

SUNDAY BASEBALL TIDBITS

NOVEMBER 2020

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

POST SEASON STUFF

Corey Seager. Not too shabby. Hit .400 in the World Series with 2 HRs, scored 7 runs, drove in 5 and stole a base. Eighth player to be named MVP of both LCS and WS. He hit .328 in 18 post season games. Sixth shortstop to be World Series MVP, joining a list that includes Edgar Renteria of the Giants (2010), David Eckstein of the Cardinals (2006), Derek Jeter of the Yankees (2000), Alan Trammell of the Tigers (1984) and Bucky Dent of the Yankees (1978). Seager's three career World Series home runs tie Carlos Correa and Jeter for the most by a shortstop in Major League history. His eight home runs this postseason match Nelson Cruz (2011), Carlos Beltrán (2004) and Barry Bonds (2002) for second-most in a single postseason, trailing only Tampa Bay's Randy Arozarena (10 this year). His RBI in Game 6 was his 20th of the 2020 postseason. Only David Freese, who had 21 in 2011 for the Cardinals, had more in a single postseason.

After sweeping Brewers and Padres Dodgers rallied from being down 3 games to 1 against Braves to make the WS.

Like many people I was yelling at the TV when Cash pulled Snell (visions of Gibson, Koufax, Ford, Morris in my head). But despite the uproar afterwards His last fastball against Austin Barnes was his slowest fastball of the night, and a full tick below where he'd been sitting so far in the game. And Snell has been, in his career, 23 percent worse than league average when it comes to third-time through the order. If his personal splits in that might not matter (we're still only talking about 432 regular-season plate appearances in which he's seen a lineup a third time), the league has established third-time through the order splits that matter. Snell had not finished the sixth inning all season.

Johnny Damon's 2004 Red Sox led in every inning of every game of their four-game sweep of the Cardinals.

Rickey Henderson's 1989 A's held a lead at some point in every inning but the very first inning of their four-game sweep of the Giants — which meant, since they took a mid-Series earthquake break, the A's were leading pretty much round the clock for two weeks.

Game one 1955 world series. Jackie Robinson steals home. Last time a straight steal of home in a world series (two on back end of double steals).

The only players to score 10 runs in a single World Series--Reggie Jackson (1977) and Paul Molitor (1993).

Last player to be named the MVP of the LCS and the World Series in the same season was Madison Bumgarner (2014).

Mookie Betts and Reggie Jackson only two players ever to HR in clinching WS game for multiple teams.

Kershaw played in 19 postseason series before the 2020 World Series. That's the most postseason rounds played for a player before winning his first title.

The Dodgers used seven pitchers in their Game 6 victory, the most used by a winning team in a nine-inning World Series clincher, and it is tied for the most used by the winning team in a World Series clincher of any length, with the 1992 Blue Jays, who clinched their title in 11 innings in Game 6.

The Dodgers and Rays combined for 27 strikeouts in Game 6, breaking a record previously shared by the Mets and Yankees in Game 3 of the 2000 World Series and the Dodgers and Yankees in Game 1 of the 1963 World Series.

The Dodgers had a .717 winning percentage in the regular season. That's the second-highest for any eventual World Series champion, behind the 1909 Pirates, who won at a .724 clip. Those Pirates played 154 games, to the Dodgers' 60. This season's Dodgers team led MLB with 2.27 run differential.

Their .629 winning percentage over the past four seasons, including the playoffs, is the highest of any team in a four-year span in the Wild Card Era. They surpassed the 1996-99 Yankees, who had a .628 winning percentage. It is worth noting, however, that those Yankees won three World Series titles in that four-year span.

Only one team beat them in any series -- the Rockies, who [won two out of three at Dodger Stadium in early September](#). That's it.

This win snaps a streak of 13 consecutive postseason appearances that did not result in them hoisting a World Series trophy, which is tied for the third-longest such streak all-time.

[Cody Bellinger](#) now joins his father, Clay, as a World Series champion. Clay played for three teams that won the World Series -- the 1999 Yankees, 2000 Yankees and '02 Angels -- though he only appeared in the Series for the 2000 club. They are the eighth father-son duo to both win at least one title as players, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, joining Ray and Bob Boone, Pedro Borbon Sr. and Jr., Sal and Drew Butera, Dave and Chris Duncan, Jim and Mike Hegan, Julian and Stan Javier and Ed and Scott Spiezio.

OTHER INTERESTING BITS

I was impressed to read that the only player in MLB history with three straight seasons reaching both 35 home runs and 200 hits is Jim Rice (1977-79).

I thought maybe Ruth, Gehrig (he came up 1 HR short), Aaron, Mantle (never had a 200 hit season). Nope.

The last switch-hitter to lead the NL in home runs in a season would be the Mets' Howard Johnson (38 homers in 1991).

On June 29, 1990 both Fernando Valenzuela (vs. Cardinals), who turns 60 today, and Dave Stewart (vs. Blue Jays) threw no-hitters.

Back to the Dugout

Tony LaRussa takes over the White Sox. In 33 years of managing the White Sox, A's and Cards he won 2,728 games, 4 time manager of the year, 3 time World Champion. When he first managed the White Sox in 1979 no current MLB player had been born.

La Russa will manage the White Sox in 2021, 35 years after he last managed them in 1986. Only four other managers have managed a team 20 or more years after last doing so: Paul Richards with the White Sox (22 years, 1954 and '76), Bucky Harris with the Tigers (22 years, 1933 and '55), Joe Maddon with the Angels (21 years, 1999 and 2020) and Yogi Berra with the Yankees (20 years, 1964 and '84).

La Russa's span between stints managing the White Sox is the longest in the history of the four major North American professional sports, according to Elias. Dick Irvin coached the NHL's Blackhawks in 1955-56, 25 seasons after his initial two-year coaching stint ended after the '30-31 season. Jon Gruden began coaching the NFL's Raiders again in 2018, 17 years after he last coached them in '01. And Cotton Fitzsimmons coached the NBA's Suns for six seasons beginning in 1988-89, 17 seasons after he coached them in '71-72.

La Russa joins Connie Mack, Luke Appling, Yogi Berra, Frankie Frisch, Rogers Hornsby, Bob Lemon, Paul Molitor, Tony Perez, Frank Robinson, Ryne Sandberg, Red Schoendienst and Ted Williams as the other Hall of Famers to manage after being elected, according to Elias.

If La Russa can guide the White Sox to a championship, he would be the oldest manager in history to win a World Series. That record is currently held by McKeon, according to Elias. McKeon was 72 in his first stint with the Marlins when that club won it all in 2003. The only other 70-plus manager to even reach the Fall Classic is Hall of Famer Casey Stengel, with the 1960 Yankees.

This will be La Russa's 34th season managing in the Majors, breaking a tie with John McGraw for second all-time behind Mack (53 seasons).

With 36 wins in 2021, La Russa will pass McGraw (2,763) for second on the all-time wins list, behind only Mack (3,731).

La Russa's next postseason appearance will be his 15th, tying Joe Torre for second, behind only Bobby Cox (16). He already ranks second in postseason wins (70), behind Torre (84).

A talented White Sox club will give La Russa a shot at becoming only the sixth manager to win seven league pennants, and the first since Walter Alston in 1974. A World Series win would make La Russa just the sixth four-time championship-winning skipper and first since Torre in 2000.

TWO GREAT LONGISH PIECES THIS WEEK—METS & YANKEES

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Joel Sherman is a terrific baseball columnist for the NY Post.

So forget about Jay Buhner for a minute and look at the Mets side of the ledger for trades that came back to haunt them. (thanks to subscriber Joe for the contribution)

Like Halloween, Justin Turner shows up every October [to haunt the Mets](#).

It has been seven seasons since Sandy Alderson took him off the Mets' 40-man roster, and this is Turner's seventh straight postseason with the Dodgers. On Friday night, he tied Duke Snider for the franchise record of 11 postseason homers, then topped it with No. 12 on Saturday as part of a four-hit performance in an [8-7 loss to the Rays](#). Turner has done this with 158 more at-bats than Snider, whose only postseason was playing in the World Series not multiple rounds.

But Turner still has claims as one of the best postseason performers in the club's history, with a .923 OPS in 70 games. He also has an .886 OPS as a Dodger, leaving him with a 139 OPS-plus, which is sixth all-time (minimum 3,000 plate appearances) in franchise history just behind, yep, Snider at 142.

This got me to thinking about who has done the best after leaving the Mets without much distinction. A ground rule: Like Turner, I wanted to limit this to mainly players with limited or no accomplishments with the Mets, who then transformed into something special after their exit. So that removes Tom Seaver, for example, but also David Cone, Lenny Dykstra, Daniel Murphy and Tug McGraw. Hubie Brooks had a third-place Rookie of the Year with the Mets before going onto better things and Gregg Jefferies twice finished top six for Rookie of the Year before liberation from his Mets torture chamber.

The Mets, their fans and general manager Brodie Van Wagenen will close their eyes and hope Travis d'Arnaud and Jarred Kelenic never end up on this top 10 list:

- 1. Nolan Ryan:** He had his moments with the Mets, especially with two brilliant relief appearances during the 1969 postseason. But he is nevertheless the before-and-after epitome, leaving the Mets for the Angels in their worst trade ever (for Jim Fregosi) en route to seven no-hitters, becoming the symbol of power pitching forever and the Hall of Fame.
- 2. Jeff Kent:** After coming to New York for Cone, Kent actually posted two 20-homer seasons and a 107 OPS-plus in parts of five Mets seasons. Then he was traded for Carlos Baerga and became among the preeminent power-hitting second basemen in history, winning the 2000 NL MVP.
- 3. Nelson Cruz:** Signed out of the Dominican Republic by the Mets in 1998, he never appeared for the big league club before being traded in 2000 to the Athletics for shortstop Jorge Velandia, who hit .149 in 47 Mets games. Cruz has 417 career homers and three AL MVP top-10 finishes.
- 4. Turner:** Others may have accomplished more in bulk than Turner after he left the Mets, but the year-to-year impact he has had as a two-way third baseman who performs well in October elevates him to this place on the list.

5. Amos Otis: He had a couple of cups of Mets coffee before they turned him into Joe Foy in possibly the second-worst trade in organization history. For the terrific Royal teams of the late 1970s/early 1980s, Otis would have four top eight AL MVP finishes and win three Gold Gloves in center field.

6. Jose Bautista: Within a few hours on July 30, 2004, the Mets traded Bautista (whom they had just obtained from the Royals) and Scott Kazmir in separate trades, before they had ever played for the team, to acquire Kris Benson and Victor Zambrano.

7. Mike Scott: He was 14-27 with a 4.84 ERA as a Met and was traded to Houston for Danny Heep. As an Astro, he won a Cy Young, finished second and single-handedly nearly kept the Mets from advancing to the 1986 World Series.

8. Paul Blair: The Mets left him unprotected after his first minor league season and Blair was taken by the Orioles in the 1962 first-year draft. He went on to win eight Gold Gloves and is on the short list for greatest center fielders ever.

9. Ken Singleton: He would be higher, but the Mets did get Rusty Staub in exchange for the Mount Vernon native. Here is the list of switch-hitters who came to the plate 8,000 or more times in the modern era who have a better OPS-plus than Singleton's 132: Mickey Mantle (172), Chipper Jones (141) and Reggie Smith (137).

10. Kevin Mitchell: There were a whole bunch of closers to consider at No. 10 such as Rick Aguilera, Jason Isringhausen, Randy Myers and Jeff Reardon. Jim Bibby had a nice career after being dealt by the Mets and Jason Bay was a Met who went on to excellence with the Pirates and Red Sox before a horrible Mets return. And here is a hat tip to you, Melvin Mora, Darren O'Day and Octavio Dotel.

But the nod goes to Mitchell, who finished third for Rookie of the Year with the 1986 Mets, but was then traded as part of a large package to the Padres for Kevin McReynolds. The Mets,

among other things, wondered if he was a bad influence on Dwight Gooden and Darryl Strawberry. Away from multiple positions in New York, Mitchell settled in mainly as a left fielder. He won the NL MVP with the Giants in 1989 to begin a six-year run in which only Frank Thomas (184) and Barry Bonds (174) had a better OPS-plus than Mitchell's 160.

Lindsey Adler from The Athletic—Thoughts on Yankees Off Season Decisions

The Los Angeles Dodgers had a luxury: Eight straight division titles, eight attempts at winning the World Series. It took them two front office regimes, two field managers, three losses in the NLDS, two losses in the NLCS and two losses in the World Series to [win their first championship since 1988](#). Few teams ever get that luxury — having a window of contention that large, with that much potential for dominance.

Yankees fans may recognize it, though the dynasty-era Yankees were successful at capitalizing on their opportunities in a way that seems difficult to imagine we will see from a team in the near future. If contention is a window, the Dodgers were able to hold theirs open, determined to be better than their many seasons of coming up short.

The Yankees' window of contention opened in 2017 with an exciting new core. Now, after their fourth consecutive postseason exit, twice at the hand of a division rival, what will it take the Yankees to break through? Will they have eight years to do so? Or is this an inflection point, with just a few years left to win with the bulk of players who general manager Brian Cashman dreamed of watching wave their way down the Canyon of Heroes year after year?

The Dodgers resemble those dynastic Yankees of the 1990s not just in their perennial contention, but also in the way their roster is built. Just as the superstar Core Four was homegrown, a vast majority of the championship Dodgers team was homegrown or acquired through smart and inexpensive pickups.

[Clayton Kershaw](#)? Famously homegrown. Justin Turner? Famously non-tendered by the Mets. Cody Bellinger? Corey Seager? Walker Buehler? Homegrown and under (expensive) team control.

As Evan Grant of the Dallas Morning News [noted](#): "The Dodgers played 18 postseason games. Every one of them was started by a pitcher who has spent his entire professional career in the LA organization."

Remarkably, [Mookie Betts](#) was the only significant player on the World Series roster who was a star before he was traded to Los Angeles or signed as a free agent.

It should not come as a surprise to anyone that the Dodgers' roster would be a behemoth constructed of good drafting and good pickups in trades and free agency. The president of baseball operations, Andrew Friedman, helped usher in the current manner of front office acumen when he was a young executive with the alarmingly frugal Tampa Bay Rays.

Where the big market, big money advantage comes in for the Dodgers is that unlike teams like the Rays or the Oakland A's, ownership authorizes the front office to spend the money to retain the homegrown and previously-under-the-radar talent. This, if you can swing it, is the model method of roster building. The Dodgers will get knocked as a big-money team with a lot of well-deserved superstars. What's lost in this narrative will be a crucial piece of the puzzle: They developed most of them.

"I always think it's great when there's a homegrown player that's potentially signed up to finish his career in the same place," Friedman said in 2019. "There's something nostalgic about that for me."

Not every roster building decision has been a win for the Dodgers. In 2016, Friedman traded future 2019 AL Rookie of the Year Yordan Álvarez for reliever Josh Fields (who had a strong three-year run with the Dodgers). In some corners of Dodgerville, fans grew so frustrated with their failure to win a World Series year after year, they adopted "Fraudman" as a nickname for the team's top baseball executive. (One can guess those cries will be quieter now.)

The Yankees, now, are entering a crucial moment to decide how to manage their own homegrown core. Aaron Judge and [Gary Sánchez](#) can hit free agency in 2022. The former is the oft-injured, de facto captain of the team. The latter is the franchise catcher whose role moving forward is "one of the discussion points we're gonna have to focus on," Cashman said.

Looking more broadly at the erstwhile Baby Bombers: Greg Bird is likely out of baseball. Miguel Andújar, a special talent at the plate, has no defensive position with the Yankees and [is frustrated with the way he lost his starting job at third base after his 2019 shoulder injury](#). Gleyber Torres is very young and has a high offensive ceiling, but the Yankees will have to decide if they would like to leave him at short (a position he played poorly in 2020), or slide him back to second and find a shortstop elsewhere. Clint Frazier may have finally cracked through to earn regular playing time. Luis Severino is due for a return from Tommy John surgery in 2021. And so on.

In his end-of-season press conference, Cashman rattled off a list of pitchers who'd come up through their farm system who they could turn to in 2021 to fill out their rotation behind Gerrit Cole.

“There’s a possibility of having a Severino return to play, there’s a possibility of having — these are the controllable pieces — having, potentially Domingo Germán return,” Cashman said. “The possibility of [Deivi Garcia](#) now, who obviously [got battle tested](#) as early as 2020 and and in taking the next step. [Clarke Schmidt](#) is coming up through the system and the depth. I say all that with the hopes of maintaining health for not just them but for all other parties involved.”

It’s no secret to the Yankees that their future success relies on successful player development. Ahead of the 2020 season, *The Athletic*’s Keith Law listed the Yankees sixth on his [annual ranking of farm systems](#). Law [described](#) the Yankees’ system as “deep, but very young; of their top 10 prospects, only three appeared above Low A in 2019, with most of their better prospects in short-season ball last year or, in one case, not playing at all because he had just signed.”

The Rays and Dodgers ranked first and third in baseball, respectively. “The Dodgers’ chain of elite prospects remains unbroken, to the point that perhaps we should no longer be surprised,” Law wrote. “The Dodgers get credit for the money they spend but not enough for the players they develop on their own.”

The general reputation will likely always be that the Yankees spend their way into contention. Amongst Yankees fans as of late, the narrative is that they don’t spend enough.

The Yankees roster is top-heavy financially. Cole was the organization’s white whale, brought in as a free agent to supplement what the organization believes is a very capable group of players. [Giancarlo Stanton](#)’s Yankees career was off to a slow, injured start, but he showed in the 2020 postseason what he can still offer his teammates when he is healthy.

Like the Dodgers, the Yankees’ depth has been a core triumph of their construction. They take pride in getting contributions from lesser known players (though does any success story ever stay unknown for long in New York?). By FanGraphs Wins Above Replacement, [DJ LeMahieu](#) has been the top offensive player for the Yankees since 2019. Gio Urshela, who was a glove-only guy in Cleveland, is the third most valuable in that time period. [Luke Voit](#), a Quad A first baseman with St. Louis who [played through an abdominal muscle tear](#) in 2019 and plantar fasciitis in 2020, [is the sixth most valuable](#).

If the Yankees have been stymied by one paradox of their roster, it’s this: They’ve gotten excellent production where most did not expect it, but not enough production from many of the players they entered this new era intending to rely on.

The Dodgers have demonstrated over their nearly decade-long window of contention (with Friedman taking over the front office in 2015) that they are built to win. Period. No foreseeable expiration date. The Yankees, [who must make important decisions about who is the future of their organization and what role they will occupy](#), are entering the 2021 season in win-now mode.

The postseason is typically seen as a semi-chaotic endeavor. Great teams can be vulnerable in a five- or seven-game series. This year's Dodgers team was far and away the best team baseball has to offer and they were finally rewarded for their efforts. The question in New York is now this: How long do the Yankees have left? What can and what will they do to hold that window open? And who will be on the field if and when they hoist baseball's most coveted piece of metal above their heads?

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

Late and light—travel got the best of me and I will be on the road for the next three weeks. But here are a few goodies for you.

Were you as shocked as I was that MLB didn't suspend Justin Turner for his refusal to pass on Dodgers celebration after he had tested positive for COVID?

Yankees should open their wallet--DJ LeMahieu led the majors this year with a .369 average. He has the third best BA over the last 6 seasons.

"Somebody may need to tip their hat to Stan Kasten." The Dodgers' president and CEO, between his tenures in Atlanta, Washington and Los Angeles, has now been part of 20 division champions, eight NL champions and two World Series champions (Braves 1995, Dodgers 2020). All three general managers he has hired (John Schuerholz, Mike Rizzo and Andrew Friedman) have won World Series.

Jimmie Foxx was the first player to win three MVPs (1932, 1933, 1938).

Honus Wagner won 8 batting titles from 1900 to 1911.

Rogers Hornsby won 6 straight batting titles 190-1925.

It took Stan Musial from 1946 to 1957 to win 6 batting titles.

Roberto Clemente won NL batting title in 1961, 1964, 1965, 1967.

I remember Bill Madlock as a good hitter but didn't remember that he won NL batting titles in 1975, 1976, 1981, 1983.

Tony Gwynn won three straight batting titles 1987-88-89. Then delivered four more in a row 1994-95-96-97.

Ty Cobb won 9 straight and 12 of 13 years 1907-1919.

Ted Williams won back to back batting titles 3 times—1941-42, 1947-48, 1957-58.

Rod Carew won 7 batting titles between 1969 and 1978.

From 1983 to 1988 Wade Boggs won 5 batting titles, his streak interrupted by Don Mattingly in 1984.

Miguel Cabrera won 4 batting titles in 5 years 2011-12-13-15.

Interesting piece from The Athletic by Eno Sarris (I hope the formatting comes through in email)

Your favorite pitcher is probably cheating.

A large majority of big league pitchers right now are using some sort of extra-grip substance to impart more spin — and therefore more movement — on the ball. That's the consensus of nearly 20 major league hitters, pitchers and pitching coaches who spoke to *The Athletic* in the last month. The median answer was more than three-quarters of the league, but five respondents thought the portion was much closer to 100 percent.

"Almost everyone is using something," said a coach with experience in several major league organizations.

"My guess on total MLB players using some sort of grip enhancement ... 99.9 percent," said another coach who has worked with multiple major leaguers.

Those who are loading up with a "grip enhancement" on the mound are violating Official Baseball Rule 6.02, which states that the pitcher may not "apply a foreign substance of any kind to the ball" or "have on his person, or in his possession, any foreign substance" or "attach anything to his hand, any finger, or either wrist."

But, rather than try to eradicate such a widespread practice, it might make more sense for Major League Baseball to legalize it.

Because of ongoing innovation in the grip substance marketplace, the difficulty of enforcement, the perils of selective enforcement and the flaws in alternative solutions, the simplest way out of this current situation may be to find some sort of substance that satisfies the pitcher's needs and hopefully ends the race to develop better grip.

The advantages of using grip substances are unmistakable.

"It's better than steroids," said one player development executive about the benefits, which have been demonstrated by major league pitchers in real time before. Trevor Bauer, after making some comments about how a pitcher could add spin rate and throwing some shade at Astros pitchers, ended up doing what can only be described as a public experiment when it appears [he added spin rate to his fastball](#) for one inning in 2018, when he was with Cleveland.

"For eight years I've been trying to figure out how to increase the spin on my fastball because I'd identified it way back then as such a massive advantage," Bauer himself [wrote in a piece](#) for The Players' Tribune. "I knew that if I could learn to increase it through training and technique, it would be huge. But eight years later, I haven't found any other way except using foreign substances."

It wasn't for a lack of experimentation.

"I've tested all sorts of different stuff in the lab up at Driveline," Bauer [told Jordan Bastian](#) in 2018. "I sat down with a chemical engineer to understand it. At 70 mph, when we were doing the tests, spin rates jumped between 300-400 rpm while using various different sticky substances. The effect is slightly less pronounced at higher velocities — more game-like velocities — but still between 200-300 rpm increase. So, that's a lot of the research we've done. We've done it with multiple test subjects. ... And those are the results we found."

Some of those experiments at Driveline Baseball, the data-driven center for pitching research outside Seattle, made their way into "The MVP Machine," a 2019 book by Ben Lindbergh and Travis Sawchik. One test left current Giants coordinator of pitching analysis Matt Daniels with [baseball on his fingers](#) and, of course, increased spin rates on his fastball. In a possibly related matter, Bauer now has the highest spin rate of any four-seam fastball in baseball.

An independent pitching development lab was kind enough to do some applied research for the purposes of this article, asking a pitcher to throw multiple times without any grip, then with pine tar on his fingers, and finally with Pelican Grip on his fingers.

The results were remarkable. Going from nothing on the ball to applying Pelican Grip added more than 300 rpm to this pitcher's fastball and more than three inches of extra movement. That's enough to move from 39th on the fastball spin leaderboard (Sam Selman with 2476 rpm)

to first (Bauer, with 2776 rpm). See how much each substance changed the spin and movement on the same pitcher's fastball:

Pitch Characteristics by Grip Substance

Nothing	velocity 82.4 spin rate 2193 x-break 14.2 inches y break 9.6 inches
Pine tar	velocity 82.6 spin rate 2431 x-break 16 inches y-break 9.6 inches
Pelican grip	velocity 82.3 spin rate 2520 x-break 16.8 inches y-break 10.1 inches

These resulting changes in movement would improve this pitcher's stuff in an apparent way. A pitcher who added this much spin to a league average fastball would expect his swinging strike rate to go up from the 10.4 percent (league average) to 11.1 percent, research on "stuff" metrics has found. That would be like going from Michael Pineda's fastball to Trevor Bauer's fastball, given [their respective whiff rates](#) from the last two years combined. Real improvement, more strikeouts, all from a little tacky stuff on the fingers.

It's because of results like this that pitchers are largely turning to grip substances on the mound. The league's average spin rate has [risen steadily](#) from 2238 rpm in 2015, when we first started tracking the stat, to 2306 in 2020. Part of that might be due to teams selecting pitchers with higher spin rate, but it also could be that more pitchers are turning to a grip substance as they see the improvement in colleagues who have used these substances before.

The practice has become so commonplace that pitchers, in past seasons, have "loaded up" in front of multiple reporters, and casually talked about the practice when off the record. Reporters have also observed infielders and catchers putting pine tar on their gloves and equipment in order to improve their grip, maybe, but also (admittedly) to add some goop to the ball for the pitcher as it's thrown around the infield.

Perhaps because of the ubiquity, and the form that enforcement takes, very few pitchers have gotten in trouble for violating a rule that very many are disregarding every time they take the mound. In practice, a manager must ask the umpire to check the pitcher on the mound — and it could be that managers aren't willing to go there if they know their own staff would be made vulnerable by the action.

When Brendan Donnelly was caught using pine tar on his glove in 2005, he brought with him the ill will of being a replacement player who had crossed picket lines to play during the 1994 strike. And, because Nationals manager Frank Robinson, who'd been told by a former teammate of Donnelly's that the pitcher used pine tar, checked the pitcher, the very next night Angels manager Mike Scioscia sent the umpire to the mound to check on reliever Gary Majewski, who didn't have pine tar anywhere the umpire examined.

Right there, you have the flaws in the way the rule is enforced shown front and center. Making the manager the enforcer means that it can be used tactically once the reward outweighs the risk.

So, maybe baseball could change the process. A pitcher in South Korea said that the umpires basically "check you up and down" before your start. Something automatic and daily like this would make enforcement less tactical and selective and more of a routine.

"If you know where to look, it's all obvious," said one coach. "Watching the playoffs today, there are clearly three guys touching the same spots."

But would that catch all of the rule breakers?

Check the bill of the cap, check the glove, check the belt, check the back of the neck and under that long pitcher mane. Then suspend those infringing on the rules, and get this out of the game. Except it's probably not that easy. Try it for yourself, if you like. Find where the six or seven pitchers in each game, on average, are getting their grip substance from. Yes, there are the obvious few, but are *all* of them obvious?

Here's another clue that it's not so easy to eliminate the use of grip substances by pitchers: Baseball itself announced an intention to crack down on the practice in 2020, but the results of that effort are not obvious to the public. In an internal memo [obtained by Lindbergh](#) before the season, MLB senior vice president Chris Young points out that umpires may decide on their own without the prodding of a manager and adds that the clubs themselves have some responsibility to quell the cheating.

"It is the responsibility of each Club to ensure that its staff and its players understand the rules set forth in this memorandum," Young wrote. "Clubs may be subject to sanctions by the Commissioner for failing to adequately educate their staff and players on the applicable rules."

And ... not one pitcher was cited this year. One [clubhouse manager was fired](#) for selling grip substances to visiting pitchers, and that's seemingly all that happened.

MLB declined to comment for this article, but *The Athletic* has confirmed with multiple sources that the league has spoken to teams about the issue and is working toward finding an alternative — whether it be a new ball or an approved sticky substance — because enforcement is so difficult.

Technology is part of the reason that specific pitchers, even those with big increases in spin rate, have been able to evade punishment. Pitchers have found some substances that aren't so easy to detect.

"Pitchers make concoctions and then use the Rhapsodo, and it makes it spin like crazy," said one coach, pointing to the fact that ubiquitous pitch-tracking technology makes it easy for pitchers to conduct their own experiments and discover (often clear!) grip substances that change their metrics.

"Some teams 'cook' their own mixtures," said another coach. "I've heard about some guys putting Pepsi on a stove top and heating it until it had to be cut off. When slightly heated this can be mixed with other mixtures and you create some unbelievable stick."

With the immediate feedback provided by today's pitch-tracking technology and the eagerness to get noticed by spin-hungry front offices, the groundwork is laid for an arms race. And not all of the substances pitchers are working with are as visible as a pine tar patch on a pitcher's neck. Clearer options that have been tested or considered include CBD oil, lubricants, Tyrus Clear Sticky Grip, shaving cream, Sprite instead of Pepsi, and the tried-and-true rosin-plus-sunscreen trick.

That last one has been around a while and seems impossible to catch. Should pitchers be suspended for having too much sunscreen on their arms? If not, there's already a huge hole in the plan to enforce the rules more stringently.

Pitchers often see the use of sticky substances as a collective response to a dry, dusty ball with increasingly tighter seams that are harder to grip.

"I would say a vast majority use something, but it's because balls are so slippery after they rub them up," said one pitcher.

You might even find some hitters who say it's no big deal because they'd rather the pitcher had a good grip on the ball. Not all of them, though.

"This topic really bugs me when pitchers say it's only for grip," said one major league hitter with a different perspective. "Lots of position players use substances for grip too, so we get it. *But* guys are gaining insane amounts of spin and ride from using insanely sticky substances. Guys are already throwing harder than ever; we don't need their sliders to have unconventional break."

The idea that the substance is only there to improve command (and thus protect hitters) is also hard to square with the fact that batters hit by pitches are at an all-time high. It seems implausible that the problem would be that much worse than what is already the worst hit-by-pitch rate of all time with less pine tar, especially when [other pitching trends](#) seem to explain the plunking situation better than any pine tar addition or subtraction would.

“This has absolutely changed the way we have to approach hitting,” said one major league hitter that was adamant that something should be done about the situation and didn’t think the grip substances were saving him from any plunkings. “We have to deal with more ride. We have to deal with more break.”

But, if the ball is the reason pitchers are using pine tar, the ball can also be a way out. In South Korea, where they check every pitcher before each appearance, they also have a different ball that’s easier to grip.

“The balls in Korea are treated with something and they use powder rosin, not rock rosin, so it actually dries off in your hand and allows you to grip the ball,” said one pitcher with experience in the KBO.

Rawlings and the league are working on a tacky ball, and it was tested in the Atlantic League last year, but one complaint from a hitter seems ominous for a league that has struggled with [ball changes](#) over the last five years.

“The big difference for me was that they felt a little bit softer than the other ball,” former Reds catcher Ramon Cabrera [told Newsday](#) last year. “... I really liked it. But when we’re hitting, the balls don’t jump like the regular ones. So, we hit a couple line drives and a couple balls really hard, and the balls didn’t go anywhere.”

Does baseball want to risk taking the carry out of the ball at a time when strikeout rate also has risen to an all-time high? The reward would be that strikeouts and home runs both go down, and perhaps more balls are put in play — but the risk is that only the home run rate comes down, and viewers are rewarded with a game that is reduced to strikeouts and strikeouts alone.

Maybe that’s why baseball is reportedly considering developing and distributing an MLB-approved sticky substance, which [Lindbergh reported](#) and *The Athletic* has confirmed.

“Allow it,” Bauer said in 2018. “I don’t see that there’s a way to enforce it, because you can’t go check a pitcher every single inning, every single pitch, and that’s currently how it is.”

“You can get thrown out of a game and suspended for it if an umpire comes out and checks and finds out,” he continued. “But it doesn’t happen. So, pick a substance that’s sticky, that gives you all the performance benefits, and just put it on the back of the mound. That way, if you want to use it you can and everybody knows it’s being used. And, if you want to use other substances and skirt the rule, whatever. Have a certain amount of outlawed substances — Vaseline or whatever. But, if you want to use sticky stuff, it’s right there on the mound. Put your fingers on it and throw.”

With a couple options on the table, the least likely seems to be an all-out enforcement blitz. But some sort of action is on the table since baseball — as it has acknowledged — thinks this is a problem worth solving. With strikeout rate (and spin) at an all-time high, wiping out grip

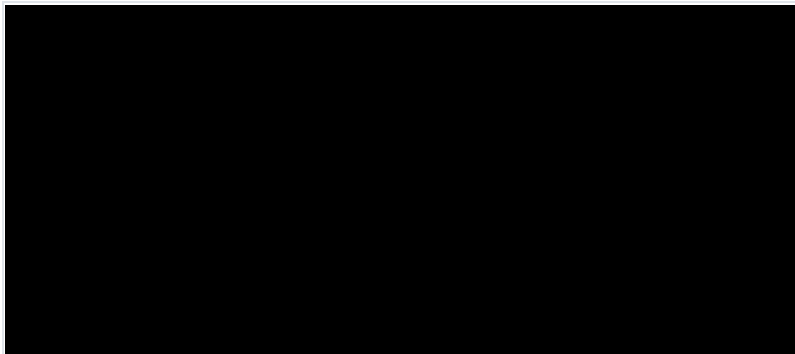
substances that give pitchers an unfair advantage might be a way to achieve more balls in play by enforcing a rule already on the books.

“Pressure is on in the league,” one coach said. “Front offices value spin and velo. If everyone around you is getting favoritism from the front office and having higher success rates because they are using sticky stuff, then you’ll most likely start to learn how to use it.”

“Something should happen,” said one hitter, before adding something disturbing for a league that was just racked by a sign-stealing cheating scandal. “Can the league do something? Absolutely. Is a *little* bit of cheating OK?”

Pitchers look around and see teams picking up high-spin pitchers. “You don’t have to give them a name,” reliever Ryan Buchter said once of [the pitchers the Dodgers brought into camp](#). “You just bring in the numbers from the TrackMan, give them 10 guys and they’ll pick off of their stats. They don’t care what they look like or anything.”

These pitchers see more than three-quarters of the league using this tacky substance, and they know it doesn’t have ramifications for their bodies the way steroids did, as those performance-enhancing drugs have been shown to cause [long-term issues](#) with heart and psychiatric health. Can you blame them for joining in?



Long-Term Psychiatric and Medical Consequences of Anabolic-Androgenic St...

The problem of anabolic-androgenic steroid (AAS) abuse has recently generated widespread public and media attent...

It might behoove the league to try and enforce this, but it's also apparent that the practice is so widespread, and the grip substance research so advanced, that enforcement will be difficult, if not impossible. The league has a choice between offering options — like an approved tacky substance, or a new ball — that address the problem, or doubling down on previously unsuccessful efforts to catch the pitchers in the act.

Either way, there's a fascinating process that starts almost every time the pitcher gets the ball back from the catcher. That series of seemingly innocuous ticks may have a calculated goal designed to impart a sticky advantage. And the way out is as difficult to track as the high-spin breaking ball that ends up sizzling its way to the plate.

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

Rangers, Rockies, Marlins never have had a Cy Young winner—Trevor Bauer became the first Cincinnati Red ever.

Shane Bieber joined elite company with his unanimous Cy Young win. In the National League, 11 players have unanimously won the Cy Young Award, for a total of 14 wins.

- [Sandy Koufax](#) (1963*, 1965, 1966)
- [Greg Maddux](#) (1994, 1995)
- [Bob Gibson](#) (1968*)
- [Steve Carlton](#) (1972)
- [Rick Sutcliffe](#) (1984)
- [Dwight Gooden](#) (1985)
- [Orel Hershiser](#) (1988)
- [Randy Johnson](#) (2002)
- [Jake Peavy](#) (2007)
- [Roy Halladay](#) (2010)
- [Clayton Kershaw](#) (2014*)

In the American League, 7 players have unanimously won the Cy Young Award, for a total of 10 wins.

- [Denny McLain](#) (1968**)
- [Ron Guidry](#) (1978)
- [Roger Clemens](#) (1986*, 1998)
- [Pedro Martínez](#) (1999, 2000)

- [Johan Santana](#) (2004, 2006)
- [Justin Verlander](#) (2011*)
- [Shane Bieber](#) (2020)

Three pitchers have been unanimous Cy Young Award winners in back-to-back seasons--Sandy Koufax (1965-66), Greg Maddux (1994-95) and Pedro Martinez (1999-2000).

Seven teams in the last 30 years had both MVP and Cy Young (excluding when a pitcher won both awards):

2013 Detroit Tigers: Miguel Cabrera, Max Scherzer
 2006 Minnesota Twins: Justin Morneau, Johan Santana
 2005 St. Louis Cardinals: Albert Pujols, Chris Carpenter
 2002 Oakland Athletics: Miguel Tejada, Barry Zito
 1993 Chicago White Sox: Frank Thomas, Jack McDowell
 1991 Atlanta Braves: Terry Pendleton, Tom Glavine
 1990 Pittsburgh Pirates: Barry Bonds, Doug Drabek

Corey Kluber (2014 and '17), Cliff Lee ('08), CC Sabathia ('07) and Gaylord Perry (1972). The Tribe's four Cy Young Award winners since 2007 already were the most in the big leagues in that span. And with Bieber's win, Indians pitching coach Carl Willis has now coached five Cy Young Award winners, including Sabathia, Lee, Félix Hernández and Rick Porcello.

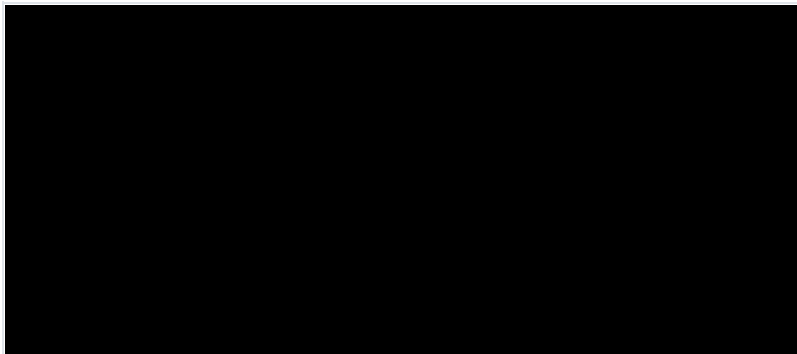
Before Don Mattingly, most recent to win Manager of the Year after winning an MVP award as a player was Kirk Gibson (2011 Manager of the Year for the D-backs; 1988 MVP for the Dodgers)

Accidentally left out of last week's 3 or more batting titles discussion -- Tony Oliva won batting titles in 1964, 1965, 1971. In his rookie year of 1964 Oliva hit .323 with 42 doubles, 32 HRs. He led the majors that year with 217 hits and 374 total bases.

From one astute subscriber--I'm sure it was just an oversight that you didn't mention Rogers Hornsby AVERAGED .402 for the 5 years 1921-25 (after a "shitty" .370 batting title in 1920). Oh yeah, his OPS for those 5 years was a sick 1.162. In addition to the 7 BA titles, he led the league in OPS 11 times! During the 20's, he hit below .360 once and led the league in OPS every year but '26. Also during the 20's, he led the league in runs 5 times, hits 4 times, doubles 4 times, RBI's 4 times, BBs 3 times, HRs 2 times. During the decade he walked 753 times and struck out 431 times (43/yr).

Freddie Freeman of the Braves and Jose Abreau of the White Sox both won MVPs this year as 1B. The last time both MVPs were first basemen was 2006: The Twins' Justin Morneau and the Phillies' Ryan Howard.

Freddie Freeman joins Chipper Jones, [Terry Pendleton](#) (1991) and [Dale Murphy](#) (1982 and '83) as Braves players to win the NL MVP Award since the team moved to Atlanta in 1966. [Hank Aaron](#) (1957) and [Bob Elliott](#) (1947) are the franchise's other winners.



Bob Elliott Stats, Fantasy & News

Bob Elliott Stats, Fantasy & News

Astros manager Dusty Baker became the first manager ever to lead five different organizations to the postseason.

Cy Young Free Agents

Trevor Bauer, the 2020 National League Cy Young Award winner, is a free agent, and just added a very notable honor to his résumé.

Bauer had a great season, posting the second-lowest ERA in the Majors and lowest in the NL, at 1.73. His contract-year performance was already on the way to netting him a notable deal on the free-agent market. But his situation of being a free agent who won a Cy Young Award is pretty unique.

He's the eighth pitcher to be a free agent in the offseason immediately following a Cy Young Award win. Of the prior seven, only three changed teams, with the other four all re-signing with the team they had won the award with.

And in addition to the three Cy Young Award-winning free agents to change teams, there have also been four pitchers (David Cone, Pedro Martinez, Roger Clemens, R.A. Dickey) to be traded in the offseason following a Cy Young Award-winning season. That means the total number of pitchers to change teams the offseason after winning is seven, which could be worth noting if Bauer does not re-sign with the Reds.

Here's a look at the seven previous Cy Young winners to be free agents in the offseason after winning the award, in reverse chronological order by the year in which they won the award, and where they ended up signing.

2004: Roger Clemens, Astros

Re-signed with HOU

Clemens was in his age-41 season when he won the seventh and final Cy Young Award of his career. The Texas-raised hurler had signed as a free agent on a one-year deal with the Astros entering 2004, following a five-year tenure with the Yankees and an initial retirement

announcement after 2003. He had a 2.98 ERA and 212 strikeouts in '04, beating Randy Johnson and teammate Roy Oswalt for the award.

He became a free agent after the season, and at the time of the award announcement, had not formally stated whether he planned to pitch in 2005 or not. As the offseason progressed, he made it known he did want to pitch, and returned to the Astros on a one-year, \$18 million deal. At the time, it was the largest total value for any one-year contract in history.

1996: John Smoltz, Braves

Re-signed with ATL

Smoltz won his first and only Cy Young Award in 1996, in a year where he had a 2.94 ERA in 253 2/3 innings. He led the Majors with 276 strikeouts and received all but two of the 28 available first-place votes for NL Cy Young, beating out Kevin Brown. At 29 years old, Smoltz was set to be a free agent for the first time following the season.

He re-signed with the Braves relatively quickly, inking a new contract in late November. At four years and \$31 million, it was, at the time, the largest contract for a pitcher in baseball history by both total value and average annual value. It was superseded by another Braves pitcher a few months later, when the team gave Tom Glavine a four-year, \$34 million extension.

1992: Greg Maddux, Cubs

Signed with ATL

Speaking of that vaunted Braves rotation, Maddux joined it following his first Cy Young Award. In 1992 he had a 2.18 ERA in a Major League-leading 268 innings for the Cubs as a 26-year-old with free agency on the immediate horizon. Maddux received a \$34 million offer from the Yankees, but signed with the Braves -- on the heels of back-to-back World Series appearances -- instead, for \$28 million. That total value still set the record for the largest pitcher contract at the time.

Maddux's 1992 award was his first of four straight, which established a record matched only once since, by Randy Johnson. He's also the only pitcher to win two consecutive Cy Young Awards with two different teams.

1990: Bob Welch, A's

Re-signed with OAK

As a 33-year-old in 1990, Welch had a 2.95 ERA, 127 strikeouts and 27 wins in 35 starts. He won the AL Cy Young, receiving 15 of 28 first-place votes, ahead of Roger Clemens -- who had a 1.93 ERA and 209 strikeouts.

In December, Welch re-signed with the A's for four years and \$13 million. He made 35 starts again in 1991, but never posted an ERA below 3.25 again, finishing his career after 1994 in Oakland.

1989: Mark Davis, Padres

Signed with KC

Davis, who began his career primarily as a starter, made 70 appearances in 1989, all in relief. It was his second season pitching exclusively out of the bullpen. In '89, he recorded 44 saves and had a 1.85 ERA. He received 19 of 24 first-place votes for the award, beating out second and third place finishers Mike Scott and Greg Maddux.

In December, Davis signed with the Royals, netting a four-year, \$13 million contract. Davis joined none other than fellow 1989 Cy Young Award winner Bret Saberhagen on the Royals' staff, marking the first time a team entered a season with both reigning winners from the previous season.

1984: Rick Sutcliffe, Cubs

Re-signed with CHC

Sutcliffe became the first -- and to this point only -- pitcher to win a Cy Young Award after an in-season trade after he joined the Cubs on June 13 from the Indians. After posting a 5.15 ERA in 15 starts with the Indians, he went on a strong run in Chicago, with a 2.69 ERA in 20 starts for the Cubs, going 16-1. He won the NL award unanimously, then headed into free agency.

In December, Sutcliffe chose to re-sign with the Cubs, after receiving offers from the Padres, among other teams. He got a five-year, \$9.5 million deal, which was -- this may sound familiar -- the largest by total value for a pitcher at the time.

1974: Catfish Hunter, A's

Signed with NYY

Hunter threw 318 1/3 innings in 1974, posting an AL-leading 2.49 ERA and a Major League-leading 0.99 WHIP. He beat out Fergie Jenkins for the award, receiving 12 of 24 first-place votes. Hunter became a free agent following the season, but not in the way we are used to. And unlike the others listed above, he did not play the season "heading into free agency" the way we would recognize now.

In November 1974, he claimed that his contract had been violated, telling A's ownership that he hadn't been paid part of his contract, which was meant to go into an insurance annuity. The case went to an arbitrator, who ruled that the contract had indeed been violated. That made him a free agent, the first big-time name to hit the open market in this way in the modern era after Curt Flood's Supreme Court case.

Hunter signed a five-year deal with the Yankees worth more than \$3 million, the first multi-million dollar contract in total value in history.

Mattingly and Baker Deserve Second HOF Look

I've commented several times about how good a baseball columnist Joel Sherman of the NY Post is. Thanks to one subscriber who sent this one along. I have argued "total contributions to baseball as HOF criteria—for example Jim Kaat. This Sherman column adds to the argument.

Don Mattingly's baseball life was elevated last week when he won the National League Manager of the Year award to join Don Baylor, Kirk Gibson, Frank Robinson and Joe Torre as the only men to win both Manager of the Year and MVP awards.

"Baseball life" was purposefully used, because for the last quarter of a century I have recommended that the various committees that judge candidates after they leave the standard Hall of Fame ballot should be thinking of the whole baseball life. The standard group that votes (of which I am a member) are charged with judging just a playing career and, anyway, often lack the information that will come post career and in a full baseball life.

I wrote about this first in 1996, suggesting that if Joe Torre's Yankees were to win the World Series that year (which they did) that when he passed in front of the then-Veterans Committee, they should take his cumulative career into account. Torre was a borderline Hall of Fame player who by 1996 was in the 14th of the then maximum 15 years on the regular ballot, and it was obvious that he was never getting the votes to enter that way.

To me, this is why Gil Hodges is such a no-brainer Hall of Famer. His stats are similar to Torre's as a player, plus as manager of the 1969 Mets Hodges steered one of the most improbable, iconoclastic champions of all time. His full "baseball life" deserves recognition in Cooperstown.

This is how Mattingly, who fell off the regular ballot in 2015, and Dusty Baker, who was only on the regular ballot one year in 1992, can gain a second look. In 2020, they both improved their full résumés — their baseball lives.

Maybe both need a championship as a manager to get to Cooperstown. Torre ultimately won four and was selected. The expectation is that Bruce Bochy, who won three with the Giants, will almost certainly get in, though you may note his career .497 winning percentage is the same as that of Mattingly.

The Today's Game Era Committee (an offspring of the Veterans Committee) is, among other things, charged with looking at "the overall contribution to the game" of candidates, though it still considers an individual in "the role in which they were most prominent." Again, to me, toss that out and just consider the full baseball life regardless of prominence.

I hate to bring up Harold Baines, because he is often criticized for being in the Hall of Fame, and it is not like he was campaigning and — regardless of where you stand on his enshrinement — he was a terrific player. But the 16-member Today's Game Era Committee elected Baines in December 2018, likely with strong backroom maneuvering by committee members and former White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf and manager Tony La Russa (whatever happened to those kids?).

But Baines had been through the regular Hall voting that judged him as a player and never received more than 6.1 percent of the vote (75 percent is needed for election). And he had not done anything post-career to change his narrative. These committees should be the safety net of perspective for those whose baseball lives keep becoming more impressive. How is the totality of Baines' baseball life, for example, greater than that of Hodges?

Whose baseball life would you rather have — Mattingly's or Baines'?

Baines was probably never one of the 10 best players in any season of his career. Mattingly was arguably the best player in the majors for about three years as a Yankee. His career totals, even with back issues that shortened his prime, stand with those of Torre. As a manager, he won three division titles with the Dodgers and just led the Marlins to their first postseason berth since 2003 and a first-round win over the Cubs. Again, it is going to take more, but Mattingly's Hall candidacy for a baseball life is better now than even two months ago.

As for Baker, it is forgotten to time just how good a player he was. Baker won a Gold Glove, finished fourth and seventh for an MVP (Baines' highest finish, as an example, was ninth) and went to two All-Star Games. His 116 OPS-plus is the same as Hall of Famers Roberto Alomar and Barry Larkin.

Baker was a similar, but better, player than Lou Piniella, and their managing careers have much in common, too — success in multiple places. Piniella managed 23 years with five teams going 1,835-1,713, winning six division titles, making the playoffs seven times, winning the pennant and World Series once. Baker has managed 23 years with five teams going 1,892-1,667, winning seven division titles, 10 playoff appearances and one pennant, but not that elusive title.

Piniella, in the committee process that led to Baines' election, finished one vote shy of his own induction and probably be up for a vote again in December 2022. So when Baker is done managing, perhaps he will have that shot. Obviously, a title would improve the chances. But the full baseball life of Baker (15th all-time in manager wins) stands with that of Piniella (16th all-time in manager wins).

And Baker's candidacy — like Mattingly's — only improved in 2020. Yes, there were expanded playoffs and the Astros were under .500. Still, Baker became the first manager ever to lead five different organizations to the postseason. After so much playoff heartache, Baker guided the Astros through two rounds and nearly came all the way back from a three-games-to-none deficit in the ALCS before losing in Game 7 to the Rays.

But it went beyond that. Baker's temperament and status in the game helped the Astros navigate through the season after it was revealed that they stole signs illegally in 2017-18.

The team obviously was helped by the absence of hostile crowds in the pandemic season, but by Baker, too. Though the Astros are hated, Baker might just be the most beloved figure in the game. He owns a mystic place in the sport now at 71 as sage and storyteller, as mentor and father figure, as eclectic and cool.

The scope of his half-century-plus career includes being on deck when Hank Aaron hit No. 715, managing Barry Bonds when he hit No. 71 and being a wise voice within a 60-game season.

It is not done — Baker is still managing the Astros — but it has been one extraordinary baseball life.

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

Took last week off for my 6,000 mile drive through 24 states. Quarantine here in NC, binge re-watching Ken Burns' Baseball. If you haven't seen it, I implore you, watch the whole thing. Baseball history through 1994—it is awesome. It brings me joy every time I watch it.

Last pitcher to start 40 games in a season -- Charlie Hough (40 starts for the Rangers in 1987)

Only two pitchers to yield home runs to both Hank Aaron and Barry Bonds--Rick Reuschel and Frank Tanana

Only switch-hitters to win multiple batting titles--Pete Rose (1968, '69, '73) and Willie McGee (1985, '90)

Yadier Molina has 15 seasons with 100 or more games at catcher for the Cardinals. Hall of Famer Ted Simmons (10 seasons with 100 or more games) is the only other player with 10 such seasons for St. Louis.

I didn't know that the only Padre besides Tony Gwynn to win an NL batting title is Gary Sheffield (.330 in 1992).

Bob Gibson 7-2 in World Series with 8 complete games. Made \$85K in 1968.

Longest hitting streaks since 1945

Pete Rose, Cincinnati Reds: 44 games, 1978.

Paul Molitor, Milwaukee Brewers (AL): 39 games, 1987.

Jimmy Rollins, Philadelphia Phillies: 38 games, 2005-06.

Luis Castillo, Florida Marlins: 35 games, 2002

Chase Utley, Philadelphia Phillies: 35 games, 2006.

Benito Santiago, San Diego Padres: 34 games, 1987.

Dan Uggla, Atlanta Braves: 33 games, 2011.

Hal Morris, Cincinnati Reds: 32 games, 1996-97.

Vada Pinson: Cincinnati Reds: 31 games, 1965-66.

Willie Davis, Los Angeles Dodgers: 31 games, 1969.

Rico Carty, Atlanta Braves: 31 games, 1970.

Ron LeFlore, Chicago White Sox: 31 games, 1975-76.

Ken Landreaux, Minnesota Twins: 31 games, 1980.

Vladimir Guerrero, Montreal Expos: 31 games, 1999.

[Whit Merrifield](#), Kansas City Royals: 31 games, Sept. 10, 2018-19.

Stan Musial, St. Louis Cardinals: 30 games, 1950.

George Brett, Kansas City Royals: 30 games, 1980.

Jerome Walton, Chicago Cubs: 30 games, 1989.

Sandy Alomar Jr., Cleveland Indians: 30 games, 1997.

Nomar Garciaparra, Boston Red Sox: 30 games, 1997.

Eric Davis, Baltimore Orioles: 30 games, 1998.

Luis Gonzalez, Arizona Diamondbacks: 30 games, 1999.

Albert Pujols, St. Louis Cardinals: 30 games, 2003.
Willy Taveras, Houston Astros (NL): 30 games, 2006.
Moises Alou, New York Mets: 30 games, 2007.
Ryan Zimmerman, Washington Nationals: 30 games, 2009.
Andre Ethier, Los Angeles Dodgers, 30 games, 2011.
Freddie Freeman, Atlanta Braves, 30 games, 2016.

In 1962 Whitey Ford broke Babe Ruth's record with 29 2/3 scoreless World Series innings pitched, a record Ruth had held for 43 years.

Sandy Koufax pitched a no hitter every year for 1962 to 1965.

Marvelous Marv Throneberry for the 1962 Mets hit a triple only to be called out for missing 2B. When he protested the umpire said "I hate to tell you but you also missed 1B". 40 wins-120 losses.

When the Astrodome opened Tug McGraw was asked how he felt about artificial grass. McGraw replied "I don't know, I never smoked artificial grass".

Hall of Fame Season

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You know I love the Hall and debating who should be in and out. And in the coming weeks this newsletter will feature some cool stuff on the Hall of Fame.

Roger Maris and Dale Murphy—back to back MVP's, neither in the hall of fame.

Sandy Koufax retired in 1966. That season he won 27 games with 11 shutouts and an era of 1.73. He became the youngest person to enter the HOF.

Non-player HOF inductees include Abbott and Costello "Who's on First". Do yourself a favor and watch it again on you tube—it will brighten your day.

329 members of the HOF

232 are players

57 made it on their first ballot:

Derek Jeter

Mariano Rivera

Roy Halladay

Chipper Jones

Jim Thome

Ivan Rodriguez

Ken Griffey Jr.

Randy Johnson

Pedro Martinez

John Smoltz

Greg Maddux

Tom Glavine

Frank Thomas

Rickey Henderson

Tony Gwynn

Cal Ripken Jr.

Wade Boggs

Dennis Eckersley

Paul Molitor

Eddie Murray

Ozzie Smith

Kirby Puckett

Dave Winfield

Before 2000

George Brett

Nolan Ryan

Robin Yount

Mike Schmidt

Steve Carlton

Reggie Jackson

Tom Seaver

Rod Carew

Jim Palmer

Joe Morgan

Johnny Bench

Carl Yastrzemski

Willie Stargell

Willie McCovey

Lou Brock

Brooks Robinson

Hank Aaron

Frank Robinson

Bob Gibson

Al Kaline

Willie Mays

Ernie Banks

Mickey Mantle

Warren Spahn

Sandy Koufax

Stan Musial

Ted Williams

Bob Feller

Jackie Robinson

Ty Cobb

Walter Johnson

Christy Mathewson

Babe Ruth

Honus Wagner

Lou Gehrig and Roberto Clemente were elected prior to their first year of eligibility.

These seven were elected in their last year of eligibility:

Larry Walker, 2020

Edgar Martinez, 2019

Tim Lincecum, 2017

Jim Rice, 2009

Ralph Kiner, 1975

Joe Medwick, 1968

Red Ruffing, 1967

I enjoyed this exercise from MLB.com. Best players from each team not in the Hall of Fame—how many do you agree with? How many do you think should be in?

Blue Jays: Dave Stieb#, RHP

Key fact: Blue Jays' all-time leader in wins (175), starts (408) and innings (2,873)

Orioles: Rafael Palmeiro#, 1B

Key fact: He is one of six Major Leaguers with at least 3,000 career hits and 500 home runs

Rays: Fred McGriff#, 1B

Key fact: He was a five-time All-Star, three-time Silver Slugger Award winner and a World Series champion who finished his career with 2,490 hits and 493 home runs

Red Sox: David Ortiz*, DH

Key fact: One of four players all-time with 500 homers and 600 doubles

Yankees: Alex Rodriguez*, SS/3B

Key fact: 696 career home runs (fourth all-time)

Indians: Kenny Lofton#, OF

Key fact: One of seven players all-time with 600 steals and 100 homers

Royals: Frank White#, 2B

Key facts: Five All-Star Games, eight Gold Glove Awards

Tigers: Lou Whitaker#, 2B

Key facts: 1978 AL Rookie of the Year Award winner, five All-Star selections, three Gold Glove Awards, four Silver Slugger Awards

Twins: Joe Mauer*, C/1B

Key fact: Will become eligible on 2024 ballot

White Sox: Minnie Minoso#, OF

Key fact: Played 17 seasons across five decades

Angels: Bobby Grich#, 2B

Key fact: He was a six-time All-Star, four-time Gold Glove winner and one-time Silver Slugger

Astros: Lance Berkman#, OF/1B

Key fact: His 52 bWAR is first among switch-hitters with fewer than 1,900 games played

Athletics: Mark McGwire#, 1B

Key fact: 583 career home runs (11th all-time)

Mariners: Alex Rodriguez*, SS/3B

Key fact: 696 career home runs (fourth all-time)

Rangers: Adrián Beltré*, 3B

Key fact: One of seven players all-time with 450 homers and 600 doubles

Braves: Dale Murphy#, OF

Key facts: Two-time NL MVP Award winner (1982 and '83), seven-time All-Star, four-time Silver Slugger, five-time Gold Glove winner

Marlins: Gary Sheffield^, OF

Key fact: Hit 509 career home runs, including 42-homer season with Marlins in 1996

Mets: Keith Hernandez#, 1B

Key fact: 11-time Gold Glove Award winner

Nationals: Jeff Reardon#, RHP

Key fact: 367 career saves (10th in MLB history)

Phillies: Dick Allen#, 1B

Key fact: He earned the 1964 NL Rookie of the Year Award, 1972 AL MVP Award and seven All-Star selections

Brewers: Cecil Cooper#, 1B

Key fact: 30.8 bWAR is fourth in club history behind Robin Yount, Paul Molitor and Ryan Braun

Cardinals: Scott Rolen^, 3B

Key fact: His career bWAR of 70.1 is ninth-best among third basemen all-time

Cubs: Sammy Sosa^, OF

Key fact: Only player in MLB history to hit 60-plus homers in three seasons

Pirates: Barry Bonds^, OF

Key fact: 762 career home runs (most in MLB history)

Reds: Pete Rose#, OF/1B

Key fact: All-time leader in hits (4,256), games played (3,562) and at-bats (14,053)

D-backs: Curt Schilling^, RHP

Key fact: 2.23 ERA in 19 career postseason starts, including 2.06 in seven World Series outings (split 2001 World Series MVP Award with Randy Johnson)

Dodgers: Adrián Beltré*, 3B

Key fact: One of seven players all-time with 450 homers and 600 doubles

Giants: Barry Bonds^, OF

Key fact: 762 career home runs (most in MLB history)

Padres: Gary Sheffield^, OF

Key fact: He racked up 509 homers and 60.5 WAR over 22 seasons

Rockies: Todd Helton^, 1B

Key fact: One of eight players all-time with at least 350 homers and a .315 batting average

More HOF Debate

With the release of the [2021 Hall of Fame ballot](#) earlier this month, our thoughts turned to the institution of the Hall itself, and particularly this question: Are enough players being inducted? Or too many? *What is the right number of players to have in the Hall, anyway?*

There isn't a correct answer to that, of course. Maybe you're a "Big Hall" person, or maybe you like it to be far more selective. Either approach is fine, but without knowing the historic trends of what share of active players at a given time end up getting in, we're sort of shooting in the dark. If we look back through history, we can see if more recent players are getting in at a higher or lower rate -- which might help us answer whether more or fewer players should be inducted.

There are a few ways to look at this, but to start, we'll take a study that Dave Cameron (then writing for FanGraphs, now [special assistant to the GM for the Padres](#)) [wrote back in 2013](#) and updated it seven years later. What Cameron did was to look at Hall of Famers split into decades by birth year, pointing out that, at the time, only two players born after 1960 had been inducted (Roberto Alomar and Barry Larkin). While the [definition of a decade is somewhat arbitrary](#), for consistency's sake, we'll stick with doing it in the "1961-70" fashion, not "1960-69."

We'll update that with seven more years, fix what appears to be a minor mathematical issue with the 2013 study, and we'll come up with this:

Looking at it like this, 1.5% of all players who have ever played -- that's 1.8% of hitters and 1.1% of pitchers -- have entered the Hall of Fame. If you think eternal enshrinement should be reserved for the absolute best of the best, then maybe the top 1 percent or so sounds right. It's certainly an easy number to define as "the cream of the crop," anyway.

You'll also notice a slight downward trend. We'll get back to that.

Comparing this to when Cameron did his work in 2013, we've since seen an additional 15 Hall of Famers who were born between 1961-70, and six more, to date, from 1971-80. That's partially due to the passage of time -- Mariano Rivera, born in 1969 and [inducted unanimously in 2019](#), had only just completed his final season in '13 -- and partially because the writers have alleviated a logjam that came to a head when zero players were inducted in '13. ([Thirteen have gone in over the last four years](#).) It remains possible that the 1960s get another bump this year if Omar Vizquel (born '67) and Curt Schilling (born '66) -- who appear to be the two most likely candidates this year -- are inducted.

That aside, we've set a baseline: **1.5% of all players get into Cooperstown**. But let's try this another way, because maybe just looking at the share of Hall of Famers out of "all players" gets

skewed over time, as the sheer number of players (mostly pitchers) keeps on skyrocketing, while their share of playing time decreases. (To cherry pick but one example, the [1961 Yankees](#), in the first year of the 162-game schedule, used 36 players ... while the [2019 Yankees](#) used 54.)

Instead, let's try to look at Hall of Famers out of "regular" players, which we'll somewhat arbitrarily define as hitters who received 1,000 career plate appearances and pitchers who threw at least 500 innings. You might prefer to set those numbers higher, but mostly we're trying to exclude the cup-of-coffee guys, and these numbers are about two full seasons of hitting and two to three full seasons of starting pitching or six to seven of relieving. More important, the number of players who reached those thresholds is about one-third of all players who ever appeared, which gives us a nice clean line of "semi-regular, successful ballplayers."

That sets the number a little higher, so instead of saying "1.5% of all players make it to Cooperstown," you could also say "4.3% of all regular players make it there," again, assuming you're using our definition of "regular."

The shape is consistent, as both views have a bump in the players who were born from 1931-40, the "Golden Age" stars of the 1950s and '60s. You might like to think that's because the era of Mantle, Mays, and Koufax simply had that many great players; it might also be because that particular era of baseball, through media, myth and legend, seems to have taken on an outsize importance. (It is probably during the youth of a great deal of today's voting sportswriters.)

But more important than the shape, there is the downward slope, which is offering an unavoidable truth -- it's become more difficult than ever to get into Cooperstown, and that's not likely to change in the near future.

Take, for example, the six players we noted who were born in the 1970s who have made it into the Hall so far -- Pedro Martínez, Iván Rodríguez, Chipper Jones, Derek Jeter, Vladimir Guerrero and Roy Halladay. That's a mere 0.9% of regular players, and just 0.3% of all players from that decade.

Now, the story of that decade hasn't been fully written yet. These additional four have strong-to-no-question odds of joining them, and remember that 1980 births are included in our 1971-80 decade:

- **Ichiro Suzuki** (born in 1973, eligible following the 2024 season)
- **Albert Pujols** (born Jan. 16, 1980, still active)
- **Adrián Beltré** (born in 1979, eligible after 2023)
- **CC Sabathia** (born in 1980, eligible after 2023)

Perhaps they'll be joined by Todd Helton (born 1973) or David Ortiz ('75) or Álex Rodríguez ('75) or Andruw Jones ('77) or Carlos Beltrán ('77) or Chase Utley ('78), but also, perhaps not. If they're not, if it's just these four, then we'll end up with just 10 Hall of Famers born in the '70s.

It would be by far the fewest from any decade in the 20th century, and, it would mean that in order to get up to historic averages, the Hall would be something like *18 players short* from the decade.

Let's find another way to look at this. Rather than decades and careers, let's look at the percentage of innings pitched by future Hall of Famers in a season ...

... and the same thing again, this time from the hitting side, showing percentage of plate appearances taken by future Hall of Famers.

You should have two takeaways from these:

1) The lowest points in the first nine decades or so of the 21st century came during the two World Wars, understandably so. Bob Feller, for example, missed all of 1942-44 in America's service, while Ted Williams missed all of 1943-45. [Dozens of Hall of Famers missed the primes of their careers serving](#), plus several more (including Williams again) in the Korean War. The talent level had a meaningful drop.

2) The last three decades have consistently had the lowest Hall of Famers-per-year numbers in history outside of those wars, and it's not just because not all of those players are eligible yet.

Taken all together, it does appear we're being too stringent with the recent decades. We're not hitting the "1.5% of all players" or "4.3% of regular players" thresholds, and the only times in history we've seen such a low percentage of Hall of Famers was literally *during two world wars*.

So: Where are the missing players, the extra few dozen we should have seen who were born since 1960? We can give you three theories as to what's going on here.

PEDs, or suspicions thereof. This is unavoidable, obviously. Barry Bonds (born 1964), Roger Clemens (born '62), and Manny Ramírez (born '72) [would all have been inducted on the first ballot](#) if not for the questions surrounding PEDs, and we'll soon have another round of this discussion when Rodríguez (born '75) is eligible one year from now. It's safe to say that this is a much more complicated conversation than we can satisfy here, other than to point out we'll never, ever have a full list of who was using what, and that we know for sure that some already-inducted stars -- even some from the "Golden Age" -- were using some helpers, too.

The 10-player limit. Voters are limited to choosing only 10 names at most on their ballot, which in recent years simply hasn't been enough. There have been several ballots in recent years in which 16 or 17 names were worthy of consideration, and it's likely that some of the slam-dunk candidates at the top lost some support so that voters could select someone who needed the vote more urgently. This has never really made sense; anyone who makes the ballot in the first place has had a great career, and deserves the respect of a yes/no vote, not one that depends on who else happens to be eligible at the time. This may have prevented some good first-year

candidates, who were perhaps the 11th-best players on that ballot, from getting serious consideration or possible induction.

A perfect example of this phenomenon is Johan Santana, arguably the best pitcher in baseball over a five-year stretch that included two Cy Young Awards and three top-five finishes. He had the misfortune of appearing on the ballot for the first time in 2018, when four players were inducted (Guerrero, Jones, Jim Thome and Trevor Hoffman) and five others got at least 50% of the votes. Santana got only 2.4% of the vote -- below the 5% threshold to stay on the ballot -- and was one and done, as they say, despite the fact that he was legitimately one of the best pitchers of his era. Of course that brings us to our next point ...

No one knows what to do with starting pitchers anymore. Thanks to the way the game has changed, the counting stats compiled by today's greatest starters will never, ever match up to their historic ancestors. To pick but one example: Clayton Kershaw, who should be a no-doubter inductee when he becomes eligible, has 25 complete games and 15 shutouts over his career. Bob Gibson, inducted in 1981, had 28 complete games and 13 shutouts ... *in 1968 alone.*

With the long-magical 300-win barrier no longer in play, what we've seen is that starting pitchers have generally been ignored. Or, to put that another way, *only two pitchers born in the past 50 years [have been inducted](#)*, and one, Pedro Martínez, has a credible claim to make toward being the best pitcher of all time. (The other, Halladay, made it in on the first ballot, sadly after his passing in a 2017 plane crash.) Schilling, this year, and Sabathia, soon, seem possible to join them.

This part will change eventually, because it has to. [Kershaw's guaranteed to get in](#), and Justin Verlander, Max Scherzer and possibly Zack Greinke have strong chances to join him. Voters are just going to have to get used to not comparing wins or innings totals to pitchers of years past.

But we leave you with this, which might tell the entire story. There are 235 players in the Hall of Fame, currently, with birth dates ranging from 1847 (Deacon White) to 1977 (Halladay). Of those 235, just 55 were born since the end of World War II in 1945. *One hundred and eighty seven*, or slightly more than 76% of all Hall of Famers, were born before that (thanks, in part, we admit, to [some long-ago cronyism](#) on the Veterans Committee).

Meanwhile, there have been [221,495](#) games in Major League history. A little more than 65% of those games have taken place since the end of 1945. It seems to us that the writers have held a standard in recent decades that's maybe just a bit too high.

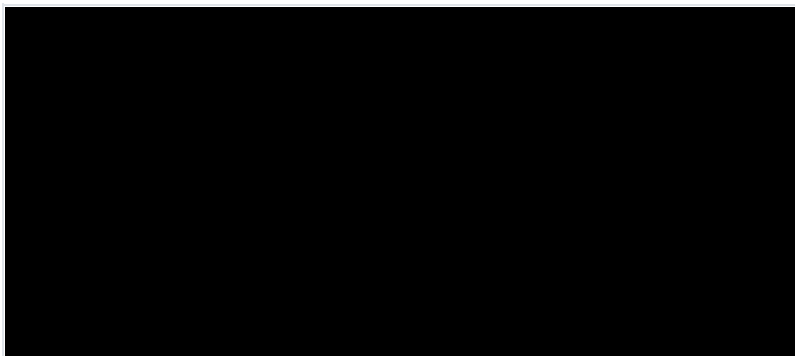
One of the best things about this newsletter is input and feedback from the fans who receive it. Thoughtful note of the week. I'm not sure Buehrle should be in the HOF but worth a read.

I assume you saw the NYT article on the new HOF ballot:

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/16/sports/baseball/hall-of-fame-finalists.html>).

I loved Buehrle. The article doesn't mention that he also won 3 gold gloves and could be counted on to finish nearly all of his games in under 3 hours regardless of who he pitched against; he even finished some games under 2 hours on get-away days (I wonder if any of the 7-inning doubleheader games this year finished in that short a time.). In 2005, he pitched the fastest 9-inning game since 1984 in 99 minutes--that's slightly less than half the average game time this year. A 538 article identified Buehrle as the fastest worker between pitches since they started keeping stats. Based on a quick look, games he started over his career had a running time of between 8 and 10 minutes less than the MLB average. The 538 article from 2014 (the year before he retired) has lots of other stats about average game times for his teams--not just the ones he pitched, but all of their games, even after he leaves--showing how they played at a faster pace overall (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/mark-buehrle-is-a-one-man-baseball-game-accelerator/#:~:text=Over%20nearly%201%2C300%20innings%2C%20he's,amounts%20of%20time%20from%20games.>).

According to a blog post on fangraphs (also from 2014, [Game Pace and the Mark Buehrle Effect](#)) Buehrle's average time between pitches was 5 seconds faster than the average for starters that year (17.3 vs 22.3) and 5.7 seconds faster than all pitchers. Here's what that post had to say about Buehrle against the slowest hitters in MLB and what the effect was:



Game Pace and the Mark Buehrle Effect

Daily baseball statistical analysis and commentary

"From 2014, I examined all of Buehrle's matchups against hitters with Pace marks of 25+ seconds. Together these hitters have an average Pace of 25.7 seconds, 12% slower than average. Between those guys and Buehrle, I was able to make 105 Pace readings. The average: 21.5 seconds. In other words, against the slowest hitters in baseball, Mark Buehrle had to be a little patient, but he still managed to get the guys to work quicker than the average bat against the average arm. Buehrle responded to the hitters' collective behavior, but the hitters also responded to Buehrle's haste."

And against the fastest hitters...

"These hitters averaged a Pace of 20.7 seconds, five seconds quicker than the slow group. Between those guys and Buehrle, I came away with 68 Pace readings. The average: 14.9 seconds."

Why couldn't they clone this dude and save baseball from the Yu Darvishes of the world (29.4 seconds between pitches)? According to fangraphs not a single pitcher was quicker than 21.3 seconds between pitches in 2019/2020 (that was the Reds' Luis Castillo).

Ray Miller, who had more than a little success as the pitching coach for the Orioles always said, "Work fast, throw strikes, change speeds." That describes Buehrle. Is it worth a plaque just for that.