accomplished more than two of those five feats.

More immediately, the Dodgers are currently facing outfielder Joc Pederson in the N.L.C.S. Pederson, who had flashed some signs of stardom in Los Angeles, had a strange end to his time in with the Dodgers.

He was dealt to the Los Angeles Angels as part of a complicated trade that included Betts's arrival from Boston just before spring training in 2020. But Pederson ended up staying with the Dodgers that season because the first iteration of that deal was called off. When it was redone, Pederson remained with the Dodgers.

So that fall, Pederson helped the Dodgers win their first World Series since 1988 by smashing a key home run in Game 5 to lead a 4-2 win over Tampa Bay. That was after he had produced four hits in Game 3 of the N.L.C.S. against Atlanta to help the Dodgers avoid elimination after losing the first two games.

And yet, the Dodgers once again said goodbye, this time for real. Pederson, who had been reduced to a platoon role, opted for a one-year, \$7 million free agent deal with the Chicago Cubs, who gave him a chance to become an everyday player.

Atlanta then acquired him in [a July trade](#) after losing outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr. for the season to a knee injury. Against Milwaukee in the division series, Pederson slammed a [series-turning](#), three-run, pinch-hit homer against reliever Adrian Houser in Game 3. Having already homered in Game 1 against the Brewers, also off Houser, it was "JOctober" once again.

That flair for the dramatic continued with yet another home run on Sunday, helping give Atlanta [a surprising 2-0 lead](#) in the N.L.C.S.

“He’s been in these situations a lot, number one,” Atlanta Manager Brian Snitker said. “Number two, that guy’s got no heartbeat at all. It’s like he’s on the playground. Playing against him in the postseason the last few years, you could tell that.”

Pederson has walloped 12 homers in 165 career postseason at-bats, yet the Dodgers haven’t seemed to miss him all that much. Their current roster has at least three players who are expected to be first-ballot Hall of Famers: Clayton Kershaw, Max Scherzer and Albert Pujols. Then there are other battle-tested veterans like [the 2021 All-Stars](#) Betts, Justin Turner, Trea Turner and Chris Taylor, and more. The team has often brought in veterans like Chase Utley to serve as mentors.

“Going into the playoffs in 2019, J.T. pulled me aside, and Chase Utley was there, too, and he was just, like, ‘Every time you step up in the box, try to have that feeling that you’re 4 for 4,’” Lux said. “That’s the best feeling you can have if you’re a hitter. Going up there 4 for 4, there’s no pressure. You feel good. So that’s kind of the best take of advice I’ve gotten from anybody, I think, going into the playoffs.”

For the players who stay, knowledge is available at every turn. Sometimes, it comes from unexpected sources. When Bellinger won [Thursday’s division series game](#) with an R.B.I. single in the ninth inning it was his third game-winning hit in a winner-take-all game. This one, after a season in which the former most valuable player hit only .165, came after several conversations this summer with Scherzer.

“Belli had a tough year,” Scherzer said. “I’ve had some talks with him. Man, just keep grinding. I know you’re fighting through some stuff. Everyone in their career gets punched in the face. No one’s ever had just an easy career. There are always years where the game just comes back and punches you in the face.”

Scherzer told Bellinger that he had to keep working hard and fight through a down year and that if he continued to get opportunities, good things would come.

“He’s going to do absolutely big things for us in the playoffs,” Scherzer said late Thursday night in San Francisco. “I saw this coming a mile away. I just wanted that so bad for him. It’s so awesome to see him do it.”

Bellinger, who isn’t eligible for free agency until after the 2023 season, could be one of the homegrown players who stays, but he will have to show some improvement as the Dodgers won’t wait forever. There is always a Betts or a [Trea Turner](#) or a Scherzer who can be acquired to replace a player who is not at their best.

To play in what Tommy Lasorda, the team’s Hall of Fame manager [who died this off-season](#), called “Blue Heaven” is to reside in a clubhouse with constant change, endless creative possibilities and a steady stream of new toys.

Nearly everyone, it seems, is replaceable.

FROM NYT, BUILDING ON THE THREE HR NIGHT BY CHRIS TAYLOR

Chris Taylor helped the Los Angeles Dodgers stay alive in the National League Championship Series on Thursday night by [belting three home runs](#). In the sport's long history, three-homer games in the postseason stand out as a rarity: They have occurred only 12 times. While Taylor has had his share of postseason magic in the past, and he is a useful player, the fraternity he joined includes several all-time greats.

Try to guess who was the first player to hit three homers in a postseason. Did you guess Babe Ruth? You're right. Guess who did it second. Yes, Ruth again.

[The first time](#) came with the Yankees in Game 4 of the 1926 World Series against the St. Louis Cardinals. One of the blasts reached the center field bleachers of Sportsman's Park, which only two men had previously reached. His 12 total bases and four runs scored were also records at the time.

Two years later, again in a World Series Game 4 in St. Louis, [he once more hit three](#), despite recording only three at-bats (he walked in his other two plate appearances). The game completed a sweep of the Cards, and caused The New York Times to gush on the front page that the Yanks were "establishing records that will live as long as the game itself."

So far, that prediction is holding up. Ruth remains the only player to homer three times in a postseason game twice, and he did it when the postseason consisted of only one round per year.

No one matched Ruth until the 1970s, when the unheralded Bob Robertson [hit three for the Pittsburgh Pirates](#) in the 1971 N.L.C.S. He is the only person to add another extra base hit in the same game as his homers, a double. Robertson's story was heightened because he had missed an entire season for kidney surgery; [he was trumpeted as a "medical marvel."](#) Not enough star power for you? Willie Mays also hit a home run in the game for the San Francisco Giants at age 40.

Which brings us to the most famous three homer game: [Reggie Jackson's in the 1977 World Series](#). That clinching Game 6 went a long way toward establishing Jackson as "Mr. October" and gave him five homers in the series — a record. After a year of criticism from the typically demanding New York fans, Jackson said after the victory, "Perhaps for one night, I reached back and achieved that level of the overrated superstar."

Another Hall of Famer, George Brett, completed the fertile decade with [three solo homers in the 1978 A.L.C.S](#) for the Kansas City Royals. Brett was the only leadoff man to do it. Too bad his

teammates weren't getting on base: The Royals were the only team to lose a three-homer game, 6-5, to the Yankees.

There were no postseason three homer games in the '80s or '90s and just one in the '00s: [Adam Kennedy for the Anaheim Angels in the 2002 A.L.C.S.](#) (He somehow did it batting ninth.)

But a surge in home runs across the board, and an expansion of the playoffs, meant a golden age was about to begin. Through Kennedy, the feat had been performed six times. It has been done six more times since.

- Adrian Beltre [hit three solo shots](#) for the Texas Rangers in the 2011 division series. That accounted for three of the four runs in a 4-3 victory that sent the Tampa Bay Rays home.
- Just 18 days later, Albert Pujols [hit three for the Cardinals](#) in the World Series, becoming the only player to collect five hits in his three-homer game. His clouts were described by The Times as "gigantic." His teammate Yadier Molina said: "He's been doing this for 11 years, and you're surprised? I'm not surprised."
- The next year, Pablo Sandoval [hit three in the World Series](#) for the Giants against the Detroit Tigers. "I still can't believe it," Sandoval said after the game. "When you're a little kid, you dream about being in the World Series. But I wasn't thinking about being in this situation, three homers in one game, you know?"
- Jose Altuve [had three for the Houston Astros](#) in the 2017 division series. "I told him the last time I've seen three home runs in a game was Pablo Sandoval, and I gave up two of them, so I'm glad there's somebody new that's done it," said the Astros starter Justin Verlander, formerly of Detroit. It is notable that those home runs came in Houston in the season in which the Astros have admitted to employing a complex [sign-stealing operation](#). Altuve has denied participating in the scheme.
- Two weeks later, a versatile utility player, Kiké Hernández, [did it for the Dodgers](#) in the N.L.C.S., collecting seven R.B.I. The game sent the Dodgers to the World Series. (Somehow the Dodgers ran out of room for Hernández, who took [his postseason magic](#) to Boston.)

Which brings us to Taylor on Thursday night. Based on the trends, it should happen again, and maybe soon.

BASEBALL AND RADIO FROM WSJ

I loved doing radio play-by-play when I was much much younger. Travel this week had me listening to playoff games on ESPN radio.

A Hundred Years of Listening to Baseball

Technology has changed since the World Series was first broadcast in 1921, but the game and radio remain a perfect match

As a child growing up in the 1930s, Vin Scully would take a glass of milk, a plate of crackers and a pillow into the living room of his family's walk-up apartment in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan. He would crawl underneath a massive four-legged radio console, put his head down and let the sound of a baseball game wash over him, like water rushing out from a shower head.

"When I got old enough to really express myself, I knew that it was the radio that really brought me into yearning to do baseball," Mr. Scully said. "The simple radio and baseball, that was my springboard."

Mr. Scully, now 93, spent 67 years broadcasting Dodgers games, moving with the franchise from Brooklyn to Los Angeles in 1958, and is widely considered to be one of the best announcers in baseball history. He has seen the dissemination of live baseball move from radio to television to the internet, which allows anyone with a smartphone to stream any game anywhere in the country.

But as technology has evolved, the humble radio has endured, with the voice of the local broadcaster serving as the soundtrack to summer for generations of baseball fans. Almost every day from April through September, and into the special season of October, baseball on the radio is there—in the car during a weekend road trip, at the backyard cookout at grandma's house, at the beach.

This year's World Series, starting on Tuesday, marks a century of the Fall Classic on the radio. On Oct. 5, 1921, a reporter from the Newark Sunday Call stationed at the Polo Grounds in upper Manhattan passed reports by telegraph to the newspaper office. The sports editor relayed information by phone to WJZ radio announcer Thomas Cowan, who would then repeat it for the listening audience. By the end of the game, Cowan didn't even know who had won; it took all of his brainpower simply to recite what he was being told.

It was a primitive setup, but it launched what has turned out to be the perfect marriage between medium and sport. Baseball has been played since the 19th century, but it might as well have been invented for radio. "Television takes your imagination away," said Al Michaels, the longtime sportscaster who now calls Sunday Night Football for NBC. "If you're listening to a game on the radio, you can dream along with the game."

Radio broadcasts exist for many sports, but none of them work quite as well as baseball. Ironically, that's because of a quality that today might be the largest existential threat to baseball: the languid pace of the game. Basketball and hockey are nonstop action, moving too fast to truly

appreciate with audio alone. Football progresses at a consistent rhythm: A team runs a play, analysts discuss it for 30 seconds or so, then another play unfolds, with little room for extra talk.

But baseball has no clock to anchor the events on the field, allowing radio announcers to tell extended stories between the pitches, a hallmark trait of a great announcer. Mr. Scully, who in 1982 earned a place in the broadcaster's wing at the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., was famous for his ability to seamlessly weave innings-long tales as the game played out. It was an extended conversation with his audience that lasted for nearly seven decades. "If Vinny was telling a story, I would just stop in the driveway and let the car idle, because I had to hear the rest of the story," said Mr. Michaels.

The time of the average game has ballooned to 3 hours, 11 minutes this season—an all-time record—and Major League Baseball is actively trying to eliminate those dead moments. Long games hurt TV ratings, which bring in revenue in a way that radio never could. In modern professional sports TV ratings are king, and baseball's are declining, with fewer people willing to commit three hours to a sport played every day for six months.

Radio requires no such commitment, lending itself to how baseball is ideally consumed: as a familiar sound in the background as life goes on, there for you when you want it, wherever you are. Understanding basketball or football on the radio takes active listening. Baseball can be listened to passively, the excitement in the broadcaster's voice dictating the level of attention needed at that moment.

"Radio means freedom," Mr. Scully said. "You have the radio on and you can paint the garage. With television, it's a commitment. Radio is your associate—you have it with you and you're listening while you're doing something else. Television, you're saying, 'You're the boss. I can't leave while you're on.'"

For announcers, baseball on the radio represents a blank canvas. From his or her perch in the press box high above home plate in stadiums around the country, the announcer's job is to fill it with color in the form of words. A TV announcer has a different role—to accentuate the main attraction, the images on the screen.

Radio is far more intimate. To the listeners, it so often feels like the broadcaster on the other end of the transmitter is speaking just to them. Gary Cohen, the New York Mets' play-by-play announcer on the SNY television network after many years calling Mets games on radio, says that "all things being equal—and by all things, I mean the money—most people would choose to stay on radio."

After a century of baseball on the radio, what happens next? TV has ruled sports for decades, and now other options—like streaming and social media—have given fans even more ways to get information about sports into their brains. Last year, the Oakland Athletics entered the season without a terrestrial radio station partner, meaning the only way fans could hear games would be using the team's online streaming platform. They eventually found a radio partner later in the summer. For half of this season, the Toronto Blue Jays didn't have a dedicated radio broadcast

team, opting instead for a simulcast aired on both TV and radio. In July, the Blue Jays announced a radio-only broadcast would return.

These episodes raised questions about whether other teams might move away from traditional radio. Baseball on radio has lasted 100 years, surviving the rise of TV and the internet. The practitioners of the craft—and millions of people who love the game—hope it lasts 100 more. “It’s a marvelous way to hear a sport,” Mr. Scully said. “Especially baseball.”

POST SEASON HR LEADERS

Eddie Rosario went on a power tear for the Braves. Here’s a look back on the best HR runs in post season history.

You never know who will go on a postseason power binge.

In many cases, it’s a renowned slugger. But in others, it’s a player not as well known for hitting the ball out of the park.

Only 10 players have homered at least seven times in a single postseason, and not surprisingly, all of them have done so in the Wild Card Era (since 1995), with expanded playoffs allowing for greater opportunity. (The pre-Wild Card Era record was six, set by the Pirates’ Bob Robertson in 1971 and matched by the Phillies’ Lenny Dykstra in 1993).

Here is a look at the players with the most roundtrippers in one postseason:

1) Randy Arozarena (2020 Rays): 10

Arozarena was the breakout star of the 2020 postseason, going from virtual unknown outside the Rays' fanbase to a household name within a matter of weeks. The 25-year-old outfielder set an MLB rookie record when he smashed his seventh home run of the postseason in Game 7 of the ALCS against the Astros, and then set a new MLB record for homers in one postseason with his ninth in World Series Game 4 against the Dodgers. Arozarena extended that record in Game 6, going deep in the top of the first inning for home run No. 10. Overall, Arozarena hit three homers in the ALDS against the Yankees, and four against the Astros in the ALCS before his three World Series homers. Along with the 10 homers, Arozarena set single-postseason records for both hits (29) and total bases (64).

2-T) Corey Seager (2020 Dodgers): 8

Seager had a postseason for the ages, smashing eight home runs overall, including five against the Braves to set a National League Championship Series record. Those eight total homers are the most by a shortstop in any single postseason, and Seager was named the MVP of [both the NLCS and World Series](#). With his eighth homer of the postseason in Game 4 of the Fall Classic

against the Rays, Seager tied Duke Snider for the second-most career postseason roundtrippers in Dodgers history, with 11. (Teammate Justin Turner homered in the same game for his franchise-record 12th career postseason home run).

2-T) Nelson Cruz (2011 Rangers): 8

The late-blooming slugger introduced himself to the nation in his first postseason, in 2010, launching six homers during the Rangers' run to the World Series. Then he topped himself the next year, helping Texas win a second straight American League pennant. Amazingly, he did so despite going homerless in a 1-for-15 Division Series. How? Cruz blasted six homers in an MVP-winning performance in the AL Championship Series against the Tigers, the most by a player in any single postseason series. The damage included two homers in Game 2, the latter the only walk-off grand slam ever hit in the postseason. Cruz now has 17 career postseason big flies, putting him in the top 10 on [the all-time list](#).

2-T) Carlos Beltrán (2004 Astros): 8

On June 24, 2004, the Astros acquired Beltrán from the Royals in a three-team trade also involving Oakland. It turned out rather well. Beltrán was good down the stretch for Houston, but he was otherworldly in his first chance at postseason play. The switch-hitting center fielder went deep four times in both of the first two rounds, a five-game victory over the Braves and a seven-game loss to the Cardinals, slashing a combined .435/.536/1.022.

2-T) Barry Bonds (2002 Giants): 8

Bonds never won a championship ring, but he certainly did all he could in 2002. Despite walking 27 times in 74 plate appearances -- 13 of those free passes intentional -- Bonds took advantage of his opportunities to do damage. He homered four times in a seven-game World Series loss to the Angels, including an absolutely monstrous blast off Halos closer Troy Percival in the ninth inning of Game 2 in Anaheim.

6-T) Jose Altuve (2017 Astros): 7

This performance was all the more amazing given that in his first three full Major League seasons (2012-14), the 5-foot-6 second baseman had finished with homer totals of seven, five and seven. By the time the 2017 postseason rolled around, Altuve had just hit 24 big flies for the second consecutive year, and he carried that power into Houston's championship run -- beginning with a [three-homer outburst](#) in Game 1 of the ALDS against the Red Sox.

6-T) Daniel Murphy (2015 Mets): 7

Murphy did not have a reputation as a power hitter, to put it mildly, entering the 2015 postseason with 62 career homers in 903 games. That included 14 in 130 regular-season games in '15. Then the playoffs started. Murphy hit a key homer off Clayton Kershaw in Game 1 of the NLDS, then set a record by going deep in six straight contests, between Game 4 of that series and the Mets' Game 4 clincher in the NLCS against the Cubs. Murphy cracked the decisive

homer off Zack Greinke in a winner-take-all Game 5 of the NLDS and was named MVP of the NLCS.

6-T) Jayson Werth (2009 Phillies): 7

A big part of the Phillies' 2008 championship run -- when he posted a 1.361 OPS in the World Series -- Werth was even better the next year. He popped a career-high 36 home runs in the regular season, then slugged .725 in 15 postseason games, although his club finished a couple wins short of defending its title. Werth had two multi-homer playoff games, including in Game 5 of the NLCS, when the Phillies finished off the Dodgers.

6-T) B.J. Upton (2008 Rays): 7

The 24-year-old hit all of nine home runs in 145 regular-season games for the 2008 Rays, who captured the AL East in what was the first winning season in franchise history. But after going homerless in his first two postseason games, Upton suddenly found his power stroke, going deep seven times in an eight-game span through Game 6 of the ALCS against the Red Sox. However, Upton went just 5-for-20 with no extra-base hits in a five-game World Series loss to Werth's Phillies.

6-T) Troy Glaus (2002 Angels): 7

While Bonds was carrying the Giants in 2002, Glaus was doing the same for the Angels. The slugging third baseman, who had hit 118 homers over the past three regular seasons, was on fire all October. His .344/.420/.770 slash line included two multihomer efforts, a clutch go-ahead shot in the eighth inning of ALCS Game 3 against the Twins, and eight World Series RBIs that helped earn him MVP honors.

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

10.17.2021

Good morning baseball fans. We are down to 4. I'm amazed the Red Sox got past the Rays but the game is played on the field. I watched all five Dodgers-Giants games—a very entertaining series.

As new subscribers come on board (we have just over 100) I offer them packages of back issues (please let me know if you'd like them sent to you). One comment back this week was that the September issues added up to over 200 pages. So a word from your fearless editor on structure and a request for feedback.

I cruise a bunch of websites every week for stuff that strikes me as interesting. I receive emails with content ideas from subscribers—thanks and please keep them coming. I also do some

original research looking through sites like baseballreference.com. It is a cut and paste exercise through the week with release Sunday mornings (copyrights belong to the respective authors/publishers-this is for the non-commercial enjoyment of my friends). The goal is 30-40 pages ---15-20 minutes reading over 2 cups of coffee for you folks. I try to put short stats related things up front and more detailed “think pieces” like today’s on umpire accuracy at the back.

If any of you have ideas on how to improve the structure and content, please send them along.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Youngest player with a multi-homer game in the postseason--Atlanta's Andruw Jones (2 HRs in Game 1 of the 1996 World Series). He was 19 years, 180 days old.

Most multi-homer games in postseason history--Babe Ruth, with 4.

First time a team hit two grand slams in a playoff game—the Boston Red Sox yesterday afternoon.

Interesting factoid --this is the first time in franchise history the White Sox have made the postseason in back-to-back years.

The Vegas over/under total for Dodgers wins this season back in the spring was 103.5. They went over and didn't win their division.

From 1955-2017, there was one Orioles season with at least 100 losses. They've now lost 100 games in three straight full seasons.

Who led the National League in games played in 1962--The Dodgers' Maury Wills (165 games, including all 3 tiebreaker games vs. the Giants).

I remember watching--Which ballpark was the site of the first World Series night game? Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium (Game 4 of the 1971 World Series on Oct. 13, 1971). It was the end of transistor radios in class.

Most post-season shut outs caught

Buster Posey 14

Yadier Molina 8

Yogi Berra 7

Trea Turner of the Dodgers ended the season with a 17 game hitting streak in which he batted .403 with 7 HRs and 14 RBIs, 31 hits and a 1.199 OPS.

Yankees Multiple 40+ HR Seasons

Babe Ruth 11

Lou Gehrig 5

Mickey Mantle 4

Jason Giambi 2

ARod 2

Curtis Granderson 2

Think about this age 20 season—Dwight Gooden in 1985. 24-4, 1.53 ERA, 268 K's.

Five second basemen in AL/NL history to hit 40 or more home runs in a season--Davey Johnson, Brian Dozier, Rogers Hornsby, Ryne Sandberg and Marcus Semien.

Considering what [Corey Kluber](#) (\$11 million), [Garrett Richards](#) (\$10 million) and [James Paxton](#) (\$8.5 million) received in guaranteed one-year deals last offseason as pitchers coming off injuries; it will be interesting to see how much Justin Verlander signs for.

MOOKIE

Game 5 Dodgers win to eliminate Giants—Mookie Betts was a big reason for all that happiness. By going 4-for-4, he became the only Dodger in history with four hits in a winner-take-all game.

Betts became the fourth player in AL/NL postseason history with at least four hits and a stolen base in a winner-take-all game, joining the Royals' George Brett (1985 World Series), the Astros' Terry Puhl (1980 NLCS) and the Pirates' Max Carey (1925 World Series).

Since joining the Dodgers, Betts is 32-for-95 (.337) with 17 runs scored in the postseason.

Before Mookie Betts last night, which Hall of Famer was the last player with 4 hits and a stolen base in a winner-take-all postseason game--Royals' George Brett (Game 7 of the 1985 World Series)

BRANTLEY

A guy I think is very underrated...When Michael Brantley of the Astros got a hit Friday night against the Red Sox the tv graphic said Brantley had hit in 16 straight post season games, one behind Manny Ramirez, Derek Jeter and Hank Bauer.

Looked up Bauer's career—1948 to 1961, 12 years Yankees, 2 years KC A's. The right fielder batted .277 in 1544 games, 164 HRs and 703 RBIs. He played in 53 World Series games with the Yankees (9 series) with 3 HRs.

LIST OF THE WEEK—MOST STEALS IN A FIVE YEAR PERIOD

1. Rickey Henderson (1982 - 1986) 403
2. Vince Coleman (1985 - 1989) 383
3. Lou Brock (1971 - 1975) 313
4. Tim Lincecum (1981 - 1985) 292
5. Maury Wills (1962 - 1966) 281
6. Ron LeFlore (1976 - 1980) 266
7. Omar Moreno (1978 - 1982) 265
8. Kenny Lofton (1992 - 1996) 259
9. Joe Morgan (1972 - 1976) 243
10. Bert Campaneris (1965 - 1969) 241

EXCERPTED FROM WSJ

Base stealers were safe on 75.7% of their attempts in 2021, a record. They've been even more successful during the early part of these playoffs, entering Thursday having gone 17 of 19 in stolen bases, an 89.5% clip. Oakland Athletics outfielder Starling Marte led the major leagues this year with 47 steals in 52 tries, including one stretch of 23 straight without being caught.

In the wake of "Moneyball" and the analytics revolution that followed, baseball's brainiest data wonks arrived at a surprising conclusion that changed the way the game is played: Stolen bases, one of the sport's most thrilling events, are worth attempting only if they are successful 75% of the time.

The result of this mathematical discovery was essentially the death of the stolen base. Teams reacted by keeping runners anchored on first, waiting around for the next home run. There were nearly 2,000 fewer stolen-base attempts this season than there were 20 years prior. The 2021 campaign saw the fewest stolen-base attempts on a per-game basis since 1964.

Yet as attempts go down, the success rate is going up. Base-stealers crossed the magic 75% threshold for the first time ever during the pandemic-shortened 2020 campaign and only improved this season. An entire generation has gone by since stolen bases fell out of favor, and the game hardly resembles what it once was. What's left is a style of play that could turn stolen bases into an unexpected inefficiency.

It starts with shifts in the approach of pitchers, the first line of defense against speedsters. As stolen-base rates plummeted, pitchers all but stopped concerning themselves with the possibility that the runner on first base might take off. It reached the point that runners try to steal so rarely that "it's almost like you forget to care," A's starter Chris Bassitt said earlier this season.

Modern baseball revolves around the pursuit of power, not small ball. The art of holding runners on base has become devalued, with pitchers generally instructed to focus on the batter trying to hit a home run and less on the runner leading off first base. Fastball velocities have surged, which means that pitchers' deliveries have become slower as they push their bodies to the limit, giving runners an extra half-second to go.

The Houston Astros were clinging to a one-run lead in the fourth inning of a playoff game on Tuesday when outfielder Kyle Tucker seized the moment. After leading off with a single, he broke for second, stealing the base without drawing a throw.

Then on the very next pitch, Tucker took off again, advancing to third so easily he didn't even need to slide.

His daring baserunning resulted in a three-run inning for the Astros, turning a tight contest into a rout. Now they're hosting the Boston Red Sox in the American League Championship Series on Friday.

Tucker's ability to so comfortably swipe two bases reinforced what has been a paradox of this season: While runners are trying to steal less frequently, when they do choose to go, they make it more often than ever before in history.

Prospective thieves were safe on 75.7% of their attempts in 2021, a record. They've been even more successful during the early part of these playoffs, entering Thursday having gone 17 of 19 in stolen bases, an 89.5% clip. Oakland Athletics outfielder Starling Marte led the major leagues this year with 47 steals in 52 tries, including one stretch of 23 straight without being caught.

As baseball looks to revert to a more exciting, fast-paced and athletic version of itself, it has raised questions about whether it's time for the much-maligned stolen base to stage a comeback.

"It gets the fans going, especially when you know there's a possibility and you're like, 'He's gonna go, he's gonna go,' and he does," said Los Angeles Dodgers infielder Trea Turner, who led the National League in steals with 32 in 37 attempts. "Fans can get behind that, and it's exciting."

In the wake of "Moneyball" and the analytics revolution that followed, baseball's brainiest data wonks arrived at a surprising conclusion that changed the way the game is played: Stolen bases, one of the sport's most thrilling events, are worth attempting only if they are successful 75% of the time.

The result of this mathematical discovery was essentially the death of the stolen base. Teams reacted by keeping runners anchored on first, waiting around for the next home run. There were nearly 2,000 fewer stolen-base attempts this season than there were 20 years prior. The 2021 campaign saw the fewest stolen-base attempts on a per-game basis since 1964.

Yet as attempts go down, the success rate is going up. Base-stealers crossed the magic 75% threshold for the first time ever during the pandemic-shortened 2020 campaign and only improved this season. An entire generation has gone by since stolen bases fell out of favor, and the game hardly resembles what it once was. What's left is a style of play that could turn stolen bases into an unexpected inefficiency.

It starts with shifts in the approach of pitchers, the first line of defense against speedsters. As stolen-base rates plummeted, pitchers all but stopped concerning themselves with the possibility

that the runner on first base might take off. It reached the point that runners try to steal so rarely that “it’s almost like you forget to care,” A’s starter Chris Bassitt said earlier this season.

Modern baseball revolves around the pursuit of power, not small ball. The art of holding runners on base has become devalued, with pitchers generally instructed to focus on the batter trying to hit a home run and less on the runner leading off first base. Fastball velocities have surged, which means that pitchers’ deliveries have become slower as they push their bodies to the limit, giving runners an extra half-second to go.

“From a pitching standpoint you’re worried about not giving up that home run or double, and the baserunner moving is kind of a ‘whatever’ in our game right now,” Bassitt said. “I don’t agree with that, but that’s just the case of what it is.”

How pitchers attack batters has also evolved. The simplest pitches for catchers to nab a potential base-stealer are fastballs. They get to the plate quicker and are relatively straight and often high in the strike zone, enabling catchers to easily leap out of their crouches and fire down to second base. Breaking balls are slow and tend to be thrown in or close to the dirt.

Fastball usage is now rapidly declining, as pitchers emphasize their secondary pitches in order to avoid contact altogether and rack up more strikeouts. Nearly 30% of all pitches thrown this season were breaking balls, up from 23% in 2008, the first year pitch-tracking data became available. Fastball usage has dropped from 62% to 57% over the last decade. So when runners choose to steal, there’s a good chance it’ll be the right pitch to go on.

Compared with the rest of baseball history, stolen bases today are still a remarkably rare occurrence. In 1999, four players stole 50 or more bases, led by Tony Womack with 72. In 1986, three players reached 80, led by 107 from Vince Coleman.

KIKE’

It’s difficult to follow a 5-for-6, three-run, three-RBI night in a postseason game.

[Kiké Hernández](#) was up for the challenge.

Following his five-hit performance in Boston’s [Game 2 American League Division Series victory](#) at Tropicana Field on Friday, Hernández settled for three hits, one run and two RBIs in the Red Sox’s [pivotal 6-4 Game 3 win](#) on Sunday at Fenway Park.

Hernández established a Major League record with his eighth hit over a two-game span in a single postseason.

Hernández’s eighth hit -- the homer off a Pete Fairbanks fastball -- came off the bat at 109.8 mph and traveled a projected 424 feet, according to Statcast. The home run was Hernández’s

seventh consecutive at-bat with a hit, shattering a Red Sox record of six that had been shared by David Ortiz (2013) and Hanley Ramirez (2017), according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Across three games this series, Hernández is 8-for-16 with four runs, three doubles, two homers and five RBIs.

The postseason record is eight straight at-bats with a hit, shared by Reggie Jackson (1977-78), Billy Hatcher (1990) and Miguel Cairo (2001-02).

Hernández is the first player to collect eight hits across a two-game span in a single postseason. The Yankees' Derek Jeter had eight hits in a two-game span across the 2005-06 postseasons.

Additionally, Hernández has tied the Red Sox postseason record for extra-base hits in a single series, with five. The mark is shared by Carl Yastrzemski (1967 World Series), John Valentin (1999 ALDS) and Kevin Youkilis (twice -- 2007 ALCS and 2008 ALCS).

Then, [Kiké Hernández](#) stole the show with a monster performance for the Red Sox in their American League Division Series victory over Tampa Bay. So it should come as no surprise that in Game 1 of the AL Championship Series against the Astros, it was Hernández who kicked things off with a bang.

The legend of Postseason Kiké grew even larger on Friday night. His latest feat: A four-hit effort in which he launched a pair of home runs and finished a triple shy of the cycle.

Hernández's run as a postseason juggernaut is reaching historic levels. With a double in the fourth as well, his 13 hits over his last four games are the most in a four-game span for any player in MLB postseason history. He passed:

Randy Arozarena 11	2020
Hideki Matsui 11	2004
Marquis Grissom 11	1995
Billy Hatcher 11	1990

Hernández's eight extra-base hits in his last four games, tied with Hideki Matsui and Reggie Jackson for the most over a four-game span in postseason history. His pair of four-hit games in the last week is tied for second-most in a single postseason, trailing Albert Pujols (2011) by one game. This was also Hernández's third career postseason game with 10 or more total bases, surpassing Pujols, Babe Ruth, Steve Garvey and George Brett.

MAX FRIED

NLDS game 3. Max Fried of the Braves beat the Brewers 3-0.

6 IP, 3 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 BB, 9 K

First Braves post-season pitching effort of 6 innings, 9 K, 0 runs, 0 walks.

Not Maddux, Glavine, Smoltz, Burdette, Spahn.

This feat had never been accomplished, by any Brave — in 186 postseason starts by 47 different Braves ... until Max Fried did it Saturday.

One more fun fact: The Braves have been around so long, they won their first World Series during World War I. But you know what they'd never, ever done, in any postseason series in franchise history, until this week?

They had never had two starting pitchers head for the mound and strike out at least nine hitters in back-to-back games in the same postseason series ... *until this series!* [Charlie Morton](#) whiffed nine Brewers in Game 1 Friday. Then Max Fried K'd nine more in Game 2 Saturday.

MORE GREAT STUFF FROM THE ATHLETIC'S JAYSON STARK

Freddie Freeman's average with runners in scoring position on you from the last seven seasons.

.352

.423

.358

.327

.346

.295

.376

Hey, those are some cool-looking numbers, aren't they? They also add up to a .346 average in those situations — over seven seasons. And guess where that ranks him in the entire sport in that span? Did somebody say first? Correct! Here are the active players who trail him, just in case their names sound familiar. (Minimum: 400 plate appearances in those situations.)

Freddie Freeman: .346

[Nolan Arenado](#): **.338**

[Mookie Betts](#): **.333**

[Mike Trout: .328](#)

(Source: baseball-reference.com/Stathead)

How good is Julio Urias of the Dodgers?

He hasn't lost since June. He went 20-3 during the regular season. He's now 5-0 in the last two postseasons. **His regular-season record over the last two seasons: 23-3 (.885 win pct.)**

His record, *counting the postseason*, over the last two seasons: 28-3 (.903 win pct.!)

He has the second best 2 year regular season winning pct (second to Randy Johnson 1995-96, 23-2, .920 winning pct. Add post season and Urias has the best 2 year pct in MLB history. And while he was at it, Urias batted .313 with runners in scoring position.

The Braves won a postseason game in Milwaukee on Saturday ... for the first time since Game 2 of the 1958 World Series ... when they were the *home* team because they hadn't gotten around to moving to Atlanta yet.

Lew Burdette went all nine innings on the mound that day — and homered *in the first inning* ... but *not* off the [Yankees'](#) starter in that game (Bob Turley), because the Braves had knocked him out after a third of an inning. It wound up Braves 13, Yankees 5, despite two Mickey Mantle homers.

Wander Franco of the Rays crushed a 96 mph fastball over the Green Monster at Fenway Park on Oct. 10, 2021.

By recording his first postseason homer at the age of 20, Franco became one of the youngest players to hit a postseason home run in Major League Baseball history.

Here's a look at the full list:

1. Andruw Jones

Homers: 1996 NLCS Game 7 (19 years, 177 days), 1996 World Series Game 1 (two; 19 years, 180 days)

The supremely talented Jones earned several distinctions during his first foray into October, becoming the youngest to homer in both the postseason and in the World Series. Jones' first dinger came as part of a Braves barrage in Game 7 of the NLCS as they completed a comeback from down three games to one against St. Louis.

Jones stayed hot three nights later, homering twice off Andy Pettite and Brian Boehringer to make Fall Classic history in the Braves' 12-1 rout of the Yankees in Game 1.

2. Bryce Harper

Homers: 2012 NLDS Game 5 (19 years, 362 days)

Fresh off winning the NL Rookie of the Year Award, the highly regarded Harper tripled in the Nationals' first run off Cardinals ace Adam Wainwright in the first inning of the decisive Game 5, and then sent the home crowd into a frenzy with a solo blast to lead off the third.

Unfortunately, Harper's big day was overshadowed by Washington's collapse as the Nationals blew a 6-0 lead and saw their season end with a 9-7 St. Louis victory.

3. Manny Machado

Homers: 2012 ALDS Game 3 (20 years, 96 days)

Machado's fifth-inning tater off Yankees starter Hiroki Kuroda came in a big moment, giving the Orioles a 2-1 lead midway through the swing contest of the series with the teams tied at one game apiece. But like Harper, Machado was overshadowed by Yankees veteran Raul Ibanez, who hit two homers -- including a 12th-inning walk-off shot -- that gave New York momentum in its eventual five-game triumph.

4. Miguel Cabrera

Homers: 2003 NLCS Game 1 (20 years, 172 days), 2003 NLCS Game 2 (20 years, 173 days), 2003 NLCS Game 7 (20 years, 180 days), 2003 World Series Game 4 (20 years, 187 days)

It's hard to imagine the Marlins making their storybook run in the fall of 2003 without a breakout from Cabrera, who showed the first glimpses of the immense hitting talent that would define his Hall of Fame-caliber career. Cabrera's homer yielders included aces Carlos Zambrano, Mark Prior and Kerry Wood in Florida's topsy-turvy NLCS triumph, but his most impressive homer came in the World Series. After Roger Clemens threw a heater up and in to Cabrera in Game 4, the 20-year-old kept grinding and took the Yankees' ace deep on the seventh pitch of the at-bat. The Marlins gutted out a 12-inning victory that night and went on to shock the Yankees in six games.

5. Wander Franco

Homers: 2021 ALDS Game 3 (20 years, 223 days)

Franco entered the 2021 season as baseball's consensus No. 1 overall prospect and continued cementing his status as a future star in October. The phenom clobbered an opposite-field home run over Fenway Park's famous Green Monster for his second hit of the game and sixth of the postseason, making him [the only 20-year-old or younger player](#) with multiple hits in his first three postseason games.

6. Ronald Acuña Jr.

Homers: 2018 NLDS Game 3 (20 years, 293 days)

Acuña became the youngest player to hit a grand slam in a postseason game, punctuating the Braves' five-run second inning with a towering shot against Buehler at SunTrust Park. It marked

the Braves' first grand slam in the playoffs since Adam LaRoche in Game 4 of the 2005 NLDS and the first of Acuna's career.

7. Juan Soto

Homers: 2019 NLDS Game 3 (20 years, 346 days), 2019 NLDS Game 5 (20 years, 349 days), 2019 World Series Game 1 (20 years, 363 days), 2019 World Series Game 5 (21 years, 2 days), 2019 World Series Game 6 (21 years, 4 days)

Soto had an incredible 2019 regular season, then took his game to another level on the national postseason stage. At just 20 years old, he clubbed a pair of homers in Washington's NLDS victory over the Dodgers. Soto then added another in Game 1 of the World Series, then -- after celebrating his 21st birthday on the same day as Game 3 of the Fall Classic -- the 21-year-old tacked on two more homers to help close out the Nationals' World Series title.

8. Rafael Devers

Homers: 2017 ALDS Game 3 (20 years, 349 days), 2017 ALDS Game 4 (20 years, 350 days)

As a rookie in 2017, Devers went deep twice for the Red Sox in the ALDS against the eventual-champion Astros. His first long ball was a two-run, go-ahead shot off Francisco Liriano in Game 3 that helped Boston avoid elimination and force a Game 4. Devers homered again in that contest, knocking an inside-the-parker in the ninth inning that pulled Boston to within one run. It was the 17th inside-the-park home run in postseason history and first since Alcides Escobar's in Game 1 of the 2015 World Series.

9. Mickey Mantle

Homers: 1952 World Series Game 6 (20 years, 352 days), 1952 World Series Game 7 (20 years, 353 days)

Mantle hit 18 postseason home runs in his Hall of Fame career. The first two came as a fresh-faced 20-year-old in the 1952 World Series against the Brooklyn Dodgers and helped deliver the Yankees their 15th title. Mantle went deep in the eighth inning for a solo homer that ended up being the deciding run in Game 6, then hit a go-ahead blast in the sixth inning of New York's title-clinching Game 7 victory.

10. Carlos Correa

Homers: 2015 ALDS Game 4 (two; 21 years, 20 days)

Correa became the youngest player in AL history with a multihomer playoff game (behind only Jones for youngest overall) when he went deep twice for Houston in a losing effort in Game 4 of the 2015 ALDS. Correa, the AL's Rookie of the Year that season, homered off Royals starter Yordano Ventura in the second, then repeated the feat in the third.

HE HITS, HE PITCHES. BUT SHOHEI OHTANI ALSO FREES UP AN EXTRA ROSTER SPOT. HOW MUCH VALUE DOES THAT OFFER?

Interesting analysis from Eno Sarris of The Athletic

In 2018, Doug Fearing, former [Dodgers](#) head of research and development and current head of Zelus Analytics, penned an academic piece about the value of versatility to a roster. He focused on [Ben Zobrist](#) in [that paper](#), but his findings presaged [Chris Taylor](#)'s importance to the Dodgers. By trying to "quantify the impact of flexibility on team and individual performance and explore the player chains that arise when injuries occur," the paper showed that "top teams can attribute at least one to two wins per season to flexibility alone, generally as a result of long subchains in the infield or outfield."

That makes sense when you think about the role of a manager on any given day. He's trying to put the best lineup out there, and if he has one player who can play six or seven positions, he has a way to paper over any short-term loss of another player to injury. As teams try to chase the platoon advantage in every at-bat, too, a player like Taylor can really improve the manager's chances of sending someone of the correct handedness to the plate. Taylor is a double-switcher's dream and has helped the Dodgers overcome injury issues with players such as [Corey Seager](#), [Max Muncy](#) and [Cody Bellinger](#) this year.

He's a ton of positions in one roster slot, and that helps the manager solve the Rubik's Cube that is the lineup.

"You're solving a constrained optimization problem every time you're putting together a lineup," Fearing said on the phone. "You want to eliminate as many constraints as possible so you can have the best lineup on the field on any given day. When you have players that that can play a lot of positions really well it helps soften some of those constraints and gives you more options."

Chris Taylor's added value does not *exactly* port over to the Shohei Ohtani situation. As great as Ohtani is, he's not helping at center or shortstop when someone gets hurt at those positions. And his ability to stay on the field as a hitter even when he can't pitch is something that WAR should capture: He's still producing, and the numbers will capture it.

But there *is* something similar here. Having Chris Taylor means that you don't necessarily need to have a backup on the roster who is dedicated to shortstop, or to center field, or to second base. He can be the backup. And that opens up another spot on the active roster. Much like the way Ohtani's being a pitcher and a hitter opens up a roster spot for the [Angels](#).

"What is the value of a (extra) roster spot?" is the most important question, Fearing said. "How many wins does that spot create for the average team?"

Here is where there might be a divergence between WAR as a construct and what actually takes place from team to team, where the way organizations use their rosters varies widely. Because, all things being equal, the "R" in WAR stands for replacement, or what the average team would be able to call up from Triple A right now if it were given another roster spot. And replacement equals zero.

In practicality, that's close to what has happened with the 26th roster spot this year. If you order the players on each team one through 30 by quality, the average 26th slot has been worth .15 WAR this year. If you order them by playing time, the average 26th man has been worth .27 WAR. Either way, you'd round those numbers to zero, especially with a statistic that has fairly wide confidence bands. In other words, one couldn't say with any certainty that a player with .15 more WAR than another player was actually any better than him, so it's a functional zero.

But that doesn't feel right, either. There are obviously teams that make a full effort to keep roster flexibility so they can make impactful waiver claims over the course of the season. The Dodgers claimed [Phil Bickford](#) this year, and since he joined the team, he's been its [fourth-best reliever by WAR](#). You could say that having someone like Taylor on the team helped the Dodgers keep that roster spot open for the claim who produced all that value.

Over the past two seasons, the [Giants](#) — who are led by the waiver-aggressive Farhan Zaidi, who worked with Fearing on the Dodgers — have acquired [Jake Jewell](#), [José Quintana](#), [Luis González](#), [Skye Bolt](#), [Luís Madero](#), [Kean Wong](#), [Tyler Anderson](#), [Wandy Peralta](#), [Ricardo Pinto](#), Corbin Joseph, [Kyle Barraclough](#), [Ryan Dull](#), [Joey Rickard](#), [Aaron Altherr](#), [Hanser Alberto](#) and more off waivers. Some of those claims have had very valuable periods, but as a group, you'd round them to zero WAR.

That does, though, point to the fact that the lower part of a roster is pretty fluid, and focusing on just one spot to try to find the value of the bottom of a roster doesn't make sense. So let's look at which teams are best at getting value from the 26th to 30th spots on the roster, as judged by quality.

Getting the most out of the roster: (I skipped the chart comparing WAR for each roster slot but here is the overall ranking—a lot of playoff teams in there).

1. Rays
2. Yankees
3. Giants
4. Dodgers
5. White Sox
6. Astros
7. Mets
8. Brewers

9. Braves

10. Blue Jays

Not every team here is making claims at the pace of the Giants; some of them got here by making acquisitions at the trade deadline that bolstered their team and created depth. Some had some injuries, which thrust lower-level players into more prominent roles and spread the wins around the roster some.

This leaderboard *does* capture the teams that are the most active when it comes to transactions on the back end of the roster, though. The [Mets](#) (third), Dodgers (fourth), [Braves](#) (eighth) and Giants (eighth) are all in the top 10 in waiver claims since the 2020 season ended.

It's still not a ton of value. [Cubs](#) outfielder [Frank Schwindel](#), Angels infielder [Jack Mayfield](#), [Pirates](#) outfielder [Ben Gamel](#), Cleveland outfielder [Harold Ramirez](#), [Orioles](#) infielder [Jorge Mateo](#) and Bickford are probably the very best waiver claims this season, and they've put up around five wins as a group, mostly from Schwindel, who went to a roster decimated by trades that had all sorts of room. Ben Zobrist didn't make that happen, unless we're talking some serious butterfly-effect stuff.

So how many wins does Ohtani actually provide with his flexibility, beyond whatever impact he makes at the plate and on the mound?

A front office that makes an effort can try to milk a half a win out of an extra roster spot afforded by a player like Ohtani due to the extra roster space. Once you consider that he also does that for the 40-man roster, maybe it's a little more. Giving him a full win would feel extra generous, though, since so many teams don't do much at all with that roster spot. You have to actually put in the work to make the flexibility you get from Ohtani be worth anything more than zero.

Even if you add that value of a roster spot to Ohtani's production so far this year, the probable MVP this season will end up a little short of the 10-plus wins that his teammate [Mike Trout](#) put up in his first two full efforts in the big leagues. There have only been 54 10-win seasons in the history of baseball, according to FanGraphs.

Eh, that's good news, really. Something for Ohtani to shoot for in the sequel.

HERE ARE MLB'S POSTSEASON HR LEADERS

To rack up a lot of home runs in the postseason, a hitter needs plenty of chances and the ability to come through on the biggest stage.

These 12 elite October performers have had both, each producing at least 17 big flies in their playoff careers. Here is a look at the top postseason home run hitters of all time.

1) Manny Ramírez: 29 HR

Manny played in 11 postseasons for the Indians, Red Sox and Dodgers, got 493 plate appearances (third all time) and slugged a typically robust .544. His first two postseason homers, in Game 2 of the 1995 American League Championship Series, helped Cleveland reach the World Series. He was still raking as a 36-year-old for the 2008 Dodgers, when he went 13-for-25 with four big flies in eight October games. In between, Ramírez was MVP of Boston's victory in the 2004 World Series.

2) Bernie Williams: 22 HR

Williams wasn't known as a huge power hitter, topping out at 30 homers in a season. But as a key member of the Yankees in the 1990s and 2000s, he got lots of October opportunities and took advantage. The center fielder was MVP of the 1996 ALCS against the Orioles, when he homered twice, including an 11th-inning walk-off shot in Game 1. He finished that year's championship run with six long balls and wasn't done coming through in the clutch. Williams hit another extra-inning walk-off in Game 1 of the 1999 ALCS against the Red Sox, making him one of three players (along with David Ortiz and Carlos Correa) to end two different postseason games with a homer.

T-3) Derek Jeter: 20 HR

Jeter's postseason batting average (.308) was two points lower than his regular-season mark, but his .465 slugging percentage was 25 points higher. The five-time World Series champion, who had three 20-homer campaigns in his career, essentially had a fourth if you combine his playoff production over 158 games. The damage included two homers in the 2000 World Series against the Mets, which led him to MVP honors. Then there was his famous 10th-inning walk-off in Game 4 of the 2001 Fall Classic against the D-backs, after the clock struck midnight at Yankee Stadium and the calendar flipped to November for the first time in World Series history.

T-3) Jose Altuve: 20 HR

Altuve has been one of the best postseason tone-setters, clubbing a playoff-record seven first-inning homers. Altuve's first three postseason homers all came in the same game, as he turned in a three-homer performance in Game 1 of the 2017 ALDS against the Red Sox. While Altuve has had his share of first-inning home runs, his most memorable blast came in Game 6 of the '19 ALCS, when he sent Houston to the World Series with a pennant-clinching walk-off shot against Aroldis Chapman. Altuve's homer to help Houston clinch in Game 4 of the 2021 ALDS gave him at least one big fly in five straight postseasons. He then got to the 20-homer mark for his postseason career with a two-run shot in ALCS Game 1 against the Red Sox.

T-5) Albert Pujols: 19 HR

Pujols, tied as the active postseason home run leader with George Springer, is a two-time World Series champion. He was MVP of the 2004 NLCS (four homers) and is one of only 10 players to go deep three times in a postseason game -- one of four to do it in the World Series (2011, Game

3). And yet, his most famous homer remains one that came in a series his team lost. That was the 2005 NLCS, when the Cardinals superstar hushed the Houston crowd by annihilating a ball off All-Star closer Brad Lidge for a go-ahead, three-run shot in the top of the ninth. Pujols could have climbed to the top of this list, but only made the postseason once with the Angels (one homer in 2014) before returning with the Dodgers in 2021.

T-5) George Springer: 19 HR

Springer has gotten off to quite the start in his postseason career. The 2020 postseason was the fifth of Springer's career, and he's hit multiple home runs in all but the first one -- when he hit one home run in six games in the 2015 postseason. While Springer has a long ways to go, it'll be hard to top his MVP-winning performance in the 2017 World Series, when he swatted five homers.

T-7) Reggie Jackson: 18 HR

Well, his nickname is Mr. October for a reason. Reggie slugged .527 over 11 postseasons and is one of three players -- and the only hitter -- to win multiple World Series MVP Awards, doing so for the 1973 A's and '77 Yankees. In the latter Fall Classic, against the Dodgers, Jackson set a record for a single World Series with five homers (since tied by Chase Utley in 2009 and George Springer in '17). The barrage included three big flies in the Yankees' clinching victory in Game 6 at Yankee Stadium, with Jackson driving in five of the team's eight runs.

T-7) Mickey Mantle: 18 HR

Mantle played his entire career before the postseason expanded to multiple rounds in 1969, but his 18 World Series home runs are three more than any other player (Babe Ruth, 15). Nine of Mantle's homers came off Dodgers pitchers, his most of any opponent. That's tied for the second-most postseason home runs by a player against a single opponent, with Jackson (also against the Dodgers). Only Duke Snider hit more against an opponent -- with 10 against the Yankees. Mantle hit one walk-off home run in his postseason career, in 1964 World Series Game 3, off the Cardinals' Barney Schultz.

T-7) Nelson Cruz: 18 HR

Cruz's 18 career postseason homers include six in his first postseason in 2010, and eight in 2011, when he set a record for a single series with six in the ALCS. That performance included a walk-off shot in Game 2, off the Tigers' Ryan Perry in the bottom of the 11th inning. In 2021, he became the 11th player to hit at least one postseason homer after turning 40, swatting a solo homer off Nick Pivetta of the Red Sox during Game 1 of the ALDS as a member of the Rays.

T-7) Carlos Correa: 18 HR

Correa only turned 27 shortly before the start of the 2021 postseason, yet he's already rocketing up this list. (No other player has gone deep more than 13 times in the postseason before their 27th birthday). Correa got things started with a multi-homer effort in Game 4 of the 2015 ALDS and has continued to provide October power in the years since. His six big flies in the 2020 playoffs included a walk-off shot in Game 5 of the ALCS against the Rays, which staved off elimination for Houston and made Correa the third player with multiple postseason walk-offs. He then went deep in Game 1 of the 2021 ALCS against the Red Sox, launching a go-ahead solo homer in the seventh inning at Minute Maid Park for the 18th postseason homer of his career.

T-11) David Ortiz: 17 HR

Ortiz's first career postseason home run was off Mike Mussina in ALCS Game 1 in 2003. He hit another home run, off David Wells, in Game 7 of that series, but the legend would really grow in 2004. Ortiz hit two walk-off home runs in the 2004 postseason, off Jarrod Washburn in ALDS Game 3 and off Paul Quantrill in the 14th inning in ALCS Game 4, with the Red Sox facing elimination. Ortiz, who took MVP honors in the latter series, is the only player to hit multiple walk-off home runs in a single postseason. He later was named World Series MVP in 2013, when he homered twice against the Cardinals shortly before turning 38.

T-11) Jim Thome: 17 HR

Thome hit all of his homers in the first 53 games of his postseason career, for the Indians between 1995-2001. That was easily the most in MLB over that span. His first came in Game 3 of the 1995 ALDS against the Red Sox, when he took Tim Wakefield deep. There were three pitchers he homered off multiple times in the postseason, hitting two each off Bret Saberhagen, Andy Pettitte and Derek Lowe. However, Thome went homerless in his final 18 postseason games as he bounced from the Indians to the White Sox, Dodgers, Twins and Orioles.

GRADING MLB UMPIRES: MEET THE HUMANS BEHIND THE TWITTER BOTS THAT TRACK BALLS AND STRIKES

An old Acer laptop sits on top of a mini fridge in a 17th-floor dorm room at Boston University. It has one job. Every morning, at 10:30 a.m., the laptop whirs to life and runs some simple Python code, scraping data from an internet library, generating graphics and spitting them out to more than 140,000 followers on Twitter. Then the laptop goes to sleep. This is a day in the life of a bot.

Its creator is often in class at that time of morning. Ethan Singer is a sophomore studying statistics, computer science and public policy at BU. He never imagined this many people would follow an account about umpires.

The [@UmpScorecards](#) bot is the result of a project Singer started three summers ago when he was still a high schooler in Bethesda, Md. A friend showed Singer a study from BU lecturer Mark T. Williams that [found MLB umpires had missed 34,294 ball/strike calls](#) in 2018. Singer wanted to know more about the impact of incorrect calls — quantifying their value over sheer volume — so he created a tool to analyze how individual missed calls change run expectancy and, after two years of tinkering, took it to Twitter.

“Now,” Singer says, “the tweets just send themselves from my dorm room.”

The bot is fully automated. It draws from detailed data released daily by [MLB](#) and pulls five of the 89 values for each pitch: the baseball's horizontal and vertical position as it crosses home plate; the top and bottom of the strike zone; and whether the pitch was called a ball or a strike. That turns into a scorecard for each umpire, each day of the regular season and playoffs, listing their accuracy, consistency, crucial missed calls and which team those helped or hurt.

Singer does not lose sight of the fact he'd built a bot targeting a profession already threatened by them. Umpires always are under fire and often absorb undue criticism, Singer says. He wants his project to be as objective as possible. So he goes to class and lets the Acer laptop do its job. There is no personality infused into the tweets, just cold, hard numbers. Once the bot's scorecards hit the Twitter bloodstream, wherever they go from there is not Singer's call.

On the last day of the 2021 regular season, Ángel Hernández was the home-plate umpire for the Yankees' 1-0 walk-off win over the [Rays](#). Any missed call could have tipped the score and sent New York to a Game 163 against Toronto. Twitter had erupted during the game when Hernández, who's been calling MLB games for 30 years, flipped over the dugout railing to make an out call.

But when retired MLB umpire Dale Scott saw [the @UmpScorecards report](#) for that game — 96 percent accuracy, 99 percent consistency — he felt compelled to share it. "Can we maybe try to put to rest that every time Ángel walks on the field he's the worst umpire ever? Because it's just a bunch of BS," Scott says.

If you were to rank the most reviled umpires in baseball, Hernández would be toward the top. Singer has noticed that fans are surprised when Hernández turns in a good game (like Yankees-Rays), and they pile on whenever he grades out poorly (like [the week before](#)). To Singer, it's a little overblown. "By my numbers, he's not great," Singer says, "but he's also not the worst."

There are more people closely tracking umpires than ever before, and more ways to do it. Pitchers have always developed scouting reports for individual umpires, looking for soft spots to exploit and expand their strike zones. But that information wasn't blasted to millions of baseball fans until rather recently. Last week, before the AL wild-card game, ESPN showed a breakdown of home-plate umpire Mark Carlson's hot and cold zones for called strikes. (He's susceptible to calling inside strikes to right-handed batters, and outside to lefties.) Now, with Statcast data and game footage readily available, there's no need for pitchers to stockpile secret umpire scouting reports. It's all out there. Your favorite player probably follows @UmpScorecards. [Mike Trout](#) does.

Easy access to umpire profiles can be a benefit to ballclubs and baseball fans, but it also can make life miserable for umpires. It's one thing to be booed at a ballpark one night. It's another to be dragged on social media for days on end. (Bill Miller, head of the MLBUA, did not respond to an interview request.)

Scott retired in 2017. He says MLB security advised active umpires not to have social media accounts. Scott didn't need to be told twice. He was part of the crew in Atlanta on July 27, 2011, when Jerry Meals called a [Braves](#) runner safe at home plate in the 19th inning and [became public enemy No. 1 in Pittsburgh](#). Meals' phone number and home address were leaked online, and he reportedly received death threats. So, if Scott were still umpiring, he'd be off Twitter.

"When you sign up to be an umpire, you're not signing up to make new friends," Scott says, laughing. "Part of the job is the negativity. When people are yelling at me on the field, they don't know Dale Scott. They're yelling at a uniform. They're yelling at the guy who made an out call they don't like. ...

"But when you get into social media, with your name and your stats, it feels like a much more personalized thing. They still don't know Dale Scott. They read about him every fourth day after a plate job, or they see him on a goofy call on the bases, and suddenly it seems much more personalized, like they're attacking you and not necessarily just a uniform that made a call."

A year ago, in the first month of Singer's freshman year, the [Giants](#) missed the final NL playoff spot by one run, losing a win-and-in home game to San Diego on the last day of the regular season. The @UmpScorecards account was 40 days old and had next to no one paying attention to it. That changed when the bot tweeted [the report for home-plate umpire Rob Drake](#): He had missed 29 calls, and the net change in run expectancy in favor of the [Padres](#) (1.85 runs) was greater than their margin of victory. San Franciscans were incensed.

"That was the first one that actually got some exposure," Singer says.

Singer's @UmpScorecards wasn't the first umpire bot on Twitter, though by now it's the most popular and polished. One of its predecessors, [@UmpireAuditor](#), is the bad boy of the genre — boasting 50,000 followers, a Twitter banner that shows it's been blocked by the Major League Baseball Umpires Association ([@MLBUA](#)) and a one-sentence bio: "The worst calls of the day, every day."

(The tweet that led to the umpires union blocking @UmpireAuditor — sent not by the bot, but by its creator, Dylan Yep — was mocking the umpire Drake after [he tweeted about buying a gun for a coming civil war](#) if then-President Donald Trump were impeached. Yep doesn't appear to regret his tweet, but tagging @MLBUA in it, he admits, "wasn't my most professional moment.")

In 2014, while teaching himself to code, Yep decided his first data project would be about umpires. He was a diehard baseball fan bothered by the disproportionately large impact umpires can have on games. And, like Singer, no one cared about his project at first. "I was absolutely shouting into the void for like four years," Yep says. But he cornered the missed-call market. His bot posts the worst call of the day, with video evidence, and angry fans pounce.

There's more nuance to @UmpScorecards, which captures the best calls and worst calls and every one in between, bringing a fuller picture into focus.

This summer, Singer [started a website](#) to serve as a storehouse for umpire stats from this season, allowing fans to sort all 99 home-plate umpires by consistency, average, favor and leverage metrics. Soon after, Singer saw two spikes emerge in site traffic. The first was at 10:30 a.m., right as the bot tweeted results from the previous day's games. The second was between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m., when games were underway and fans stopped by to scout the umpire.

On the morning of May 8, @UmpScorecards [published a scorecard from a 5-0 Cardinals win](#) over the [Rockies](#) called by John Libka, a 34-year-old umpire from Michigan. Libka had missed one call — on a borderline pitch in the second inning — for 99 percent accuracy and consistency grades. It was an almost perfect game. The tweet went wild. Even players shared it. [Cubs](#) outfielder [Michael Hermosillo](#) wrote, "this is honestly amazing," and the [Dodgers'](#) Steven Souza Jr. said Libka "is no doubt a stud at what he does." An appreciation post for Libka's game gained 13,000 upvotes on Reddit. More than 2.3 million people have watched Jomboy's video breakdown of it.

That's an element Singer has come to enjoy about @UmpScorecards: By showing results from every game, it reveals the consistent quality of many MLB umpires. Just as [Twins](#) slugger [Josh Donaldson](#) can wave around the scorecards [as proof of poor umpiring](#), Oakland starter [Chris Bassitt](#) can share one from a recent start — umpire Adam Hamari; two missed calls out of 134 called pitches — and [tip his cap](#): "Honestly... this is absolutely absurd for how bad I was spraying the ball. 2 missed calls all day is elite." Most weeks, several of the most popular @UmpScorecards tweets are from especially well-called games.

"I have the utmost respect for umpires," Singer says. "It's an impossible job, and there's just an unbelievable amount of scrutiny. It's a rare combination. It's unfortunate that there's virtually nowhere on the internet that celebrates good umpires. ... Not that I'm providing a major service for umpires, but it is nice."

There is an asterisk to the Libka story. The next day, after @UmpScorecards's tweet took off, MLB completed post-processing and updated the data. Libka, it turned out, had missed two calls. The almost perfect game was one pitch less perfect. It wasn't even the best call of the year to that point. Six days earlier, umpire Lance Barksdale had called 156 of 157 pitches correctly in a 16-4 Dodgers rout of the [Brewers](#). No one noticed. They just wanted the game to end.

When an umpire is on fire, they feel it. But MLB doesn't send out push alerts putting fans on perfect-game watch. Pitchers don't suddenly give the umpire the silent treatment. Managers don't pause their yapping for fear of jinxing it. The game just goes on. The umpire will get his official grade from the league the next morning. And if it's a perfect score, barely anyone finds out.

Scott, the retired umpire, has been an Oregon football season ticket-holder for years. He'll never yell about the officiating, even if replay shows a blown call. When his friends whine about a holding call against the Ducks, Scott will remind them about an earlier holding call that fell in their favor and gave them a first down. This is incredibly annoying, on brand, and accurate.

"They never remember that shit," Scott says, laughing.

Lindsay Imber isn't an MLB umpire, but she watches games like one, which means every baseball game has three lineups: home, away and umpires.

Imber umpired locally in Los Angeles until taking a wild pitch to the head. Now, she is an organist for the Anaheim Ducks, a member of the Society for American Baseball Research's Umpires and Rules Research Committee, owner of [CloseCallSports.com](https://www.closecallsports.com) and chief commissioner of the MLB Umpire Ejection Fantasy League. (The UEFL is a real thing, and MLB umpires know all about it. "If you're gonna draft, you'd better take Joe West and Ángel," Scott says.) It's a resume unlike any other. Inspired by a confusing but correct interference call in 2007, Imber created CloseCallSports to explain umpire rulings, often providing a pro-umpire perspective that doesn't exist elsewhere. That was well before Twitter and its bots. CloseCallSports and its devoted community of readers turned into [a tiny corner of the baseball internet just for umpires](#).

Now, the universe of umpire content is ever expanding. "The cat's kind of out of the bag," Imber says. In the earlier days of the site, she explains, the best resource for umpire tracking was Brooks Baseball, but it had several issues: The strike zone was two-dimensional; its vertical height constant from one batter to the next; and the ball a singular data point instead of a sphere almost three inches in diameter. "It was like, this is useful, but it's also not useful." (One of Imber's readers contacted Singer about factoring in ball width to eliminate potential error on edge calls. Singer adjusted the @UmpScoresheets algorithm.)

Umpire grading has been part of the profession for two decades, though the information isn't released publicly. When the AL and NL merged in 2000 and combined the umpiring crews, MLB officials wanted a more book-rule, consistent strike zone. Umpires had widened the zone significantly and stopped calling the high strike. "It was getting a little bit ridiculous," Scott admits. So, the league redefined the zone and introduced tracking technology QuesTec to evaluate umpires. There were growing pains — for umpires, for hitters, for Greg Maddux, getting used to a ball off the plate being called a ball.

Since then, the technology has improved, but there's still inexactness to the science. As of Scott's last games four years ago, MLB was still manually checking the upper and lower lines of the strike zone — which, unlike the sides of the zone, can change from pitch to pitch — to make sure they were being graded correctly. Long before Scott received his official report from the league, fans would have seen his calls on the completely unofficial and often incorrect strike zone hovering on their TV screen and come to their own conclusions.

“Perception is reality,” Scott says. “When people see that, it’s gospel. It’s really hard to try to convince somebody that’s a facsimile of the strike zone and intricacies of the zone are much more complicated. They don’t want to hear it.”

Believe it or not, home-plate umpires are more consistent than ever before.

[Rob Arthur wrote for Baseball Prospectus](#) earlier this month that umpire accuracy on called strikes hit a new high in 2021, as more than 89 percent of pitches with a predicted strike probability of at least 0.5 were called strikes — up more than 2 percent over the past six seasons.

There’s less spread from one umpire to the next than fans might expect, when considering a full-season sample of games. Among umpires who called at least 10 games this year, according to the @UmpScorecards website, the average accuracy of all called pitches ranged from 91.3 percent (Ed Hickox) to 95.6 percent (Libka). “So,” Singer says, “the difference between the people that you love the most and the people that you hate the most is 4 percent.”

If umpires are better than ever, why doesn’t that feel true?

“I feel like if you would ask any fan, they would say, ‘Umpiring has never been so bad. People are missing balls and strikes all the time,’” says Yep, the @UmpireAuditor operator. “I think that’s a really interesting data point, because it does speak to how intensely social media affects people’s perceptions of reality. Umpires have never faced such intense scrutiny. So, even as they get better, people perceive them to get worse.”

The devil’s advocate can’t resist. Yep runs an account that traffics in only the worst calls. If fans are getting the wrong impression about MLB umpires from social media, isn’t Yep part of the problem?

“I 100 percent agree with you,” Yep replies. “The account fully reinforces confirmation bias. I think I would only have deep problems with it if the truth wasn’t that they’re constantly missing about 8 to 9 percent of calls.”

The purpose of @UmpireAuditor is to highlight the flaws of the current system, where mere mortals attempt to accomplish what robots already are being trained to do. Yes, Yep wants robo umps. The [ABS \(Automated Ball-Strike System\) already has been used](#) in the Atlantic League, Arizona Fall League and Low-A Southeast League. Yep regrets that individual umpires can be caught in the crossfire from his account — and if he were an umpire, he says, he wouldn’t like it either — when his true targets are the decision makers he says are slow to adopt new technologies.

“Umpires are not being put in a position to succeed,” Yep says. “We are asking them to track a 98-mph slider exploding across the zone and pinpoint that in a three-dimensional plane — and

do that 100 times in a row correctly. This is simply not something that the human eye was designed to do.”

In the Baseball Prospectus article, Arthur drew a distinction between a living strike zone — which expands and contracts based on the pitch’s circumstances — and a true strike zone, determined solely by the baseball’s coordinates above home plate. Younger umpires have been graded by the true strike zone since entering the game. “They’re outstanding,” Scott says. They didn’t follow the same learning curve as Scott and his umpiring peers, a generation slowly fading into retirement. With or without robo umps, Arthur argued, the living zone is leaving. Its replacement won’t shape-shift based on game situation; balls and strikes will be called based only on whether they’re in or out of the zone.

To most, that is exactly an umpire’s purpose.

To purists, something about the art is lost.

Says Scott: “If I’m in the bottom of the fifth, it’s 7-1, and the groundskeeper says, ‘There is a big-time storm at our door. I want to get this game in, because once you leave the field we’re not coming back,’ you might expand that zone a little bit. Is that right or wrong? I don’t know. You can’t do any of that now. If it’s a blowout and you expand the zone, you’re just going to get graded down.”

Now, if you’ll excuse him, Singer’s linear algebra class starts soon.

Though @UmpScorecards has taken countless hours of his time in the past few years, Singer doesn’t expect to pursue a career in baseball. He’s plenty qualified for it. He interned with Advocates for Minor Leaguers last year, working in data analytics, and this summer the lifelong [Nationals](#) fan was an associate quantitative analyst for the [Phillies](#). But most of Singer’s research at BU is in politics. His recent projects include [a polling error simulator](#) and [how COVID-19 deaths impacted the American electorate](#). Grading umps is just a side hustle.

An extremely active hustle, however. Singer is flooded with requests from readers wanting certain features added to the site. This year, he caved to the No. 1 demand and created a tab that lets fans sort through which teams have been [most \(and least\) favored by umpires](#) over the course of the season. Singer is a man of the people. He knows why we’re here. It’s coded into sports fans: We want to be told exactly how badly we’ve been robbed by umpires and officials.

This is the enduring pull of @UmpScorecards. With each tweet, two fanbases lean in, waiting to have their assumptions about the game confirmed or challenged by a college kid’s bot. One side sees the big number right in the middle of the graphic — where it says which team was favored, and by how many runs — and turns into the [Pointing Leonardo DiCaprio](#) meme.

“That, without a doubt, is what people care about,” Singer says.

As for a future in which robo umps render his bot obsolete, Singer welcomes it.

“If this service is no longer needed, I would be perfectly content to close up shop,” he says, “which just means close my laptop and put it in my backpack.”

Until then, between homework and class, Singer adds to the @UmpScorecards site bit by bit. There’s one feature he’s been thinking about a lot lately, but it’ll take someone more technically advanced to help him create it. The idea is a corner of the site where fans play umpire. It’s an ump’s view in real time. They’ll see a pitcher wind and deliver on the screen. They’ll hear the pitch smack the catcher’s mitt. Then they’ll have a split-second to call ball or strike. And at the end of the demo, Singer says, each umpire will get their own grade.

INTERESTING ANALYSIS OF RED SOX OVER RAYS

Did the nerds lose when the Tampa Bay Rays were eliminated? Or did they actually win?

When it comes to numbers, no team’s identity is as clear as that of the [Rays](#). They are the team of analytics and ingenuity, the team that will do things differently if the numbers say they can gain an advantage by doing so. They are the team that listens to their nerds.

So, when they lose in the postseason — and earlier than they should have, by the numbers — it’s tempting to make their loss bigger than it should be. It’s tempting to make it a referendum on their entire identity, on their style of play, on the way they construct their rosters.

That’s problematic for more than a few reasons.

For one, no single postseason series should serve as a final judgment on the quality of a team. The Rays played 162 and won more games than any other American League team; they are not suddenly “bad” because they lost to the [Red Sox](#) in this series. Every team that makes the postseason is a good team. The playoffs are then a crapshoot. The stat that best predicts team wins (Wins Above Replacement) predicts over 80 percent of the variance in team win totals during the regular season. WAR predicts *6 percent* of the variance [in postseason wins](#), and it’s the only single stat that has a meaningful correlation with postseason wins.

There’s also something deliciously ironic in declaring that the Red Sox, led by former Rays vice president of baseball operations Chaim Bloom, gloriously defeated the nerds. The Red Sox have been run more like the Rays since he took over, with more of an eye for sustainability and savvy pitching acquisitions like [Nick Pivetta](#), [Garrett Whitlock](#) and [Hansel Robles](#) — all pitchers who provided key outs in the American League Division Series.

As the author of this piece Eno Sarris tweeted, “The team that beat the nerds is run by the nerd who used to run the team that lost.”

This tweet could have been about the [Giants](#) and [Dodgers](#) game as much as it was about the Red Sox and Rays game. You can trace much of baseball’s leadership back to a few analytically savvy organizations. Think of all the links in baseball leadership to the Houston front office as an example of how an analytics-forward front office found success and other teams hired their new leaders away. David Stearns in Milwaukee and Mike Elias in Baltimore come straight from that tree, much as Bloom in Boston and Andrew Friedman in Los Angeles got their starts in Tampa Bay.

Every front office will tell you that analytics are important, and most of the teams that are winning are actually listening to their nerds. How can the nerds have lost if the nerds beat the nerds?

To be fair, even if it’s perhaps unfair to load up all this meaning on one postseason series, and even if analytics are ubiquitous at this point, we could ask if there is *something* about how the Rays are run specifically that led to this series loss. It certainly seems like they ran out of pitchers capable of any bulk innings, and that, coming from a team that seems to be rethinking the relationship between bulk and quality, might be a warning sign.

Have the Rays strayed too far from the traditional model of pitching? Did they lose because they didn’t have bulk pitchers?

It’s definitely true that no other playoff team got [fewer innings from its starters](#) during the regular season. It’s also true that the Rays’ three playoff “starters” — [Shane McClellan](#), [Shane Bieber](#) and [Drew Rasmussen](#) — usually top out around 80 pitches. Eighty pitches can get you through five innings if you’re being efficient, and maybe it was the right thing to do for the health of these relatively young arms, but it’s also less than most teams stretch out their starting pitchers. It’s something they’re doing differently, and in light of the way this team lost, seemingly due in part to the lack of bulk it got from any of its pitchers, it might be fair to point to this particular innovation as a poor one.

Did the Rays go “full nerd” on pitching, and did they pay for it? I’m not sure the actual numbers support this.

Consider these facts about the Division Series:

- No pitcher on either team threw more than 85 pitches in an appearance.
- The most any pitcher threw ([Nathan Eovaldi](#), 85 pitches; McClellan, 82) suggests that *both* teams removed starting pitchers early even in good starts.

- Both teams used “bulk” pitchers for “medium bulk” appearances: [Tanner Houck](#) (61 pitches), Pivetta (67), [Michael Wacha](#) (59), [Collin McHugh](#) (37).
- Baz (47 pitches) and Rasmussen (33 pitches) were removed early but were stretched out enough to go longer.

It’s that last point that sticks out for me. If Rasmussen and Baz had given their teams more bulk those days, this series might have gone better for Tampa Bay. But would you, as a manager, have left those guys in to pitch longer? They *could* have pitched longer — as in, they had more pitches in them. But it wasn’t their day. And so the Rays took them out, but did they take them out too early?

It’s also not that the Rays had such a young rotation that it sunk them — at least it hasn’t worked that way in the past. FanGraphs’ Dan Szymborski looked into the teams with the least experienced starting pitchers in the playoffs and found those teams went 29-32 in those 61 series — and should’ve gone 29.4-31.6 based on their regular-season records and home-field advantage. The Rays’ starters were young and lost their first playoff starts, and those things are not causally related.

Were the Rays’ moves scripted, whereas the Red Sox granted Alex Cora more autonomy to make his own moves? From the outside, there was near-unanimous agreement that the front office of Rays general manager Erik Neander scripted last season’s signature managerial move of removing [Blake Snell](#) early from Game 6 of the World Series even though he was dealing. But the Rays vehemently pushed back on that idea in the ensuing days, saying Kevin Cash makes his own moves. There’s been massive open debate about how much Dave Roberts follows a script in Los Angeles. But there’s no denying that the average front office has significant input on how games are managed and has for a long time — multiple sources told me the front office handed Bruce Bochy lineups during the Giants’ dynastic run starting in 2010.

It seems doubtful we’ll ever know this sort of thing for sure. Each team has its own unique relationship between the front office and the manager, and the true nature of that relationship seems well guarded. It’s probably right to say that some more analytically inclined teams give their managers more power, but does it then follow to say that those teams that give their managers more power are less nerdy because of that decision?

The one place where the Red Sox were superior, before and during this series, was with their starting pitching *depth*. Not depth as in how far they can go into a game, but depth as in how many starters they have to begin with. Boston got incredibly important contributions from Houck and Pivetta, both starters that didn’t start a game, while the Rays chose to leave [Ryan Yarbrough](#) off the playoff roster and also traded away [Rich Hill](#) midseason, leaving them with basically three starting pitchers for the postseason.

Maybe Hill or Yarbrough wouldn’t have moved the needle in this series. But [Tyler Glasnow](#) would have, and the Rays had the second most days lost to injury in baseball last season. And

it's not like the Rays didn't try to add starting pitching depth last offseason — they signed Hill for \$2.5 million, [Chris Archer](#) for \$6.5 million and Wacha for \$3 million in that effort. Interestingly, the Rays were rumored to be bidding against the Red Sox for a lot of the same pitchers, as Boston signed [Garrett Richards](#) for \$10 million and Martín Pérez for \$5 million. Both teams were also supposedly in on [Corey Kluber](#), who signed with the [Yankees](#) for \$11 million.

Yes, the Rays may have run out of pitching in the end. That might be partially due to their philosophy, but it seems a little more due to injury, superior starting pitcher depth and maybe even to being beaten by teams (with more money) trying to employ the same strategies that pushed the Rays to the most wins in the American League in the past three seasons.

So maybe the nerds lost Monday. They also won.

WHY THE MEMORY OF THE BROOKLYN DODGERS HAS OFTEN OUTSHINED THE NEW YORK (BASEBALL) GIANTS

In 1957, the [Dodgers](#) bolted for Los Angeles and broke Brooklyn's heart.

And the [Giants](#)? Well, yeah, they left New York, too.

In the decades since the Dodgers' and Giants' exodus to California, one team's New York legacy has become more pronounced than the other's. More revered, more famed. The Dodgers of Brooklyn are among the most romanticized clubs of any era: Dem Bums. Wait 'Til Next Year. In all, the Dodgers seem to have a larger foothold in the consciousness of baseball fans and New Yorkers than the Giants of New York.

"I've never thought about this before, but I can't tell you off the top of my head somebody that's going to wax nostalgic about the New York Giants, as far as somebody you identify (as), 'Oh, he was the diehard Giants fan,'" Dodgers historian Mark Langill said.

John Thorn, MLB's official historian, had one name jump to mind, a fellow who died in 1935.

"DeWolf Hopper, maybe. The actor," Thorn said. "Hopper became famous for reciting 'Casey at the Bat' the first time in public, and then did it 10,000 more times. He was a big Broadway star. All the Broadway theater performers attached themselves to the Giants, not the Dodgers."

But being Broadway's flame was not enough to widely sustain the Giants' legacy. Empirically, major figures of subsequent generations have written and spoken more about the Dodgers. Doris Kearns Goodwin wrote a book about them. Larry King was a Dodgers fan. Fred Wilpon, the former [Mets](#) owner, designed Citi Field as an homage to the Dodgers' old home, [Ebbets Field](#), not the Giants' Polo Grounds of Manhattan.

Gary Mintz, organizer of the New York Giants Preservation Society, said that at times, the Giants' legacy in New York absolutely feels pushed aside relative to the Dodgers'.

"Especially the stadium," said Mintz, whose group has regular video meetings, and more than 2,500 followers on Facebook. "It's always, 'Ebbets Field was *this*.' And then the Mets build a duplicate of it basically, and then they sit there and tell you, 'Well, the green seats (at Citi Field) are for the Polo Grounds.' The Giants, I think in New York as the years went by, probably considered themselves third-class citizens behind the [Yankees](#) and Dodgers."

None of this is to say that the Giants have necessarily been wronged by popular culture or history. It's not too hard to figure out some of the reasons the Dodgers' legacy can lead a conversation. One team had Jackie Robinson. The other didn't. But there's also more to unpack than one might expect.

A lot of the conversation around the Brooklyn Dodgers ties back to scarring. Pain. Because Dodgers fans probably did suffer more than their National League counterpart in New York.

Giants fans, of course, were grief-stricken when their team left in 1957. But the team's departure was ultimately not as surprising.

The Dodgers' exit was more hurtful, Thorn said, "because the Giants had descended to a second-tier ball club after the World Series of '54. And their attendance, the minimal attendance at the Polo Grounds, was more stark than the still flourishing attendance at Ebbets Field.

"Everyone knew the Giants were dead in New York. They had a whole year to accept it, while (Walter) O'Malley's decision to move to LA seemed rushed, even though he had been dissatisfied with Ebbets Field for a long time."

In longer timelines beyond relocation, the different narrative arcs of the teams may have shaped their memories differently. Early in the 20th century, the Giants were a dominant force.

"The earlier Giants were much more famous than the Dodgers," the late Larry King said in 2013. "The Giants of (John) McGraw, Carl Hubbell, Christy Mathewson."

The Giants won the 1905, 1921, '22 and '33 World Series and lost several others. The Dodgers, meanwhile, were empty-handed, year after year after — until their only title in New York, in 1955. The Dodgers were the occupants of the mantle that the Mets would later take up: the lovable loser.

In 1934, Giants manager Bill Terry asked whether the Dodgers were even still in the league. The Giants carried a feeling of superiority that the Dodgers, for the longest time, never could.

The Giants didn't "have what's building in Brooklyn as far as, 'Wait' Til Next Year,'" Langill said. "It really led to a crescendo with the '55 championship."

The Dodgers made the World Series again in 1956, too. They were reaching new peaks, and then they were gone.

“In ’57, it’s announced the team’s leaving,” Brooklyn pitcher Carl Erskine said in a 2013 interview. “I relate that to a young person who is talented ... and everybody’s so proud of. And suddenly, they’re gone. They got wiped out, they got into an accident, or something took them out of the picture.”

The team’s respective stadiums probably contribute to the Brooklyn Dodgers’ flourishing image. Ebbets Field is considered much more charming than the horseshoe-shaped Polo Grounds.

“Going to the Polo Grounds always felt dark, always felt bleak: 155th and Eighth Avenue in Manhattan, and the beautiful Yankee Stadium across the bridge,” King said. “The Polo Grounds was a weird place.”

Harvey Weinberg, a 76-year-old New York Giants fan born in the Bronx, believes some of the sentimentality toward the Brooklyn Dodgers can be found in the team name itself.

“When you say ‘New York,’ it could be New York City, it could be New York State,” Weinberg said. “But when you say ‘Brooklyn,’ it’s a defined, confined geographical area.”

In the broadest of strokes, the Dodgers had blue-collar fans, the Giants white-collar.

“Bankers and lawyers and clerks, and they would leave downtown for the Polo Grounds by the train in 1905, 1910, and arrive in time for a game’s start at 3:30,” Thorn said.

But to Thorn, the teams were more defined by the sentiment attached to them rather than specific geographic location.

The Dodgers-Giants rivalry dates back to when Brooklyn was technically a separate city, which was the case until 1898 — a point of significance to Thorn.

“The sense that we have of Brooklyn being the team of underdogs predates Jackie Robinson,” he said.

Robinson’s reach extended to Thorn himself.

“(He) was an inspiration to me as a kid,” Thorn said. “Because he was the outsider brought inside. I was born in a displaced person’s camp. I had no say in the matter of coming to the U.S. at age two and a half. But I was certainly mystified by it. Through baseball cards, I came to love not only Jackie Robinson but the Dodgers. I could have chosen — my parents had no allegiance to any ball club. They knew nothing about sports ever, their entire lives.”

Bob McGee, author of a book about Ebbets Field, called “The Greatest Ballpark Ever,” thinks that some of the Dodgers’ image has been shaped by what’s transpired since the move, not before it.

After 1962, the Giants didn't appear in a World Series again until 1989.

"I think the difference in terms of separation in the sort of baseball consciousness between the two franchises, in as much as there was one," McGee said, "probably came about during the '60s, after the Giants started to fade, and the Dodgers still had competitive teams through the '70s."

Dodger Stadium, McGee noted, was better designed and became more popular than the Giants' Candlestick Park.

Langill notes that the Dodgers also had the advantage of literally being in Hollywood, and they won very quickly in their new locale: in 1959 and again in '63 and '65. The Giants didn't win a World Series in California until 2010.

Many times over the years, Carl Erskine has been asked about the staying power of his Brooklyn Dodgers. He's always settled on the winner-gone-too-soon theory. But what about the other guys across town?

"That's the other thing I wonder, is there as much carryover — I don't think so — for the Giants?" Erskine said. "The Shot Heard 'Round the World and Willie Mays ... I don't know how to answer that one."

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

10.10.2021

Good morning baseball fans. Tight series outside of Astros-White Sox. If you haven't watched the Dodgers-Giants games do yourself a favor and look on the web for defensive highlights of the first two games—some amazing plays. Stay safe out there.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Adam Wainwright led by MLB with 14 sac bunts this year.

The Rays had 14 different pitchers earn a save this year—MLB record.

In the regular season, only Ted Williams and Tony Conigliaro have more home runs for the Red Sox before turning 25 than Devers' 112.

One key to the game for the Yankees always seems to be: have Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton go yard. Since acquiring Stanton entering the 2018 season, the Yankees are 16-1 when both of those sluggers homer in the same game. The one loss was in this year's Field of Dreams game on Aug. 12, after which the Yanks reeled off a 13-game winning streak.

You could win a bet with this one—Braves Second baseman Ozzie Albies, first baseman Freddie Freeman, third baseman Austin Riley and shortstop Dansby Swanson each hit at least 25 home runs. They're the second team in MLB history with four infielders with at least 25 homers, along with Jorge Cantu, Mike Jacobs, Hanley Ramírez and Dan Uggla of the 2008 Marlins.

The Dodgers led the NL in runs scored and runs allowed in four straight seasons -- scoring the most and allowing the fewest. That's tied for the longest such streak by a team leading its league in both categories, with the 1936-39 Yankees.

Dodgers' 106 wins tied their franchise record set in 2019, and also tied the record for a defending World Series champion, set by the 1939 Yankees. Those 1939 Yankees repeated, winning their fourth World Series in a row.

Tony La Russa is 77 and Dusty Baker is 72. Baseball's oldest active managers. La Russa and Baker have managed against each other 208 times; each has won 104 games. The history between them goes back 50 years, when they were briefly Braves teammates in 1971. In Baker's final career year with the A's in 1986, La Russa was his manager for the final 79 games.

Worst Start for a Wild Card Winner after 50 games, 18-32: 2005 Astros (finished 89-73)

Most recent switch-hitter to win an AL batting title--Boston's Bill Mueller (.326 in 2003)

57th postseason appearance and fifth in a row. The Yankees rarely take so long to secure a trip to the postseason. This was only the fifth time they had entered the final day of the regular season with a chance to clinch a playoff spot — and one of those regular seasons, 1978, ended with a clash at Fenway made famous by Bucky Dent's surprise three-run homer over the Green Monster.

Rays 2021-- They set a franchise record for victories this season, with 100, propelled by the best offense in team history, trailing only Houston with 857 runs scored. They scored all those runs while also leading the A.L. in strikeouts, challenging the traditionalist's notion that teams must — or at least should — strive for contact. They spent just \$83 million on their 40-man roster this season (26th in the majors) without a single player making \$12 million. They accept flaws, emphasize strengths and now have a five-year streak of improving their overall ranking in runs scored: from 25th in 2017 to first now. The Rays are missing their top three starters from last year's World Series — they traded Blake Snell to San Diego, let Charlie Morton leave for Atlanta as a free agent and lost Tyler Glasnow to Tommy John surgery — their offense stayed largely intact. Add Franco and Nelson Cruz, subtract Willy Adames and Hunter Renfroe, and it is virtually the same group that hit .207 across the last three rounds of the postseason. The Rays led the majors in strikeouts last season and still came within two victories of their first title, helped greatly by a sudden slugging outburst from outfielder Randy Arozarena. Cash is a master of leveraging matchups; he used a major-league-high 158 different lineups this season and substitutes often. The team excelled in situational hitting, batting .354 with runners on third and less than two outs and scoring by far the most runs in the majors in the ninth inning.

FUN PLAYOFF STATS

I watched Randy Arozarena steal of home live. Very exciting. He became the first player in history to hit a home run and steal home in the same postseason game.

Want to take a stab at how many players in the history of this sport have ever even hit a home run and pulled off a straight steal of home *in the same postseason series*? Arozarena is the first player ever to do that in a *series*, let alone the same game.

The Dodgers' streak of winning eight division titles in a row ended despite their blistering finish to the season. They went 44-13 after acquiring Max Scherzer and Trea Turner in a trade with Washington on July 31, and finished with 106 victories to tie a franchise record.

Since 2015 the Dodgers have played 70 post-season games, most of any playoff teams. Tony LaRussa has 70 post-season managing wins—last was 2011 World Series title with the Cards.

With three hits last night, Buster Posey passed Pablo Sandoval to become the Giants' all-time leader in postseason hits. Posey now has 55.?

Astros are down to just five players on this postseason roster who played in the notorious 2017 World Series.

The Astros led the Majors with a 116 [wRC+](#) this season, outpacing every other team in that category. What does that mean? Their offense was 16% better than league average, across the board. Part of their offensive prowess comes from avoiding strikeouts: the club had just a 19.4% strikeout rate, lowest in MLB.

Dusty Baker deserves a shoutout, too. The 72-year-old has now guided Houston to the playoffs in consecutive seasons, becoming the first manager in MLB history to manage a team to the postseason in separate years at the age of 70 or older.

Wander Franco of the Rays tied Frank Robinson by reaching base in 43 straight games at age 20. Should Wander homer in the playoffs he would join an elite group--Only eight players have homered in the playoffs at age 20 or younger, and it's *quite* the list: Miguel Cabrera, Juan Soto,

Mickey Mantle, Andruw Jones, Rafael Devers, Manny Machado, Bryce Harper and Ronald Acuña Jr.

Only two players have won a postseason MVP Award before turning 22: 21-year-olds Steve Avery in the 1991 NLCS and Bret Saberhagen in the 1985 World Series.

Tim Anderson of the White Sox was practically unstoppable in last year's playoffs, going 9-for-14 with three games with three hits. That's the most consecutive three-hit games to start a postseason career, and it's tied with 1968 Lou Brock for the longest streak of three-hit games at *any* point in a postseason. That's right, Anderson can set a record if he tallies another three hits in Thursday's Game 1. His nine hits are the most in a player's first three postseason games. The record for first four is 11, by Marquis Grissom.

Astros jumped on White Sox but consider Chicago's Tim Anderson:

Career postseason games — 5

3-hit postseason games — 4

Which stands in contrast to this esteemed group:

Postseason games with three hits or more by:

[Chase Utley](#) — 3 (in 68 games)

Paul O'Neill — 3 (in 85 games)

Vlad Guerrero — 3 (in 44 games)

Craig Biggio — 3 (in 40 games)

Wade Boggs — 3 (in 39 games)

But Tim Anderson has four of those games already.

Yadier Molina caught Adam Wainwright in the NL Wild Card Game on Wednesday, their 15th postseason start together, tying Mike Mussina and Jorge Posada for fifth-most all-time, according to Elias. The only duos with more postseason starts together: Andy Pettitte and Jorge Posada (24), Tom Glavine and Javy Lopez (19), Chris Carpenter and Molina (18) and Roger Clemens and Posada (16).

The Giants boast the best record in MLB this season, at 107-55. So, what might that portend for the postseason? Of the 26 World Series champions in the Wild Card Era, seven have had the best

record in MLB that year -- the 2020 Dodgers, 2018 Red Sox, 2016 Cubs, 2013 Red Sox, 2009 Yankees, 2007 Red Sox and 1998 Yankees. The Giants are the 17th team to win 107 or more games since the first World Series in 1903. Of the prior 16 teams, 10 won the World Series, another five *lost* the World Series, and just one failed to reach the Fall Classic at all -- the 2001 Mariners.

Meanwhile, in 2021, the current MLB drought without a repeat champion is the longest in the history of MLB, NBA, NFL or NHL. Can the Dodgers become the first team to do it since the 1998-2000 Yankees?

Since the creation of the one-game wild-card playoff in 2012, two wild-card teams have won the World Series — the Giants in 2014 and the [Nationals](#) in 2019.

Most post-season games caught for one team--Yankees' Jorge Posada (119 postseason games caught).

Dodgers walk-off homer in wild card game was the second allowed by the Cardinals in a deciding game in the postseason. Only other franchise to allow two such walk-off blasts -- Yankees (1960 World Series Game 7 and 2019 ALCS Game 6).

Something for Dodgers fans to consider--Last NL team to win consecutive World Series was the 1975-76 Cincinnati Reds

Rays' Jordan Luplow's grand slam in first inning of game two against the Red Sox—first time in 117 post seasons team hitting grand slam in the first inning and lost the game. the Rays have existed now for 24 seasons. They've hit 82 regular-season slams in those 24 seasons. You know how many times they'd hit a first-inning slam and lost? You've got it. Not once — until this game.

Luplow started this game ... and went 1 for 1 ... hit a grand slam and was pulled for defense. Only four other players in the modern era have ever had a game like that, in either the regular season or postseason: Started the game, got one plate appearance, hit a slam, called it a day. The others:

Carlos Delgado, [Blue Jays](#) — Sept. 28, 2003

Jack Hamilton, [Mets](#) — May 20, 1967

Ox Miller, Cubs — Sept. 7, 1947

Al Hollingsworth, [Reds](#) — May 28, 1936

In the same game [Enrique Hernández](#) pounded a home run and three doubles. That adds up to four extra-base hits. [David Ortiz](#) never got four extra-base hits in a postseason game for the Red Sox. Carl Yastrzemski never got four extra-base hits in a postseason game for the Red Sox. Ted Williams? Wade Boggs? Jim Rice? Nomar Garciaparra? Fred Lynn? Carlton Fisk? None of them ever did it, either — because Hernández just became the first man in the history of the Red Sox to get four extra-base hits in a game. Amazing.

Hernández also got five hits, total, in this game. You know how many times he'd ever had a five-hit game in the regular season? If you guessed zero, excellent guess! Before Kiké Hernández the last player with four extra-base hits and five RBIs in a postseason game was Albert Pujols (Game 2 of the 2011 NLCS).

The Red Sox got 20 hits in this game. Yep, 20. So how many 20-hit games did they have in the regular season? None, of course. And how many times did the Rays give up 20 hits in a game in the regular season? That would also be none. (True, the Rays did allow *20 runs* — to the Red Sox — in a game this year, but not 20 hits.)

Finally, the Red Sox did something in this game they've done in just three regular-season games in the last 70 years — get 20 hits and hit five homers. Think of all the wacky games in postseason history. There have been a ton. You know what they had in common? No team had ever totaled up five homers *and* 20 hits in any of them — until now.

Giants won game 1 against the Dodgers 4-0. The Giants launched three home runs in that game. They also shut out the Dodgers, 4-0. What's so Weird and Wild about that, you might ask? Oh, only that ... the Giants hadn't won a game like that against the Dodgers, in front of their home crowd, *in almost 50 years*. Last time the Giants shut out the Dodgers in San Francisco and hit at least three homers? How about Oct. 1, 1962 — in the opener of their three-

game tie-breaker series to decide who would represent the National League in the World Series! Billy Pierce outdueled Sandy Koufax, 8-0, at Candlestick. Willie Mays, Orlando Cepeda and Jim Davenport all got to trot.

But back here in modern times, it feels like we've been watching Buster Posey and [Brandon Crawford](#) work postseason magic together 100 times in the last 11 years. Just not like this. Crawford hit his first postseason homer *in seven years*. And Posey hit his first *in nine years*. And here's the Weirdest and Wildest part of all: They'd never homered in the same postseason game — until Friday.

Charlie Morton started game 1 against the Brewers. Morton has now started at least one postseason game five years in a row, in his age 33-37 seasons — *for three different teams* (Astros, Rays, Braves).

Assuming we're not counting [Cole Hamels](#) as "active" at the moment, only two other active pitchers have matched that Morton streak at any point, by getting a postseason start in at least five consecutive Octobers: [Clayton Kershaw](#) (eight years in a row, from 2013-20) and [Jon Lester](#) (six in a row, from 2013-18).

And since, once upon a time back in 2013, Morton also made an October start for the [Pirates](#), he's one of only three active pitchers who have made postseason starts for at least four different teams. The others: [Zack Greinke](#) and [David Price](#) (four apiece).

Rays success is impressive—they spent just \$83 million on their 40-man roster this season (26th in the majors) without a single player making \$12 million. Rays are missing their top three starters from last year's World Series — they traded Blake Snell to San Diego, let Charlie Morton leave for Atlanta as a free agent and lost Tyler Glasnow to Tommy John surgery.

BOOKS

Three weeks ago I asked you to send your favorite baseball books. Thank you for the excellent response. I've included descriptions and comments you sent along. For your reading pleasure, here are the submissions:

56: Joe DiMaggio and the last magic number in sports

by [Kostya Kennedy](#)

The Boys of Summer: The Classic Look Back at the Glorious Dodgers of the 1950's

By Roger Kahn

Season of '42: Joe D, Teddy Ballgame, and Baseball's Fight to Survive a Turbulent First Year of War

By Jack Cavanaugh

Pinstriped Summers: Memories of Yankee Seasons Past

By Dick Lally

Wait Till Next Year

By Doris Kearns Goodwin

I taught my daughter how to keep score at a ball game before this came out, but it proved I'd done the right thing.

Ball Four

Jim Bouton

Pure Baseball

By Keith Hernandez

A book that Keith wrote in 1995 that takes a ridiculous deep dive into 2 games from the 1993 season. It describes the intricate details of a baseball game that reminds me why I love the sport more than any other. (And neither of the 2 games are Mets games!)

I'm Keith Hernandez

By Keith Hernandez

Less for the general audience and more specific to fans of Keith. He spends a lot of time talking about his time in St. Louis, so it's not just a Mets book.

So Many Ways to Lose

by Devin Gordon

Traces the many misfortunes that Mets fans have had to endure since 1962. It does so in a laugh-out-loud funny manner and is unlike any book I've read about the Mets.

Moneyball

by Michael Lewis

Sandy Koufax, A Lefty's Legacy

by Jan Leavy

"Sandy Koufax pitched twelve seasons in the major leagues: six of them indifferent, six of belated brilliance. Five consecutive years, from 1962 through 1966, he led the National League in earned run average. (He is the only pitcher ever to do that). Four times he led the National League in strikeouts. Three times, he won at least twenty-five games. Ninety-seven times, he struck out ten or more batters. He is one of five pitchers in major league history who pitched at least one thousand innings with more career strikeouts than innings pitched. Hi last year, pitching with a crippled, arthritic arm, he won twenty-seven games and completed as many. And he never missed a start. Then, Abruptly he was gone. "He was a meteor streaking across the heavens," his friend and former roommate, Dick Tracewski, said."

The Wax Pack: On the Open Road in Search of Baseball's Afterlife

by [Brad Balukjian](#)

Is there life after baseball? Starting from this simple question, *The Wax Pack* ends up with something much bigger and unexpected—a meditation on the loss of innocence and the gift of impermanence, for both Brad Balukjian and the former ballplayers he tracked down. To get a truly random sample of players, Balukjian followed this wildly absurd but fun as hell premise: he took a sinhle pack of baseball cards from 1986 (the first year he collected cards), opened it, chewed the nearly thirty-year old gum inside, gagged, and then embarked on a quest to find all the players in the pack. Absurd, maybe, but true. He took this trip solo in the summer of 2015, spanning 11,341 miles through thirty states in forty-eight days.

The Bullpen Gospels: A Non-Prospect's Pursuit of the Major Leagues and the Meaning of Life. Dirk Hayuhurst

Hilarious and moving.

The Art of Fielding.

By Chad Harbach.

More than a baseball book, but if you ever played in the infield this guy was inside your head.
The essence of experiential truth.

K: A History of Baseball in Ten Pitches.

By Tyler Kepner.

A senior seminar on what pitching is all about.

Only the Ball Was White.

Robert W. Peterson.

Groundbreaking.

When the Game was Black and White: An Illustrated History of Baseball's Negro Leagues

By Bruce Chadwick.

Eight Men Out.

By Eliot Asinof

If you can find them, *The Fireside Book of Baseball, Book 1* (1956), *Book 2* (1958). There's a *Book 3* (1968) I haven't read. Charles Einstein ed. A fabulous collection of classic baseball writing and my boyhood companion.

Anything on baseball (or anything else) by Red Smith. For example *The Red Smith Reader* section on baseball or *To Absent Friends* (Babe Ruth, Walter Johnson, Connie Mack, etc.). A Pulitzer Prize winner for a reason.

Shoeless Joe

By W.P. Kinsella

The Summer Game

by [Roger Angell](#)

The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played **It**

By Lawrence S Ritter

Three Nights in August: Strategy, Heartbreak, and Joy Inside the Mind of a Manager

by [Buzz Bissinger](#)

Three Nights in August captures the strategic and emotional complexities of baseball's quintessential form, the three-game series. As the St. Louis Cardinals battle their archrival Chicago Cubs, we watch from the dugout through the eyes of legendary manager Tony La

Russa, considered by many to be the shrewdest mind in the game today. In his twenty-seven years of managing, La Russa has been named Manager of the Year a record-making five times and now stands as the third-winningest baseball manager of all time. A great leader, he's built his success on the conviction that ball games are won not only by the numbers but also by the hearts and minds of those who play.

(reminder of the five I originally recommended)

Men at Work

by George Will

The Cooperstown Casebook: Who's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Who Should Be In, and Who Should Pack Their Plaques

By Jay Jaffe

Smart Baseball

by Keith Law

Veeck As In Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck

Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick

by Paul Dickson, Dan John Miller, et al.

Baseball Anecdotes

by [Daniel Okrent](#) and Steve Wulf

WHITE SOX LATINOS

Scan the Chicago White Sox lineup on any given day over the past two seasons, and it looks like Latin America. There are Cuban players at catcher, first base, third and center field. Since late July, a Venezuelan has been handling second base. A Dominican patrols left field, and [other Dominicans](#) have served as the designated hitter at various points.

Regularly, seven of the nine hitters in the [White Sox](#) lineup were born in that region of the world. And when Tim Anderson, the team's All-Star shortstop, has been injured or resting, the number has reached eight, with Leury Garcia, another Dominican, filling his spot.

In terms of numbers ([28 percent](#)) and talent ([Fernando Tatis Jr.](#), [Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#) and Juan Soto), Latinos form a vibrant and important backbone to Major League Baseball. Perhaps no team knows that better than the White Sox, who have a rich tradition of Cuban players and play on the South Side of Chicago, a community with large Black and Latino populations.

The rise of the White Sox from the depths of the American League Central to winning the team's first division title since 2008 and transforming into one of the most exciting teams in baseball has coincided with the blossoming of prominent Latinos on the roster. They include the [veteran first baseman and team leader Jose Abreu](#), 34, the reigning winner of the A.L. Most Valuable Player Award; third baseman Yoan Moncada, 26; left fielder Eloy Jimenez, 24; and CF Luis Robert, 24.

The White Sox, one of the original American League franchises, have long fostered Latino talent, [specifically from Cuba](#). In the 1950s, the Cuban outfielder Minnie Minoso became a hugely popular All-Star. He was the major leagues' first Black player out of Latin America and a treasured figure in White Sox history. A few cameos allowed his career with the team to stretch into five decades.

Minoso's legacy has been carried on through the years, from Jose Contreras to Orlando Hernandez to Alexei Ramirez to Abreu to Moncada to Robert, many of whom endured harrowing defections to come to the United States to chase their dreams. On Aug. 1, 2020, the White Sox became [the first team in major league history](#) to have a Cuban-born player occupy the top four spots in a lineup: Robert, Moncada, Abreu and Grandal.

Youngest HR champs? Where Vlad, Tatis rank

Youth is the name of the game in baseball these days, and [Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#) and [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) just proved that the future is very much now.

Guerrero belted his 48th home run of 2021 in Toronto's regular-season finale Sunday to clinch a share of the American League homer title with Royals catcher Salvador Perez. Over in the NL, Tatis finished with 42 dingers of his own to take home the NL crown.

As sons of famous big league sluggers, the concurrent rise of Guerrero and Tatis is exciting enough. But now they are both league home run champions -- and each of them achieved that distinction at just 22 years of age. Why is 22 significant? Only eight previous 22-or-younger players had ever finished a season atop an AL or NL home run leaderboard.

Guerrero and Tatis are not the youngest league homer champs in AL/NL history -- but they're pretty close. Below is a look at where they rank, per the Elias Sports Bureau, starting from the youngest player to ever do it.

Tony Conigliaro, 1965 Red Sox (20 years, 269 days)

32 HRs (led AL)

Conigliaro is atop numerous "youngest" lists, including this one. He got off to one of the greatest starts to a career in history, by certain metrics, before an August 1967 hit by pitch in the face changed the course of his career. Only one player in baseball history hit more career homers before turning 22: Mel Ott, with 86. Conigliaro hit 84, including his 32 in '65 as a 20-year-old. Willie Mays led the NL and the Majors that year, with 52 home runs.

Sam Crawford, 1901 Reds (21 years, 171 days)

16 HRs (led MLB)

Back in 1901, in the first year of the AL, 16 homers were plenty to lead the Majors. Crawford led the NL, and his 16 were two more than AL leader Nap Lajoie, as well as a career high. But he did lead his league one other time -- in 1908 with the Tigers (seven). A [1916 magazine article about Crawford](#) noted that he was considered the ideal slugger in his day: "While we are no sculptor, we believe that if we were and were looking for a model for a statue of a slugger we would choose Sam Crawford for that role."

Eddie Mathews, 1953 Braves (21 years, 349 days)

47 HRs (led MLB)

Mathews finished his career with 512 home runs, tied for 23rd-most all-time. How do you join the 500-homer club? Getting a fast start sure helps. Mathews hit 25 homers as a rookie in 1952, receiving Rookie of the Year votes in the NL, with Joe Black of the Dodgers winning the award. Then as a 21-year-old in '53, Mathews left no doubt, leading the Majors with 47 homers. He finished second in the NL MVP vote to Roy Campanella. Mathews led the Majors in homers again in 1959 when he hit 46.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr., 2021 Blue Jays (22 years, 201 days)

(48 HRs, tied for MLB lead)

After a decent start to a career that only underwhelmed because of fans' sky-high expectations, Guerrero broke out with a massive 2021 campaign and thrilled fans with titanic homers to

every part of the ballpark. His 48 round-trippers surpassed Mathews' record for the most by any AL/NL player in his age-22 season or younger, and he made a legitimate push for the AL MVP Award (though two-way sensation Shohei Ohtani also made history for the Angels).

Fernando Tatis Jr., 2021 Padres (22 years, 274 days)

42 HRs (led NL)

Tatis solidified his standing among the game's best all-around stars, submitting an NL MVP-caliber season with 42 dingers, a .611 slugging percentage and 25 stolen bases. Tatis' homer total was all the more impressive given that he only played in 130 games because of several stints on the injured list. He is the only primary shortstop to knock at least 40 homers in an age-22 or younger season.

Ty Cobb, 1909 Tigers (22 years, 293 days)

9 HRs (led MLB)

By the time Cobb turned 26, he had already led his league, if not the Majors, in batting average six times, and had similar accolades to his name in other categories, too. Those include the 1909 season, when a 22-year-old Cobb led everyone in homers with ... nine. It was a different era, but he led the way -- the only time he ever topped his league in home runs.

Johnny Bench, 1970 Reds (22 years, 298 days)

45 HRs (led MLB)

By the start of the 1970 season, Bench had already won a Rookie of the Year Award, received MVP votes in two separate seasons, won two Gold Gloves and was a two-time All-Star. And he was still just 22 years old. He continued the strong start to his Hall of Fame career by crushing 45 homers and driving in 148 runs in '70, leading the league in both categories, before he even turned 23 in December of that year. It was one of two times he'd lead the Majors in homers, also doing so in 1972, when he hit 40.

Joe DiMaggio, 1937 Yankees (22 years, 312 days)

46 HRs (led MLB)

As a 21-year-old rookie in 1936, DiMaggio tied for the Major League lead in triples with 15, along with Earl Averill and Red Rolfe. The following year, he led the Majors in an extra-base hit category again, but this time it was homers. DiMaggio hit .346 and led the Majors in total bases and runs scored in addition to homers, but he finished second in AL MVP voting behind Charlie Gehringer. DiMaggio paced the AL in home runs a second time in 1948, when he hit 39.

Bryce Harper, 2015 Nationals (22 years, 353 days)

42 HRs (tied for NL lead)

Harper's 2015 season was one for the ages, earning him an NL MVP award. He was the youngest player to win one unanimously. He hit .330 with a .460 on-base percentage and a .649 slugging percentage, with the latter two leading the Majors. His 42 homers were tied with Nolan Arenado for the most in the NL, behind only Chris Davis' 47. Harper has led the Majors in walks twice since then, but not in homers.

Juan González, 1992 Rangers (22 years, 354 days)
43 HRs (led MLB)

González played in three Major League seasons before 1992, exceeding rookie limits in '90. In 1991, he hit 27 homers in 142 games. A year later, he blasted 43 home runs, leading the Majors in a season that ended just before his 23rd birthday. The following season he tied for first in the Majors, hitting an AL-high 46 and tying the Giants' Barry Bonds. González totaled five 40-home run seasons in his career, but 1992-93 were the only times when he led the AL or the Majors.

12 WALK OFF HRS TO CLINCH A POST SEASON SERIES

(inspired by Chris Taylor's HR for the Dodgers over the Cards—I've been arguing the Yankees should sign him for CF this winter).

There are few plays in baseball more dramatic than a walk-off home run. One of them is a walk-off home run to win a postseason series.

That occurred for the 12th time in MLB history on Wednesday night in the National League Wild Card Game between the Dodgers and Cardinals. [Chris Taylor](#) launched Los Angeles' fourth postseason walk-off home run in franchise history when he clubbed an Alex Reyes slider well over the left-field fence and delivered a dramatic [3-1 win](#) that sent the Dodgers on to the NL Division Series.

Here's a look at each rare round tripper (winner-take-all games are marked with an asterisk):

*** Chris Taylor, Dodgers: 2021 NL Wild Card Game**

The Dodgers had won 106 regular-season games only to finish second in the NL West by one game behind the Giants, meaning they had to play in the winner-take-all Wild Card Game. And for the most of the night the Dodgers' offense was befuddled by Cardinals postseason ace Adam Wainwright and the St. Louis bullpen. Taylor took advantage of L.A.'s final turn at-bat, however, belting Alex Reyes' 2-1 slider with a 110.7 mph exit velocity -- matching the hardest-hit base hit of his career, per Statcast -- and sending it into the night to join Kirk Gibson, Justin Turner and Max Muncy on the very short list of Dodgers postseason walk-off homers. Taylor's clout sent the Dodgers on to their first postseason meeting against their biggest rival, the Giants.

José Altuve, Astros: 2019 ALCS Game 6

The Astros led 4-2 entering the ninth, but they found themselves in a tie game headed to the bottom of the inning after a DJ LeMahieu homer. Houston made two quick outs against Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman and it looked as if the game might be headed to extras, but then George Springer worked a five-pitch walk. Up next was Altuve, one of only two players in franchise history to win a regular-season MVP award. He sent the third pitch of the at-bat to left-center field, and with that, sent the Astros to the World Series. It was the 11th time in

postseason history that a team clinched an LCS win and a trip to the World Series with a walk-off.

Yankees manager Aaron Boone watched the ball sail out of Minute Maid Park from the deflated visitors' dugout. He had a unique perspective on the moment, having been in Altuve's shoes 16 years and three days earlier. Boone sent the Yankees to the World Series with a walk-off home run in Game 7 of the 2003 ALCS against the Red Sox. [Boone is the only man](#) to hit one as a player and lose on one as a manager.

*** Edwin Encarnación, 2016 AL Wild Card Game**

This was a low-scoring affair between AL East foes Toronto and Baltimore that was tied at 2 after the fifth inning and remained that way into the 11th at Rogers Centre. In the bottom of that frame, with lights-out Orioles closer Zack Britton still languishing in the bullpen, Ubaldo Jiménez gave up back-to-back one-out singles to Devon Travis and Josh Donaldson, putting runners at the corners. Encarnación then crushed a ball into the left-field seats, and the celebration began north of the border as Toronto headed toward its second straight berth in the ALCS.

Travis Ishikawa, Giants: 2014 NLCS Game 5

The Giants entered Game 5 up three games to one with a chance to clinch on their home field, with Madison Bumgarner on the mound. Bumgarner was good, but not infallible, pitching eight innings and allowing three runs. With San Francisco trailing St. Louis 3-2 in the bottom of the eighth, Pat Neshek allowed a game-tying solo homer to Mike Morse on the third pitch he threw. After a scoreless top of the ninth, Pablo Sandoval led off the bottom of the inning with a single off new pitcher Michael Wacha. Hunter Pence flew out, then Brandon Belt walked. Up to the plate stepped Travis Ishikawa -- whom the Giants drafted in 2002. He'd played for them in 2006, then in 2008-10 at the Major League level, before bouncing around to the Brewers, Orioles, Yankees, White Sox and Pirates via free agency and waivers. Pittsburgh released him in April 2014, and two days later he signed with San Francisco. Then, in the bottom of the ninth inning of a potential clincher, he sent the Giants to the World Series with one swing of the bat, knocking a walk-off three-run homer.

Magglio Ordóñez, Tigers: 2006 ALCS Game 4

Ordóñez sent the Tigers to their first World Series in 22 years when he launched a three-run walk-off homer off Athletics closer Huston Street in the bottom of the ninth inning to complete a sweep of Oakland. It was Ordóñez's second home run of the game -- he also hit a solo shot off starter Dan Haren. In the end, Ordóñez had driven in four of Detroit's six runs. Entering Game 4, Ordóñez was just 2-for-13 (.154) in the series with no extra-base hits.

Chris Burke, Astros: 2005 NLDS Game 4

Before Altuve's home run in Game 6 of the 2019 ALCS, this was the only postseason series-clinching home run in Astros history. Burke's line drive into the Crawford Boxes ended an 18-inning marathon against the Braves at Minute Maid Park. Burke had entered the game as a pinch-runner for Lance Berkman in the 10th and had walked and flied out to left prior to coming up in the 18th. The Astros were down to their final out in the ninth inning when Brad Ausmus

launched a game-tying solo homer off Kyle Farnsworth to keep Houston alive another nine innings.

David Ortiz, Red Sox: 2004 ALDS Game 3

Little did he know it at the time, but this was the first of several walk-off hits Ortiz would deliver in the 2004 postseason for the Red Sox. The two-run homer came in the bottom of the 10th inning off Angels right-hander Jarrod Washburn, lifting Boston to an 8-6 victory and a sweep of Anaheim.

Of course, the rest is history -- the Red Sox fell into a 3-0 hole in the ALCS against the archrival Yankees, and trailing in the ninth inning of Game 4, came back to tie the game before Ortiz won it with a walk-off homer at 1:23 a.m. ET. The next night, Ortiz hit a walk-off single to center to stave off elimination again. Boston would go on to complete the greatest postseason comeback in baseball history, winning two more games at Yankee Stadium before sweeping the Cardinals for its first World Series championship in 86 years.

*** Aaron Boone, Yankees: 2003 ALCS Game 7**

The Yankees had traded for Boone from the Reds at the Trade Deadline in 2003. An All-Star for Cincinnati that year, he'd hit .273 with 18 homers in 106 games. In 54 regular-season games with the Yanks, the only Major League games he'd play for the Bronx Bombers in his career, he hit .254 with six homers. But that's not what he's remembered for in Yankees lore.

The Red Sox got out to a 3-0 lead in the second inning in Game 7, pushing it to 4-0 in the fourth. The Yankees narrowed the gap to 4-2 by the bottom of the seventh, but Ortiz hit a solo homer off David Wells to give Boston a three-run lead. Starter Pedro Martínez allowed three runs on a single and a double in the bottom of the eighth, and the game was tied. It headed to extras, and Tim Wakefield pitched a scoreless bottom of the 10th. But in the bottom of the next inning, Boone, who had entered the game as a pinch-runner for Ruben Sierra in the eighth, got his first plate appearance of the game. He sent Wakefield's first pitch of the 11th out into the night, and the Yanks were headed to their fifth World Series in six years.

Todd Pratt, Mets: 1999 NLDS Game 4

The Mets had required an extra game to make the playoffs -- a Game 163 tiebreaker with the Reds for the National League Wild Card spot. But in the Division Series, they wouldn't even require the maximum five games, clinching in four. After the D-backs took a 3-2 lead in the top of the eighth, the Mets came back and tied it on a sacrifice fly in the bottom of the inning. Nobody scored in the ninth, and the game went to extras. With one out in the bottom of the 10th, Pratt, a backup catcher who had hit three regular-season homers that year, strode to the plate. He knocked a pitch from Matt Mantei over the wall at Shea Stadium, and suddenly the Mets were headed to the NLCS.

Joe Carter, Blue Jays: 1993 World Series Game 6

"Touch 'em all, Joe! You'll never hit a bigger home run in your life!"

That was Blue Jays announcer Tom Cheek's call for Carter's title-clinching homer off Phillies reliever Mitch Williams -- still an iconic moment north of the border. Toronto trailed

Philadelphia, 6-5, in the bottom of the ninth and appeared to be heading toward a winner-take-all Game 7 before Carter joined Bill Mazerowski as the second player to end a World Series with a dinger.

*** Chris Chambliss, Yankees: 1976 ALCS Game 5**

(Your fearless editor was at this game)

The pinstripes hadn't won a pennant in 12 years -- an eternity in the Bronx -- but Chambliss put that "drought" to rest with a dinger off Royals pitcher Mark Littell's first pitch to begin the bottom of the ninth. It was a walk-off in a winner-take-all game against the Yankees' bitter rival at the time, and it sent a sea of Yanks fans streaming onto the field. Chambliss wasn't even able to make it through the crowd to home plate; he came back later to touch the spot where it would have been, as the plate was already removed from the Yankee Stadium diamond.

*** Bill Mazerowski, Pirates: 1960 World Series Game 7**

The Yankees outscored the Pirates in this Series, 55-27. New York's three wins came by blowout scores of 16-3, 10-0 and 12-0. The World Series MVP went to Yanks second baseman Bobby Richardson. But Pittsburgh scratched and clawed its way to a 9-9 tie in the winner-take-all Game 7, when the defensive specialist Mazerowski stepped to the plate against Ralph Terry to lead off the bottom of the ninth.

Mazerowski had homered just 11 times over the regular season, and 138 times over his 17-year career, but he drove Terry's 1-0 pitch over the left-field wall at Forbes Field (over the craning head of Yogi Berra) to deliver an improbable championship for the Pirates over the mighty Yankees. Maz's homer was the first to end a World Series, and it would be 33 years before anyone else joined him on that list.

JAYSON STARK What we learned from the 2021 MLB season: For Giants, 30 is the new 20; tanking needs to end; teams to watch out for in 2022

"It is what you learn after you know it all that counts."
—John Wooden

On Opening Day of any baseball season, there is so much we think we've figured out. By closing time, we're always reminded how wrong we were about practically everything.

So what did we learn from the wild and thrilling baseball season of 2021? Hey, always happy to help with that!

1. 162-game seasons matter

Was there any lesson from 2021 more important than this? That 60-game season a year ago beat the heck out of no season at all, but it wasn't baseball. The marathon is the essence of baseball. And 2021 was all about the meaning of that marathon.

Ask the [Cardinals](#). Ask the [Braves](#). Ask the [Blue Jays](#) and [Mariners](#), who chased a spot in the tournament until the final day, Ask the [Yankees](#), for that matter.

"Sixty games felt so weird," said an executive of one contender. "It was over before it started. This feels more normal ... I don't know who the playoff teams would have been this year on June 1, but I bet it would have been completely different."

Good call. You know who was in first place on June 1? The [Cubs](#). The [Mets](#). The A's. The season turned out to be too long for them.

You know who would have hosted the NL wild-card game? The [Padres](#). The season was definitely too long for them.

You know who would have been tied with the [Astros](#) for the last AL wild-card spot? The [Indians](#). The season turned out to be way too long for them, too.

You know who would have missed the playoffs? The Braves. The [Brewers](#). The Cardinals. The Yankees. How grateful are those teams for that magic number, 162?

"I look back," said another exec, "and I ask: How many bad decisions were made by teams based on 2020? How real was what we saw? Were the Padres that good last year, or was it just because it was 60 games? Look at the Cy Young voting in 2020. Then look at the years some of those guys just had. I think we learned that guys getting hot for two months was not that indicative of all that much.

"So what did I learn this year? That's what I learned. We're a marathon, not a sprint."

2. 100 extra games can be hazardous to your health

Nobody stayed healthy this year! OK, that's a slight exaggeration. But if all the athletic training staffs had gotten paid by the injury this year, it's possible they'd have made more money than [Mike Trout](#).

Remember all those injury worries every team obsessed over back in spring training? They totally knew what was coming. There just wasn't much they could do about it, apparently.

"We've done everything we could possibly do to protect guys," said one AL exec. "We've given pitchers extra days. We've dialed back innings. And I don't feel like any of it has paid dividends. I look around at every team's injured list, and it boggles the mind."

The boggle threshold is different for everyone, of course. But no more truthful words were uttered about anything we've seen in 2021. Here's the incredible data, courtesy of Derek Rhoads, who monitors injuries for Baseball Prospectus.

- Not even counting players who landed on the COVID-19 IL, the number of player placements on injured lists around baseball was up (ready?) by about 37 percent compared with each of the previous two full seasons, 2019 and 2018. *The average team used the IL 32 times this season* — up from about 23 in 2019!
- Recurring injuries were a huge issue. Heading into the final weekend of the season, 216 different players had made *multiple* visits to the non-COVID-19 IL this season (more than seven per team). In the last full season (2019), it was just 131 (about four per team).
- For your average GM/President of Baseball Ops, managing a roster this year felt like an endless game of Whac-A-Mole. At one point, at the July 22 peak, there were 295 different players on the IL *at the same time*— almost 10 per team. That's way above the peaks from either 2018 (207) or 2019 (233).
- And one of the upsets of the year is that teams found somebody healthy enough to pitch every darned day all season. Teams had to use the non-COVID-19 IL for pitchers an incredible *534 times* this season. That's up an astonishing 44 percent from both 2019 (370) and 2018 (367). The math works out to about 18 pitchers heading for the IL per team!

"Every way you sort it," said the same exec, "injuries took a huge jump this year. I just hope it levels out because it hurts our game when the best players don't play. So here's hoping this was just a one-year speed bump."

3. The three true outcomes were down — but that's not all

Here's a bulletin: The rate of Three True Outcomes (strikeouts, walks and homers) actually went down this season for a change!

2021	35.1%
2020	36.1%
2019	35.1%
2018	33.8%
2017	33.5%

That percentage is still way too high, obviously. But at least the War on [Spider Tack](#)'s impact on the strikeout rate (24 percent before, 22.6 percent after) was significant enough to bring a halt to one of the most sport-altering streaks in history — *16 seasons in a row* of more strikeouts per nine innings than the year before.

We'll see in future years if that continues. But in the meantime, there were big developments in the fall (or rise) worth noting in a wide array of other important stats:

BATTING AVERAGE: League average was .244, lowest since 1968.

SINGLES: The average team hit just 5.1 singles per game, almost identical to last year, but producing the fewest total singles in a season since the inception of the 162-game schedule.

STEALS: The average team stole a mere 0.45 bases per game, lowest rate since 1967. But meanwhile, the stolen-base success rate, of 75.5 percent, was actually the best ever, proving that for data-driven teams, base-stealing is now basically a math equation.

DOUBLE PLAYS: The pitcher's best friend isn't as loyal as it used to be. The average team grounded into only 0.69 double plays per game, the lowest rate since this has been calculated.

HIT BATTERS: Welcome to the first season in history with more than 2,000 batters getting hit by a pitch. The total is a record, although the rate per game was slightly higher last year.

BABIP: The batting average on balls in play was only .292, barely below last year and the lowest since 1992 (the year before offense exploded in the PED era). Two words: Shifts work!

ERRORS: The average team made only 0.54 errors per game. But we regret to report that is *not* a tribute to leatherwork. Like the DP rate, it's a reminder merely that *the ball is never in play anymore*. All right, not never. But, despite that dip in the Three True Outcomes, not nearly enough.

So what does it all mean? It's a reminder that too many action plays are disappearing from this sport. And that's a problem.

"It's just a symptom of how the game has changed, how the game has moved in the direction of power and strikeouts," said one AL exec. "When you're seeing singles, hits on balls in play, stolen bases, all these things, going by the wayside, it's telling us that nothing that's been done around the edges has made an impact the way we thought it would."

So what's the moral of that story? A lot of traditional baseball fans don't want to hear this. But here's the unvarnished truth:

"Without some structural shift — without some significant change to the rules — I don't see this reversing course," the same exec aid. "We have to incentivize changing the way the game is played, because it's just not happening organically."

4. The postseason format needs to change

A 106-win team is going to be forced to play in the National League wild-card game. We all understand why. It's The System. It wasn't designed to be fair.

Not that we'd blame any [Dodgers](#) fan (or player) for complaining. But from the day this wild-card system was devised, the response to those complaints was already in place: *Hey, you had six months to finish first. You played the team that beat you 19 times. That's your own fault.*

But you know what isn't the Dodgers' fault? Getting stuck in the same division as a 107-win team (the [Giants](#)). And the result is:

A) They just became the first defending World Series champ to win 100 games and *not* finish first since the 103-win 1954 Yankees (although at least, unlike those '54 Yankees, these Dodgers get a wild-card game mulligan).

B) Their whole spectacular season now comes down to three hours of praying that [Max Scherzer](#) is Mad Max, that they hit a bunch of long balls that day and that no baseballs take any crazy hops.

Logically, that seems kind of ridiculous. So doesn't it have to change? Of course it does.

"Their reward for winning all those games," said one sympathetic NL exec, "is, they have to face [Adam Wainwright](#) at 5 in the afternoon. So they're probably looking at a 1-1 game in the sixth inning, and then we'll see who wins the next four innings? That's crazy.

"This is baseball," he said. "Anyone can beat anyone on one day. Baseball should always have a series. Every two games you add to any series make it more likely that the best team is going to win. That doesn't help (the Dodgers) this year. But I'm hoping this year will expose the ridiculousness of our system."

There's widespread expectation that the system *will* change next year, that more teams will make the postseason and the first round will be (at least) best-of-three. But we found lots of sentiment for seeding teams by record, not by what place they finish in, even if that requires making the schedule more balanced. It's a topic for your friendly neighborhood labor negotiators, so stay tuned.

5. Old managers can still dance

On Thursday, one of the American League Division Series games will feature a [White Sox](#) team managed by Tony La Russa, who turns 77 Monday, versus an Astros team managed by [Dusty Baker](#), who turned 72 in June. Shouldn't all fans with an AARP card get in for half-price?

So here's a story to follow this October: Only one manager as old as either of them has ever won (or even managed in) a World Series. That was good old cigar-puffing Jack McKeon himself, of course. He was 72 when he won it all with the 2003 [Marlins](#).

Obviously then, La Russa and Baker will become the first two managers in history to manage against each other in a postseason series after having spent at least 72 years on earth apiece. The previous record, according to mlb.com's resident font of info, [Sarah Langs](#), was set in the 2003 NLDS, when McKeon (72) outdueled the Giants' Felipe Alou (then 68).

On one hand, we couldn't find anyone in any front office who thinks this represents any sort of renaissance for veteran managers, or believes it's a sign that the 21st-century trend toward young, data-savvy managers, with little or no managing experience, is about to turn. On the other hand, why can't it still be something to celebrate?

Baker has now managed five teams in his career — and finished first with all of them. That has never been done, by anybody. But it's also true that Dusty has never won a World Series. So he has a chance to write the story of a lifetime this month.

And La Russa now has won 13 division titles — second-most all-time behind Bobby Cox (15). It's hard to even comprehend that Tony La Russa just won his 13th division title 38 years after he won his first, with the 1983 White Sox. No other manager in history has even come close to that.

Connie Mack (naturally) set the previous record, finishing first 29 years apart (1902-31). In division-play times, Joe Torre did it 27 years apart (1982-2009). But they're not even in La Russa's area code.

So here's to Dusty Baker and Tony La Russa. The first time they managed against each other was so long ago (May 7, 1996) that five of the players who will start for them Thursday ([Yordan Alvarez](#), [Kyle Tucker](#), [Luis Robert](#), Eloy Jiménez, [Andrew Vaughn](#)) weren't even born yet. Now here they are again — to let the kids play and let the legends manage.

6. For the Giants, 30 was the new 20

The San Francisco Giants are amazing. You probably already know that. But let's talk about one of the biggest reasons they're amazing. And if it harkens back to the previous section of this column — the one on defying age — hey, that's not a coincidence.

Best record in baseball in 2021: The Giants.

Oldest group of position players in 2021: The Giants. (Average age: 30.6 years old).

We live in a world now where your average 30.6-year-old free agent would probably wind up begging for a job all winter and then signing a minor-league deal on Feb. 11 — because that's how the new-age baseball universe operates.

South of 30: Awesome. North of 30: Can't be trusted.

Except along came the 2021 Giants to prove there are exceptions to every trend. Fourteen Giants have gotten at least 250 plate appearances this season. Twelve of them are in their 30s. And their five most productive offensive players — [Brandon Belt](#), [Brandon Crawford](#), [Buster Posey](#), [Evan Longoria](#) and [Darin Ruf](#) — are all 33 or older.

“We don’t really have those very young, very durable guys you can just throw out there for 150, 155 games,” Giants manager Gabe Kapler told me and Doug Glanville the other day, in a conversation that will air on our Oct. 5 [Starkville podcast](#). “We have to be very careful about monitoring workloads and not pushing these guys too hard.”

So sure, they’ve had to handle this group differently than they’d treat a bunch of players in their mid-20s. But if what they’ve done has worked this well, is there a lesson in that?

“I honestly don’t know if this is super-replicable,” said one exec. “If you asked any team in this offseason, ‘Would you rather have a 26-year-old player or a 34-year-old player,’ they’d all take the 26-year-old player. But maybe this shows us there’s a spot in the middle, that at the right price and in the right spot on the roster, players can be very valuable, and we don’t have to automatically give up on players at 32.”

7. The three-batter rule isn’t working

Maybe it seemed like a good idea at the time. But two seasons in, here is what we’ve learned about the rule that says all relief pitchers have to face at least three hitters unless the inning ends first:

It’s a bust.

It was supposed to make games zip along faster. Instead, the average time of a nine-inning game this year was the longest ever (3 hours, 10 minutes).

It was supposed to reduce pitching changes. Instead, the number of relief pitchers per game (3.4 per team) is at an all-time high.

It was supposed to give hitters a chance to get more late-inning at-bats against a pitcher who threw with the opposite hand (left vs. right, right vs. left). Even that hasn’t happened. It’s actually gone the other way:

Percent of PAs vs. same hand

2021	24.7%	28.4%
2019*	23.8%	26.8%

(* Last year before 3-batter rule; source: [Sportradar.com](#))

Oh, and one more thing: The people being asked to implement this rule — the managers — hate it, and don't see the point in it.

"It's my least favorite rule," said [Phillies](#) manager [Joe Girardi](#). "And I'll continue to say that until one comes along that I like even less. I just think it changes the strategy of the game too much."

So should everyone just say, "Aw, whatever," and ignore this data? Or should the powers that be think seriously about admitting this hasn't worked and trying something else? Could baseball actually admit that mistake — and do something?

"Why not, right?" Girardi said. "I'm sure it's happened before. I mean, there was a rule on the books that (the pitcher) could fake to third and go to first, right? That rule is gone. You can no longer do that."

So yes, change is possible. Change is good. And sometimes, even in this sport, undoing change is good.

8. It takes 800 pitchers to get through a season!

Pitchers who appeared in a game this season: 846!

Ten years ago: 642!

Twenty years ago: 560!

So when you hear people say these days, "There's never enough pitching," that's not technically true, since we can document that teams found somebody to pitch every day for six months. The question is whether there are enough people walking around Planet Earth to fuel every team's desperate desire for some dude (preferably with options) who can potentially eat up four outs next Wednesday.

And also, there's this related question: Is this a road baseball really wants to continue to travel — until you turn on a game in like four years and recognize nobody who takes the mound?

Before we answer that, consider this:

- Until this year, only two teams in history had ever used 40 pitchers or more in a season. Five teams did it just this year! (Orioles/Mets 42, Diamondbacks/Rays 41, [Angels](#) 40)
- Ten years ago, only one team in baseball (the Blue Jays) even used 30 pitchers. This year, 25 teams sent at least 30 pitchers out there!
- Ten years ago, just 10 teams in the whole sport even went through 25 pitchers. This year, only one team (the Indians) used *under* 25!

So let's ask this one more time: Is this really what baseball wants its sport to look like?

"I think we need to address this in the next (labor deal)," said one NL exec. "Unless we have roster limits (on the number of pitchers teams can carry), I don't see why it would change. COVID-19 affected that number to some extent. But all the back and forth, and Triple-A shuttling — that's here to stay unless we do something."

There's resignation, among even the most aggressive roster-shuttling front offices, that eventually, [MLB](#) will take a second shot at implementing a 13-pitcher limit, which was supposed to take effect last year before the pandemic. But there has been talk about dropping that even lower, to 12, if it comes to that.

It's all part of the never-ending quest to incentivize starters to work longer and to chip away at the strikeout rate by reducing the parade of smokeballers whose job is just to pile up whiffs, three outs at a time, two or three days a week.

9. The next labor deal has to fix ...

Speaking of that labor deal, the next round of always-harmonious negotiations over that deal is coming right up this winter. And there's nothing like the threat of a good old-fashioned work stoppage to splash ice water all over the hot stove.

But we can bemoan that some other time. For now, I asked execs I surveyed which 2021 development they think is most in need of repair in the next collective bargaining agreement. And you might be surprised to learn the issue that got the most votes was...

Tanking!

So why is that a 2021 thing? Not that complicated.

- Four different teams ([Diamondbacks](#), [Orioles](#), [Pirates](#), [Rangers](#)) lost 100-plus games. Before 2018, that had only happened in one season in history (2002). We've now had four 100-game losers in each of the last two full seasons (2019 and 2021).
- Over the 30 seasons from 1988 to 2017, baseball averaged just one 100-loss team a year. Over the last four full seasons (2017-18-19-21), the average has nearly tripled (with 11 in four years).
- Finally, has there been enough attention paid to the sight of the D-backs and Orioles *both* losing 110 games? There has been only one other season in history when two teams lost that many. And at least that year (1969), the two teams that did it — the 110-loss Padres and Expos — were in their first season of existence. So this is the first season ever in which two non-expansion teams lost this many games.

“We have to actively discourage teams from tanking,” said one longtime exec. “Under this system, if you’re out of it in July, there’s nothing wrong with making trades at the deadline. But when you have three, or four, or five teams that have absolutely no incentive to win and start tearing down everything, which we had this year, it sways the races. It’s a huge problem.”

We’ll have all winter to kick around what to do about this problem. But among the ideas thrown out there are:

- Change the draft (lotteries, limits on how often teams can pick in the top five, awarding the top picks to the teams that just miss the playoffs instead of the worst teams, bumping up draft-bonus pools for wild card teams and the winningest teams that don’t make the playoffs, stop basing draft order on won-lost record alone, etc.).
- Impose a “reverse” luxury tax to penalize teams that spend under, say, \$90 million on payroll year after year.
- Softening luxury-tax penalties at the top so the tax functions less like a salary cap.

There were lots more like those. But here’s the bottom line, from one exec: “We have to be really creative — not just to incentivize trying to win but disincentivizing trying to lose. We need to do both at the same time.”

10. Watch out next year for ...

When we asked this open-ended question about teams on the rise, three teams came up most:

MARINERS — When I started this survey, their playoff odds were below 5 percent. Then, whaddayaknow, the planets lined up and they somehow found themselves with a real chance on the season’s final day. But even before that, it was obvious to rival execs that 2022 was always the Mariners’ ETA.

They’ve already had [Jarred Kelenic](#) and [Logan Gilbert](#) arrive. Julio Rodríguez is just over the horizon. [Ty France](#) had an eye-opening second half. [Chris Flexen](#) was one of the best under-the-radar signings of the year. There is money to spend and more young players on the way. And of their 2021 core, only [Kyle Seager](#) is a free agent.

So it’s taken a long time. But finally, said one AL exec, “Seattle is in position. And I think they’re going to push the pedal down this winter.”

TIGERS — Throw out those first 33 games, when they went 9-24, and the [Tigers](#) have spent the last five months outwinning the A’s*, [Reds](#), Phillies, Mets, Padres, Indians and every non-contender in the sport. And there’s near-unanimous sentiment that all of that was for real.

One review: “They have young pitching ([Casey Mize](#), [Tarik Skubal](#), [Matt Manning](#)). You can see what’s coming in (Spencer) Torkelson and [Riley Greene](#). You know they’ll spend money. And they’ve played really well since May. So of all the AL teams out there, it’s them and the Mariners who look like they’re ready to take the next step.”

MARLINS — It might be over-optimistic to say that 2022 is their time. But the Marlins have definitely gotten the attention of front offices around the sport. In part, that’s because of their collection of high-upside arms, but it’s also because of the contrast between their stockpile of young talent and the lack of system depth in the rest of their division.

“Their pitching is so good,” said one rival exec. “They need to add some position players. But it’s hard to imagine that any team has the quality of young pitchers who have already done it in the big leagues ([Sandy Alcantara](#), [Trevor Rogers](#), Pablo López, Jesús Luzardo, [Sixto Sánchez](#)) that they have. They’re not ready yet. But if you’re in the game every night because you’re running out one top-of-the-rotation arm after another, that to me makes them the one National League team to keep an eye on.”

Giants-Dodgers

Did you know the first time these two teams met was *48,005 days ago*? That was back on May 3, 1890, when Mickey Hughes pitched the Brooklyn Bridegrooms over the New York Giants, 7-3, in a game whose highlights are extremely unavailable on YouTube.

- That was so long ago, Benjamin Harrison was president.
- That was so long ago, Hugh Grant (no, not that one) was the mayor of New York.
- That was so long ago that, the day before the game, Congress created a new territory — called Oklahoma!

Since that day, the Dodgers’ franchise had played the Giants’ franchise 2,535 times, on two different coasts. And heck yeah, that’s the most in history between any two teams before their first postseason game. You were expecting maybe Diamondbacks-Rockies?

So I got to wondering about the wait for other famous rivals to meet up in the postseason. I hate when I wonder because normally, the next thing I know, like an hour of my theoretically useful lifetime has slipped by and I’m still wondering. But here’s what this burst of wondering resulted in:

YANKEES-RED SOX — Heck, those teams didn’t even have to wait a century to meet in October. From 1903, the year the [Yankees](#) moved to New York, it took a mere 96 years until they finally met up.

That happened in a 1999 ALCS that didn't end well for the Bostonians, but did give the Fenway faithful a chance to revel in beating up on Roger Clemens in a 13-1 Game 3 thrashing. I remember walking into a bar near Fenway that day — and found a lovely photo of the Rocket hanging on the wall ... *upside-down!*

But sorry. I digress. Games played between those two franchises before their first postseason meeting: “Only” 1,846.

CUBS-CARDINALS — Before the paths of the Dodgers and Giants finally crossed Friday, these were the previous record holders. After the Cardinals joined the National League in 1892 (as the Browns), they hosted the Chicago Colts on Opening Day. Historians tell us that was long before Harry Caray left St. Louis for Chicago, believe it or not.

Those clubs then danced around each other in the regular season for another 123 years until, at last, they met in the 2015 NLDS, which the [Cubs](#) clinched in a raucous Game 4 at Wrigley. Beverages were served.

Total regular-season games before their first matchup: 2,241.

Now the Giants and Dodgers have supplanted them as the rivals that waited longest to meet on the October stage. But remember this: Not everybody has played each other.

DRAFT 2022

There wasn't just final day drama surrounding the playoff race in Major League Baseball. It trickled all the way down to the bottom end of the standings, where Sunday's games determined who will have the No. 1 pick in the 2022 Draft.

With the D-backs winning their final contest of the year and the Orioles losing, the two teams finished with identical 52-110 records. Ties for Draft order are broken based on last year's record, and in 2020, the D-backs and Orioles finished with ... identical 25-35 records. That meant a trip back to 2019, when the Orioles had the second worst record in baseball and the D-backs were over .500, meaning Baltimore will have the top pick in 2022.

It marks the second time in four years the Orioles have the top pick after they selected [Adley Rutschman](#), currently the No. 1 prospect in baseball, in 2019. Baltimore also had the top pick back in 1989, taking Ben McDonald.

The D-backs (No. 2), Rangers (No. 3), Pirates (No. 4) and Nationals (No. 5) round out the top five. The Nats haven't had a top 10 pick since 2011, when they took Anthony Rendon at No. 6, a

year after nabbing Bryce Harper No. 1 overall in 2010 and Stephen Strasburg with the top overall selection in 2009. The Cubs, picking at No. 7, are in the top 10 for the first time since taking Ian Happ at No. 9 in 2015, the last of four straight top-10 picks.

The Mets will pick twice in the top 15, getting the No. 11 pick as compensation for not signing 2021 first-rounder Kumar Rocker, the No. 10 overall pick, as well as their regular pick, now at No. 14. The Astros will be back in the first round for the first time in three years after forfeiting their first-round pick in 2020 and 2021 as punishment for sign stealing.

There is no clear-cut favorite to be the No. 1 overall pick right now, though MLB Pipeline put Cal Poly shortstop Brooks Lee at the top of its [recent college prospects rankings](#) and Georgia prep infielder Termarr Johnson at No. 1 on its [high school prospects list](#). Much will change between now and whenever the 2022 Draft is held.

The Draft took place in July for the first time in 2021 as part of All-Star festivities, but there's a TBD next to the 2022 date as well as a number of other Draft-related issues. Much of that will be on the table when Major League Baseball and the Players Association meet to collectively bargain a new agreement this offseason.

Since 2012, each pick in the top 10 rounds has been assigned a bonus value, with the total for each club's selections representing the amount it can spend in those rounds without incurring a penalty. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the values from the 2019 were frozen for the next two years, meaning the team picking No. 1 came with an allocation of \$8,415,300 for three straight Drafts. The Tigers signed [Spencer Torkelson](#) for \$8,416,300 in 2020, breaking the Draft record of \$8.1 million set by Rutschman a year earlier. The Pirates signed 2021 top pick [Henry Davis](#) for \$6.5 million, using that savings to aggressively pursue talent later in the Draft.

Working with the assumption that some version of the bonus pool system will be used again, it does remain to be seen if, and how much, the values for each pick will be increased. Things like how free-agent compensation will involved Draft picks will also have to be negotiated, so it's unclear just how that, or exceeding the luxury-tax threshold (which in the past forced a team to drop a selection 10 spots if it exceeded that threshold by more than \$40 million), might alter the first-round order below.

Here's the order for the 2022 Draft:

1. Orioles (52-110)
2. D-backs (52-110)
3. Rangers (60-102)
4. Pirates (61-101)
5. Nationals (65-97)
6. Marlins (67-95)
7. Cubs (71-91)
8. Twins (73-89)

9. Royals (74-88)
10. Rockies (74-87)
11. Mets (compensation)*
12. Tigers (77-85)
13. Angels (77-85)
14. Mets (77-85)
15. Padres (79-83)
16. Indians (80-82)
17. Phillies (82-80)
18. Reds (83-79)
19. A's (86-76)
20. Braves (88-73)
21. Mariners (90-72)
22. Cardinals (90-72)
23. Blue Jays (91-71)
24. Red Sox (92-70)
25. Yankees (92-70)
26. White Sox (93-69)
27. Brewers (95-67)
28. Astros (95-67)
29. Rays (100-62)
30. Dodgers (106-56)
31. Giants (107-55)

*--compensation for not signing 2021 Draft pick Kumar Rocker

MY INTRO TO THE RIVALRY

October 2, 1978. I will never forget that day. 5 months from college graduation, working for software vendor CSI. I was doing an installation at the Ledger-Enquirer in Columbus, Georgia. I took the afternoon off, returned to my hotel room with a 6 pack of 16 oz. beers, kept score on the bag the beer came in, wearing my Yankee hat, eyes glued on the small hotel tv. No one can summarize it better than Peter Gammons:

Gammons: As Red Sox and Yankees prep for a winner-take-all game, my memories of 1978 resonate

It wasn't just a game, or even just a winner-take-all-game. It was 316 games distilled down to one day, featuring two teams who, in the 78th year of their rivalry, had led the American League East for 148 of the season's 162 game days — the [Yankees](#) trailing by 14 on July 17, the [Red Sox](#) trailing by 3 1/2 on Sept. 16.

Yankee manager Billy Martin had to resign July 27 after quipping about star Reggie Jackson and owner George Steinbrenner that “one’s a born liar, the other’s convicted,” and after they caught the Red Sox with the fourth and final game of “The Boston Massacre” on Sept. 10 and reliever Sparky Lyle said, “I don’t feel sorry for them, I pity them,” it seemed as if the season was yet another post-World War II chapter in a one-sided non-fiction novel. In recent years, of course, the script has flipped, as the Red Sox have had the upper hand for most of the past two decades. And the two AL East rivals enter Tuesday’s winner-take-all wild-card game as something more akin to equals today, all that lopsided 20th-century history now more in the past than ever.

But in the 1978 that I remember, that history was playing out in front of all of our eyes.

On a Friday night, Sept. 22, the Red Sox had lost an ugly 5-4 game in Toronto. After the game, third baseman Butch Hobson, who had 43 errors partly due to an elbow locked up with bone chips, told Boston manager Don Zimmer he should be benched the rest of the way. Several players were so discouraged they admitted that being two games behind the streaking Yankees with only eight games remaining made the task of overtaking them seem monumental.

The next morning, I was waiting for a cab outside the team’s hotel in Toronto. Luis Tiant, that afternoon’s starting pitcher, came out and asked to join in the ride. “Did some guys really say we’re in big trouble?” he asked as the cab pulled out. “Well, (screw) them. If we lose today, it will be with my face flat down on the mound.”

The [Blue Jays](#) got 13 runners on against Tiant in nine innings. One scored, and the Red Sox won 3-1. The next afternoon, down 6-4 in the ninth inning, the Red Sox rallied to win 7-6, with Carl Yastrzemski going 3-for-6 with a triple and a homer and having what 29 years later he told me was “the greatest at-bat of my career.” They won the next five, leading into Tiant’s start in the 162nd game at Fenway, again against Toronto, with Boston one game behind New York — who had Catfish Hunter pitching in Yankee Stadium against the [Cleveland Indians](#).

October 1. During batting practice, the Jays’ [Tom Murphy](#), a former Red Sox pitcher, climbed inside the scoreboard and playfully — optimistically? — put an 8 in the Indians’ first inning. An hour later, as Blue Jays third baseman Roy Howell stepped into the box to lead off the first inning against Tiant, a roar erupted in the bleachers.

“I was standing there, figuring out how to play Howell,” said Red Sox third baseman Jack Brohamer. “All of a sudden I knew someone had taken Catfish deep.” (It was Andre Thornton.) Indeed, all of a sudden this was a baseball day played out in two cities. Yankee games could be heard in Eastern Massachusetts on a Fall River station, and hundreds of fans had transistor radios out listening to that game while watching the Red Sox. One young bleacher fan handed Bob Stanley her radio in the bullpen so the relievers could hear it live rather than being forced to scoreboard-watch. Stanley updated the crowd with hand signals — 2-0, 6-2, all the way on to Cleveland’s 9-2 triumph behind pitcher Rick Waits — and when Tiant’s two-hit, 5-0 masterpiece

in what turned out to be his last appearance in a Boston uniform was over, Yastrzemski put the next day in perspective:

“Neither team deserves to lose,” he said, knowing they had 21 hours to prepare.

I lived that season as the Red Sox beat writer for The Boston Globe, which allowed the only lede that seemed appropriate: “It was the the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epic of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.” What one read in Jim Satterthwaite’s eighth grade English class certainly applied to baseball when one grew up in Nashoba County, Massachusetts.

Walking from the South End to Fenway on that Oct. 2 morning of Game 163, drivers beeped horns and waved, and at 8:15 a.m. the home clubhouse was nearly filled, but quiet, Rick Burleson describing how he drove around for close to an hour preparing for his arrival at Fenway. Yankees pitching coach Clyde King was sitting in the stands down the left field line at 9 a.m.; he was a [Dodgers](#) pitcher on an Oct. 3 day 27 years earlier for Bobby Thompson’s homer, and knew what history looks like. So did Yankee manager Bob Lemon, who soon joined King; he was in the Indians dugout in Fenway on Oct. 4, 1948, when Cleveland beat the Red Sox 8-3 in the American League playoff game.

There was no preparation necessary. They knew one another well. They each stood 99-63, the best records in the game, they’d played 15 times, Ron Guidry had thrown a shutout at Fenway during The Massacre, Red Sox starter Mike Torrez had been a postseason hero for the Yankees the previous October, Carlton Fisk and Thurman Munson had been rivals all the way back to September, 1971, Yastrzemski and Jackson for a decade, including a diving play Yaz made to cut off a potential Jackson triple in the clincher of the 1975 ALCS in Oakland.

But when Yastrzemski, age 39, jumped on an inside fastball by Guidry — already 24-3 and in the middle of a Cy Young season — and bashed it into the right-field seats leading off the second inning, there was a clear sense that it was the opening to a Broadway classic. The game itself played out in movements.

For six innings, Torrez was dominant. The Red Sox had a 2-0 lead thanks to Yastrzemski’s homer and a sixth-inning RBI single by MVP Jim Rice. But as Torrez went out to pitch the seventh, his team had missed two chances to give him a greater cushion. There were two unfulfilled scoring chances. In the third, George Scott was on third with one out and was stranded, and in the sixth, with runners at first and third and two out and Fred Lynn at the plate, Lou Piniella — playing right field over Jackson, who was miffed — saw Munson call for a slider inside to Lynn. Realizing Guidry did not have the bite on his breaking ball that has carried him through his 1.74 ERA career year, Piniella took eight steps toward the right-field line. Lynn jumped on the breaking ball down and in and pulled it to the right-field corner ... and Piniella caught it, saving two runs, and leaving Lynn mystified as to why the Yankee outfielder was where he was.

So it was 2-0 when the Yankees got two runners on in the seventh with one out and Bucky Dent, the light-hitting Yankee shortstop, walked to the plate. Torrez jammed him with a fastball that Dent fouled off his foot, and as he gingerly shook off the pain, on-deck batter Mickey Rivers noticed a crack in Dent's bat and replaced it. The next pitch was a slider, Dent pulled it in the air, and while Fisk said he breathed a sigh of relief off the bat, he saw Yastrzemski turn and look up at the screen above The Wall. As can happen on a New England autumn day, the wind had gradually shifted from Northeast to Southwest and Dent's fly ball carried ironically close to where Fisk's famous 1975 home run clanked the screen. Silence. 3-2.

Eventually Munson knocked in a run off reliever Bob Stanley, Jackson homered into the center-field bleachers in the eighth, and the Yankees had a 5-2 lead.

But it was not over. Rich Gossage had been brought in with one out in the bottom of the seventh to strike out Bob (Beetle) Bailey, and with six outs to go for the pennant, Red Sox second baseman Jerry Remy, who had two hits, a sacrifice bunt and a dazzling diving stop of a ground ball, doubled. Yastrzemski knocked him in, Lynn knocked in another, and it was 5-4 when Gossage retired Butch Hobson and Scott with Fisk in scoring position.

And, in the end, there was the final movement, the bottom of the ninth of a game Tom Boswell called "the greatest ever played." With one out, Gossage walked Rick Burleson. Remy then roped a line drive to right field. At that point, the sun was blinding, and Piniella admitted he lost the ball off the bat. "I went where I thought it would land," he said. Boston third base coach Eddie Yost knew Piniella lost sight of the ball and was trying to wave Burleson on, but Burleson feared Piniella was deking, and held up. The ball hit the ground, and Piniella stabbed the bounce like a hockey goalie; in the dugout Lemon noted that, had Jackson been in that position, his glove would have been on the other hand and the ball likely would have gone to the bullpen fence as the fleet Remy dashed around the bases.

So it was first and second, one out, and when Gossage got Rice to fly to center, it set up the Hall of Fame finale: Goose vs. Yaz, Burleson 90 feet from home plate. Two Octobers later, Gossage would give up a back-breaking home run to Kansas City's George Brett in the ALCS, and when reminded of his confrontation with Yastrzemski and asked if in those situations one person must win, and that great players don't really lose, he replied, "exactly."

Yastrzemski was looking fastball away, but the Gossage pitch ran in, Yastrzemski popped it up in foul territory between third base and the Yankee dugout, Graig Nettles caught it, and it was over. The 100-62 Yankees moved on. The 99-63 Red Sox were on vacation.

Afterwards, George Steinbrenner entered the Red Sox clubhouse and said, "We won, but you didn't lose." Jackson also went to the Red Sox clubhouse, saw Yaz with tears in his eyes, embraced him and said, "Yaz, you're the greatest."

"Go all the way," Yastrzemski replied.

When Steinbrenner and Jackson left, Yastrzemski said, “We have everything to be proud of, but what we don’t have is a ring.”

Yastrzemski played in 3,308 regular season games, more than any player but Pete Rose. He played in two World Series Game 7s, in 1967 against the Bob Gibson Cardinals, and in 1975 against The Big Red Machine. Yet that Gossage fastball that ran in was the closest he may actually have come to earning — for the Yastrzemski family, everything has always been about earning — a ring.

Forty-three years later Yaz stays up late to watch his grandson Mike play for the [Giants](#). When the two walked together to The Green Monster together for the first time in September 2019, Carl called it “the greatest moment of my baseball life after 1967,” and if the Giants do win the World Series and Mike is the first Yastrzemski to earn a ring, it will replace that walk as the second most significant baseball moment in the baseball life of the toughest player this ink-stained scribe has covered in his 50 years.

MASK DEVELOPMENT FROM WSJ

Jason Klein was umpiring a minor-league game in Durham, N.C., in 2007 when a business idea hit him in the face—literally.

A foul tip slammed directly into Klein’s chin so viciously that he immediately turned to the catcher and asked if he was bleeding and still had all his teeth. He couldn’t feel anything. The blow left him incapacitated for several minutes. Umpires call a ball in that spot a “kill shot.”

“That is the knockout punch,” Klein said. “This shot will put you down.”

When his brain stopped rattling and the stars disappeared from his eyes, Klein realized there had to be a better way to protect umpires from this sort of trauma. It led to him creating the Force3 Defender mask, which uses a spring-cushioned shock-absorbing system to take the brunt of the force from foul tips. The son of a metallurgist and a teacher, Klein spent five years researching, developing and testing the product, which aims to minimize the risk of concussions and other head injuries.

he mask has caught on, not just with umpires, as Klein originally intended, but with players. Dozens of catchers across the major leagues now wear the Force3 mask exclusively. During this month’s postseason, Travis d’Arnaud of the Atlanta Braves, Yasmani Grandal of the Chicago White Sox, Omar Narváez of the Milwaukee Brewers, Will Smith of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Christian Vázquez of the Boston Red Sox will be among the catchers wearing the Force3.

Grandal, 32, was an early adopter. On the recommendation of Tyler Flowers, a MLB catcher for 12 seasons and a Force3 investor, Grandal started wearing the mask in 2017 after years of “getting hammered in the face and having to be on a liquid diet for a week at a time.” In the first game he wore it, Grandal was hit in the face multiple times with no ill effects. Now, he’s an investor in the company.

By 2021, the mask had become commonplace. Narváez, an All-Star for Milwaukee, started wearing it after seeing many of his peers with it on.

“I don’t want to spend time on the IL because of something I can prevent,” Narváez said. “Sometimes you get dizzy with another mask.”

The road to widespread acceptance was slow and not always smooth. Though umpire Todd Tichenor was the first big leaguer to wear the Force3 mask during a game in 2014, players were more reluctant to try something new, especially from a small, unestablished manufacturer.

Klein thought he had a player on board in 2014, when a friend working for the Boston Red Sox connected him with veteran catcher David Ross. Now the Chicago Cubs’ manager, Ross ultimately declined to wear it in a game after experimenting with it, telling Klein that the four sets of springs impeded his vision.

The feedback prompted Klein to change the design so that the mask had only three sets of springs. It has taken off from there. Players and umpires who wear it all have stories about taking a foul tip off the mask that seemingly would’ve caused a serious injury and barely feeling it.

“Without that mask, my career probably would have been over four or five years ago easily,” said longtime MLB umpire Tim Timmons, 53. “There’s absolutely no way I’d be working right now.”

This isn’t the first time significant innovation in catchers’ gear came from the people who actually wear the equipment. In 1976, while waiting to bat in the on-deck circle, Dodgers catcher Steve Yeager suffered a near-fatal injury when a large piece of a broken bat hit him in the throat, requiring surgery. The shards punctured his esophagus and missed piercing a major artery by millimeters.

In order to resume his career and protect his throat, he worked with Dodgers trainer Bill Buhler, to invent a plastic protective shield that hung down his neck. Throat protection is now a common part of the equipment set for catchers of all ages.

Flowers, the first major-league player to wear the Force3, thinks it makes sense that people like Yeager and Klein are the ones driving the change. Umpires and catchers are the ones who face the consequences from the head injuries caused by foul tips to the face, a problem that has received increased scrutiny in recent years.

“If you’re just an outsider looking in, it’s hard to get a true appreciation of what a 98-mph foul-tipped fastball feels like,” Flowers said. “You see the reactions on TV and you hear the noise, and, if they’re not wearing our mask, then you see some eyes rolling in the back of their heads.”

For Yeager, 72, the invention of the throat guard became a memorable part of his baseball career, serving as fodder for trivia questions on television broadcasts for decades. At first, other players teased him about the unusual appendage. He remembers one time where Hall-of-Famer Willie Stargell looked back at him and said, “Hey Yeager, put your tongue back in your mouth!” (Yeager responded, “My tongue isn’t blue,” to which Stargell said, “Everything else about you is blue.”)

Yeager played in 15 major-league seasons, 14 of them with the Dodgers, appearing in four World Series and winning a championship in 1981. His lifetime batting average was just .228, but his legacy lives on in every catcher who now has throat protection behind the plate.

“I still have people today tell me, ‘Thanks for coming up with the throat guard because it helped my son,’” Yeager said. “If it saves one throat from getting hit with a foul ball or a blocked ball, that’s great. I’m very proud of Bill Buhler and what we’ve done together.”

The Force3 mask has spread through the league organically, largely through word-of-mouth as catchers and umpires who have worn it recommend it to others. The players who wear it don’t have any endorsement deal with the company. Klein won’t give any masks away free of charge, even when player agents call asking for a freebie for their high-profile clients. The hockey-style defender mask currently sells for \$239.95 on the company website.

That hasn’t stopped players from trying it, Klein says, when they hear from peers how the masks perform. Still, Klein’s success has put him in a bit of a strange position. Klein was an umpire. He has made a product popular with catchers. Catchers and umpires don’t always have the most cordial relationship. Now catchers are the people he’s protecting—and his customers.

“If I would have known that this would have carried over to the player world and protected catchers,” Klein said with a laugh, “I would never have done it.”

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

10.3.2021

Good morning baseball fans. A little late this morning—had the Yankees on DVR and didn't start to watch that mess until midnight.

Some comfort: The 2000 [Yankees](#) stand as the standard-bearer for how to survive a late-season fade and win a World Series. Those Yankees went 3-15 down the stretch, finished with 87 wins — the fewest of any division winner that season — then eliminated the A's, Mariners and [Mets](#) to win their fourth Series in five years.

As I'm sure you know, the [Yankees](#) have backed themselves into a position where they must clinch a postseason spot in Game 162 or play a Game 163 on the road for a spot in the American League wild-card game.

The Yankees are guaranteed a Game 163 on Monday if they lose their season finale to the Rays on Sunday, meaning they do not face elimination from postseason contention just yet. If they win, they are guaranteed a spot in the wild-card game, with the results of the Red Sox's final game against Washington set to determine who they will face and where.

With one game left in the season, here are the AL wild-card standings by record:

- Yankees: 91-70
- Red Sox: 91-70
- Toronto: 90-71
- Seattle: 90-71

Should be a crazy wild card day. Enjoy.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Last pitcher with consecutive seasons of at least 300 innings pitched--Hall of Famer Phil Niekro (334 1/3 IP in 1978, 342 IP in '79).

Last second baseman to lead the AL or NL in home runs in a season--Cubs Ryne Sandberg (40 home runs led the NL in 1990).

Two 20-game winners on the Giants in 1993, the last year they won 103 games--John Burkett (22-7) and Bill Swift (21-8).

The only grand slam ever hit during an All-Star Game happened during the 1983 Midsummer Classic at Comiskey Park--the Angels' Fred Lynn.

There have been 314 officially recognized no-hitters thrown in major league history. By contrast, according to Baseball Reference, there have been 358 instances of a starting pitcher surrendering a hit to every batter he faced.

Among those is a 1988 start in which Al Leiter heard a snap in his forearm upon being struck by a Carney Lansford liner, the first and only pitch he'd throw in the game. It also includes a 1916 contest between the [White Sox](#) and [Red Sox](#), a matchup between fellow southpaws Dave Danforth and Babe Ruth, in which both were pulled after facing only the leadoff man. Each manager had been angling to seize the platoon advantage. Ruth got his man, Danforth did not, and a century before the [Rays](#) were accused of ruining baseball, the Red Sox prevailed in a battle of dueling openers. (Then, as it is now, the purists were not pleased. "Such strategy," The Moline (Ill.) Daily Dispatch reported, "is beyond explanation.")

Cleveland outfielder Bradley Zimmer hit a solo shot off his older brother Kyle during [Monday afternoon's 8-3 win over Kansas City](#).

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, a brother homering off a brother has only happened three other times in AL/NL history in the modern era (since 1900):

Oct. 7, 1904: Naps' George Stovall off Tigers' Jesse Stovall
July 19, 1933: Red Sox's Rick Ferrell off Indians' Wes Ferrell
May 29, 1975: Astros' Joe Niekro off Braves' Phil Niekro

The younger Zimmer faced his brother two other times this season, [striking out once](#) and walking once.

Hall of Famer Dave Winfield was born on Oct. 3, 1951 -- the day Bobby Thomson hit "The Shot Heard 'Round the World".

MORE TO THE ARGUMENT THAT SOTO IS THIS GENERATION'S TED WILLIAMS

Last year, Soto became the fifth youngest player to win a batting title in the Modern Era (since 1900). This year? He very likely may win another, entering Tuesday at .321, just shy of former teammate Trea Turner's MLB- and NL-leading .322 average. Only one player in history has won multiple batting titles before turning 23: Ty Cobb, who won three.

- Speaking of Soto leading in categories, here's another: on-base percentage. This one, unlike batting average, won't come down to the final week. The only question left is just how much he will lead the Majors by. Last year, he led everyone, at .490, becoming the fifth qualified player to lead MLB in OBP in his age-22 season or younger, along with Bryce Harper, Stan Musial, Ted Williams and Ty Cobb. This year, he'll join Williams as the only players to do that *twice* before their age-23 seasons.

- Soto is the only qualified batter with more walks than strikeouts this season, with 139 free passes and just 86 punchouts. And of course, as you may have already guessed, Soto had more walks than strikeouts in 2020, too. Only other player has done that in his qualified age-22 season or younger in the Wild Card Era: Albert Pujols in 2002. And Soto will now have done it twice within that age frame.

- As described above, he reaches base quite frequently. Soto has an MLB-leading 25 games reaching base safely at least four times this season. Next most such games? 14, by Freddie Freeman and Carlos Correa. That's quite the gap. So where does Soto's total rank in history? Glad you asked. There have been just seven individual seasons since at least 1901 where a player had more than 25 games where they reached base safely at least four times. Those performances came from: Barry Bonds (2001-02, '04), Babe Ruth (1920, '23, '31) and Lou Gehrig (1931). Talk about next-level company.

Soto has reached base safely 72 times this month. The next-most in any calendar month in 2021? Freddie Freeman's 57 times reaching safely in July. Soto is the fourth youngest player to reach base safely at least 70 times in a month, older than only Mel Ott, Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams when they did it.

- During a stretch earlier in the month, he reached base in 12 consecutive plate appearances. That was the longest such streak by a player in the Expansion Era (since 1961) at age 22 or younger, and the longest in Nationals/Expos franchise history overall, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

- Soto had a good first half, slashing .283/.407/.445, but he's been otherworldly following the Midsummer Classic and his performance in the Home Run Derby, which [he participated in in](#)

[part to fix his swing](#). He now has a .542 OBP in the second half. That would be fifth-highest in the second half since the first All-Star Game in 1933 (min. 250 PA), behind only 2002 Bonds (.608), '04 Bonds (.589), 1941 Williams (.583) and '02 Bonds (.547).

- In September, it's been on an even more impressive level. He has a .590 OBP this month, which would be fourth-highest in a September/October since at least 1901, behind only, you guessed it: Bonds. That would be '04 Bonds (.619), '02 Bonds (.614) and '01 Bonds (.607).

Of course, this year for Soto is anything but an aberration, as many of the notes above imply. And it isn't just about on-base or even batting average, either. His 161 career [OPS+](#) would rank fifth in baseball history for a player through his age-22 season, with a minimum of 1,200 career plate appearances. The only players ahead of him on that list: Williams (183), Mike Trout (167), Musial (166) and Cobb (163). Hall of Fame company to start a career, for sure.

- Speaking of power, Soto has 98 career home runs, which is fourth most by a player before turning 23, trailing only Mel Ott (115), Eddie Mathews (112) and Tony Conigliaro (104). And that's with a shortened 2020 season, too. In related news, his 11 career multi-homer games are second-most before turning 23, behind only Mathews (13).

- Let's stick with the homers, but add on-base tendencies to the mix. He has 42 career games with at least one walk and one home run. The only players with more such games before turning 23 are Ott (55), Mathews (45) and Williams (44).

What about multiple homers and a walk? Soto has six of those games, tied with Ott for the most before turning 23. This is just what he does.

- Remember his 25 games reaching safely at least four times this year? He has 51 of those games total in his career, trailing only Williams' 54 for players before turning 23.

So, where does Juan Soto fit into the NL MVP conversation? Good question, considering Soto's .470 on-base percentage leads the majors by 38 points (!) and his .410 batting average with runners in scoring position leads by 21. Oh yeah, he also is a ridiculous 29-for-54 in his last 16 games, with five homers and 19 walks for a slash line of .537/.653/.926. According to [Baseball-Reference](#), the last player to hit .500/.650/.900 in a 16-game span was Barry Bonds in 2004.

if Soto's MVP candidacy is built largely on his ridiculous 1.258 OPS since the All-Star Game, [Bryce Harper](#) has been nearly as good, producing a 1.222 OPS over that same period and trying to drag the [Phillies](#) into the playoffs practically by himself.

Harper leads the majors in OPS and is barely second in OPS+, but I'm still not sure he's the MVP over the [Padres' Fernando Tatis Jr.](#), who has hit 40 homers at age 22, leads the majors in Win Probability Added, and been invaluable when healthy. Yet, Tatis has played 120 games, Harper 132 and Soto 142.

WHITE SOX FADE

The White Sox on Thursday ended a two-month sleepwalk, getting two home runs from [Tim Anderson](#) and one each from [Luis Robert](#) and Eloy Jiménez to defeat the [Indians](#), 7-2, and clinch the AL Central. “A different focus today for sure,” one team official said. About time: The White Sox, who lost the second game of the doubleheader, 5-3, had been 27-29 since July 20.

Playing in a division with four sub-.500 clubs, the White Sox should be competing for the best overall record in the AL. Instead, they’re 86-67, five games behind the [Astros](#), who lead the AL West, and eight behind the [Rays](#), who lead the AL East. They almost certainly will open the playoffs on the road against one of those teams, so their late-summer malaise already has cost them.

RAYS

Would the Rays be better off finishing with the second-best record in the league so they can play the White Sox in the Division Series, rather than the winner of the wild-card game? Probably not, if the White Sox are at their best. But three of the remaining four wild-card contenders are AL East clubs, and all three play Tampa Bay fairly tough. The Yankees are 7-9 against the Rays this season, the [Red Sox](#) and [Blue Jays](#) 8-11. The Rays are 63-36 against all other opponents, including 3-3 against the White Sox and 1-6 against the Mariners.

Wander reaches base ... but streak ends?

Rays rookie shortstop [Wander Franco](#) saw an historic on-base streak come to an end Thursday night. Oddly enough, his streak ended in a game in which he stood on first base three times.

Franco went 0-for-4 in the [Rays’ 3-2 loss](#) to the Astros at Minute Maid Park, the first time since July 24 that the 20-year-old didn’t reach base safely on a hit, walk or hit-by-pitch. Franco’s on-base streak ended at 43 games, tied with Frank Robinson in 1956 for the longest in AL/NL history by a player 20 years old or younger.

Among the Hall of Famers passed by Franco as he built up his 43-game streak to match Robinson: Ken Griffey Jr., Al Kaline, Mel Ott, Arky Vaughan and, finally, Mickey Mantle.

Just as impressive as that 20-and-under list he now resides atop with Robinson? The small collection of players who put together an on-base streak longer than Franco’s at the age of 22 or

younger: four inner-circle Hall of Famers, and one who will join them in Cooperstown five years after his playing days are over.

A young Stan Musial had a 55-game on-base streak in 1943. Joe DiMaggio reached safely in 52 straight in '37. Albert Pujols ran up a 48-game streak in 2001. Rickey Henderson got on base in 46 straight from '80-81. And Ted Williams strung together a 44-game on-base streak in '41, a mark Franco fell one short of.

Franco appeared to have kept the streak alive in the sixth inning, when he was called safe at first base on an infield single. But umpires went to a replay review and the initial ruling was overturned.

Franco reached first base two other times, but neither counted toward his streak. In the fourth inning, he sped down the line on a fielder's choice grounder to Jose Altuve, who forced out Brandon Lowe at second base. In the ninth, he hit another grounder to Altuve with a runner on first base. Franco reached on a fielder's choice, although Randy Arozarena wound up safe at second as Altuve committed an error on the play.

So ended the streak -- a relatively obscure statistical accomplishment, considering the qualifiers involved, but still an impressive run during which the 20-year-old showed what all the prospect hype was about.

Franco finished the streak with more hits (55) than swinging strikes (48), and he has only struck out twice in his last 82 plate appearances and four times in his last 123 trips to the plate. He reached on hits in 34 of those games, exclusively on a walk in eight games and via a hit-by-pitch only in one game.

The record for most consecutive games reaching base regardless of age--Hall of Famer Ted Williams (84 games in 1949).

SO YOU WANT TO BE A GM?

The decision on third baseman [Kyle Seager](#)'s option looms as a doozy for the Mariners. Seager is sitting on 35 home runs and 100 RBIs, but because of his .215 batting average, his OPS+ is only 5 percent above league average. So, should the Mariners exercise his club option, which with escalators is expected to be \$20 million? According to FanGraphs' dollars metric, which is WAR converted to a dollar scale based on what a player would earn in free agency, Seager is [valued](#) this season at \$22.4 million.

Of course, the decision is not that simple. Most teams are willing to pay a higher salary for a player on a one-year deal. Seager brings intangible value with his [leadership and emotional value](#) as a player who has spent his entire 11-year career in Seattle. On the other hand, he turns 34 on Nov. 3. He is hardly guaranteed to replicate his career-high home-run and RBI totals next season. And the Mariners can move [Abraham Toro](#) to third and redirect Seager's \$20 million to other needs.

Mariners GM Jerry Dipoto proved again with his acquisition of Toro for closer [Kendall Graveman](#) that he is not afraid of making unpopular moves. He soon might make another one with Seager.

INTERESTING PIECE FROM MLB.COM ON POST SEASON RELIEF PITCHERS

The relievers who could cement a title run

If we've learned anything about postseason baseball over the last five years or so, it's that relievers become ever more important when the lights get the brightest. Don't get us wrong, exactly; of course starters still matter, and of course you'll immediately think of the 2019 Nationals, who went with the "what if we make the entire staff out of starters" strategy, to fine results.

But that group of Nationals seems more like an outlier than the plan these days. With more days off between games, no tomorrow should you lose said games and a greater understanding of what letting non-elite starters turn over a lineup three or four times actually means, managers have become more and more aggressive about going to the bullpen early in October, to the point that it's become more an expectation than a surprise.

The point is that you're much more likely to see 2016 Andrew Miller (who faced 73 batters in 10 appearances over 15 Cleveland playoff games) than you are 2016 Zack Britton (who waited for a save opportunity that would never come as six other relievers entered in the AL Wild Card Game).

Not that you don't already know this just from having watched the games, but to show it in graph form ...

After many years of relievers throwing about one-third of postseason innings, their share began climbing in 2015 and topped 50% for the first time ever in 2020. (We'll stipulate that the 2020 playoffs were *unusual*, to say the least, but 2018 was only a fraction of a percent behind it, and the Nationals singlehandedly affected 2019.)

So, as we head full speed into what ought to be quite an entertaining month of baseball, we bring to you the 2021 postseason reliever tiers, highlighting the various groups of relievers you'll expect to see and need to know as the playoffs move on.

We thought about trying to add some science to this, attempting to predict or project 2021's best October relievers, and then we remembered how playoff baseball tends to go, and so we thought we'd better group them together in a semi-scientific-but-mostly-not way to come out with approximately two dozen important relievers, in tiered groups. This is not a list of "lowest ERA, ordered." It is not a list of every reliever that will appear in October, lest we go 75 deep. It's a list of the arms we think will be most important. (Note: We are including some pitchers below whose *teams have not yet clinched*, but will end up being important if they do.)

With apologies to Pete Fairbanks, Luis Garcia, Garrett Crochet, Ryan Tepera, Camilo Doval, Joe Kelly, Adam Cimber, José Álvarez, Phil Bickford, Michael Kopech, J.P. Feyereisen, Drew Steckenrider and whichever other reliever you're mad we omitted ...

Tier 1: The two kings

These are the top dogs, the Main Dudes. These are not out of nowhere pop-up types or the fading big-name veterans; these two were each dominant in 2019 and '20, and have continued to be so in 2021. They've *been* great. They're still great.

Liam Hendriks, RHP, CWS

Josh Hader, LHP, MIL

Hendriks entered the season as [baseball's best reliever](#), and the White Sox paid him accordingly, giving him [four years and \\$54 million](#) to come to Chicago. One hundred and eight strikeouts later -- against only seven walks, giving him [one of history's best K/BB rates](#) -- not much has changed with his elite status.

Hader, somehow, has managed to improve even beyond the historical dominance he showed in his first four seasons with Milwaukee, posting a 1.27 ERA thanks in large to part to allowing as

many homers (3) in 56 2/3 innings as he did last year in 19 innings. Not bad, paired with the [highest strikeout rate](#) this side of Jacob deGrom.

Tier 2: The high-end 30-somethings

These four have had wildly different career paths, with several needing to find a new home before they found success. One is one of the better closers of his generation; one is his setup man; another wasn't the closer as recently as six months ago. (This is the tier where Devin Williams would have appeared before [his broken hand](#) put him out for most or all of the postseason. Since he's not included, we get to title it 30-somethings.)

Kenley Jansen, RHP, LAD

Blake Treinen, RHP, LAD

Ryan Pressly, RHP, HOU

Giovanny Gallegos, RHP, STL

Every time we think **Jansen** has seen his best days, he surprises us -- and he certainly looked good [striking out the side](#) to finish off the Padres on Wednesday night. After a rough July, he's been very good over the last two months (1.32 ERA and a 37/8 K/BB since Aug. 1), and he's regained some of the velocity that had been declining in previous years. But Jansen, 34, also has his highest walk rate (13%) since he was a rookie back in 2011, and thanks to the crime of a reliever being *very good* and not *perfect*, it just never feels like Dodger fans trust him as much as you'd think his track record should allow.

His running mate in Los Angeles, **Treinen**, is having a pretty special season of his own, completing a turnaround from "historic 2018" (0.78 ERA) to "inconsistent 2019-20" (4.59 ERA) to this year, when he's posted a 2.02 ERA and upped his strikeout rate from 21% to 30%. He's doing it in an interesting way, too, since after years using his sinking fastball as his primary pitch, [he's now using his cutter and slider in ways he's never done before](#).

Pressly is now in his fourth season in Houston since the Astros swiped him from the Twins, and he just keeps on dominating. Prioritizing his slider over his curve, Pressly has 80 strikeouts against only 12 walks this year, and a wild 213/34 over his Astros career. This year, he's got a career-low 5% walk rate.

You might not consider **Gallegos** a big name, but we do. While St. Louis fans rightfully bemoaned the loss of Luke Voit as he slugged in the Bronx, the trade did return Gallegos, who is now into his third year of excellent relief work, posting a 2.78 ERA and more than five times as many walks as strikeouts as a Cardinal. His ascension to the closer's role, replacing All-Star Alex Reyes, is a big part of the Cardinals' wild run to the playoffs.

Tier 3: The big names with question marks

These names, to be honest, carry as much or more star power than some in the group above it, and if we'd done this exercise on or around June 15, we'd have been including half of these stars in our first group. But for each of them, be it second-half struggles or some specific flaw in their game, there's an added level of uncertainty that comes with putting them in a big spot right now -- and if there's anything managers hate, it's bullpen uncertainty.

(In Reyes' case, he's had such a rough go of it -- a 6.08 ERA over the last two months -- that we're not sure he'll have any meaningful role at all unless the Cardinals advance beyond the NL Wild Card Game.)

Aroldis Chapman, LHP, NYY

Craig Kimbrel, RHP, CWS

Matt Barnes, RHP, BOS

Will Smith, LHP, ATL

Chapman has had one of the most wild seasons we can remember. In his first 23 appearances, he allowed one single earned run; in his next 12 appearances, he allowed 14 earned runs. It's been better since then, as a 2.19 second-half ERA will attest to, but the walk rate remains high, and his appearances in high-pressure spots can charitably be described as "uncomfortable watching." Still, few relievers in history have such a long track record of success as he does. The Yankees haven't clinched yet, but they're in the driver's seat for an AL Wild Card spot.

Kimbrel, like Chapman, got off to a fantastic start this year, which is why the White Sox paid such a high price [to acquire him from the Cubs](#) on July 30. But it hasn't been such smooth sailing on the South Side, where he's allowed a .326/.475 OBP/SLG after .190/.146 marks with the Cubs. The Sox had the division wrapped up long before he arrived, so this acquisition was entirely about what he can do in October, which means that he's going to have to pull it together, and soon.

Barnes -- whose Red Sox have not yet clinched -- could probably have the same description as the two names above him: *Track record of success, wonderful start to 2021, hugely problematic stretches since*. It's been so troublesome -- in a seven-game span in August, he allowed nine earned runs -- that he's lately been pitching in the sixth inning of losses during Boston's most important stretch of the season.

In Atlanta, **Smith** is the biggest name in a generally underwhelming Braves bullpen, and for good reason, because he's been one of baseball's better relievers ever since joining the Brewers in 2014. But his first season with the Braves, 2020, was a rough one; [he was delayed by COVID](#) and ended up throwing just 16 innings. His 2021 has been better, but it seems like clean innings are a rarity. There are pitchers on this list further down that we like better, but none as important to their teams as Smith will be.

Tier 4: The under-the-radar arms you don't know enough about

Your mileage may vary on “under the radar,” of course. If you’re a serious fantasy player or a fan of one of their teams, then of course you know these guys. But for the larger population of general baseball fans, these aren’t necessarily names that jump off the page, or in some cases, ring a bell for you at all. Don’t however, let that relative anonymity prevent you from realizing just how *good* these arms have been.

Yes, the Yankees have three of them. And yes, this tier includes players on a few teams (Yankees, Mariners, Blue Jays, Red Sox) that have not clinched. Half of those four teams will make it, the other half will not.

Clay Holmes, RHP, NYY

Michael King, RHP, NYY

Jonathan Loáisiga, RHP, NYY

Alex Vesia, LHP, LAD

Paul Sewald, RHP, SEA

Garrett Whitlock, RHP, BOS

Tyler Rogers, RHP, SF

Jordan Romano, RHP, TOR

Ten months ago, **Holmes** was [non-tendered by Pittsburgh](#) before coming back on a Minor League deal, and why not, given that he had a career 5.91 ERA and had pitched just once in 2020. Two months ago, he was [traded to the Yankees](#) as an elite ground-baller with trouble throwing strikes. Since then? He’s got 31 strikeouts against only three walks, allowing just four runs, in 25 innings -- and he’s become one of Aaron Boone’s most trusted relievers.

Fellow righty **King** made the Opening Day roster as a multi-inning reliever, and immediately impressed by [retiring 16 straight](#) in a six-inning relief appearance on April 4. But after being pressed into the rotation in July (5.24 ERA in five mostly unimpressive starts) and then missing two months due to [a finger injury](#), he was off the bullpen radar until returning three weeks ago ... and looking fantastic. In six outings, he's allowed two earned runs while striking out 13. The Yankees' bullpen looks a lot different than it did just two months ago.

Speaking of which, **Loáisiga** had been kicking around as a swingman for three years, showing flashes but also inconsistency, before emerging in 2021 as one of the better relievers in baseball (2.22 ERA) upon moving away from the four-seamer that never really worked and toward the 98 mph sinker that does. After missing a few weeks with a sore shoulder, he returned [on Wednesday](#) to touch 99 mph, giving confidence he's healthy.

Dodger rookie **Vesia** didn’t gain much notice allowing 10 runs in five games for Miami last year, and Dylan Floro was the big name in [the winter trade](#) that sent Vesia to Los Angeles. Score another one for the Dodger pitching machine; fueled by a fastball with [elite rising action](#), Vesia has become a high-leverage lefty, particularly [since](#) the Trade Deadline, as he’s allowed two earned runs in 22 outings, whiffing 27.

It's possible, though, that **Sewald** is an even less likely name here, because while Vesia had little track record, Sewald's was just *poor*. In parts of four seasons with the Mets, he posted a 5.50 ERA, then last winter they chose to [not even offer him](#) a contract. Good for the Mariners, who signed him to a non-roster invite and watched him blossom into [a relief ace](#). Thanks to suggested [changes](#) from the Seattle development staff, Sewald has a 39% strikeout rate, though he's allowed nine second-half homers after giving up zero in the first half.

Or maybe it's **Whitlock**? Drafted as a Rule 5 pick when the Yankees couldn't or wouldn't find room for him on the 40-man roster, Whitlock not only made the roster, he's thrived, [striking out five](#) in his Major League debut and not looking back from there. Over 72 1/3 innings, Whitlock has allowed only 16 earned runs while striking out 79. While he's currently out with an injured pectoral, he's expected to be back before the end of the season.

If you know **Rogers**, it's mostly because of his funky delivery, and that he's not Trevor or Taylor. But the focus on the *way* he pitches overlooks *how* he pitches, which is that in 78 innings this year, he's posted a 2.31 ERA. More importantly than that, no regular reliever has avoided the most dangerous of hard contact -- the [barrel](#) -- [as well as he has](#). He won't pile up the strikeouts (a below-average 17% K rate), and that's not usually what managers look for in October, but just about no one prevents loud contact as well as he does.

In Canada, **Romano** (along with Adam Cimber, Trevor Richards and Tim Mayza) has been [a consistent piece](#) in a sometimes-shaky bullpen. Maybe, perhaps, we should have seen this coming, because his 2021 underlying stats look a whole lot like they did last year, when he had a 1.23 ERA (in only 14 2/3 innings). He's added three ticks on his fastball since this 2019 debut -- he now averages 97.6 mph -- and he's allowed just one hit in his last nine outings.

Tier 5: The solid veteran arms who will make some noise

Aaron Bummer, LHP, CWS

Kendall Graveman, RHP, HOU

Chad Green, RHP, NYY

Andrew Kittredge, RHP, TB

If you didn't already know **Bummer**, you should; if you look at the ground-ball rate leaders since 2018, he's [second](#) behind only Britton. He still gets the grounders, but he's a lot more than that now; in the first three years of his career, he struck out 23% of the batters he faced. From 2020-21, that's up to 32%. Bummer's sinker may get the ground balls, but [his slider is his true deadly putaway pitch](#).

Remember when Seattle traded **Graveman** to Houston and the players were so angry it ended their season? Yes, about that ... anyway, Graveman got off to a dominant start with the Astros before running into some command issues that haven't totally abated yet. (While his 1.04 ERA in September looks great, a 9/9 K/BB in 8 2/3 innings says otherwise.) In an attempt to better

attack lefties, he's using his slider *four times as often* against them this month as he did last month.

Green -- whose team hasn't clinched yet -- should get more respect than this, we think. He's been a valuable Yankee for six years (3.19 ERA), he's got more than five times as many strikeouts as walks the last two seasons and there was a stretch in early July, as the Yankees' season was at a low point, when he all but singlehandedly saved the bullpen. He's allowed runs in five of his last dozen games, though, allowing homers in three consecutive.

Let's be sure to give **Kittredge** his due, though, because after being a useful if not prominent arm for his first four years with Tampa Bay, he's having something of a moment right now, and we're not just talking about his [last-second All-Star selection](#). He's not "1.66 ERA" good, but relying almost entirely on sinkers and sliders, he's posted a 75/15 K/BB for the Rays, particularly coming in handy against righty batters, with a dominant 56/5 mark in such spots.

Tier 6: The starting pitchers working out of the 'pen

This quartet has a long history of being in the rotation; between them, they've made 370 career starts, including 36 this season. This isn't the same thing as "team's fourth- or fifth-best starter may work out of the bullpen in October," as may happen with Adrian Houser or Shane Bieber. These are the guys already working out of the bullpen, to great effect, though a couple of them are not yet guaranteed to pitch in October.

Luis Severino, RHP, NYY

Garrett Richards, RHP, BOS

Collin McHugh, RHP, TB

Reynaldo López, RHP, CWS

Yes, another Yankee, we're sorry, but don't forget that **Severino** finished in the top 10 in Cy Young voting in both 2017 and '18 before [shoulder](#) and [elbow](#) injuries ruined his next two seasons. Finally healthy but far from built up to a starter's workload, Severino is a newly minted reliever for Boone, and so far, so good: Seven scoreless innings.

Further north, behold the transformation of **Richards**, who [struggled](#) so badly with grip issues after the substance crackdown that he [lost his rotation job](#) in the first week of August. Improbably, he's been spectacular, continuing usage of his [new changeup](#) and posting a 1.93 ERA. ("Maybe this is the future for me," he [told](#) The Athletic. If not the future, it's at least the present.)

It's a little different for **McHugh**, a long-time starter who didn't pitch in 2020 and [signed with the Rays](#) without a defined role. He quickly became a [valued part of the bullpen](#), though he's still started eight times this year, or at least "was the first pitcher" eight times, given how fluid Tampa Bay pitching spots can be. Wherever he's pitching, he's been strong, with a 1.60 ERA and a 73/12 K/BB.

From 2016-20, [no one started more games for Chicago](#) than **López** did, but he spent most of the first half injured or in the Minors, and he's spent September pitching in as a starter to get the rotation through the end of the season. But in between, López worked in relief, and the results were spectacular; in 20 innings as a reliever, he allowed two earned runs, striking out 22.

YOU KNOW I ENJOY EVERYTHING JAYSON STARK PUTS UP ON THE ATHLETIC

2021 MLB awards: Jayson Stark's MVP and LVP, Cy Youngs and Cy Yuks, Rookies of the Year and more

C'mon. Was it really six months ago that [Miguel Cabrera](#) pounded that unforgettable Opening Day home run through the snowflakes? Seems like 20 minutes ago.

But now here we are, a couple thousand baseball games, 38 no-hitters and the best 1919 Babe Ruth imitation ever later – and it's that time again. Time for me to give out those annual end-of-season awards that always have North America saying to itself: *"We can't believe he got them all 100 percent right again!"*

I've been waiting around all day for James Corden, [James Shields](#), [James Paxton](#), LeBron James, Kevin James, Susan Saint James, James and the Giant Peach, and, of course, James Bond to join me here in Raymond James Stadium for this awards ceremony. But since they've snubbed me again, as usual, I'll just have to hand these things out myself. So ... the envelopes, please.

NL MVP — [Bryce Harper](#), [Phillies](#)

An AL executive said this to me about Bryce Harper the other day, 100 percent unprompted, at the end of a long conversation in which I never brought up Harper's name:

"What Bryce Harper has done, on a team that really shouldn't be a playoff contender, is insane. This and Ohtani are the two things from this season we're just not talking about enough."

This and Ohtani. That's what he said. The more I thought about that afterward, the more it struck me that there's a massive disconnect between what people inside baseball think about Bryce Harper and what your average fan thinks about him.

Inside the game, there is widespread recognition that Harper is clearly one of the top 10 players on Earth. Outside that inner sanctum, and certainly outside Philadelphia, I'm fascinated by how little you hear any baseball fan say that. Ever.

We've spent a lot of time lately debating whether he's overrated, underrated or so overrated, he's underrated. But while all that's been sucking up oxygen, Harper has had a fire-breathing, franchise-altering second half that is rattling the baseball Richter Scale.

Harper since the All-Star break: 1.173 OPS, .700 SLUG, .473 OBP, 19 HR, 52 runs, 64 BB, 46 XBH

Players in the live-ball era who had a 1.170+ OPS, .700+ SLUG, .470+ OBP, 19+ HR, 50+ runs, 60+ BB, 46+ XBH in the second half:

Babe Ruth (5 times)

Lou Gehrig (1934)

Barry Bonds (2001)

Bryce Harper (2021)

So maybe you're saying to yourself: That's an arbitrary, cherry-picked collection of numbers designed to make this guy look good. Well, if it is, it's only because I guess my definition of "arbitrary" or "cherry-picked" is "all the incredible numbers that jumped off the stat sheet."

But the truth is, *any* of these numbers, or any combination, would be the stuff of true offensive behemoths. When they all appear on the same stat line, wow. How can you not look at them and shake your head?

Then the next question is: But does all that make him the MVP? I've thought about that question a lot, too. Here's why I think it does.

First of all, it has nothing to do with how I feel about Juan Soto or [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) I've already written *this year* that Tatis is positioned to be [the face of baseball for a decade](#) and that Soto is [the 21st-century Ted Williams](#). This isn't about any of that. It's about this year.

And this year, I thought for five months that this was Tatis' award to lose. Except now he's lost it. He's lost it by missing so much time with injuries. He's lost it in a second half in which his team has careened from 17 games over .500 to a losing record. And he's lost it because, well, here is how his second half compares with the MVP competition:

SECOND-HALF OPS

Soto: 1.195

Harper: 1.173

Tatis: .918

So Tatis now sits third on my list. But then why not Soto? Look, I can't say this enough. Juan Soto is awesome. He's a must-watch attraction every at-bat of every game. His second-half OPS is nearly identical to Harper's. And Soto's .533 second-half on-base percentage has been topped by only three hitters in the modern era — three guys named Bonds, Williams and Ruth.

I get goosebumps thinking of all of that. So save your *Philly bias* or *you hate the [Nationals](#)* or whatever other fictitious theories you have for why I'd take Harper over Soto for this award, in this season. I honestly hope Soto wins 10 MVP awards before he's done.

But should he win *this* one? That's the question. It's excruciatingly close. But ... over this full season, Harper has outslugged Soto by 64 points (.607-.543), has 24 more extra-base hits (75-51) and twice as many doubles (40-20). And there's no better measure of how he has lugged his team into contention than this:

SECOND-HALF OPS

Bryce Harper: 1.173

All other Phillies: .688

I bring that up because, when an MVP race is this close, I still believe numbers mean more when they come in the context of some kind of postseason push. It's obviously not Soto's fault that his team unraveled and sold off his supporting cast. But it happened.

Baseball-reference.com now has a metric called Championship Win Probability Added. It measures how much a player improves the chances of his team winning a World Series. Harper leads the entire sport this year. Soto isn't even on the leader board.

Again, that's not Soto's fault. But this is an MVP conversation. So if this is about value, that's one more separator.

In the history of baseball, only one player has ever won an MVP award for two different teams before his 30th birthday: Barry Bonds. You know who deserves to become the second? Bryce Harper.

MY MVP "BALLOT": 1) Harper, 2) Soto, 3) Tatis, 4) [Brandon Crawford](#), 5) [Paul Goldschmidt](#), 6) [Austin Riley](#), 7) Max Muncy, 8) [Freddie Freeman](#), 9) Tyler O'Neill, 10) [Willy Adames](#).

(Can't believe I ran out of room for: [Zack Wheeler](#), [Corbin Burnes](#), [Trea Turner](#), [Manny Machado](#), [Nick Castellanos](#), [Max Scherzer](#), [Brandon Belt](#), [Nolan Arenado](#), [Ozzie Albies](#), [Bryan Reynolds](#), [Adam Duvall](#), [Joey Votto](#) and more!)

AL MVP — [Shohei Ohtani](#), Angels

We still don't get it. We're still debating all the wrong things. We've been watching the great Shohei Ohtani produce the most remarkable season of our lifetimes — and possibly not just in *his* sport — and we're still stuck on yesteryear stuff like "*but look at his batting average*" or "*what if Vladdy wins the Triple Crown?*"

Nope. Sorry. Doesn't apply. Not this year. Not to this man. Not to this award.

Most years, on most planets, Vlad Guerrero Jr.'s season would be MVP material. But he's not in a fair fight. The offensive numbers — yessir, they're close, and Vlad has eked ahead:

Vlad Jr.	46 HRs	.596 slug	.998 OPS
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Ohtani	45 HRs	.594 slug	.964 OPS
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But then there's that other Ohtani. In his spare time, he has this cool hobby, remember? And in that hobby, he's accumulated more Wins Above Replacement, just as a pitcher (4.1), than [Adam Wainwright](#), [Charlie Morton](#), Julio Urías or literally 800 other guys.

So, sorry, Vladdy. You've been tremendous. You're just going head-to-head with a superhero. You're trying to out-MVP a human who is just way too good at both hitting and pitching baseballs. Here's exactly how good he is at both those things:

OPS+: Ohtani is at 158. Better than [Aaron Judge](#) (150)! Or Paul Goldschmidt (144)! Or Freddie Freeman (133)!

ERA+: Ohtani is at 141 in his other life. Better than [Gerrit Cole](#) (133)!

HOME RUNS: 45 homers. More than [Mookie Betts](#) and [Anthony Rizzo](#) combined (44)!

TRIPLES: Eight triples (leading the American League!). More than noted triples machines Whit Merrifield and Trea Turner combined (six)!

STEALS: 26 stolen bases. More than former SB champs [Jonathan Villar](#) and [Billy Hamilton](#) combined (23)!

EXTRA BASES: 78 extra-base hits. More than Vlad (75) or Bryce (also 75)!

STRIKEOUTS: Back on the mound, a 29.3-percent strikeout rate. Better than [Walker Buehler](#) (25.3)!

NO SLUG ZONE: .351 opponent slugging by the poor folks who have to hit against him. To once again steal a great stat from [MLB.com](#)'s Andrew Simon, Ohtani could allow a home run to the next 34 hitters he pitches to — and they still wouldn't have as high a slugging percentage as he does (.594)!

So how is Vlad (or anyone) supposed to compete with that? Impossible.

Vlad's season: Spectacular. Ohtani's season: *Ohtanic*! (H/T to my Starkville co-host, Doug Glanville.) And we all know the synonym for *Ohtanic*. It's M-V-P.

MY MVP “BALLOT”: 1) Ohtani, 2) Guerrero, 3) [Marcus Semien](#), 4) [Carlos Correa](#), 5) Aaron Judge
6) Jose Ramírez, 7) [Matt Olson](#), 8) [Cedric Mullins](#), 9) [Salvador Perez](#), 10) [Mitch Haniger](#).

(Can’t believe I ran out of room for: [Brandon Lowe](#), José Abreu, Gerrit Cole, [Robbie Ray](#), [Kyle Tucker](#), José Altuve, [Xander Bogaerts](#), [Rafael Devers](#), [Giancarlo Stanton](#) and more!)

NL Least Valuable Player (LVP) — [Cody Bellinger](#), [Dodgers](#)

I’m not sure I’ve ever picked any player as an MVP and LVP this close together. But I’m doing it now, because it’s been One of Those Years for the 2019 NL MVP, Cody Bellinger.

- His OPS+ is 47! That’s not 147. That’s an actual 47. If it sinks much further, he could tie or beat the record for lowest OPS+ by any former MVP with 300-plus plate appearances in a season, currently held — for more than half a century — by Elston Howard (who had a 42 OPS+ in 1967).
- Did you know Bellinger hit .152/.276/.222 out of the cleanup hole? And just for the record, that’s historically not good. According to [baseball-reference.com/Stathead](#), that’s the lowest slugging percentage by any NL cleanup hitter (100 PA or more) since Les (Is Not More) Scarcella — in 1939!
- Baseball-reference also tells us Bellinger has been worth *minus-1.7 Wins Above Replacement*! And that makes him the least valuable player in the National League — literally. If we’re going to use WAR to decide who’s most valuable, might as well use it the other way around, too, right? So the LVP Awards Committee hereby thanks baseball-reference.

I understand that much of this is injury-related. On the other hand, what was the biggest of those injuries? That would be offseason shoulder surgery. And why did Bellinger need offseason shoulder surgery? Because of the Strangest But Truest injury of the 2020 postseason — his shoulder-dislocating, leaping forearm bump with [Enrique Hernández](#) in Game 7 of the NLCS. So come to think of it, that’s probably worth a few LVP bonus points unto itself.

MY LVP “BALLOT”: 1) Bellinger, 2) [Francisco Lindor](#), 3) [Didi Gregorius](#).

AL LVP — The [Orioles](#) (most of them)

I’ve handed out many a group Cy Yuk award. But I’m almost certain this is my first group LVP award. I didn’t expect to wind up here. But in a season with no truly deserving single AL LVP, why not “honor” a team that has pretty much cornered the market on tanking-inspired ineptitude.

It should be obvious that I’m not including everybody on this roster. Cedric Mullins, [Austin Hays](#), [Trey Mancini](#), [Ryan Mountcastle](#), Ramón Urías — they’re all above this sort of LVP reproach. And I’ll try my best not to single out any individual players, because what the heck. As

those two wins over the [Red Sox](#) proved this week, *they* were trying, even if management had other ideas about the value of actually winning baseball games. But as a group effort, it's hard to beat this one.

WAR GAMES: The Orioles had 21 position players who played in 20 games or more. Exactly three of them were even worth one Win Above Replacement (or more) — Mullins, Hays and Urías. Only four AL teams in the 60-year expansion era have ever had fewer one-win players in a full season — Todd Cruz's 1983 [Mariners](#), Brian Kingman's 1979 A's, Jack Heidemann's 1971 [Indians](#) and Paul Casanova's 1968 Senators (all with two apiece).

MENDOZA WATCH: These Orioles also had eight of those 21 position players with a batting average *under* .200. And only one AL team in the expansion era ever had more sub-Mendoza bats than that — Lenny Randle's 1972 [Rangers](#) (with 10).

BUT THAT'S NOT ALL: Did you know this team had *eight* position players who played in at least 20 games and were worth *minus* Wins Above Replacement? ... Or that the Orioles went 1-54 in the many, many games where they never got around to scoring three times (or more)? ... Or that they ran 19 players out there this year who were claimed on waivers? ... And I should also mention that the position players weren't even their biggest problem! (It's one thing to finish last in the major leagues in ERA. It's another to be a whole run worse than the next-worst staff in the major leagues.)

As group LVP efforts go, it doesn't get much more compelling than that. So here's to the Orioles, the first LVP ensemble ever to take a major-league field.

MY LVP "BALLOT": 1) Orioles, 2) [Andrelton Simmons](#), 3) [Gleyber Torres](#)

NL Cy Young — Corbin Burnes, [Brewers](#)

I'll admit I wrestled with this one. Even pushed back this column by a day to see how Max Scherzer fared in his final regular-season start. But now that my editors need me to make up my mind and write this thing already, I only need one word to sum up why I'd vote for Corbin Burnes if I had to cast a vote today:

Historic.

We've never seen a season like this. I keep coming back to that. Here's why:

THE RATE-STAT TRIPLE CROWN — This could still change because it's close. But as of this writing, Burnes leads the league in strikeout rate (12.55 per 9 IP), walk rate (1.80 per 9 IP) and home run rate (0.33 per 9 IP). How many pitchers have ever led their league in all three in the same season? That would be none.

THE FIP-PLE CROWN — With one regular-season start remaining, Burnes' FIP (Fielding Independent Pitching) stands at a sensational 1.55. That would be lower than 1968 Bob Gibson (1.78), lower than 1963 Sandy Koufax (1.85), lower than 1915 Grover Cleveland Alexander (1.82), lower than any starting pitcher in National League history, dating back to 1913, when earned runs became an official stat.

The current NL record: 1.69, by 1985 Dwight Gooden. The only pitcher with a lower FIP in NL/AL history: 1999 Pedro Martínez (1.39). That kind of gets your attention!

THE UNHITTABILITY/UNTOUCHABILITY FACTOR — Speaking of 1999 Pedro, it's only him and the 2021 edition of Corbin Burnes whom you'll find on this scale of domination:

More than 12 strikeouts per nine innings ... fewer than two walks per nine innings ... home-run rate under .5 homers per nine innings ... ERA and FIP lower than 2.40.

Pedro 1999	13.2 K/9	1.56 BB/9	0.38 HR/9	2.07 ERA	1.39 FIP
Burnes 2021	12.6 K/9	1.80 BB/9	0.33 HR/9	2.29 ERA	1.55 FIP

So if you're in a club with Pedro and only Pedro, I'd say there's no more need to debate whether you've been dominant enough to win a Cy Young. The only question now is: Have you pitched enough?

That, of course, is the only issue with Corbin Burnes. Pedro squashed those hitters' souls in nearly 50 more innings (213 1/3) than Burnes (165). And in a season where innings and volume were extra valuable, coming off the 60-game mini-season last year, it's Burnes' lack of innings and lack of volume that made me think long and hard about this.

Zack Wheeler (2.78 ERA) has been great — and faced 201 more hitters than Burnes (849-648). Walker Buehler (2.49) has been great — and pitched to nearly 150 more hitters (795). Scherzer (2.46) missed some time early, but he, too, has 14 1/3 more innings and 45 more batters faced (693).

How much should we weigh those extra workloads? I thought that was worth considering. So here is what their season stats would look like if they'd all had roughly *the same* workloads. If none of them had ever been asked to throw a pitch after the sixth inning this year, their numbers would look like this:

Wheeler	2.32 ERA thru 6 IP	20 games 6+ IP	121 batters faced after 6 IP
Burnes	2.34 ERA	9	45
Scherzer	2.60	11	58
Buehler	2.72	17	69

So obviously, the Cy Young case of Wheeler in particular has been damaged by the innings he was asked to absorb by the Phillies. It's not his fault or [Joe Girardi](#)'s fault that this intricate algebraic formula applied: *Need to win (+) bullpen that can't be trusted*. But now it's been left to the Cy Young electorate to figure out what to do about it.

FanGraphs says Burnes was worth the most Wins Above Replacement. Baseball-reference says Wheeler was most valuable, at least by WAR. So if they can't even agree, I'm not sure how we're supposed to. In the end, I was swayed by Burnes' historic dominance. But if you think the Cy Young is any of those other three guys, you know what I'd say? Great choice.

MY CY YOUNG "BALLOT": 1) Burnes, 2) Wheeler, 3) Scherzer, 4) Buehler, 5) [Brandon Woodruff](#).

(Can't believe I ran out of room for: [Kevin Gausman](#), Adam Wainwright, Julio Urías, Charlie Morton, [Josh Hader](#) and more.)

AL Cy Young — Robbie Ray, [Blue Jays](#)

Full disclosure: I also waited a day to make this pick because I needed one more Gerrit Cole start to help me sort this out. After Cole punched out 15 Angels on Sept. 1, I was sure he'd wrapped up this award. But then the rest of September happened:

Cole	5 games started	2-2 Wins/Losses	6.15 ERA	26.1 IP 18 Earned runs
Ray	6	2-3	3.44	13

OK, so that changed a little. Now we're looking at a scenario in which Ray seems likely to lead the league in ERA (2.84) and innings pitched (193.1). And for more than 60 years of Cy Young elections, that's been about as proven a formula as any for how to win one of these trophies.

In the history of this award, 19 pitchers have led their league in both categories. All but two have won the Cy Young: 2008 [Johan Santana](#) and 2001 Freddy Garcia. They each finished third, for reasons we can sum up pithily as "wins."

You can still make a case for Cole, who seems positioned to join Curt Schilling, [Chris Sale](#) and Adam Wainwright in the I Can't Believe He Hasn't Won a Cy Young Club. This would be Cole's fourth top-five Cy Young finish without ever winning. So one of these years — but probably not this one.

Even after his rough September, Cole still has a slightly better strikeout rate (12.06 per 9 IP) and opponent OPS (.639) than Ray. And if you're a FIP fan, Cole has a significant edge there (2.91, to Ray's 3.68).

But FIP is really a metric that tells us what *should* have happened. And I've always felt we should vote on these awards based on what actually did happen. So you know what did happen in the American League this season? Robbie Ray outpitched everyone else who took the mound.

MY CY YOUNG "BALLOT": 1) Ray, 2) Cole, 3) [Lance Lynn](#), 4) [Nathan Eovaldi](#), 5) Carlos Rodón.

(Can't believe I ran out of room for: José Berríos, [Lance McCullers Jr.](#), [Chris Bassitt](#), [Frankie Montas](#), [Liam Hendriks](#) and more!)

NL Cy Yuk — [Jake Arrieta](#), Yukked Up Cubs/Padres

The Jake Arrieta of 2015 was a modern-day Bob Gibson. Did he really have a 0.86 ERA over his last 20 starts? Unbelievable. And that's what Cy Youngs are made of.

But the Jake Arrieta of 2021? That guy was more like a modern-day Nick Bierbrodt. A 7.39 ERA for two teams who were banking on any semblance of that old 2015 Jake magic? That's what Cy Yuks are made of.

This Jake Arrieta couldn't keep the Cubs afloat, and then couldn't keep the [Padres](#) afloat. His 6.68 ERA in 20 starts for the Cubs was the worst in a season by any Cubs pitcher in the live-ball era who made that many starts. His 10.95 ERA in four starts for the Padres goes down as the worst career ERA in Padres history by a pitcher who made at least four starts.

And then there's this: His 7.39 ERA for the two of them combined was the highest ERA in history by any former Cy Young winner who made this many starts in any season. (The old record: 7.29, by Doug Drabek in 1998.) Once, there was a time when watching Arrieta do his thing was so much fun. But that time wasn't this time.

MY CY YUK "BALLOT": 1) Arrieta, 2) [Patrick Corbin](#), 3) [Brad Hand](#) (with extra bi-leagual credit for his work with the Blue Jays).

AL Cy Yuk — [Andrew Heaney](#), Yukked Up Angels/Yankees

Any Cy Yuk can Yuk up one team in a season. But here in 2021, we're "honoring" those who found a way to Yuk up two teams. So Andrew Heaney can thank Jake Arrieta for paving the way to his first trip ever into the Cy Yuk "winner's" circle.

By the time the [Yankees](#) traded for Heaney in July, they weren't expecting him to show up and be Andy Pettitte. But five starts and seven rocky relief appearances later, Heaney had made all sorts of Yankees history that nobody had in mind.

Home run history: 13 HR allowed, 35 2/3 IP. He may not have been out there a whole lot, but Heaney served up nearly twice as many home runs in those 35 2/3 innings as Pettitte once

allowed (seven) in the entire 1997 season, in 240 2/3 innings. That gopherball rate — one every 2.7 innings and every 12 batters faced — was easily the worst in the history of pinstripes.

Yankees trade-target history: 7.32 ERA as a Yankee, 5.27 ERA for the team that traded him. It isn't often that the Yankees make a midseason trade for a starting pitcher with a 5.00 ERA or worse. But it's less often that the guy they trade for then has an even higher ERA for them.

In fact, I could only find one other time in the live-ball era when that happened, at least when it involved a pitcher who then made at least four starts for the Yankees. And that other time was a mere 83 years ago! The culprit back then: Wes Ferrell — 6.28 ERA for the 1938 Senators, followed by an 8.10 ERA in four starts for the Yankees.

Luckily for Wes Ferrell, nobody had invented any Cy Yuk awards for him to win back then. But unfortunately for Andrew Heaney...no such luck!

MY CY YUK "BALLOT": 1) Heaney, 2) [Matt Harvey](#), 3) [Dallas Keuchel](#)

NL Rookie of the Year — [Jonathan India](#), [Reds](#)

First item of business: Full disclosure, I'm a National League Rookie of the Year voter, so I'm not permitted to reveal my complete ballot. But that doesn't mean I can't discuss how I'm leaning and why. So if that works for you, it works for me.

Let's start with this. Have you ever watched Jonathan India play? He's not just a baseball player. He's a winner. He has taken 22 pitches off his shins, elbows and other assorted body parts, all in the name of winning. The energy he plays with, the extra bases he's relentlessly taking, the importance he so obviously attaches to every inning of every game — it's the way winners play.

But there's also substance to go with that style. He'll head into the final weekend of the season with a .377 on-base percentage (two points below Joey Votto), 96 runs scored, 56 extra-base hits and 234 times on base. Even if we lower those bars to .370/95 runs/50 XBH/200 times on base, there are only eight other rookies in the division-play era who have reached those thresholds. You've probably heard of them:

Aaron Judge, [Ichiro Suzuki](#), [Albert Pujols](#), [Mike Trout](#), Fred Lynn, Derek Jeter, Mark McGwire and Kevin Seitzer.

So much as I admire the fabulous season by [Marlins](#) ace [Trevor Rogers](#), why do I think Jonathan India is about to become the first Reds second baseman to win a Rookie of the Year award since Pete Rose? That about covers it!

ROOKIES IN THE ARGUMENT: India, Rogers, [Dylan Carlson](#), [Ian Anderson](#), Ke'bryan Hayes, Jazz Chisolm, [Patrick Wisdom](#), [Edmundo Sosa](#) (among others).

AL Rookie of the Year — [Randy Arozarena](#), [Rays](#)

There has never been a Rookie of the Year quite like Randy Arozarena. You've noticed that, right? In normal times, guys don't play for two teams, show up in two postseasons and win an LCS MVP award *before* their rookie season. But the whole world has gone off the rails these last two years. So maybe this dude is the perfect rookie of the year for our times.

It's also kind of humorous that Arozarena's Rookie of the Year season, if that's what it turns into, won't be nearly as stupendous as his pre-rookie *postseason*, when he merely *hit 10 home runs in 20 games* and spent four weeks hypnotizing us into thinking he was the Willie Mays of the 21st century.

Well, he hasn't been *that* guy this year. But you know what he proved? That none of that was just some random burst of October quirkiness. I look for staying power in my rookies of the year. And Arozarena has it. Let's compare his second half to the player viewed as his chief position-player competitor for this award, Texas' Adolis García:

Arozarena	.307 average	..384 OBH	.554 Slug	.938 OPS
García	.212	.256	.378	.635

I found it kind of hard to ignore that 300-point gap in OPS. I think it's also safe to say Arozarena is a more impactful all-around player than Baltimore's Ryan Mountcastle. So for me, this actually came down to Arozarena versus [Astros](#) pitcher Luis Garcia, who has had a fantastic season.

It's always been impossible to compare pitchers to hitters for this award. And I know this isn't fair to any pitcher, but ... When it's this close, it's hard to pick a guy who plays in 30 games over a guy who is going to play in 140 games.

I just know this whole group is lucky that [Wander Franco](#), the runaway rookie of the *half-year*, has only played 66 games in the big leagues — because if he'd arrived in May instead of July, we'd be having a whole different discussion.

MY BALLOT: 1) Arozarena, 2) Luis Garcia, 3) Adolis García, 4) Mountcastle, 5) [Emmanuel Clase](#).

NL Manager of the Year — Gabe Kapler, [Giants](#)

Back in March, Baseball Prospectus unleashed its ever-popular PECOTA projection of Gabe Kapler's 2021 Giants — and decided they were bound for 75 wins. That was fewer than a [Diamondbacks](#) team that has gone on to lose 108 times! Not to mention fewer than the Angels, [Twins](#) and Cubs — three teams currently sitting at a combined 46 games under .500.

So that projection went smoothly. Obviously, there are many reasons that any projection can turn out to be off by *a mere 30 wins*. The manager is only one of them. But can't we all agree that this wasn't an easy team to steer toward 105 wins? So *of course* Gabe Kapler is the NL's Manager of the Year, because how the heck could he not be?

Of the 15 players on these Giants who got at least 200 plate appearances, 11 of them have celebrated their 30th birthday. The average age of this position-player group is nearly 31, oldest in the big leagues. Wilmer Flores might lead this team in games played. (*Wilmer Flores!*) The Giants have hit the most homers in the major leagues, even though not a single hitter on their team ranks in *the top 40* in the sport in homers. Try to find the conventional wisdom that explains any of that. Good luck.

These Giants also have hit 17 pinch-hit home runs. Every one of their eight most used relief pitchers has an ERA of 3.24 or lower. And they're going to finish just behind the much more ballyhooed rotations of the Dodgers and Brewers in starting-pitcher ERA, even though this is practically an entire rotation of Reds castoffs. Amazing.

Much of that is a tribute to all the puzzle pieces the manager dropped into the right place at the right time — and to the exhaustive attention to detail from Kapler and maybe the most unique and innovative coaching staff ever assembled. But also...

It's a reflection of the maturation of Gabe Kapler, to understand that those furious nightly maneuvers on his managerial chess board in Philadelphia weren't really the ticket to true managerial success. As he tells me and Doug Glanville on the next edition of Starkville, he now gets that "the harmony of the clubhouse (and) the comfort level of the players" can actually be more important than any in-game strategic move, even if the math tries to convince him otherwise. And his team is a reflection of that.

Did you know Bruce Bochy managed the Giants for 13 seasons, won three World Series and somehow won zero Manager of the Year awards? I'm still not sure how that happened. But I know one thing. A decade or so from now, we won't be saying that about the manager who succeeded him.

MY NL MANAGER OF THE YEAR "BALLOT": 1) Kapler, 2) Craig Counsell, 3) Mike Shildt, 4) [Brian Snitker](#), 5) Dave Roberts.

AL Manager of the Year — Kevin Cash, Rays

If I were an actual voter for this award, here's what I would do: I'd wait until after the final game is played. And if the Mariners make the playoffs, I'd cast this vote for [Scott Servais](#), for ending a two-decade postseason drought by finding a way to win 90-plus games with a team that finishes with a minus-40 run differential. No precedent for that.

But since all I'm doing is writing an awards column, I'm voting for Kevin Cash, in part just to make a point.

Here is how us dopey writers normally vote for these manager-of-the-year awards: *Let's see. What team did I get the most wrong in my preseason predictions? Boy, that guy must have done an awesome job. I'll vote for him!*

Look, I get why we vote that way. But in way too many years, we use that logic to make ourselves feel better — but avoid voting for the folks who are actually the best managers in the game. So why am I casting this (not an actual) vote for Kevin Cash? That's why.

How many managers could win nearly 100 games with a team that's missing all three top-of-the-rotation starters from a World Series team ... that is currently minus *every* reliever on that World Series team who saved more than one regular-season game ... that traded away its most important clubhouse energizer (Willy Adames) and most dependable reliever (Diego Castillo) in the middle of this season ... that has lost 25 different pitchers to the injured list (25!) this year and had to roll out 38 pitchers (38!) to get through the season — breaking the team record by seven?

Only managers of the year do stuff like that. So please don't tell me the manager of the Rays doesn't deserve this award. Of course he does — whether he wins it or not.

MY AL MANAGER OF THE YEAR "BALLOT": 1) Cash, 2) Servais, 3) A.J. Hinch, 4) Charlie Montoyo, 5) [Dusty Baker](#).

AND BECAUSE I LOVE PETER GAMMONS (AND WE HAVE A LOT OF SOX FAN SUBSCRIBERS)

The great Roger Angell once wrote of the nature of New Englanders, and of [Red Sox](#) fans in particular, that amidst the brightest of summer days, there still exists a Calvinist cloud of self-doubt.

Some were raised to ask, "Where were you when you heard Denny Galehouse was starting (the '48 playoff game with Cleveland)?" Forty years later, after the '78 Bucky Dent game, it was "the sonofabitches got my father, now they're coming to get me," further on down to John McNamara yanking Roger Clemens or Grady Little doing the same to [Pedro Martinez](#). Despite so much success since then, that feeling still lurks even in September 2021, when the specter of something like a ghost of Grady Past — Aaron Boone, for instance — might put a red light on

the Red Sox season. In that, he had help from [Giancarlo Stanton](#), whose monstrous blasts gave the [Yankees](#) a weekend sweep at Fenway Park and gave him more RBIs in the three-game sweep than total runs the Red Sox scored.

So in the moment, and certainly afterwards, those feelings of Calvinist self-pity were hard to ignore. But the reality is this is a Red Sox team that arrived early, with young players and new additions in the midst of a learning campaign, and the foundation chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom is laying in this “reset” period is going to pay greater dividends in the near future.

Not that any of that was much consolation this weekend, of course, or certainly afterwards when the Red Sox dropped the first eminently winnable game of the following series against the cellar-dwelling Orioles. The bigger picture doesn't feel terribly important when the playoffs are almost here and now, and the perception is that they're on the verge of slipping away. Manager Alex Cora wouldn't take part in any of that, though, fully believing the Red Sox would still get to and win the wild-card game. Once they were there, they'd face the Rays in the Division Series and have the three valuable relievers — [Matt Barnes](#), [Garrett Whitlock](#), [Josh Taylor](#) — who weren't available against New York back for Tampa Bay.

When Stanton, [Aaron Judge](#) and the rest of the Yankees left Fenway Park for the last time in the regular season, the Red Sox had the fifth-best record in the American League, sporting a .564 winning percentage that tied them with the [White Sox](#). They had a run differential of +74, better than the Yankees' +44, worse than Tampa Bay, Toronto, Houston and Chicago. They were 88-68, better than their Pythagorean record of 85-71. Getting to the postseason is based on the full year's performance, and between losing the season's first three games to the Orioles and Stanton Weekend, they were 10-9 against the Yankees and [Blue Jays](#), 8-11 vs. Tampa Bay, 3-4 against the White Sox, 2-5 against Houston, 3-1 vs. Atlanta ... it goes on.

They blew leads in the eighth inning of the last two games of that Yankee series, with their three go-to relievers — Barnes, Whitlock, Taylor — either in drydock or injured. [Nathan Eovaldi](#), who went into his matchup with [Gerrit Cole](#) with the league's best pitching fWAR, had an off night without what has been a solid variety of secondary pitches, [Chris Sale](#) was in the big leagues but realistically still ramping his rehab from Tommy John surgery, and realism on Baseball-Reference showed their starting pitchers credited with 27 cheap wins and only 35 quality starts, fifth-worst in the major leagues.

In the 48 games leading up to the eighth innings of the last two games of the weekend, Boston starters had a 4.44 earned run average and had pitched as many as six innings 11 times, once in the last 10, those numbers representative of tired bodies that were further strained by a COVID outbreak that at one point landed 11 players simultaneously on the injured list. Over the season, the bullpen fared well; they allowed but 31 percent of inherited runners to score, sixth-best in the majors, their WPA was fifth in the American League, their innings pitched in the middle, but because of the lack of length from the starters, their relievers entered more outings with runners on base than any team but the Orioles. So by the last two weeks of September the bullpen was tired, with Barnes trying to figure things out, and Whitlock and Taylor sidelined.

But they were still going to be in the running for one of the two wild-card positions and almost certainly win at least 90 games, and Impossible Dreamers remember that Carl Yastrzemski and the 1967 team won 92, the 1975 team won 95. That inspiring 1967 club was a mere two years removed from a 1965 season in which they were a ninth-place 62-100, a campaign so miserable that on Sept. 16, when Dave Morehead was in the seventh inning of his 2-0 no-hit win against the [Indians](#) and Luis Tiant in front of a mere 1,247 fans, general manager Pinky Higgins was seen walking through Kenmore Square. After the game, the press was informed that Higgins had been fired and replaced by Dick O'Connell, and with that reset the Red Sox won two pennants in ten years after winning one in the 47 years preceding Higgins' stroll past The Rathskeller.

1967 and 1975 didn't end in World Series trophies, of course, and even though 2004, 2007, 2013 and 2018 did, the on-field glories of this century have not wiped away all the residue of that Calvinist spirit. About nine hours after Stanton's last homer, on MSNBC two wonderful Red Sox fans, Joe Scarborough and Jonathan Lemire, were lamenting the weekend and the continuation of Red Sox history, even though in this century the Red Sox have won four World Series, the Yankees one. The fact is the Red Sox are in a situation when, even coming off a pandemic-marred season, with restrictions on crowd size and with a July-record rainfall, they were still fourth in the American League in attendance, as they were in the 2018 World Series year.

Still, 2020 was also their fourth last-place finish in nine seasons, and last place means that even the [Baltimore Orioles](#), whose goal sometimes seems to finish last, finished ahead of them. That was another reset, this one in Bloom's first season running baseball operations, even though when he got to Boston, he knew what he was in for; not that this was all on Dave Dombrowski — he did what he was hired to do after three last-place finishes in four seasons sandwiched around the 2013 World Series; the only similarity to the departure of Higgins was that Dombrowski got fired during a Sunday night game, and when the media was so informed, the Red Sox owners had left the house and Alex Cora had to explain what happened to his general manager, even though he lacked any details about it.

The Reset

So the 2021 season needs to be seen in the context of what happened in 2018, and in 2020, and what they want to happen in 2023 and beyond. The reset period was conducted to benefit the organizational business model. Ownership felt they had to get underneath the luxury tax threshold and start over. When they were convinced that [Mookie Betts](#) was not going to sign without going to free agency to see if he could get something long-term — like the 10-year deal he immediately received from the [Dodgers](#) — Bloom got the best deal he could, and attached [David Price](#) to Betts. Last winter, they passed on expensive, long-term contracts, and Bloom signed Kike Hernández for \$14 million over two years, [Hunter Renfroe](#) for one year at \$3 million, [Garrett Richards](#) for \$10 million, acquired [Adam Ottavino](#), and used his pro scouting staff to steal Whitlock in the Rule 5 draft. When the trade deadline arrived, Bloom held beneath the tax trigger; his job was to rebuild the farm system, scouting and development, and he did

not have the fungible prospects (like the Yankees' 6-foot-6, 19-year-old center fielder [Kevin Alcantara](#), who was traded for [Anthony Rizzo](#) and through the weekend had a 1.024 OPS in the Arizona Complex League).

Going for it full tilt probably would have canceled the luxury tax and draft reset. Bloom used his baseball operations staff and scouts to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate the system, and was not going to trade the half-dozen prospect pitchers who by next season are expected to be in Portland and Worcester. The [Padres](#) are an example — or, perhaps, a cautionary tale. A.J. Preller has done an exemplary job as general manager, but the first run at the limelight resulted in trading [Max Fried](#) for [Justin Upton](#) and [Trea Turner](#) for [Wil Myers](#), then in 2020 [Cal Quantrill](#) for [Mike Clevinger](#). None of those deals look particularly good right now.

Bloom did get [Kyle Schwarber](#), who not only gave a major boost to what often was an all-or-nothing offense, but at the age of 28 brought a patient approach and natural Fenway power threat. He took a load off the shoulders of [Bobby Dalbec](#) — [and served as a tutor of sorts to the rookie, as well](#) — and offers them an alternative should J.D. Martinez opt out of his \$19.375 million deal if the universal DH is adopted and he can get a new multi-year contract.

Understand, however, that the Red Sox are not being sculpted in the old style of Lou Gorman, that tradition of winning the offseason and bringing the pennant to the Boston Baseball Writers Dinner. With the draft system changing after 2011, when the Red Sox got Barnes, [Jackie Bradley Jr.](#) and Betts, they could no longer do things as they had in the past, such as when they drafted an “unsigned” Anthony Rizzo in the sixth round and paid him higher-round money. There is a clear caution within the walls of Fenway Park at the idea of using free agency as a major construction tool, as opposed to a means of adding complementary or final pieces.

Bloom is out of the Andrew Friedman University of Baseball Operations, born in the period as the Rays went from teams with Elijah Dukes and Aubrey Huff to beating the Red Sox in the 2008 ALCS. Erik Neander is out of that graduate program. So is James Click, who has done a formidable job in Houston. Neander's Rays will spend in the international market for a [Wander Franco](#), but he's not going to spend what it takes to get [Max Scherzer](#) unless the Rays somehow find a way to play games in St. Petersburg, Montreal, Qatar and Nice.

After this season — however it turns out — and the 2022 expectations that it will generate, will the Red Sox go into the market for a [Marcus Stroman](#) to go with Eovaldi and Sale to give them three veteran starters alongside [Nick Pivetta](#) and their young pitchers? Bloom has consistently explained “this is a long process to get where we want to be,” which makes a \$200-million signing unlikely. But [would they jump on the best position player on the market, Marcus Semien, anyway?](#) They know his evolution as a hitter — particularly with pull flyball power — and his personal leadership right now appears to make him a big-contract guy who can play short or move to second to pair with [Xander Bogaerts](#); covering the 2019-21 seasons, Semien and Bogaerts are first and third in Wins Above Replacement among all position players, wrapped around [Juan Soto](#). On a team where he could hit anywhere in the top four positions in the order in a time when they plan to run a number of young players into Fenway and

considering that his college roommate was Boston scouting director Paul Toboni, he is seemingly the one mega signee that they'd consider, especially as they have weathered the COVID economy well enough to have done very well maintaining and building corporate sponsorships.

A learning season

Still, while 90-something wins is a remarkable jump, there is a large stock of evidence that while there is obvious improvement, there are facts that make one wonder how close the 2021 Boston Red Sox are to being on the upper floor with teams like the Dodgers, Rays and [Astros](#).

Since the July 30 trading deadline, the Red Sox are 6-20 against the Rays, Yankees, Blue Jays and White Sox, and were 2-5 against the Astros earlier in the season. In the second half, they have a 4.02 ERA in games with teams with losing records, 5.65 against teams with winning records. To get to the luxury tax reset for future signings, this necessarily had to be a bridge year. They may just win close to 10 games more than one could have expected, which may speak for Cora's use of players and the bullpen, and the character of what comes out of the clubhouse. Meanwhile, there are players learning on the job, players like Dalbec and outfielder [Jarren Duran](#), players whose contributions now are partially in the service of what may come later.

One Sox official says, "I think we see that Bobby Dalbec can be a 40-home run guy."

After a hitting session with Schwarber, the man theoretically acquired to take his playing time, through Sept. 26, Dalbec led the major leagues in OPS (1.209), the American League in slugging (.795), hit 13 homers, knocked in 37 runs and cut his strikeout percentage down to below 25 percent.

Part of the adjustment was being more patient, and part of it was Dalbec lessening his leg kick, said Red Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers. "He started seeing the ball much better, and his balance at the plate improvement immensely," says Hyers.

Dalbec himself says, "I was chasing balls all around the strike zone," and with the changes prompted scouts and coaches to talk about how his takes got noticeably better. "Excellent pitch selection and take quality work together," says one scout. "The stability, the balance in the box, control of their moves is really important."

Dalbec had only 30 Triple-A games on his resume when he was called up to play 23 games for the Red Sox in 2020. "One of the things I've learned is to constantly try to slow the game down," he says. "I had to learn that I need to swing at what I want to swing at. Look for certain pitches in certain counts. I had to learn not to try to see how far I can hit balls. I've learned to focus on making every swing as close to what's perfect for me as I can. Instead of taking 50 or 100 swings in BP, I try to take 30 and make them all right. What's important is that I clearly focus on the pitcher, pitches, swing."

That is precisely what Derek Jeter discussed at the forum at the Hall of Fame, how he used the same bat model he was given in the Gulf Coast League when he reported in 2002, the same glove, took batting practice the same way every day.

“That’s what I’m trying to do,” says Dalbec. “I know hitting is a constant learning process. I go back to my days at Arizona, where Shelley Duncan taught me how to use my legs.” Duncan, the former big leaguer, is now an integral part of the White Sox preparation team.

There will be more hard nights like Dalbec and the team endured on Sunday Night Baseball, but this learning season is a means to get his learning permit to being a full-time 30-40 home run hitter. His athleticism is such that the Red Sox have worked him out at second base, and there’s talk he may work in left field next spring.

Dalbec and Duran are still in the learning stage. First baseman [Triston Casas](#) will probably be in that category next season. [Christian Arroyo](#) is 26, but he has been on a learning curve at second base. Pivetta is 28, but not only has he pitched better than they expected, but he’s shown an ability to use two breaking balls with his upper-90s fastball to the point where he could make a leap in 2022. Hernández has worked to the point he can be an everyday center fielder; Andruw Jones told ESPN’s Eduardo Perez that the center fielder he most likes to watch is Hernández, whose analytics put him as the best defensive center fielder in the game in 2021.

What’s coming next

Their jump from last place to contending for the wild card in the final week can also overshadow that this has been the most significant season in recent memory in terms of restoring the farm system. Over the last few years scouts have bemoaned the number of young players the organization have traded for veterans, and seldom have they had selections near the top of the first round. But finishing behind the Orioles last season gave them the fourth pick in this summer’s draft, which enabled them to get arguably the top prospect in the draft, 18-year-old shortstop [Marcelo Mayer](#).

That means at the base of the system they have 2020 first-rounder [Nick Yorke](#), a 19-year old second baseman who went through three levels in his first pro season and put up a .325/.412/.516 line that the [Boston Globe’s Alex Speier noted places him in truly elite company](#): The only teenagers who have slashed .300/.400/.500 in the past decade are [Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#), [Bo Bichette](#), [Byron Buxton](#), [Mike Trout](#) and Oscar Taveras. They believe 18-year old third/first baseman [Blaze Jordan](#) is a potential 40-home run hitter, and 21-year-old Casas, finishing the season in Worcester after playing on the Olympic team and getting rave reviews from Mike Scioscia, has the hitting maturity and approach to be a star.

They have clearly made future catching a priority, although [Christian Vazquez](#) is only 30, has an option for 2022 and has caught the second-most innings the last three seasons, behind J.T. Realmuto. Bloom dealt two pitchers to Tampa for catcher [Ronaldo Hernández](#), who had a .959 OPS in Portland, has moved to Worcester, and with work on his body and mobility projects

power and offense to go with a big arm. Dayton Moore points out that [Salvador Perez](#) does chase as a hitter, but says “when a hitter has a good contact rate and can hit balls out of the strike zone, the chase rate isn’t as important.” Perez is a good example, and scouts who watched Hernández say he’s not a huge swing-and-miss hitter, so his power should play. As he further develops, Perez will be helped by the automated strike zone. And as [Connor Wong](#), acquired in the Betts deal, has improved to an .850 OPS in Worcester, the catching development staff believes he already has the ability to relate to pitchers and create conviction. They are taking 2019 draftee Stephen Scott, one of their better minor-league hitters out of Vanderbilt, and converting him to catcher.

Their international scouting program, which took a three-year hit after being charged with bundling deals — which several teams have long done — has been restored and at this point seems to have been rebuilt to where it was when Bogaerts and [Rafael Devers](#) were coming along.

But the biggest change in the system has been the emphasis on developing starting pitching, something they have not done well since drafting [Clay Buchholz](#) in 2005.

[Connor Seabold](#), acquired by Bloom with Pivetta from the [Phillies](#) in 2020, is expected to have a chance to make the major-league staff in 2022. Then comes what the system is developing, which will be interesting to watch as the Red Sox appear prepared to use pitchers in the manner of the Rays — for as many innings as they can max out their stuff. [Tanner Houck](#)’s 95+ sinking two-seamer, his upstairs four-seamer and sweeping slider make him what one opposing pitching coach says “is a weapon for nine to 12 outs at any point in games.” Houck has been developing a splitter, which could make him an effective starter sometime next season. The staff believes that [Kutter Crawford](#), now well off his Tommy John, can be a 2-3 inning power reliever.

Whitlock could stay in the bullpen, or it could be that his stuff plays well enough to be a starter. He has eight wins and two saves. In 72 1/3 innings, he has a 1.99 earned run average, 26.8 percent strikeout rate and 5.8 percent walk rate, changes speeds and, in his first full season after his own Tommy John surgery, has shown Cora “no fear of any situation.”

“We haven’t had this many really good pitching prospects since I’ve been in this organization,” says one front office member, who thinks the evolution of pitching development has been a major change in the last three years. Former first-round pick [Jay Groome](#)’s velocity and swing-and-miss numbers jumped as he worked off his Tommy John and made conditioning and pitch alterations. In Groome, [Chris Murphy](#) and Brandon Walter — a 2019 27th-round pick out of the University of Delaware who was their most sought-after prospect at the trade deadline — they have three left-handers close to the big leagues, reminiscent of the arrival of the Bruce Hurst/John Tudor/Bobby Ojeda group of the early 1980s. Bryan Bello, a 21-year-old signed out of the Dominican Republic, pitched half the season at Portland with considerable success.

To go from a .400 team in a 60-game season to winning around 90 in 162 games in the only division where four teams reached the final week with legitimate October hopes is an undeniable leap. Come next June, there may be serious questions about the pitching, Dalbec may still be in learning mode, and Duran may or may not be ready to become one of the game's most exciting players.

But taking the totality of the organization, there is a long-term promise that wasn't there even before Dombrowski arrived. From Mayer and Yorke to Bogaerts, Eddinson Paulino to Devers, the Red Sox organization is back where it was in the 1960s, 1970s and the first decade of this century. Now, boasting the largest crop of pitching prospects in decades, the question of how many of those young pitchers blossom will determine if 2023 is the time when the Red Sox can lean on their homegrown talent, sign the complementary free agents they need, and compete with a long-term window.

Bloom and Sam Kennedy understood what they were in for. [Culture](#) can start with 90 wins. With a 6-20 record down the stretch against the other Big Three in the AL East, there is a dark center to the whitest of the puff clouds to meet the doubts of every Calvinist from Stockbridge to Boston. And behind those clouds? The possibility of bluer skies ahead.

Spoilers-A player and not a team

Several teams spoiled the 1964 Phillies from winning the NL Pennant. But the one that Philly fans hold most responsible for the Team's 10-game losing streak while leading the league by 6 ½ games with 12 to play was Cincinnati's light hitting Chico Ruiz.

The losing streak began when Ruiz stole home with two-out for the game's only run. What made his decision to attempt a steal of home more disbelieving was that Red's slugger, Fran Robinson, was at the plate during the successful attempt

Following that 1-0 loss, the Philles lost 2 more to the Reds. That was followed by a 4 game sweep at the hands of visiting Milwaukee. The city was in shock. The team then went to St. Louis and lost three more, completing the most infamous ten-game losing streak in baseball history. They managed to win their final 2 games and a 2nd place finish tied with Cincinnati. But Philadelphians will still say it was Chico Ruiz who was single-handedly most responsible for the 10-day slide.

The Phillies' fall was the steepest ever for a first-place team so close to the finish line.

DO LATE SEASON HOT STREAKS MATTER IN THE PLAYOFFS?

By the time [the MLB postseason](#) starts on Tuesday, the dust will have settled on an action-packed regular season, as well as the ebbs and flows that come with it. Winning and losing streaks alike will be things of the past.

That includes the [17-game winning streak](#) the Cardinals put together from Sept. 11-28, which [set a franchise record](#) and cemented them as the National League's second Wild Card club after having playoff odds of less than 5 percent earlier in the month.

But now the question is whether that historic run, and St. Louis' overall success down the stretch, will translate into postseason glory. More broadly, does late-season "momentum" -- or a lack thereof -- carry over into the playoffs? Let's look back at recent history and see what it means for the Redbirds and the rest of the postseason field.

Note: Mentions of "September" or the "final month" refer to regular-season games played in both September and October.

Cardinals context

As impressive as St. Louis' run has been, the club's 23-7 record in this final month is not the best final month from a postseason team in recent history. Most notably, the 2017 Indians [won 22 straight games](#) beginning in late August en route to a 26-4 season-ending record. They were eliminated in the ALDS that year. The '02 A's suffered the same fate after going 42-12 in the final two months, including a 20-game win streak.

The 2021 Cardinals also bring to mind the '07 Rockies, who made a mad dash to the postseason by winning 14 of their final 15, including a tiebreaker Game 163 against the Padres. That club seemed to keep its magic going, sweeping the NLDS and NLCS, but it lost four straight to the Red Sox in the World Series.

In fact, entering 2021, only two of the 32 teams to post a final-month winning percentage of at least .700 in the Wild Card Era (since 1995) went on to win the World Series. Those were the 2020 Dodgers (17-7, .708) -- although the final month accounted for nearly half of that shortened season -- and the '17 Astros (21-8, .724).

How has the hottest team fared?

In the eight previous full seasons since the second Wild Card was introduced (2012-19), only the '12 Giants -- who tied the Braves that year with a 20-10 final-month record -- went on to win it all after posting the best final-month winning percentage among playoff teams. Of the other seven "hottest" teams, only the '19 Astros even made it to the World Series.

Hottest playoff teams by final-month record (in the two-Wild Card Era, since 2012)

2020 Dodgers (17-7) -- won World Series

2019 Astros (19-6) -- lost World Series
2018 Astros (21-6) -- lost ALCS
2017 Indians (26-4) -- lost ALDS
2016 Red Sox (19-10) -- lost ALDS
2015 Cubs (23-9) -- lost NLCS
2014 Nationals (19-8) -- lost NLDS
2013 Indians (21-6) -- lost ALWC
2012 Giants/Braves (20-10) -- won World Series/lost NLWC

It's also worth noting that despite its recent run, St. Louis may not end up being the most successful playoff team this past month when things are all said and done. The Giants (22-6) and Dodgers (20-7) also have winning percentages over .700 since Sept. 1. But whichever club ends up on top, it hardly guarantees a title is in its future.

What about the coldest team?

Final-month records can admittedly be deceiving, as teams that clinch a postseason berth early might rest players once their playoff seeding is settled. For example, the 2015 Royals were the first team to clinch a division title when they locked up the AL Central on Sept. 24, and they still retained home-field advantage throughout their championship run despite posting a 15-17 record to close the regular season. They are the only team in the two-Wild Card era to win a World Series after going under .500 in the final month.

On the other hand, four of the nine World Series winners during that span actually ranked among the bottom half of all playoff teams in final-month winning percentage. The only team to win the World Series from the second Wild Card slot was the 2014 Giants, and unlike this year's Cardinals, they backed into playoff position by dropping the NL West lead on July 26 and going 30-28 afterward, including 13-12 in September.

In other words, don't worry too much about the postseason prospects of teams with less impressive final months, such as the Brewers (14-13), Astros (15-13), Rays (15-13) and Yankees (15-13).

Do eventual champions finish strong?

Incredibly. Or not at all. It depends. In terms of winning percentage, teams such as the 2012 Giants and '17 Astros were at least 85 points better across the season's final month than they were overall. At the same time, teams such as the '15 Royals and '18 Red Sox were just as far off their full-season record in the other direction, but nonetheless "flipped the switch" and went on to hoist the Commissioner's Trophy once everything was said and done.

Every other team in the second Wild Card Era found itself somewhere in between. Even champions -- such as the 2019 Nationals (who clawed back from a slow start) and the '16 Cubs (who posted a dominant 50-23 second-half record) -- weren't markedly better in the final month than their overall record, despite feeling like teams that created momentum heading into the playoffs.

[At FanGraphs, Jay Jaffe](#) pooled together the numbers all the way back to the 1995 season and found that the results remained the same, adding that “[final-month] winning percentages just don’t tell us very much at all about what happens in [the playoffs].”

What are the implications of Game 162?

Some teams may have a lot on the line on the final day of the regular season. But does the result of that 162nd game matter once the postseason begins? Almost certainly not. And yet, recent seasons have seen a curious trend.

Each of the past seven World Series winners won their final regular-season game. The same goes for 16 of the past 18 AL or NL pennant winners, with the lone exceptions being the 2012 Giants and the '13 Red Sox.

In conclusion

Momentum may be a myth, but the confidence that comes with being a successful team winning big games late in a season is still very real. Per FanGraphs, the average win percentage of a pennant-winning team since 1995 is .590 from the start of a season through August and .591 over the final month. So while a team hustling to the finish line or coasting in may not be predictive of postseason success, the overall records of the past 50 pennant winners average out to that of about a 96-win team. Simply put, the cream rises to the top.

FROM VINTAGE BASEBALL GROUP ON FACEBOOK

Rod Culbertson

60 summers ago, the nation was captivated by the race of two men - two NY Yankees - "The Mick" and his teammate, Roger Maris, as they fought to see who could break the incomparable Babe Ruth's single season record of 60 home runs. Being only 6 years old and gravitating toward the underdog, I wanted that "unlikely" guy - not the favorite, who was Mantle, but Maris - to win. 60 years ago today, October 1, Roger Maris hit a historic 61st home run, to set a record never exceeded by anyone except for cheating steroid influenced players. The slogan "'61 in '61" became a symbol of Maris's MVP year. He became my childhood hero. I tried to meet him after the Yankees traded him to the St. Louis Cardinals in 1966. But I was afraid - my hero was "larger than life" and being a shy kid, I couldn't summon the courage to yell at him while he entered the dugout at a Braves' game in Atlanta. Nevertheless, after he retired, he settled down in Gainesville, Florida to run an Anheuser Busch distributorship and 18 years later - living in Gainesville while ministering at UF - I saw him on the campus of Sante Fe Community College where he had been watching one of his fine sons play baseball. I could not summon up the courage to meet him (he was alone), but my friend, John Vidal, coerced me to meet him. So we walked over to him and I introduced myself. He was the kindest, warmest, gentlest man possible, who noted that I had on a St. Louis Cardinals' hat (bright red). I was able to tell him that I became a Cards' fan when he was traded from the Yankees. He really liked that. Beautifully, he

had on a cream colored windbreaker jacket and stitched upon it, in small black print, were the words "'61 in '61." How appropriate. Little did I realize that my hero (a mere man, of course) was ill with cancer (it didn't show in any way) and that he would pass away in three months. What a day in my life! So, I celebrate this 60th anniversary, a day that is remembered by many as one of the greatest days in baseball history. Roger Maris was an exceptionally gifted athlete, but he was also a genuine, humble man who faithfully loved his wife and family and did not let his accomplishments go to his head. He was a first class man (I've read every biography possible). Here's to Roger Maris!!!!

BASEBALL'S WALL STREET-STYLE EXECUTIVES GET TITLES TO MATCH--NYT

As M.L.B. front offices get more and more corporate, titles have steadily inflated. Yesterday's general manager is today's president of baseball operations ... or chief baseball officer.

The Tampa Bay Rays recently bestowed a new contract and a new title on their baseball operations leader, Erik Neander. He began the season with dueling corporate epaulets — senior vice president of baseball operations and general manager — and is now president of baseball operations. This was not, however, an elevation in rank.

"This position is the same as it was yesterday, it just happens to have a different title," the Rays' team president, Matt Silverman, said. "It's not a promotion — he's been leading the department for years. But the title change itself is really just to make it more consistent with how the industry currently titles the department."

A week after Neander's title change, the Kansas City Royals installed their own president of baseball operations, only their news release included the word "promoted" to describe Dayton Moore's ascension from general manager to president as well as J.J. Piccolo's move from assistant general manager to general manager.

While the Rays indicated no plans to find a replacement for the general manager post, the Royals now have a front office structure with two leaders, an increasingly common one across Major League Baseball. It's akin to Fortune 500 companies that employ both a chief executive and a president, and it is largely in recognition of the growing size of baseball operations departments.

Among the many byproducts of "Moneyball," both the Michael Lewis book and the film it inspired, has been the lionization of general managers. But that position — well, that title at least — has been devalued. Of the 30 M.L.B. franchises, only 16 still have a baseball operations department led by a general manager, with the rest now directed by people with titles like

president of baseball operations or chief baseball officer. Even Billy Beane, the Oakland Athletics general manager that Moneyball centered on, is now his team's executive vice president of baseball operations.

Three teams — the Chicago Cubs, the Los Angeles Dodgers and now the Rays — don't even have a general manager or interim general manager even as two of those clubs — the Cubs and the Dodgers — still list assistant general managers in their directory. (The Cubs have signaled an interest in adding a general manager this winter under Jed Hoyer, the team's, you guessed it, president of baseball operations.)

It was just this past off-season that Kim Ng broke through baseball's glass ceiling for front office executives by being [hired as the general manager of the Miami Marlins](#). Ng remains her club's top baseball executive, but she seems to have gotten to general manager just in time for that title to slowly fade away.

While the trend toward reclassifying job duties, and changing executive titles, has picked up steam this season, it is not the first time the Rays' de facto general manager office has sat vacant. After Stu Sternberg bought the franchise in late 2005, he and Silverman replaced the general manager at the time, Chuck LaMar, with Andrew Friedman — but with a title befitting the new owners' shared Wall Street heritage.

“When Andrew was named executive vice president of baseball operations back in 2005, people were wondering why we'd stray from the general manager title,” Silverman said. “It felt like we were on an island in going more corporate.”

All but four of the 16 general managers currently leading baseball decisions also have a corporate officer title, such as president or vice president. That stems not only from the influx of owners with backgrounds in finance but also to the reality of managing much larger front offices.

Both the Rays' Neander and the Royals' Moore remarked that their groups had grown three- or fourfold in the last decade and a half, with Moore having done the math: Kansas City's had 85 employees in 2006 and 266 in 2021. Internally, the Rays joke about their “westward expansion,” a reference to the geography of the baseball operations department's creep along the fourth floor of Tropicana Field's offices.

There's “more information than there's ever been, there's more perspective, there's more training methods and greater understanding of how we do everything, from how we evaluate to how we develop, to how we support — it's so much to stay on top of,” Neander said.

Referring to his entry level position with the club in 2007, Neander added: “When I started, it wasn't a very big group. But you look at it today, if you're doing it that way, you're going to get swallowed up and chewed out and passed in a hurry. And so I think just the sheer size of it, and how much coverage you have to have to do this well. It's not enough to just be analytical. It's not enough to just treat people right. It's not enough to develop players well. You have to do all

of these things really, really well to be successful. And the demands have just grown exponentially.”

Entire departments didn’t exist or were much leaner earlier in the 21st century, most notably analytics and performance, or sports science. “Once major market teams started to build out their front offices that way and deploy dollars that way, then other teams were more apt to do it,” Blue Jays General Manager Ross Atkins said. “It just raised the floor significantly and the ceiling of dollars spent on talent in front offices.”

Front office mastheads are swollen with key executives. The Dodgers, for instance, have seven vice presidents reporting into Friedman, their president of baseball operations, and 11 members of the department with a director title. Others have followed suit.

“You’re collecting intellectual horsepower that you can leverage to make better decisions,” said the Cardinals’ president of baseball operations, John Mozeliak. “And I think the trick of all this is to keeping that executive team or leadership team engaged because, in the end, you really have one person having to make a decision. But ultimately, you’re having people feel like they do have a voice on that decision tree.”

Clubs are all assembling a cadre of executives, akin to a politician’s cabinet. The common shorthand around the game is to refer to these key decision makers as being “in the room” during deliberations.

“The titles are kind of funny, and they are unique to each organization,” said Red Sox General Manager Brian O’Halloran, who reports to Chaim Bloom, the team’s chief baseball officer. “And honestly, I think to some degree, it doesn’t matter what you call these positions. It’s more about how you operate and how you handle things.”

He added: “Nothing is done unilaterally. It’s all done collaboratively.”

Perhaps the earliest use of the president of baseball operations title came in September 2007 when Larry Beinfest assumed that role with the Marlins, with Michael Hill serving under him as his general manager. The president title’s prevalence accelerated after Theo Epstein left his general manager post with the Red Sox and joined the Cubs as president of baseball operations.

Technically, Epstein was traded for three minor leaguers, but the sport maintains a professional courtesy to allow executives to pursue job openings at other clubs if it involves a promotion. Privately, executives acknowledge that has led to a bit of titular chicanery in which roles are given elevated titles to pry talented executives from rivals or to play defense against such poaching.

The Colorado Rockies made one of the first attempts at the modern two-executive leadership team in 2012 when General Manager Dan O’Dowd handed many of the day-to-day responsibilities for the big league club to Bill Geivett, a senior vice president. O’Dowd said in an interview that he remained involved in big transactions — trades and free agency — while

relinquishing tasks like waiver claims and minor league options. He felt his personal strengths in scouting and player development had been muted.

“There’s no way one person anymore can maintain a 30,000-foot view and handle the minutiae of information that now crosses your desk — not when you oversee multiple departments,” said O’Dowd, now an M.L.B. Network analyst and the chairman of baseball virtual reality program WIN Reality.

It’s not just the size of the departments that have grown but the “level of information and resources,” Atkins said, referring to the technology, data, coaching feedback, sports psychologists, nutritionists, massage therapists and everything else that helps develop better players. “I would expect that it just grows to be more and more robust,” he added.

Those inputs are growing while the schedule has been lengthened. January used to be the one quiet time, but many off-season transactions have been pushed into that month. “The calendar is year-round — it never stops,” O’Halloran said. “It’s a competitive field, obviously, and you’re always trying to get edges. So having multiple senior leaders, or two senior leaders, just makes that more manageable.”

How those duties are divvied up is based on the executives’ skill sets and preferences. The Royals’ Piccolo said he would be “laser-focused on what’s happening at the major league level” while Moore would spend more time on the holistic view of the organization.

At the end of the day, however, the hierarchies are still pyramids, with one decision maker.

“We’ll all work together on that, but ultimately, I’ve got to make the final decision, the final authority with what works well or what doesn’t,” Moore said. “And that being said, I think you know how I operate. I’m not a micromanager. We allow people to do their jobs.”

REFLECTIONS ON THE CARDINALS STREAK

At 18 wins are two New York teams. The [1904 Giants](#) won 106 games, but declined to play in the newfangled “World Series” that had been relaunched the previous season as a championship between the National and American Leagues. [The 1953 Yankees](#) had no such qualms: After sweeping to an easy pennant behind Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra, they beat the Brooklyn Dodgers in the Series.

At 19 wins are two more World Series-winning teams, Joe DiMaggio’s 1947 Yankees and the White Sox of 1906, who beat the Yankees (then called the Highlanders) to the pennant. Oddly enough, none of the longer streaks belong to World Series winners.

At 20 wins [are the 2002 Oakland Athletics](#), a streak immortalized in the film “Moneyball.” Game 20 was won on a pinch-hit homer by Chris Pratt, er, Scott Hatteberg.

At 21 wins are the 1935 Chicago Cubs. The streak started in September with the team two and a half games out of the pennant. The Cubs rode the streak to a four-game margin in the final standings but lost the World Series to the Tigers and wound up waiting until 2016 for a championship.

At 22 wins is [Cleveland in 2017](#). The best team in the American League with 102 wins, the team was defeated by the Yankees in the playoffs [in an upset](#). The streak surpasses any from the 19th century, so that makes it the record. Unless you count ...

At a mind-boggling 26 games are the 1916 New York Giants, and it was a weird streak for several reasons. The team started the season 2-13 and appeared poised for a stinker of a year. But then the team stumbled upon some bizarre, if temporary, baseball magic.

The team reeled off 17 straight wins and then ... it started to stink again. Its record fell from 19-13 at the end of the streak to 59-62 in September. And then, improbably, the magic returned. The Giants went on another tear, this one a record-setter, winning 26 without a loss. When they finally lost, a New York Times headline read: “[Braves End Flare of Giants’ Meteor](#).” The end result was an 86-66 record, and only a fourth-place finish. When the team wasn’t streaking, it was 43-66.

So why is there any doubt over whether this 26-gamer is really the record? In the middle of all those W’s there is an unsightly scar: a T. Ties were not uncommon in the early part of the 20th century, when sunset wrapped games up, and the Giants had a 1-1 draw against Pittsburgh in the second game of a doubleheader that at least somewhat marred the streak.

In the Elias Sports Bureau’s official record book, which recognizes the 26-game streak as the record, ties are ignored in the calculation of win streaks. But if you’re a stickler (or a Cleveland fan), you could choose to credit the 1916 Giants with a 12-gamer and a 14-gamer sandwiched around a tie.