

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

10.2.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

I managed to dodge most of hurricane Ian on run to NC—house cleaned out and I made my hotel in NJ driving north to see last few innings of Braves win over Mets. (bet the Dodgers miss **Kelly Jansen**—he was throwing smoke closing out the Metropolitans and pushing the Braves into first place in the NL east).

As I head back to my rented truck grab yourself a coffee and enjoy **Aaron Judge**, Posnanski on big offense seasons, Peter Abraham on free agent hits and misses, and of course, trivia.

### **THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE**

Most of you could probably name the top career saves leaders—**Mariano Rivera** (652), **Trevor Hoffman** (601), and **Lee Smith** (478).

If pressed I bet you could name a bunch in the top 25—**John Franco** (5<sup>th</sup> with 424), **Billy Wagner** (6<sup>th</sup> with 422), **Rollie Fingers** (15<sup>th</sup> with 341), **Aroldis Chapman** (24<sup>th</sup> with 315) come to mind.

You might be surprised that **Rich Gossage** (27<sup>th</sup> with 310), **Bruce Sutter** (30<sup>th</sup> with 300) and **Dan Quisenberry** (39<sup>th</sup> with 244) didn't crack the top 25.

Your question this morning—since the save rule envisioned by sports writer Jerome Holtzman in 1959 and adopted as an official stat by MLB in 1969, 5 pitchers have had 55 or more saves in a single season. Can you name them?

Hint 1—none of the 11 pitchers named above

Hint 2 – the years were 1990 (AL), 2002 (NL), 2003 (NL), 2006 (AL) and 2018 (AL).

Good luck.

### **MISCELLANEOUS STUFF**

**Cal Raleigh** hit a game-winning home run with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning and the Mariners clinched a wild-card berth in the American League with a 2-1 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Friday night.

Raleigh, pinch-hitting for **Luis Torrens**, hit a 3-2 pitch from **Domingo Acevedo** (3-4) just inside the right-field foul pole for a solo homer that sent the Mariners to the postseason for the first time since 2001.

How 'bout those Seattle Mariners? Seattle made the playoffs 4 times 1995-2001, then zip. Every team in Major League Baseball, the N.F.L., the N.H.L. and the N.B.A., with the exception of the Seattle Kraken who joined the N.H.L. last year, has reached the postseason since the Mariners last qualified in 2001. The New England Patriots won all six of their Super Bowl titles. The Stanley Cup visited Raleigh, N.C.; Anaheim, Calif.; and Tampa, Fla. Even the Sacramento Kings played for a conference championship.

The baseball gods, too, went soft. Four teams won their first-ever championship since the Mariners' last playoff game, and three others — the Chicago Cubs, the Chicago White Sox and the Boston Red Sox — snapped streaks of futility stretching more than eight decades. Yet the Mariners wait.

The Mariners remain the only franchise in baseball to never reach the World Series. Eliminated on the final day of last season, the Mariners have since added the rookie **Julio Rodríguez**; four former All-Star position players (**Eugenio Suárez**, **Jesse Winker**, **Adam Frazier** and **Carlos Santana**); and three power pitchers to the rotation (Luis Castillo, who signed a five-year contract extension last week, **Robbie Ray** and the rookie **George Kirby**).

It indeed had been a long wait — the last time the Mariners advanced to the postseason, the team was led by rookie **Ichiro Suzuki** and **Edgar Martinez** and managed by **Lou Piniella**.

The last time the Mariners reached the postseason they tied a major league record by winning 116 games in the regular season, but lost to the Yankees, 3-1, in the AL Championship Series.

If you're scoring at home, there were 47,057 regular-season games played from the start of 2002 through the 2021 season, including 3,138 Mariners contests. And Seattle missed out on participating in any of the 702 playoff games in that stretch.

Within baseball, the Philadelphia Phillies become the longest suffering team, having last qualified for the playoffs in 2011. They are in playoff position, however, sitting a half-game ahead of Milwaukee for the last of three wild-card spots in the National League. Should they make the playoffs this year, the longest runs would fall to the Los Angeles Angels and Detroit Tigers, each of whom last played in the postseason in 2014.

The Rays (86-71) began the day in the third and final American League wild-card spot, trailing Toronto and Seattle. Tampa Bay, in search of its first World Series win, extended the longest postseason streak in franchise history and earned a playoff spot for the eighth time, all since 2008.

Despite the loss, Houston (102-55) clinched home-field advantage throughout the AL playoffs. The New York Yankees lost earlier in the day, ensuring the Astros will host any AL series — only the Los Angeles Dodgers have a better record than Houston.

**Austin Riley** and **Matt Olson** hit back-to-back homers off **Jacob deGrom** in the second inning and Dansby Swanson later connected off the Mets ace as the Atlanta Braves beat New York 5-2 Friday night to move into a tie for the NL East lead.

Riley and Olson became the first players to hit back-to-back homers off deGrom (5-4) since **Freddie Freeman** and **Josh Donaldson** did it for the Braves on June 18, 2019.

**J.T. Realmuto** stole his 19th, 20th and 21st bases of the season in the Phillies 5-1 victory' over the Nationals on Friday at Nationals Park. Realmuto became just the second catcher in AL/NL history to hit 20 homers and steal 20 bases in a season. **Ivan "Pudge" Rodriguez** is the only other catcher to do it. He hit 35 home runs and stole 25 bases with the 1999 Rangers.

We've not paid a lot of attention to the AL central. Detroit and Kansas City are bad, the Twins. White Sox and Guardians didn't seem to want to assert themselves. Then Cleveland got hot.

Cleveland is now the first team in AL/NL history to win a division or league title while seeing at least 16 rookies make their Major League debuts

The Guardians will be the eighth team to qualify for the playoffs as MLB's youngest team (weighted by plate appearances and batters faced), assuming they remain the youngest when the season concludes, and the first to do so since the Mets in 1986.

The Guardians were 68-64 and tied for first place a little more than three weeks ago. In early September Cleveland had lost 8 of 10. But they then went on an 18-3 tear to pull away and clinch the division. The September surge included 10-2 against the Twins and White Sox.

Interesting Joe Sheehan newsletter objection to the shift ban: At a time when there isn't a lot of variance in baseball strategy, the shift was a true point of differentiation among teams. The Rockies shifted on fewer than 20% of hitters, while the Dodgers, Blue Jays, and Astros shifted on more than half. The conversations about shifting were so much more interesting than just

complaining about how the shift looked, there were real differences of opinion about what the right strategies were. Those conversations can no longer happen, and it's a loss.

Hats off to the Dodgers who at 110-48 clinched home field advantage throughout the playoffs. They became the first team ever to win 106 or more games in three consecutive full seasons (2019, '21).

They lead the NL with a 322 run differential, nearly doubling the defending champion Braves, who are second with a plus-166 run differential.

Last Sunday the Mets **Pete Alonso** went 4-for-5 and drove in five runs to break the Mets' single-season RBI record, passing the previous mark of 124 set by Hall of Famer **Mike Piazza** in 1999 and tied by **David Wright** in 2008.

Alonso found himself one RBI short of tying the franchise record after hitting a two-run bomb to left field in Saturday's 10-4 loss in Oakland. He then went hitless in his final three at-bats, leaving the feat for another day.

As it turns out, Alonso didn't have to wait too long to make history. The 27-year-old first baseman collected RBIs No. 124 and 125 the same way he had collected his previous two: on one swing.

With **Francisco Lindor** on second and two outs in the top of the fourth, Alonso stepped in against A's right-hander **Norge Ruiz**, who had just entered the game in relief of lefty **JP Sears**. The Mets' first baseman worked a 2-2 count, then unleashed on a slider from Ruiz, blasting a two-run homer to deep left-center field to collect the record-setting RBIs. It was Alonso's 39<sup>th</sup> HR of the season. Alonso later added three more RBIs to his season tally for good measure, lining a bases-loaded double off the right-field wall in the top of the eighth.

Alonso's 128 RBIs lead the National League by a considerable margin, as the Cardinals' **Paul Goldschmidt** currently ranks second with 112. He is now tied with **Aaron Judge** for the most in the Majors.

Alonso could become the second player in franchise history to finish the season leading the NL in RBIs. The only Met who has accomplished that feat is two-time All-Star infielder **Howard Johnson**, who recorded 117 RBIs in 1991.

The Angels avoided arbitration with **Shohei Ohtani** on Saturday, as they signed the two-way star to a one-year deal worth \$30 million for the 2023 season. Ohtani, the reigning AL MVP, remains set to be a free agent after next year.

Ohtani, who was honored before the Angels' 3-2 win over the Rangers as the team MVP and the winner of the Nick Adenhart Award for the Halos' best pitcher this season, never went through arbitration with the Angels, as he also signed a two-year deal worth \$8.5 million before the 2021 season. He looked headed toward a record-setting arbitration process this winter, but this agreement avoids that prospect. At \$30 million, the deal sets a record for a player in his third year of arbitration, surpassing the \$27 million **Mookie Betts** received before the 2020 season.

Marlins reliever **Richard Bleier** became the second pitcher this century to commit three balks in a game in Tuesday night's 6-4 Miami win over the Mets.

The lefty Bleier was called for the trio of balks in a single **Pete Alonso** at-bat, allowing **Jeff McNeil** to round the bases for a run. First-base umpire John Tumpane called each of the balks on Bleier for failing to come to a set with his glove before starting his delivery.

Bleier had never previously been called for a balk before in 296 innings over seven big-league seasons.

Marlins manager **Don Mattingly** was ejected after the third balk was called. Bleier finished the inning by retiring Alonso on a groundout before he too was ejected.

**Mike Pelfrey** of the Mets was the last pitcher to be called for three balks in a game, back in May 2009.

**George Springer** of the Blue Jays homered off **James Taillon** of the Yankees Tuesday night for his 52<sup>nd</sup> career lead off HR. He is in 4<sup>th</sup> place all-time, one behind **Craig Biggio** and two behind **Alfonso Soriano**. **Rickey Henderson** holds the all-time record with 81. Those guys hit righthanded. Most career leadoff home runs for a left-handed hitter--**Curtis Granderson** (47)

With four strikeouts on Wednesday at Rogers Centre, **Gerrit Cole** has equaled **Ron Guidry** as the Yankees' single-season strikeout king. Cole leads the Major Leagues with 248 strikeouts.

Guidry's club mark of 248 strikeouts had stood alone since Louisiana Lightning's remarkable 1978 season, in which the left-hander went 25-3 with a 1.74 ERA to bring home the American League's Cy Young Award.

September 29, 1987, **Don Mattingly** hit his sixth grand slam of the season in a 6-0 win over the Red Sox, connecting for the deep drive off Boston's **Bruce Hurst**. Mattingly's six slams in a single season set a Major League record (since tied, in 2006 by **Travis Hafner** of Cleveland).

Only 3 to manage two New York teams in the post-season:

**Buck Showalter** — '22 Mets, '95 Yankees

**Yogi Berra** — '73 Mets, '64 Yanks

**Leo Durocher** — '41 Dodgers '51/'54 Giants

**Kyle Wright** is positioned to become the first Braves pitcher to lead MLB in wins since **Tom Glavine** in 2000. He now stands with Glavine, **Phil Niekro**, **Denny Neagle**, **John Smoltz**, **Greg Maddux** and **Russ Ortiz** as the only Braves pitchers to notch a 20-win season since the team moved to Atlanta in 1966.

The Red Sox had back-to-back home runs 10 times last season and have yet to do it this season (through Friday). The last time they went back-to-back-to-back was July 7, 2011, when **David Ortiz**, **Josh Reddick**, and **Jarrod Saltalamacchia** did it.

**Michael Wacha** of the Red Sox and **Tony Gonsolin** of the Dodgers are the first pitchers with at least 21 starts and one or fewer losses since 1929 when **Connie Rector** of the New York Lincoln Giants was 18-1. He appeared in 26 games, starting 22.

At 42, **Rich Hill** is the second-oldest player in baseball, 54 days younger than **Albert Pujols**.

He has made 25 starts this season and is third on the Sox with 118⅓ innings and has a 4.41 ERA. The American League average for a starter is 4.04.

With one start remaining, Hill has two starts with at least six scoreless innings and nine strikeouts. Only **Nolan Ryan** (10), **Roger Clemens** (6), and **Randy Johnson** (3) have done that past the age of 42.

Minnesota Twins-- this will be their second straight year out of the playoffs and the franchise hasn't won a postseason game since 2004.

The Orioles are the first team since 1900 to win 80 games after losing 110 the previous season. The winning percentage jump from .321 to .513 is the largest since the Diamondbacks went from .401 as an expansion team in 1998 to .617 in '99.

Phillies catcher **J.T. Realmuto** has just under 1,100 innings behind the plate this season and only two passed balls. Only 10 catchers in history have had at least 1,100 innings and two or fewer passed balls. The last was Baltimore's **Matt Wieters** in 2011.

The Braves are the only team in MLB without a sacrifice this season.

**Dusty Baker** joined **Sparky Anderson**, **Whitey Herzog**, and **Tony La Russa** as the only managers with 100-win seasons in both leagues.

**Mike Trout**'s salary has risen from \$414K to \$37 million in 12 years. He has hit 348 HRs. He has 1536 hits, has scored 1049 runs. His career batting average is .302. Trout has stolen 348 bases with a .846 success rate. 294 doubles, 51 triples.

Jogging through stats on [baseballalmanac.com](http://baseballalmanac.com), some mlb leaders:

**Emmanuel Chase** (be honest, how many of you know the guy) has finished 65 games for the Guardians to lead the majors. **Juan Soto** has walked 134 times. **Jon Berti** of the Marlins has 38 stolen bases (where have you gone **Ricky Henderson**?) **Jose Ramirez** of the Guardians has been intentionally walked 20 times. **Carlos Rondon** of the Giants strikes out 11.98 batters per 9 innings.

**Albert Pujols** (6<sup>th</sup> with 13,031) and **Miguel Cabrera** (29<sup>th</sup> with 11,414) are the only active players in the top 197 career plate appearances. **Yadi Molina** is 198 with 8,548. The top five ahead of Pujols are **Pete Rose** 15890, **Yaz** 13,992, **Hank Aaron** 13941, **Ricky Henderson** 13346 and **Ty Cobb** 13103.

I can't remember if **Hector Lopez** or **Elston Howard** was the first person of color on a baseball card I owned. Lopez died this week. A native of Panama, Lopez was one of the first Black players for the Yankees. Appearing in five consecutive World Series.

In the fifth and final game of the 1961 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds, he smashed a home run and a triple and drove in five runs in a 13-5 victory.

Lopez was released by the Yankees after the 1966 season, in which the team finished 10th and last, ending his 12-year playing career with a .269 average and 136 home runs. He played in the minor leagues for a couple of seasons, hoping to return to the majors. But instead, in 1969, he was named manager of the Buffalo Bisons, then the Triple-A affiliate of the Washington Senators (now the Texas Rangers). He was the first black manager at AAA.

It would be six more years before **Frank Robinson** became the first Black manager in the big leagues, with the Cleveland Indians.

Over a 12-year career that began with the Kansas City Athletics in 1955, Lopez played every position on the field except pitcher and catcher, although it could be argued that his versatility wasn't entirely a strength.

From his obit in NYT, playing in an era before the designated hitter, he was known as a solid hitter who was iffy with the glove no matter where he played. He was known as Hector "What a Pair of Hands" Lopez, because of his "exciting duels with ground balls."

In Kansas City, where he was mostly an infielder, he hit 67 home runs but made 116 errors in just over four seasons. After he was acquired by the Yankees, along with pitcher **Ralph Terry**, early in the 1959 season, he played mostly outfield, where he would presumably do less damage, but he did little to dispel his reputation as a poor fielder.

His first year in New York, he made 17 errors in 76 games at third base (and three more in the outfield); however, he hit .283 with 16 homers for the Yanks, and including his time with Kansas City, drove in 93 runs for the 1959 season. His new manager, **Casey Stengel**, described Mr. Lopez, “a man which batted in 93 runs,” as a conundrum: “If I bench him I bench 93 runs, but I would like better fieldin’ outta my 93 runs.”

In eight years as a Yankee, he hit .262, he batted .286 in 15 World Series games.

In 1977 **Rod Carew** hit 14 homeruns and still managed an OPS of 1.019. It doesn’t even seem mathematically possible. In the last 95 years, only one player in baseball has had a 1.000 OPS with fewer than 15 home runs. And that one player is, yes, Rod Carew in 1977.

Before Carew you have to go all the way back to 1927 and Hall of Famer **Harry Heilmann**. Before him, you have to go back to **Tris Speaker and Ty Cobb and Shoeless Joe Jackson**, you know, back in the Deadball days when baseball was very, very different.

How did Carew do it? Well, he may have only had 14 homers but he still slugged .570, thanks in large part to a league-leading 16 triples. He added a league-leading 15 intentional walks.

Put that together with his hitting genius, you have a .449 on-base percentage (led league), that .570 slugging percentage (second only to **Jim Rice**) and he was the only player in the league a 1.000 OPS.

### **BRAVO TO AARON JUDGE**

The 8 days leading up to 61 from WSJ

One-hundred-and-fifty-four pitches came and went across most of eight games, across 34 plate appearances, across 16 different pitchers. He swung at 62 of those pitches. None cleared an outfield fence. Seventy-six, about half, were out of the strike zone or called as such. He faced a 22-year-old rookie (Pittsburgh’s **Roansy Contreras**), a 30-year-old rookie (Boston’s **Kaleb Ort**) and a 42-year-old (Boston’s **Rich Hill**) who was drafted a month after Judge’s 7th birthday. The 17th was left-hander **Tim Lincecum**, who threw the sinker that disappeared over the left-field fence.

In those 34 plate appearances, 16 began with pitches out of the strike zone. Some have charged in. Ten plate appearances began with a fastball for a strike. Judge swung at nine of them.

He leads the AL in walks and is second in pitches seen per plate appearance. In the next two plate appearances, over 34 plate appearances, over 154 pitches and 154 split-second decisions, over 62 swings, 60 remained 60. He missed a few. Resisted a few. Let pitchers hide behind their sliders off the plate. Then it was 61, and if indeed anyone had forgotten, it's hard to hit baseballs, harder to hit home runs

Judge is chasing the first triple crown since Miguel Cabrera 2012, second since Yaz in 67

Judge has hit a HR every 9.13 at bats (12<sup>th</sup> best ever), **Roger Maris** 9.67

Aaron Judge entered play on Thursday with a 1.121 OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging). no Yankees player has completed a regular season with an OPS as high as Judge's since **Mickey Mantle** in 1961 (1.135), a season in which Mantle posted a .317/.448/.687 slash line. Mantle's .687 slugging percentage led the Majors that year.

## **STATCAST**

Mlb.com had a fascinating piece on statcast. Statcast is able to generate pitch and hit metrics just milliseconds after a ball is released or contact is made. In order to answer many different and complex Statcast questions, Google Cloud BigQuery allows MLB researchers to run difficult and far-reaching queries in seconds. Statcast captures 19 points per player at 30 frames per second for the entirety of each game, resulting in over 25 TB of data each season. Statcast measures the speed of over 700,000 pitches and over 150,000 throws per season.

A few highlights:

Statcast defines a "bolt" as a baserunning play with a sprint speed at or above the elite 30 feet per second mark, and Dodger **Trea Turner**'s total of more than 120 bolts has him well on his way to leading the Majors for a fifth straight year.

Pirates infielder **ONeil Cruz** averages just under 100 mph on his throws.

To rack up hard-hit balls, which are those with at least a 95-mph exit velocity, a player must both get the bat on the ball and square it up consistently. **Vlad Guerrero Jr.**, one of the game's brightest young stars, has done that more than 250 times this season to lead the Majors.

Statcast defines as a "barrel," combining elite exit velocity and launch angle. Judge's total of 100-plus barrels in 2022 is far ahead of the field.

## **JOE POSNANSKI**

## On Aaron Judge

Everybody is pointing at the home runs, but Aaron Judge has a chance to do something else that's very rare, something that **Barry Bonds** never did, something **Mike Trout** or **Albert Pujols** never did, something **Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays and Mark McGwire and Stan Musial and Henry Aaron** never did, something that has not been done in more than 50 years.

Aaron Judge has a chance to lead the league in all three slash categories (batting average/on-base percentage/slugging percentage) AND home runs. Best I can tell, only 14 other players have ever done it.

Seasons where the players led the league in batting average, on-base percentage, slugging percentage and home runs. Here they are:

**Nap Lajoie (1901):** This was the first year of the American League, and Lajoie was laughably better than anyone else. He hit .426/.463/.643 with 14 home runs, all league-leaders. He struck out nine times all seasons.

**Ty Cobb (1909):** He hit .377/.431/.517 with nine home runs. It was the only time in Cobb's career that he led the league in home runs — **Tris Speaker** was second with seven homers. By the way, all nine of Cobb's home runs were inside-the-park homers. He is the only player in modern baseball to lead the league in home runs without actually hitting one over the fence.

**Oscar Charleston (1921, 1924, 1925):** These are based on the best Negro leagues stats we have — Charleston hit .400 in each of these years, and in addition to leading the league in homers all three years (with between 15 and 20 in roughly 70 games) he also led the league in doubles one year, in triples one year, in stolen bases one year, what a player.

**Rogers Hornsby (1922 and 1925):** These were Hornsby's two Triple Crown years and the only two years he led the league in home runs. Hornsby — and this is absolutely incredible to me — led the league in all three slash categories for **SIX STRAIGHT SEASONS, 1920-1925.**

**Babe Ruth (1924):** Funny, Ruth only pulled off the Slash and Burn once — that's because he only won one batting title in his career. People actually tend to forget his 1924 season because he hit "only" 46 home runs, but he slashed .378/.513/.739. One of my favorite trivia questions

used to be: How many Triple Crowns did Babe Ruth win? The answer is zero — this was the only year he led the league in hitting, but he finished second in RBIs to **Goose Goslin**.

**Mule Suttles (1926):** The St. Louis Stars fans used to chant “Kick, Mule, Kick,” when Suttles stepped to the plate, which is just wonderful. In 1926, he hit .425/.472/.877 with 32 home runs in 89 games, according to the Seamheads Negro leagues stats.

**Chino Smith (1929):** He is one of those amazing unknown stories of the Negro leagues. Charlie Smith — everybody called him Chino — grew up in North Carolina and was one of the greatest hitters of his day. Satchel Paige was asked to name the greatest hitter in Negro leagues history and he insisted on naming two — **Josh Gibson** and Chino Smith. He had a .400 lifetime batting average, and in 1929 hit .451, slugging .870, and he led the league with 22 homers in 66 games. He died two years later of yellow fever.

**Chuck Klein (1933):** While taking full advantage of the absurd Baker Bowl in Philadelphia, Klein hit .368/.422/.602 with 28 home runs, all league-leading totals. His splits that year are something to behold. On the road, he hit a less than impressive .280/.338/.436 with eight homers. But in the Baker Bowl? Yeah: .467/.516/.790 with 20 home runs.

**Lou Gehrig (1934):** The Iron Horse hit .363/.465/.706 with 59 home runs to win the Triple Crown and achieve the Slash and Burn. It was the only time in his career that Gehrig led the league in batting average. By the way, he finished FIFTH in the MVP voting that year; **Mickey Cochrane** won the award for his leadership and defense as a catcher, even though Gehrig (and Cochrane’s teammate **Charlie Gehringer**) had much, much better seasons.

**Josh Gibson (1936, 1947 and 1939):** It’s hard to say that any of these were REALLY Slash and Burn seasons because we have so few games to work with — in 1939, for example, Gibson is credited with only 27 elite Negro leagues-level games (during which he hit .402 with 11 home runs). But I think we can assume that pretty much every year, Gibson was the best hitter, the most feared hitter and the most powerful hitter.

**Ted Williams (1941, 1942 and 1947):** You could probably sum up Williams’ career this way — he Slash and Burned three times in his career and he did not win the MVP award in any of those seasons. In 1941, he hit .406 and slugged .735, but the award went to **Joe DiMaggio**. In 1942,

he won the Triple Crown, and the award went to **Joe Gordon**. In 1947, he won the Triple Crown again, and the award again went to Joe DiMaggio.

**Frank Robinson (1966):** This is Robinson's Triple Crown season, right when pitchers were dominating the game. He hit .316/.410/.637 with 49 home runs. Neutralize those numbers — meaning, you put them in an average run-scoring environment — and they jump to .330/.426/.662 with 52 home runs.

**Carl Yastrzemski (1967):** Carl's .326/.418/.622 Impossible Dream season looks pretty impressive on its own, but when you consider the context (the dominance of pitching that year, the pressure on the Red Sox, who were finally contenders, Yaz's truly unbelievable pennant-race performance) it becomes one of the greatest, maybe even THE greatest, in the last 75 years.

**Aaron Judge (2022):** The batting race is very much on — at this moment, Judge is hitting .314 and Luis Arraez and Xander Bogaerts are each hitting .313.

The on-base chase is over — Judge at .422 has a 15-point lead over **Yordan Alvarez**.

The slugging chase is over — Judge's .695 is about 75 points clear of **Mike Trout** and everybody else.

And the home run chase has been over since July. You probably know that MLB took something out of the baseballs this year in an effort to get away from the Three True Outcome baseball and bring more of a rhythm to offenses. In some ways it has worked: Home runs are down across baseball and some are strikeouts. In other ways, it hasn't worked at all; this year's .312 on-base percentage is the lowest in baseball in 50 years.

But the point is, this is hardly the year to be breaking any home run records. You can look at all the players who have led baseball with 60-plus homers and who finished second:

2022: Aaron Judge, 60. 2nd place: **Kyle Schwarber**, 42

2001: Barry Bonds, 73. 2nd place: **Sammy Sosa**, 64

1999: Mark McGwire, 65. 2nd place: Sammy Sosa, 63

1998: Mark McGwire, 70. 2nd place: Sammy Sosa: 66

1961: Roger Maris, 61. 2nd place: **Mickey Mantle**: 54

1927: Babe Ruth, 60. 2nd place: **Lou Gehrig**, 47

So, Judge's lead is the biggest by quite a bit.\*

*\*Though no gap will ever touch that of Babe Ruth in 1921, when he hit 59 home runs and second place was **Bob Meusel and Ken Williams** with 24. Those were the days when Ruth was pretty much the only player who knew how to hit a home run.*

I think you see the two main points: Even beyond the home runs, Judge is having one of the greatest seasons ever.

### On Records

I've already written that the PED years apparently will haunt baseball forever. But I will bring up one argument that I've seen quite a bit lately: Someone wrote that **Barry Bonds'** 73 home runs should be treated the way we treat Lance Armstrong's Tour de France victories.

And, to me, that is a perfect example of overlooking that most basic fact in the world: While the cycling world was serious (if often ineffectual) about keeping the sport clean, the people who ran baseball were not. They didn't care. They didn't test. They didn't punish. Quite the opposite: They were THRILLED by the home runs, which helped set attendance records. Everything baseball did in those days seemed geared toward more home runs — bigger strike zones, smaller parks, aggressive expansion and tacit encouragement to players to do whatever they needed to do.

Barry Bonds was not some rogue cheater. He was one of many, dozens certainly, hundreds possibly, who played by the ethos of his time. His 73 home runs are the record. **Pete Rose's** 4,256 hits are the record, despite his rampant use of amphetamines and probably corked bats, too. **Babe Ruth** is Babe Ruth even if he corked his bat and probably faced a whole bunch of 78-mph fastballs. **Ted Williams** is the last MLB player to hit .400 even though he did so before integration and before the game opened up to the world. **Cap Anson** is one of the greatest players in baseball history AND a racist who aggressively led the way toward segregation. **Bobby Thomson's** shot heard round the world is one of the greatest moments in baseball

history, even though his Giants were blatantly cheating by stealing and transmitting signs. Baseball history is both messy and awesome, and you simply don't get one without the other, no matter how tempting the myths might be.

### **HARRY MARINO SURVIVED THE MINOR LEAGUES. NOW HE WANTS TO FIX THEM.**

As a ballplayer, he experienced the grim conditions in baseball's minor leagues. As an attorney, he led the drive to unionization.

Tim Brown, WSJ

Harry Marino, the attorney and former minor-league baseball player whose work spearheaded the unionization of minor leaguers this month, sought to put a century's worth of hardball labor and heartfelt, if imperfect, dreams into perspective.

The romance of young men chasing fly balls and life's footholds in small, charming ballparks is real, he said. So are the trials.

"It's great to play baseball," Marino said. "But it's also pretty good to be a billionaire team owner. You know what I mean?"

Marino has emerged as a key player in an overhaul of minor-league baseball, whose perilous economics have been on display in recent years. Team owners are essentially small-business owners who make their money through ticket sales, stadium naming rights, concession sales and advertising and sponsorships.

Their major-league affiliates cover the costs of players' and coaches' salaries and, in a recent turn, housing. That pay for players has historically been very low. Earlier this year, Major League Baseball agreed to pay \$185 million to settle a federal class-action suit brought by minor leaguers seeking compensation for minimum-wage and overtime violations. The league also recently said it would voluntarily recognize minor leaguers' efforts to unionize.

Historically, minor-league baseball players had been on their own. Many longed for a few extra dollars. They slept wherever it was warm, dry and above all affordable, ate whatever might fit between two slices of bread and were expected to be thankful for the opportunity to one day, maybe, but probably not, be a big leaguer.

In a country where a dusty game of baseball on a sandlot field is practically a rite of passage, there have always been plenty of others to take their places if they weren't good enough.

That was Marino's story on the field. Now 32, he was one of those guys, a left-handed reliever with more guts than stuff, released once with a 2.60 ERA and then again with a 1.80 ERA, because the minor leagues don't want to hear about your guts unless they come with a mid-90s fastball.

"The reality was I just wasn't a prospect," he said. "That's kind of how it goes."



A Westfield, N.J., native and graduate of Williams College (in his final home start for Williams, Marino threw the school's first no-hitter in 20 years), Marino left the game at 24 and returned to school to become a lawyer. He was a summer associate for the U.S. attorney's office in New York, graduated from the University of Virginia School of Law, clerked for two judges, then worked for two law firms, first at Williams & Connolly in Washington, D.C., where he was assigned Appellate and Supreme Court cases, and then Zuckerman Spaeder in Baltimore.

At the latter, he assisted sports agent Jon Fetterolf, who specializes in sports law, an area that included contract negotiations and salary arbitration. Fetterolf said Marino spoke to him about becoming an agent, as baseball, his love since he was mimicking the deliveries of Billy Wagner, Al Leiter and Tom Glavine, all New York Mets, tugged at him.

But Marino picked a different path, based on his own experience.

“There was no sort of life-or-death element to baseball for Harry, I would guess,” Fetterolf said. “But, you know, for a lot of these other guys, it is. You’re watching people try to raise a family, balancing that and trying to get promoted. So I think having that firsthand experience, having empathy for that, makes him a unique leader in that circumstance.”

First as a volunteer for Advocates for Minor Leaguers, then as its executive director, Marino worked alongside and then led a handful of people committed to educating, rallying and organizing an amorphous collection of more than 5,000 minor-league players.

What he remembered of the game was the fun of it, of course. Losing himself in the competition. Making it personal. Winning with boys and then men who became brothers, six months at a time. He also couldn’t shake the conversations spread over long innings in bullpens from Peoria, Arizona to Aberdeen, Maryland to Hickory, North Carolina, some in English, some in the Spanish he could muster, many in a hybrid of both.

“This was professional baseball and it felt like real business,” he said. “And it was like, ‘Why are the players living four or five guys to a one-bedroom? Why are they feeding us like this? Why are they paying us like this?’ I mean, I went through all of extended spring training and didn’t get a single paycheck. I thought it was a joke at the time. And then realized when I was told, ‘You’re not gonna get a paycheck,’ that it wasn’t. My eyes were opened to the realities of—and dysfunction of—the system. And also the toll it was taking on particular people.”

When he wondered how he might fit into baseball again, he returned often to those stories of neglect and how so many with so little were feeding a multi-billion-dollar industry. He took up for thousands of young men he did not know because of his own minor-league experience and because of a system he viewed as exploitative. Then, because of all the ballplayers who would be next, who would hoard sandwich coupons and ache for the courage to ask for better.

“I really was trying to discern what would be the area in which I could best serve other people,” he said. “Advocates for Minor Leaguers was a vehicle for the first time to actually do something about it. There was just kind of a perfect storm where it was like, ‘Bang, that is the opportunity to use my unique skills and advantages, in terms of upbringing and otherwise, to actually make a positive impact and serve others.’ And I’ve found it to be an incredible fit and therefore incredibly fulfilling.”

Advocates for Minor Leaguers was founded by Garrett Broshuis—also an attorney and former minor-league pitcher—and others in March 2020. Through social and mainstream media, the nonprofit sought to expose the challenges that came with a minor-league life and demand changes. Soon, it was funded by the Major League Baseball Players Association, among other entities. Maybe the current minor leaguers would benefit from change. Almost certainly the next minor leaguers will.

“His consistency to the causes is as high as anyone that I’ve been around,” MLBPA executive director **Tony Clark** said of Marino. “It comes through loud and clear in how he fights for

players and how he's been willing to engage on any and all of the issues that are front and center to him and to minor leaguers in a way that gave us confidence. And with each conversation, if this was going to become a possibility, Harry is someone you want to be a part of the equation."

Marino and a small staff that included former players reached out to hundreds, then thousands, of current minor leaguers via Instagram, Twitter, email and text messaging, asking what they could do. Inside of two years, minor-league salaries had increased, if only slightly. Decent housing was being provided. And near the end of August, Kevin Slack, communications director for Advocates for Minor Leaguers and Marino's right hand, watched on his computer as digital union authorization cards poured in approving the unionization effort. Eleven days later, they were officially part of the MLBPA, Advocates for Minor Leaguers was folded into the union and Marino was assistant general counsel.

Bruce Shatel, baseball coach at Delbarton School in Morris Township, N.J., thought that sounded a lot like the Harry Marino he knew.

"When he played for me," Shatel said, "he was ultra competitive. When he started a game, he wanted to finish it. Same thing here. I think it's a selfless act where he could be making big, big money doing something else, defending clients, whether it's criminal law or corporate law, whatever he wanted to do. I don't know if there's any money in what he's doing, but at the same time, it takes a lot of courage. And that's how he pitched. That's how he approached every game."

Marino said his only aim was to assist those willing to risk the fight.

"They deserve a tremendous amount of credit for having the vision to see that this could be done and putting their time and energy into taking that risk," Marino said. "Plain and simple it does not happen without those player leaders who went above and beyond."

### **PITCH CLOCK SHORTENED MINOR-LEAGUE GAMES BY 25 MINUTES IN 2022**

MLB's implementation of a pitch clock in the minor leagues this year cut down the average time of games by 25 minutes, according to the commissioner's office.

The average length of a minor-league game in 2022 came in at two hours and 38 minutes, compared to 3:03 during the 2021 season. Minor-league pitchers were allowed 14 seconds to start their motions with the bases empty and 18 seconds with at least one runner on base (19 seconds in Triple A).

Offensive statistics saw minimal variation, with runs per team per game increasing from 5.11 to 5.13, batting average up to .249 from .247 and home run percentage dipping to 2.7 from 2.8.

Pitchers' strikeout percentage dropped to 24.4 from 25.4, walk percentage increased to 10.5 from 10.2 and hit-by-pitch percentage stayed at 1.6.

MLB announced earlier this month that pitch clocks will be introduced to major league games in 2023. MLB pitchers will have 20 seconds to begin their throwing motions with runners on base and will get 15 seconds to do so with the bases empty. Umpires will assess a ball to pitchers who don't start their motions before the clock expires and a strike to batters who aren't in the box and "alert to the pitcher" within eight seconds.

The length of a nine-inning MLB game in 2022 is currently averaging three hours and four minutes.

### **SMART OBSERVATIONS FROM PETER ABRAHAM OF THE BOSTON GLOBE**

Abraham writes the Sunday Baseball Notes column that has been a Globe mainstay back to the 1970's.

The Red Sox have money to spend in free agency this offseason. That's a good thing — unless you make bad decisions.

There were 19 free agents who agreed to contracts worth at least \$50 million before this season. For the teams who made those agreements, there are more regrets than celebrations so far.

With the understanding that the years to come could change the outcome, here's a breakdown of how the top free agents from the Class of 2022 fared.

#### **Successes**

1B **Freddie Freeman** (Dodgers, 6 years, \$162 million) — Freeman has been even better for the Dodgers than he was in leading the Braves to a World Series championship last season. He's among the MLB leaders in batting average, on-base percentage, doubles, walks, and runs created.

RHP **Kevin Gausman** (Blue Jays, 5 years, \$110 million) — Gausman has been a solid No. 2 starter on a playoff team. That's what the Jays wanted. Gausman has only one career playoff start, so October will be a further test.

- OF **Starling Marte** (Mets, 4 years, \$78 million) — Long an underrated player, the Mets spent big on the 33-year-old to improve their outfield. Marte delivered an All-Star season.

- RHP **Max Scherzer** (Mets, 3 years, \$130 million) — He has been limited to 22 starts but has a 2.13 ERA and 0.88 WHIP. His presence has given the Mets some needed passion.

- OF-DH **Kyle Schwarber** (Phillies, 4 years, \$79 million) — Schwarber turned a strong 2021 season into a long-term deal and kept hitting. He strikes out a lot and doesn't hit for average but the home runs (42) and walks helped keep the Phillies in contention.
- OF **Seiya Suzuki** (Cubs, 5 years, \$85 million) — A .780 OPS in his first season after playing in Japan bodes well for the future.

### Swing and a miss?

- OF **Nick Castellanos** (Phillies, 5 years, \$100 million) — His OPS dropped 24 percent in the first year of the deal and he has minus-10 defensive runs saved in right field.
- 2B **Marcus Semien** (Rangers, 7 years, \$175 million) — Semien took a one-year deal with the Jays in 2021 and produced big numbers before going back into free agency.

He's still an above-average hitter but dropped off with 24 fewer extra-base hits. Semien's defense remains excellent but how will this deal play for six more years?

- OF **Chris Taylor** (Dodgers, 4 years, \$60 million) — The Dodgers retained Taylor and he had the worst offensive season of his career.

### Jury's out

- RHP **Jon Gray** (Rangers, 4 years, \$56 million) — He pitched well when he pitched, but injuries cost him 10 starts.
- RHP **Raisel Iglesias** (Angels, 4 years, \$58 million) — The Angels signed Iglesias to be their closer, then traded him to the Braves Aug. 2 for two prospects. He's been an effective — and very well paid — set-up man since. Presumably the Braves plan to have him close down the road.
- LHP **Robbie Ray** (Mariners, 5 years, \$115 million) — There's a lot of value in making every start and approaching 200 innings. That his ERA climbed and his strikeouts dropped is something Seattle can live with.
- SS **Corey Seager** (Rangers, 10 years, \$325 million) — Seager had an .870 OPS over seven seasons with the Dodgers. It's been under .800 most of the season with the Rangers.
- 2B **Trevor Story** (Red Sox, 6 years, \$140 million) — The Sox are clearly a better defensive team when he's on the field. But Story will finish the season having played only 94 games. He's been a little bit better than average offensively for two years now. The Sox need better than that.
- RHP **Marcus Stroman** (Cubs, 3 years, \$71 million) — A shoulder issue cost him a big chunk of the season. The Cubs are only 8-16 when he starts.

## Disasters

- **SS Javy Baez** (Tigers, 6 years, \$140 million) — His defense took a sharp downward turn and his on-base percentage is .281. No wonder Al Avila was fired as GM.
- **OF Kris Bryant** (Rockies, 7 years, \$182 million) — This deal made little sense when it was made and less now as Bryant played only 42 games because of a series of injuries. He hit well when he played but somehow didn't homer in 99 at-bats at Coors Field.
- **OF Avisail Garcia** (Marlins, 4 years, \$53 million) — Garcia turned a productive season with the Brewers into a lucrative contract and went back to being a league-average hitter.
- **LHP Eduardo Rodriguez** (Tigers, 5 years, \$77 million) — He missed half the season because of marital difficulties and at one point wasn't returning calls from the team. But at least Rodriguez pitched fairly well when he was on the roster.

## THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Most of you could probably name the top career saves leaders—**Mariano Rivera** (652), **Trevor Hoffman** (601), and **Lee Smith** (478).

If pressed I bet you could name a bunch in the top 25—**John Franco** (5<sup>th</sup> with 424), **Billy Wagner** (6<sup>th</sup> with 422), **Rollie Fingers** (15<sup>th</sup> with 341), **Aroldis Chapman** (24<sup>th</sup> with 315) come to mind. You might be surprised that **Rich Gossage** (27<sup>th</sup> with 310), **Bruce Sutter** (30<sup>th</sup> with 300) and **Dan Quisenberry** (39<sup>th</sup> with 244) didn't crack the top 25.

Your question this morning—since the save rule envisioned by sports writer Jerome Holtzman in 1959 and adopted as an official stat by MLB in 1969, 5 pitchers have had 55 or more saves in a single season. Can you name them?

|                            |                |    |
|----------------------------|----------------|----|
| <b>Francisco Rodriguez</b> | 2006 Angels    | 62 |
| <b>Edwin Diaz</b>          | 2018 Mariners  | 57 |
| <b>Bobby Thigpen</b>       | 1990 White Sox | 57 |
| <b>Eric Gagne</b>          | 2003 Dodgers   | 55 |
| <b>John Smoltz</b>         | 2002 Braves    | 55 |

## **HOUSEKEEPING**

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