

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

3.6.2022

Good morning,

Forget the CBA for 20 minutes, pour yourself a coffee and enjoy.

Wise Words from a Pair of Bills

It never ceases to amaze me, how many of baseball's wounds are self-inflicted.

Hall of Famer Bill Veeck

Baseball must be a great game to survive the fools who run it.

Hall of Famer Bill Terry

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Less than 1% of players drafted play 3 or more years in the Majors.

Five players with 500+ HRs who never struck out 100 times in a season: Williams, Ott, Sheffield, Ruth and Aaron.

Sheffield also drove in 100+ runs for five different teams-- Padres, Marlins, Dodgers, Braves, Yankees.

Hank Aaron 6856 and **Stan Musial** 6134 are the top career leaders in total bases. (the rest of the top ten is Mays-Pujols-Bonds-Cobb-ARod-Ruth-Rose-Yaz). A subscriber pointed out this week the difference between Aaron and Musial is 722. $722 \times 90 \text{ feet} = 64,980 \text{ feet}$. Divided by 5280 feet in a mile. Aaron's total bases lead equals over 12 miles.

Only time both leagues had a triple crown winner in the same year. They played in the same city. 1933. Philadelphia Phillies' **Chuck Klein** (.368-28-120) and the Philadelphia Athletics' **Jimmie Foxx** (.356-48-163.)

Last week noted **Mark Teixeira** is all time HR leader in the new Yankee Stadium with 113. **Mickey Mantle** had 266 in the old Yankee Stadium.

Mike Lupica had a piece this week on Yankee catchers.

- Bill Dickey 7x World Series winner, .313 career average
- Yogi Berra 3x MVP, 10x World Series winner
- Elston Howard MVP, 4x World Series winner
- Thurman Munson MVP, 2x World Series winner
- Jorge Posada 4x World series winner

Twenty-seven World Series titles for these men. Five MVP Awards. Plus 53 All-Star combined appearances.

Yankee Stadium hosted its final baseball game on September 21, 2008. The ceremonies for the final game at Yankee Stadium began with the opening of Monument Park, as well as allowing Yankee fans to walk on the warning track around the field. Many former Yankee greats, including [Yogi Berra](#), [Whitey Ford](#), [Reggie Jackson](#), [Bernie Williams](#), [Paul O'Neill](#), [Willie Randolph](#), [Roy White](#) and [Chris Chambliss](#) took their positions in the playing field as their names were announced by the legendary Bob Sheppard. [Julia Ruth Stevens](#), daughter of Babe Ruth, threw out the ceremonial first pitch in the final game in "The House That Ruth Built".

With [Andy Pettitte](#) as the starting pitcher, the Yankees played their final game at Yankee Stadium against the [Baltimore Orioles](#), recording the final out at 11:43 pm EDT in a 7–3 Yankee victory. Among many lasts to be recorded, a long-time standing question was answered. It was first wondered by Babe Ruth after he hit the first home run in Yankee Stadium on its opening day of April 18, 1923:

I was glad to have hit the first home run in this park. God only knows who will hit the last.

That player turned out to be Yankees backup catcher [José Molina](#), as he hit a go-ahead and eventual game-winning two-run home run in the fourth inning.^[69]

Other lasts were [Jason Giambi](#) recording the last hit in Yankee Stadium, driving in [Brett Gardner](#), who scored the last run in Yankee Stadium. Mariano Rivera made the final pitch in the stadium with [Cody Ransom](#) recording the final out at first base. In the eighth inning, Derek Jeter became the final Yankee to bat in Yankee Stadium.

When **Mel Ott** retired with 511 home runs in 1947, he was by far the all-time NL home run leader. In second was Hall of Famer **Chuck Klein** (300 home runs)

In 1992 **Dennis Eckersley** won the AL MVP and Cy Young. (bonus points if you know Rollie Fingers 81 and Willie Hernandez 85 also won both as relievers). League-leading 51 saves, 1.91 ERA and 0.91 WHIP in 80 innings pitched. Before the transition to the bullpen he was 2 x All Star starter with Indians and Red Sox. Eckersley no hit the Angels in 1977 for Cleveland. In 1990 went 41 games without a walk. HOF 2018. 100 complete games. 390 saves.

On May 29, 1976, Houston Astros pitcher **Joe Niekro** hits the only home run of his 22-year major league career. Strangely enough, Niekro reaches the seats against his brother, Phil, the ace of the Atlanta Braves. Joe Niekro's unexpected blast helps the Astros to a 4-3 win.

July 18, 1999. Yankee Stadium. **Yogi Berra** Day. **Don Larsen** throws out the first pitch. **David Cone** then pitches a perfect game in 6-0 win over the Expos.

David Cone: 20-3 for the Mets in 1988 and 20-7 for the Yankees in 1998, only pitcher to win 20 for both teams.

Only three players have hit for the cycle in both the AL and NL. All since 1977. Two of three can boast of a batting average title. The teams they were with at the time: 1) Red Sox/Astros; 2) Mets/Mariners; 3) Twins/Rockies.

Bob Watson – Astros, 1977/Red Sox 1979; **John Olerud** – Mets 1997/Mariners 2001; **Michael Cuddyer** – Twins 2009/Rockies 2014.

Since 1883 just two players have had three hits in one inning. Both playing for the Red Sox. Red Sox left fielder **Gene Stephens** collected two singles and a double in the bottom of the seventh inning of a June 18, 1953 game versus the Tigers. The Sox scored 17 runs that inning, on their way to a 23-3 win.

Red Sox center fielder and lead-off hitter **Johnny Damon** rapped a single, double and triple (almost a one-inning cycle) in the bottom of the first inning of a June 27, 2003 game against the Marlins. The Sox put up a 14-run first, on their way to a 25-8 win. In the process, they scored 10 runs in their first at bat before making an out – another MLB record.

What do Derek Jeter, Mel Ott, Ozzie Smith, Eddie Murray, Mike Piazza, Carlton Fisk, Eddie Mathews, Al Kaline, Tony Gwynn, Manny Ramirez, David Ortiz, Duke Snider have in common? None won an MVP award.

Willie Mays. Against Sandy Koufax he hit .278 with 5 HRs and 14 RBIs in 43 games. Against **Bob Gibson** Mays .196 with 3 HRs and 9 RBIs in 33 games. Gibson struck out Mays 30 times in 108 at bats.

Mickey Mantle. In 1962, when Mantle went .321-30-89 and was the AL MVP, rookie righty **Dick Radatz** face him six times. The result? Five strikeouts and a walk.

Duke Snider. Another good pitcher who dominated a good hitter was **Juan Marichal** and Duke Snider. Snider hit just .167 with 1 HR against Marichal and struck out 8 out of 24 at bats.

June 10-21, 1968 **Bert Campaneris** of the A's stole a base in 12 straight games. He led the AL in steals six times in his career.

Vince Coleman of the Cardinals stole 100 bases in 3 consecutive seasons – 1985 (110 SB); 1986 (107); 1987 (109).

Don Baylor played in the World Series for the 1986 Red Sox, 1987 Twins and 1988 A's.

Walter Johnson, who won 417 games in 21 seasons for the Washington Senators (1907-27). In 14 Opening Day starts he threw 7 shutouts including 1-0 complete games victories of 13 and 15 innings.

In 1945 the Boston Braves played an MLB record 46 doubleheaders.

1966 was the only time brothers finished 1-2 for a batting title. **Matty Alou**, Pirates, at .342, won the NL batting title. **Felipe Alou**, Braves, finished second at .327. The third brother, Jesus Alou, hit .259 for the Giants that season.

On June 23, 1971, the Phillies' **Rick Wise** tossed a no-hitter (one walk and three strikeouts), beating the Reds 4-0 in Cincinnati. Wise also went two-for-four at the plate – hitting a two-run homer in the fifth inning and a solo shot in the eighth. That off season Wise was traded to the Cards for Steve Carlton.

Joel Youngblood, on August 4, 1982 started a day game in center field for the Mets (versus the Cubs) at Wrigley. In the top of third, Youngblood got a hit (a two-run single) for the Mets off the Cubs' Fergie Jenkins. In the bottom of the fourth, he was replaced by Mookie Wilson – and learned he had been traded to the Expos. Youngblood caught the first flight to Philadelphia, where the Expos were playing a night game. He made it in time to replace Expos' starting right fielder Jerry White in the bottom of the sixth – and to collect a single off Steve Carlton in the top of the seventh. Youngblood hit .265 over 14 major league seasons – and was an All Star with the Mets in 1981. Hits for two teams in two cities off two HOF pitchers in the same day.

3 MVP awards in the same decade:

Mike Trout- 2014, 2016, 2019

Albert Pujols – 2005, 2008, 2009

Alex Rodriguez – 2003, 2005, 2007

Mike Schmidt – 1980, 1981, 1986

Roy Campanella – 1951, 1953, 1955

Yogi Berra – 1951, 1954, 1955

Stan Musial – 1943, 1946, 1948

1951 ... **Mickey Mantle**, Yankees, 11 triples, 37 HR; **Willie Mays**, Giants, 13 triples, 51 HR both lead their league in HRs and triples in the same season.

Joe Girardi, 78-84 managing the 2006 Marlins wins Manager of the Year with a losing record. He was fired, did broadcast work with YES network for 2007 and became Yankees manager in 2008.

Warren Spahn went 23-7 for the Braves in 1963 at age 42.

Dwight Gooden went 24-4 for the Mets in 1985 at age 20.

Among pitchers who have won 300 or more games, **Charles “Old Hoss” Radbourn** (309-194) completed the highest percentage of his starts at 97.2%, 502 starts and 488 complete games. The 300-game winner completed the lowest percentage of his starts? **Tom Glavine** (305-203) who completed only 56 of 682 starts for an 8.2% rate. His teammate Greg Maddux (355-227) completed 109 of 740 starts (14.7%).

For comparison, here are a few examples from among other 300-game winners: Warren Spahn’s completion rate was 57.4%; Tom Seaver – 35.7%; Phil Niekro – 34.2%; Christy Mathewson – 78.8%; Steve Carlton – 35.8%; Gaylord Perry – 43.9%; Nolan Ryan – 28.7%. Toward the bottom you find: Roger Clemens – 16.7%, and Randy Johnson – 16.6%.

I did not know that Ernie Banks, Lou Brock, Fergie Jenkins, Bob Gibson, Satchel Paige all played for the Harlem Globetrotters.

I knew Pete Rose was player-manager of the Reds in 1986 but did not remember that **Don Kessinger**, was player-manager of the White Sox in 1979.

Oscar Gamble, Oddibe McDowell, Al Oliver, Junior Ortiz, George Scott all wore the uniform number 0.

I'll have another glass of punch. What do all these players have in common? Jimmy Piersall (Red Sox), Clint Courtney (Browns), Matt Batts (Tigers), Jim Brewer (Cubs), Dave Boswell (Twins), Reggie Jackson (Yankees), Ed Whitson (Yankees): Also on this list would be Howard Fox (Twins traveling secretary); Burt Hawkins (Rangers traveling secretary); Ray Hagar (sportswriter); Joe Cooper (marshmallow salesman); assorted patrons of night clubs in New York City, Anaheim, Baltimore and Arlington); and a Lakeland, Florida, police officer. They all engaged in fisticuffs with **Billy Martin**.

In 1920, **Babe Ruth** hit 54 home runs. More than any AL team – except his own Yankees, of course. (In fact, the MLB average for team home runs that year was 39.) The only other team in either league to top Ruth's home run total (with 64). Was the Philadelphia Phillies hit 64 round trippers, led by Cy Williams 15. *Side note: While Ruth hit 54 home runs that season, no other major leaguer reached even 20 (George Sisler of the Browns had 19).*

In 2015, **Raul Adalberto Mondesi** became the first player ever to make his first major league appearance in the World Series. His dad played 13 big league seasons (1,525 games) and never appeared in the World Series.

Raul Adalberto Mondesi, who had never played above Double A, was put on the Royals' roster for the 2015 Series. Raul struck out in his only at bat, as a pinch hitter in Game Three. His father, Raul Ramon Mondesi (1994 NL Rookie of the Year) played 13 major league seasons – Dodgers, Blue Jays, Yankees, D-backs, Pirates, Angels, Braves.

The Red Sox' **Tony Conigliaro**, Red Sox, who led the AL with 32 HRs (as a 20-year-old) hit a record 24 home runs as a teenager. 2015 NL HR leader and MVP **Bryce Harper** is second in teenage HRs at 22 (with the National); the Nationals **Juan Soto** also hit 22 round trippers as a teenager.

Three teams have retired the same number for two different players – 8, 10 and 31.

The **Expos/Nationals** have retired #10 for **Rusty Staub and Andre Dawson**; The **Yankees** #8 for **Bill Dickey and Yogi Berra**. The **Cubs** #31 for **Fergie Jenkins and Greg Maddux**.

MAKING THOSE COMPLETE GAMES COUNT

From baseballroundtable.com

Tim Lincecum threw only two complete games in the last five seasons of his 10-season (2007-16) MLB career; and

Both of those complete games were no-hitters.

On July 13, 2013 (Could 13 be Lincecum's lucky number?), Lincecum no-hit the Padres (in San Diego) as the Giants won 9-0. He walked four and struck out thirteen. On June 25 of the following season, he no-hit the Padres again in San Francisco. The final was 4-0 and Lincecum walked one and fanned six. The four-time All Star went 110-89 in ten MLB seasons (2007-16 ... Giants Dodgers). He was also 5-2, 2.50 in the post-season.

Kent Mercker ... One No-Hitter, Two Career Complete Games, 150 Career Starts

Southpaw Kent Mercker spent most of his 18-season MLB career as a reliever (542 relief appearances/150 starts). In his 150 starts, he pitched just two complete games. Both complete games came in 1994 and one was a no-hitter. It came on April 8, in Mercker's first appearance of the season. He faced the Dodgers (in LA) and Mercker picked up a win (6-0), no-hitting the Dodgers (four walks, ten strikeouts). He threw the second and final complete game of his career on July 18 of that season – a two-hit, 3-2 win over the Pirates. Mercker finished the season 9-4, 3.45. Mercker pitched for nine teams in 18 MLB seasons (1989-2000, 2002-2006, 2008 ... Braves, Orioles, Indians, Reds, Cardinals, Red Sox, Angels, Rockies, Cubs). He was 74-67, 4.16, with 25 saves over that time.

There's More Than One Way to Get This Done--Kent Mercker is one of only four MLB pitchers to start a complete-game no-hitter and also start a game which ended in a combined (multi-pitcher) no-hitter.

Jake Arrieta ... Two No-Hitters, Six Complete Games, 279 Starts

Cubs' Righty Jake Arrieta threw his first no-hitter in his sixth MLB season (2015) – a year when he led the National League in wins (22), starts (33), complete games (four) and shutouts (three). Going into the season, Arrieta had just one complete game in 97 career starts. He threw the no-hitter on August 30 in his 27th start of the 2015 seasons (his 124th career start), as the Cubs topped the Dodgers 2-0 in Los Angeles. Arrieta, in running his season record to 17-6, walked just one and fanned 12. Arrieta finished the game with a flourish, leaving no doubt, as he struck out all three hitters he faced in the ninth inning.

Arrieta's second no-hitter came just ten starts later – on April 21, 2016, as the Cubs clobbered the Reds 16-0 in Cincinnati. In that one, Arrieta walked four and fanned six. Since that 2016 no-hitter, Arrieta has started 118 games without going the distance. He finished the 2016 season at

18-8, 3.10. Arrieta's has pitched in 12 MLB seasons (2010-21 ... Orioles, Cubs, Phillies and Padres), going 115-93, 3.98. In an injury-interrupted 2021 season, he was 5-14, 7.39 for the Cubs and Padres.

What a Second Half--Jake Arrieta, although he won the NL Cy Young Award in 2015, did not make the All Star team that season. He was 10-5, 2.66 before the break and a sparkling 12-1, 0.75 after the break.

Homer Bailey Two No-Hitters, Seven Career Complete Games, 245 Career Starts

Homer Bailey threw the last MLB no-hitter of the 2012 season and the first no-hitter of the 2013 season. The right-hander made 245 MLB appearances – and never pitched in relief in the majors. Bailey (with the Reds) no-hit the Pirates (in Pittsburgh) on September 28, 2012 (1-0), walking one and fanning ten. On July 2, 2013, he no-hit the Giants (in Cincinnati) by a 3-0 score, walking one and whiffing nine. Bailey pitched in 14 MLB seasons (2007-20 ... Reds, Royals, A's Twins) going 81-86, 4.56, with 1,157 strikeouts in 1,401 innings. Bailey's given name, by the way, was David Dewitt Bailey Jr. His "Homer" nickname (which seemed unfortunate for a pitcher) honored his great grandfather.

High School High Roller --Homer Bailey was a first-round pick (Reds) in the 2004 MLB Draft – out of La Grange (TX) High School, where he had gone **41-4, 0.90 with 536 strikeouts in 298 innings.**

Speaking of the Reds:

JOE MORGAN

Morgan proved integral to the Reds' World Series triumphs in 1975 and '76. 10-time All-Star second baseman, NL MVP in 1976-77.

I was surprised to see that Morgan played less than half his 2,649 career games for the Reds. He returned in 1980 to his original Major League team, the Astros, and helped them capture their first National League West title in franchise history that season. The San Francisco Giants hadn't experienced back-to-back winning seasons since 1970-71 until Morgan spent 1981-82 with them. The Giants saw fit to trade the future Hall of Famer to the perennially contending Philadelphia Phillies, who benefited from his presence by reaching the World Series in 1983. Morgan concluded his Major League career in 1984 with the Oakland A's, who finished 25 games out of first place in each of the previous two seasons. The A's ended up seven games out of first in the American League West with Morgan on their side.

STOPPING THE STREAK

Sept. 19, 1998. **Cal Ripken Jr.**'s streak of 2632 games comes to an end. You might win a bet knowing the Orioles' third baseman that day was Ryan Minor, who started in the team's final home game of the year. Minor -- who is perhaps more famous for being an All-American basketball player at Oklahoma -- appeared in 142 Major League games across four seasons from 1998 through 2001.

In the summer of 1941, **Joe DiMaggio** famously got a base hit in [56 straight games](#), but on July 17 he wasn't able to push that to 57. A combination of Cleveland starter Al Smith and Jim Bagby, who threw 1 2/3 innings in relief, limited DiMaggio to 0-for-3 with a walk. The two pitchers combined to allow eight hits to Yankees batters. DiMaggio got a hit in the next 16 games after that streak-ender, and his overall on-base streak lasted 74 games.

Most consecutive games with a HR, individual

[This record](#) is held by three individuals, all of whom went deep in eight straight games. The first such streak was Dale Long's in 1956. His streak ended on May 29 in a game against the Dodgers. Don Newcombe pitched a complete game against Long and the Pirates, allowing a run, but no homers.

Then there was Don Mattingly's streak in 1987. He homered in eight straight before a July 19 contest in Texas in which Greg Harris and Jeff Russell combined to keep him in the yard. The Yankees did homer that day, but it came from Mike Easler.

And most recently, Ken Griffey Jr. homered in eight straight games for Seattle in 1993. His streak ended on July 29, against the Twins. Scott Erickson, Larry Casian and Carl Willis kept Griffey and his teammates in the yard, though the Mariners won the game.

Most consecutive postseason games with a HR, individual

Daniel Murphy carried the Mets to the World Series in 2015, homering in six straight games from Game 4 of the National League Division Series through Game 4 of the NL Championship Series to break Carlos Beltran's record from 2004. But in Game 1 of the World Series, Edinson Volquez, Kelvin Herrera, Luke Hochevar and Chris Young combined to keep Murphy 2-for-7 without an extra-base hit.

Longest winning streak in MLB history

The New York Giants won an MLB-record 26 straight games in 1916. It is widely known that the streak did include a tie -- but per the Elias Sports Bureau, a tie is not a decision in baseball, and it therefore is skipped over and does not count. The streak ended on Sept. 30, in the second game of a doubleheader against the Boston Braves. The Giants lost 8-3, and lost their next two games, too.

Longest winning streak to start a season

The record for consecutive wins to start a season is shared by two teams -- the 1982 Braves and 1987 Brewers. Both teams won 13 straight games. The Braves notched [win number 13](#) in walk-off fashion, when Claudell Washington singled to beat the Reds in the bottom of the ninth. But there was no similar outcome the next day, despite a close score. The Braves went up 1-0 in the

second inning, but gave up two runs in the top of the fifth -- with the go-ahead run scoring on a single from Reds pitcher Bruce Berenyi. The Braves weren't able to come back, and lost, 2-1.

The Brewers' streak-ending game wasn't nearly as close. After winning 13 straight, they faced the White Sox in Chicago in game number 14. The White Sox scored in each of the first three innings against the Brewers to go up 5-0, a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

Most consecutive games without being shut out

The Yankees went 308 consecutive games without being shut out over a stretch from 1931 through 1933. But the streak ended when they ran into Lefty Grove on Aug. 3 at Yankee Stadium. Grove had already faced the Yankees twice earlier that season, allowing five runs and 11 hits in a complete-game effort on June 10. But that early August start was another story. Earle Combs was 3-for-4 and Tony Lazzeri and Bill Dickey had one hit each -- but that was it. Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, among the others in the Yankees' lineup, were held hitless, and the team wasn't able to manufacture even a run. It was the only time they were shut out that season, and they weren't shut out again until May 30, 1934.

Longest losing streak in Modern Era

From July 29 through Aug. 20 in 1961, the Phillies lost 23 straight games, the most consecutive losses any team has had in a season in the Modern Era (since 1900). But in the second game of a doubleheader on Aug. 20 in Milwaukee against the Braves, Philadelphia finally broke through for a win. The Phillies trailed 1-0 after the bottom of the third, but came back to score two runs in the top of the fourth to grab a lead they wouldn't relinquish. The Phillies won 7-4 to stop the losing streak and start another streak -- they'd win four in a row before losing again on Aug. 25 in the second game of a doubleheader also against the Braves, but at home.

Longest losing streak to start a season in Modern Era

The Orioles' start in 1988 pretty much couldn't have gone worse. Baltimore lost 12-0 on Opening Day, and the losing didn't stop there. The O's went on to lose 21 straight games, the longest losing streak to start a season in the Modern Era. At long last, they broke through on April 29, in the 10th game of a 12-game road trip. Visiting the White Sox at Comiskey Park, the Orioles won 9-0 to record their first win of the season. Entering that day, every other team in the Majors had won at least three games and 14 teams had 10 or more wins. The Orioles won behind an offensive output that included homers from both Eddie Murray and Cal Ripken Jr.

POSNANSKI ON PLAYER VALUE

Every now and again here — and especially now with a lockout going on — we like to reference FanGraphs money. If you go to the bottom of a FanGraphs player page, you will see a section called "Value." It looks like this:

That's Mookie Betts, by the way. People often ask me to explain WAR and some of these advanced stats, and so even though I'm mathematically challenged, I'll try to do it here because I like you.

Going quickly row by row, you can see Mookie's season, his team and his level. Then you see his batting runs against average, his base running runs against average, and his fielding against average. There's a positional adjustment there, you probably know what that means, players at high-value positions like shortstop, second base, third base and catcher get a positional boost, while players at lower-value positions like corner outfield or first base get a little decrease.

You will ask: Why did Betts get a positional increase in 2015 and a decrease every other year?

It's because in 2015, he played almost every game in centerfield, while in other years he was mostly a rightfielder (with some centerfield sprinkled in, which is why each year's value is different).

OK, you add batting and baserunning, and you get your offense total.

Add up fielding and positional adjustment, and you get your defense total.

Then there's a small adjustment made for league quality and "replacement" runs are added for WAR — remember, the offense and fielding runs are against the AVERAGE player not the REPLACEMENT player.

Hope all that makes at least a little bit of sense.

Finally you have RAR (Runs Above Replacement), WAR (Wins Above Replacement) and finally the column that we're here talking about today: DOLLARS.

Now, how are dollars figured? Pretty simple: They are based on giving a dollar value per win. As you can see pretty simply with Betts, that dollar value is \$8 million or so per win. The value per win actually went slightly down in 2021 because real salaries went down after the pandemic, but Betts' FanGraphs value was still \$7.9 million per win, so it's pretty close to the same thing.

Now, here's the question: How did they come up with \$8 million per win?

Well, this is an estimation, based on how much free agents get paid. FanGraphs' Craig Edwards has done some great work around this, and he estimated a free agent's likely WAR projection over the life of a contract (using FanGraphs projections) and then divided that into total dollars paid.

So ... some examples. The Giants just paid Kevin Gausman \$110 million over five years. Using FanGraphs dollars, they are expecting to get roughly 14 wins over replacement over those five years, which I guess is pretty reasonable as he was worth roughly that amount over the last five seasons (if you adjust for the COVID season).

OK, let's try Javier Baez. He signed a six-year, \$140 million deal with the Tigers. By FanGraphs, the Tigers are expecting 17.5 WAR from Baez over those six years. Based on his last six years (23.7 WAR), they might believe they got a bargain if you could maintain that level.

It pretty much adds up no matter who you use — Alex Cobb signed a two-year, \$20 million deal. That FanGraphs expectation would be 2.5 WAR over two years — and he was worth 2.9 WAR the last two years (more, again, if you adjust for COVID).

So the numbers really do make sense. Here I will list a few free agents who signed in the lazy, hazy days of December and what the FanGraphs expectations would be:

Corey Seager, Rangers, 10 years, \$325 million

FanGraphs expectation: 40.6 WAR over 10 years

Career value: 23.7 WAR over 7 seasons

(This one does look like an overpay but the Rangers probably felt like they had to overpay).

Marcus Semien, Rangers, 7 years, \$175 million

FanGraphs expectation: 21.9 WAR over seven years

Last seven years: 24.6 WAR

Max Scherzer, Mets, 3 years, \$130 million

FanGraphs expectation: 16.3 WAR over three years

Last three years (not including COVID): 19.3 WAR

Robbie Ray, Mariners, 5 years, \$115 million

FanGraphs expectation: 14.3 WAR over five years

Last five years: 13.3 WAR, BUT, won Cy Young in 2021, suggesting that he's peaking

Eduardo Rodriguez, Tigers, 5 years, \$77 million

FanGraphs expectation: 9.6 WAR over five years

Last five years: 12.8 WAR (sat out 2020 season)

Marcus Stroman, Cubs, 3 years, \$71 million

FanGraphs expectation: 8.9 WAR over three years

Last three years (sat out COVID year): 8.7 WAR

Steven Matz, Cardinals, 4 years, \$44 million.

FanGraphs expectation: 5.5 WAR over four years.

Last four years: 4.5 WAR (but this includes some negative WAR in COVID season)

OK, we could keep going but I think you get the point — the question I want you to ask is this: Is the FanGraphs expectation of \$8 million or so per win above replacement REASONABLE? That is to say, the Dodgers just signed James Paxton to a one-year deal for \$10 million. Is it reasonable for them to expect him to put up a 1.3-WAR season? Probably so, right? The Mets signed Starling Marte for \$78 million over four years. Is it reasonable for them to expect 9.8 WAR from him over those four seasons? Probably so, right? Marte put up 13.4 WAR the last four seasons.

I think that \$8 million or so per win over replacement is a reasonable estimate of value on the free-agent market.

And that, based on my best understanding, is what the FanGraphs DOLLARS column represents — what that player's season would be worth on the open market.

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So now you say: Well, wait, some of these numbers are outrageous. According to the Mookie Betts value section, his 2018 season was worth \$83.3 million. That's lunacy. Nobody has ever been paid close to that amount.

And that's true. But that's because baseball doesn't pay per season. Baseball grossly underpays its younger players and, at least in the past, grossly overpaid some of its older players. Albert Pujols is a good example. The St. Louis Cardinals paid Pujols \$104 million from 2001 through 2011. By FanGraphs value, he was worth more than \$400 million.

OK, but from 2012 through 2021, the Los Angeles Angels paid Pujols \$240 million. And by FanGraphs value, he was worth less than \$70 million. So even though he didn't get QUITE his true open market value over the length of his career, that is still one of baseball's more equitable careers*.

**I'm sure Angels fans wouldn't see it that way, but so it goes.*

In other words, Betts may have made only roughly 13% of his value in 2018, but that year was a big reason why two years later, he got a 12-year, \$365 million deal.

This is how the system has worked for a long time. But there are cracks in it, as you well know. Players get hurt. Players have bad seasons before they become free agents. Great players who sign these long-term deals often underperform them and their careers end unhappily for everyone.

And, even more to the point, teams are ever more aware of baseball's true aging curve and are less willing than ever to give out long-term, big-money deals to players who are in their 30s.

All of which brings us back to the beginning: What is it to say that Trea Turner was worth \$54.9 million in 2021 (while getting paid about \$13 million) or that Vladimir Guerrero Jr. was worth \$53.5 million (while getting paid \$605,000) or that Corbin Burnes was worth \$59.8 million (while getting paid \$608,000)?

Well, it is to say that if baseball players were allowed on the open market with no limitations, this is a pretty good estimation of what they would be worth. If you add up all of the players in

baseball, there's about \$8 billion in FanGraphs value. That's roughly double what actual salaries were — the total baseball payroll was just over \$4 billion.

Could MLB teams afford an \$8 billion payroll? That would be a \$267 million payroll for each of the 30 teams ... and the answer that seems to make the most sense is that most teams could not come close to affording that, though some teams probably could.*

**No team has ever had a \$267 million payroll, but the Red Sox, Dodgers, Yankees, Giants and Tigers have all had \$200 million payrolls in the past.*

But what matters more than the theoretical value of a player, I think, is the amount of money MLB teams save because there isn't free movement and a completely open market. I mentioned Corbin Burnes — let's say that he were a free agent, and he were only allowed to sign for one year. How much would he get paid? How much would he be worth to a team like, say, the Red Sox, who made it all the way to the ALCS without anything resembling a No. 1 starter? Would they pay \$30 million for him? Sure they would. How about \$35 million? How about \$40 million? How about \$50 million?

How much would the Red Sox pay for one season of a 27-year-old, in-his-prime Corbin Burnes and a real shot at the World Series?

We will never know, but I imagine it's more than anyone has ever been paid for one season of baseball.

And that's the fun of looking at FanGraphs Money.

OK, so now — here were the 10 most valuable players by FanGraphs Money in 2021 and their actual salaries:

1. Corbin Burnes, \$59.8 million (\$608,000)
2. Zack Wheeler, \$58.1 million (\$22.5 million)
3. Trea Turner, \$54.9 million (\$13 million)
4. Vladimir Guerrero Jr., \$53.5 million (\$605,000)
5. Bryce Harper, \$53.0 million (\$26 million)
6. Marcus Semien, \$53.0 million (\$18 million)
7. Juan Soto, \$53.0 million (\$8.5 million)

8. Jose Ramirez, \$50.4 million (\$9 million)
9. Fernando Tatis Jr., \$49.1 million (\$1 million — but it's just the first year of 14-year, \$340 million deal)
10. Carlos Correa, \$46.2 million (\$11.7 million)

And then, for fun, here were the highest-paid players of 2021, and their FanGraphs Money value.

1. Trevor Bauer, Dodgers, \$40 million (\$14 million FG)
2. Mike Trout, Angels, \$37.1 million (\$18.2 million FG)
3. Gerrit Cole, Yankees, \$36 million (\$42.1 million FG)
- Jacob deGrom, Mets, \$36 million (\$39 million FG)
5. Nolan Arenado, Cardinals, \$35 million (\$32.1 million FG)
- Stephen Strasburg, Nationals, \$35 million (minus-\$0.2 million, FG)
7. Max Scherzer, Dodgers, \$34.5 million (\$42.9 million FG)
8. Manny Machado, Padres, \$34 million (\$35.2 million FG)
9. Justin Verlander, Astros, \$33 million (DNP)
10. Zack Greinke, Astros, \$32.9 million (\$10.3 million FG)

I would say the surprising part to me is that most of the highest-paid players are worth their salaries (or are injured or, in the case of Bauer, problematic). The only player who was relatively healthy but underperformed was Greinke.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST BASEBALL CARD EVER MADE? A SECRET WE MAY NEVER KNOW.

If ever there was going to be an industry that would have nailed down the precise *first of its kind*, it would be baseball cards. After all, the hobby is practically built upon carefully constructed and scrutinized checklists. The slightest printing errors are cataloged and noted,

with differing prices depending on how centered the image is or if a shade of blue isn't quite as cerulean as the next one. [The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a large and impressive collection of baseball cards](#) donated by Jefferson Burdick -- a man who essentially put together the very first guide to baseball card collecting and is the forefather of the entire industry.

So, while we know that 1951 was the first year that Topps released a set of baseball cards, and we know Fleer and Goudey helped create the bubble gum card in the 1930s, what was the *first* baseball card?

That is a little bit harder.

"If you're looking for the Abner Doubleday of baseball cards, you're going to be as frustrated as those who tried to figure out that Abner Doubleday, in fact, didn't invent baseball and he didn't do it in Cooperstown," John Odell, a curator and researcher at the National Baseball Hall of Fame, said in a recent phone call.

It's something Odell has thought a lot about. After all, he and the staff at the Hall of Fame spent painstaking hours determining just what is and isn't a baseball card to put into the museum's impressive exhibit devoted to the hobby, Shoebox Treasures.

"So, what is a baseball card? One of the beauties of this is there's no law that says what it is," Odell said.

Fortunately, there's at least a small window in the mid-1800s with roughly three possibilities:

There's the Magnolia Invitation -- though it's actually a game ticket -- for a contest held on Feb. 9, 1844. John Thorn, MLB's official historian, wrote about the voucher in "Baseball in the Garden of Eden."

"It cost a dollar and, given its enamel-coated card stock and its commissioned rather than stock imagery, was likely intended to be saved as a memento of the event. The baseball scene on the card reveals three bases with stakes (not wickets), eight men in the field, a pitcher with an underarm delivery, possibly base stealing, and a top-hatted waiter bearing a tray of refreshments from the Colonnade. ...

"This ticket is the first depiction of men playing baseball in America, and it may also be, depending upon one's taxonomic convictions, the first baseball card."

The next is a set of cards known as *carte de visite* (or cdv) featuring the 1866 Lansingburgh Unions -- later known as the Troy Haymakers. Often, these cdvs were made by players looking for a photo of themselves that they could trade or gift to friends and associates, much the way we may have purchased photographic prints after getting our yearbook portraits done in elementary school. These are also the [earliest cards listed in the Beckett's database](#), having sold for \$25,000 in 2006.

And then there are the series of promotional cards produced by the sporting goods manufacturer [Peck and Snyder](#) in 1869, featuring teams like the Mutuals of New York or the Cincinnati Red Stockings. These may have been used as business cards to promote the company, but their appearance and collectibility all share a lot with the humble baseball card. You can even see some of these early cards on display at the Hall of Fame.

BOBBY BONDS WAS ON PACE TO BE A HALL OF FAMER, UNTIL HE WASN'T

From [baseballegg.com](#)

[Bobby Bonds](#) five times hit at least 30 home runs *and* stole at least 30 bases in the same season, a record he shares with [his son](#). Only five players have reached 30/30 as late as age 32: Bobby and his kid; [Barry Larkin](#); [Dante Bichette](#); and the old-timer [Ken Williams](#).

When Bonds arrived as a young player with the Giants in the late 1960s, the team compared him to [Willie Mays](#). That was unfair, of course, and Bobby suffered for years under the weight of that comparison. Willie was [a once-in-a-lifetime center fielder](#), and no matter what Bobby did with the glove, he would fall short. Willie had awesome power, but Bobby struck out...a lot. Willie won home run titles and MVP awards, while Bonds did the 30/30 thing, which wasn't nearly as exciting. When the media kept writing about his potential, Bobby took it as an attack. He didn't like criticism, and he withdrew, bitter. That bitterness was manifested in his son Barry, who never trusted the fourth estate.

Bobby had one of his finest seasons in 1973, just missing 40/40 by one homer. But the taste of San Francisco was starting to sour. He was pulled over for drunk driving that year, and his drinking problem started to be noticeable on team flights and in the clubhouse. In 1974 his power numbers plummeted and he had one of his worst seasons. The Giants figured (correctly) that Bobby's thirties would not be as fruitful as his twenties and traded him to the Yankees. The deal shocked Bonds, but rumors had been swirling for months that teams were trying to pry him away from the G-Men. The Phillies reportedly declined a trade offer that would have sent Bonds to them for catcher [Bob Boone](#) and pitcher Wayne Twitchell. When the Giants pulled the trigger on the Bonds-to-Yankees deal, the Phils had another offer on the table: [Steve Carlton](#) and another player for Bobby. It's one of the great "what-if" trades of baseball history.

It didn't help Bobby that the Giants traded him for [Bobby Murcer](#), who had also been compared unfairly [to a legend](#). At Yankee Stadium, the fans in the right field bleachers reminded Bonds that he wasn't Murcer nor Mantle. Bobby only played one season in pinstripes, embarking on a seven-teams-in-seven-years tour that finished out his career. He still had immense talent as he ping-ponged around baseball changing uniforms, but Bobby never got settled after leaving San Francisco. He retired having won three Gold Gloves and with more than 300 home runs and 400 stolen bases, but that word "potential" haunted him. As if mirroring his aborted career, Bobby died a young man, at the age of 57, but lived long enough to see Barry break the single-season home run record.

MOST WAR IN FIRST 10 SEASONS, RIGHT FIELDERS

PLAYER	FIRST 10 YRS REST OF CAREER	
Henry Aaron	73.9	69.2
Ichiro Suzuki	54.8	4.9
Reggie Jackson	53.7	20.3
Paul Waner	53.3	20.6
Elmer Flick	52.3	0.7
Mel Ott	52.2	58.5
Bobby Bonds	50.3	7.6

<u>Al Kaline</u>	49.1	43.7
<u>Shoeless Joe Jackson</u>	47.9	14.2
<u>Chuck Klein</u>	46.2	-0.2

Babe Ruth is missing because he didn't play right field enough in the first decade of his career: he was pitching and often playing left field. Shoeless Joe went on to become a left fielder. Eight of the players on this list are in the Hall of Fame (or soon will be), the only exceptions are Betts, Joe Jackson, and Bobby Bonds, who was comparable to Al Kaline in value over the first decade of his career. (Betts has 50 WAR through eight seasons).

HISTORY LESSON 1 -- ARCH WARD AND THE ALL STAR GAME

The first official All-Star Game in American sports was, of course, baseball's — it was played on July 6, 1933, long before there was an NBA, when the NFL had a team in Portsmouth, Ohio, and when the NHL had five American teams, two of them in New York. It is difficult to overstate how baseball dominated the American sports landscape in the 1930s and '40s. We talk about how the NFL reigns today, and it does, but baseball was pretty much everything then — baseball and boxing and maybe a little college football.

The All-Star Game was the brainchild of a newspaper editor, the *Chicago Tribune's* Arch Ward. There's a rabbit hole for you — Arch Ward. His impact on American sports is enormous. He did not only conceive the idea of baseball's All-Star Game, he worked out all the details of timing and the fan vote, and then made it happen through sheer will, promotional talents and barrels of newspaper ink. Ward created the college football All-Star Game, which would soon draw more than 100,000 fans. He also essentially created the Golden Gloves, which existed only as a disparate group of local fights before he turned into a national and international tournament.

Anyway, there had been any number of exhibition baseball games featuring some of the league's best players — most famously, in 1911, the Cleveland Naps played against a group of American League All-Stars (Ty Cobb! Tris Speaker! Home Run Baker! Walter Johnson!) to raise money for the family of the great pitcher Addie Joss, who had died a year earlier after contracting meningitis. Vague all-star teams — usually with a couple of big stars and a lot of filler — had barnstormed America, playing each other or Negro leagues players, to make some money during the offseason.

But there had never been an official all-star game with all the best players. And the two leagues hated each other enough in those days that neither side seemed especially interested in having one. It took a figure like Ward — and, obviously, the potential for substantial money — to make that first All-Star Game happen.

Right away, the MLB All-Star Game was a massive deal. “Baseball’s dream comes true tomorrow,” was the Associated Press headline leading into the game. The two greatest managers in baseball history by all accounts — Connie Mack and John McGraw — were chosen to manage the clubs (McGraw came out of retirement to do so). And the newspapers made it clear that this game was not just for fun or mindless entertainment, no, at stake was the question at the heart of baseball in those days: Which league was superior?

The American League won that first game in Chicago 4-2. The two Lefties — Lefty Gomez and Lefty Grove — combined for six scoreless innings, but more significantly Babe Ruth hit a line drive home run ... or as the Associated Press put it:

“Out of the shooting of baseball’s big dream game blazed the mighty war club of the one and only Babe Ruth today to hoist the American League to a spectacular 4-2 triumph of the National League in the first all-star game in the majors’ history.”

I have no idea what that actually means. But right away the All-Star Game was immediately huge— not quite on par, perhaps with the World Series or a heavyweight championship fight or the Kentucky Derby, but pretty close. And then, thanks to some big moments, it grew.

The next year, 1934, Carl Hubbell famously struck out Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx, Al Simmons and Joe Cronin in order.

The next year, Jimmie Foxx homered and the American League won its third consecutive All-Star Game, seeming to end all arguments about which league was better.

The next year, Dizzy Dean pitched three dazzling no-hit innings and the National League held on to a 4-3 victory despite a late rally by the American League.

And then in 1941, in front of 54,674 at Briggs Stadium in Detroit, the American League came back from a 5-3 deficit in the ninth inning, with Ted Williams hitting the walk-off grand slam and clapping his way all the way around the bases.

HISTORY LESSON 2 – SALARY CAP ARGUMENTS

American sports first salary cap came in 1889 when the National League literally capped individual salaries at \$2,500 (about \$77,000 in 2022 money). It was a whole system created by a Civil War veteran named John Brush where players would be graded from A to E based on their play, their character, etc. An “A” player would get the highest salary which was, as mentioned, \$2,500.

The players were so enraged by this that they formed their own league, the Players League of 1890. And it did include many star players such as Dan Brouthers, Harry Stovey, King Kelly, Old Hoss Radbourn, John Ward, Jim O’Rourke and others. But even though the league did fairly well at the gate, it was a financial disaster and lasted only one year. All the star players had to go crawling back to the National League.

I’VE BEEN SELECTIVE IN CBA STUFF IN THE NEWSLETTER BECAUSE YOU HAVE ACCESS TO A MILLION ARTICLES AND OPINIONS AND IT ALSO IS PRETTY NAUSEATING BUT HERE IS A GOOD BLURB FROM JOE POSNANSKI’S BLOG THAT IS PRETTY WELL WRITTEN:

...But I do believe it’s important to add here that the players are not innocent in all this. For too many years, I honestly believe, they took their eyes off the ball, focused too much of their energies on getting their top players the biggest possible contracts and not nearly enough on the young players and marginal players who make up the majority of the union. They fought a losing and hopeless battle against drug testing, caved on a salary-capped amateur draft, fell asleep on the minimum salary, traded key points of power for creature comforts and were outflanked on any number of issues related to service time and free agency and teams’ growing understanding of the aging curve.

That's a big reason why we are here now. I don't blame the players now for trying to stand up — I absolutely think they're right to do so. But, despite what the great Tom Boswell wrote, time does not begin on Opening Day. The players' failures and blind spots the last few years are a part of this story.

As for the real culprits of this catastrophe, the owners, well, we can talk about countless things ... but I think you can see it all in one chart — the “Competitive Balance Tax” threshold through the years:

2017: \$195 million
2018: \$197 million
2019: \$206 million
2020: \$208 million
2021: \$210 million
2022 (proposed): \$220 million
2023 (proposed): \$220 million
2024 (proposed): \$220 million
2025 (proposed): \$224 million
2026 (proposed): \$230 million

I feel pretty sure you can forget everything else. Forget the minimum salary. Forget the bonus pool they're putting together for young players who are not yet eligible for arbitration. Forget the amateur draft lottery, forget the removal of draft pick compensation for free agents, forget all that nonsense because none of that costs the owners the only thing that matters to them — real money.

No, look at that chart one more time. Or, if you prefer, look at it this way — with the percentage increase each year:

2017: \$195 million
2018: 1.0% increase
2019: 4.6% increase
2020: 1.0% increase
2021: 1.0% increase

2022: 4.8% increase

2023: 0% increase

2024: 0% increase

2025: 1.8% increase

2026: 2.7% increase

Baseball's luxury tax — which, essentially, has become a salary cap as even the richest teams strain to stay below it — has grown by just 7.6% over the last five years, which is absurd even against simple inflation but particularly so when judged against the huge rise in baseball revenues. Player salaries on the whole have actually gone down since 2017. The owners did not want to share any of their newfound riches (billionaires never do, I guess), and unsurprisingly they did not.

But that's in the past, and one must admit it does include a global pandemic.

No, the truly galling and appalling part is the future — the owners propose to raise the tax threshold by less than 5% and keep it there OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS. That is the whole ballgame here. Everything else is smoke and mirrors and lights shining in your eyes. All the other proposals won't cost the owners any real money. They could raise the minimum salary and put in a bonus pool for young players and pinky swear promise to not manipulate the service time of their most gifted prospects and pay for all that and more just with the extra bucks from their latest get-rich-quick expanded playoffs scheme.

But the real money, the owners know, is in the luxury tax. The owners — and by "owners," I do mean the ones who don't own teams in New York, Los Angeles, Boston and maybe a couple of other metropolitan hotspots — have come to understand as long as they keep that luxury tax in place, they will keep salaries right where they are. The luxury tax will prevent the aggressive clubs from spending to their full capabilities or desires. The luxury tax will stifle the free market.

And the owners will never have to pay the players more than they are already paying them. They can keep all that juicy gambling money and crypto money and rising franchise value money and advertising patch money for themselves. Also bottom-feeding teams can keep crying poor and cashing revenue sharing checks. Win-win!

Of course, they will cancel Opening Day to do that.

They will cancel as many baseball games as necessary to do that.

All of which puts Rob Manfred in exactly the worst place in the world for him: In front of a microphone.

IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBTS WHY THE PLAYERS DON'T TRUST THE OWNERS

The January 8 Eight — always particularly special to me because January 8 is my birthday — were eight top baseball players who on Jan. 8, 1987, refused to re-sign with their teams because they knew that they were getting cheated. As it would turn out, they WERE getting cheated — the owners were brazenly colluding with each other to freeze out the players. But we'll get to all that.

The eight players in question were:

- Doyle Alexander (offered 2-year, \$800,000 per year by Atlanta)
- Bob Boone (offered 1-year contract with \$30,000 raise by the Angels)
- Andre Dawson (offered 2-year contract with pay cut by the Expos)
- Rich Gedman (offered 3-year contract at \$880,000 or so by the Red Sox)
- Ron Guidry (offered 2-year contract at substantial pay cut by the Yankees)
- Bob Horner (offered 3-year contract at substantial pay cut by Atlanta)
- Lance Parrish (offered 2-year contract at \$1 million by Detroit)
- Tim Lincecum (offered 3-year, \$4.8 million contract by the Expos)

Each of these contracts were infuriating to the players for different reasons. Raines, for example, was coming off a season in which he could have been the MVP. He won the batting title, led the league in on-base percentage and stole 70 bases. The Expos were offering him just a \$100,000 raise over what he was making and telling him that he'd better take it because there was no more money out there for him on the free-agent market.

“Don't be a martyr like Curt Flood,” he would recall Expos president John McHale telling him.

Lance Parrish was coming off his fifth consecutive All-Star season — over that time he'd won three Gold Gloves and three Silver Slugger Awards — and he had been drastically underpaid throughout. He felt sure that as a free agent he had a Gary Carter-like offer coming; Carter was getting paid more than \$2 million per year.

Instead, the Tigers offered him half that and, like the Expos had with Raines, assured him that there was no more money out there for him on the open market.

The Andre Dawson deal was a little bit different. Dawson had been the Expos' most iconic player for a decade. He did everything — hit line drives into the gaps, hit home runs, stole bases, won Gold Gloves, rifled down runners. He was a riveting force. But all that play did take a toll on him, particularly his knees, and in 1986 he played in only 130 games and for the first time in more than a half decade did not win a Gold Glove.

The Expos offered him less than he made in 1986 and dared him to try the market.

“They’re asking me to take a pay cut,” he told the press. And I hold almost all the team’s offensive records. I think I deserve better. ... If I never play another game in my life, it’s no big deal.”

Rich Gedman, coming off his second-consecutive All-Star season, was looking for a contract in the range of Tony Pena’s \$1.2 million deal — the Red Sox offered \$900,000 and warned him to take it.

And, as they say on Gilligan’s Island, the rest:

Ron Guidry at age 35 was coming off a down year — 9-12, 3.98 ERA — and the Yankees responded by offering him a \$150,000 or so pay cut. Yankees owner George Steinbrenner insisted that this was already way above market value and refused to budge even when Guidry and his agent asked for \$50,000 more.

Bob Horner was coming off a 27-homer season (which, believe it or not, was good enough for fifth in the National League) and was looking for a raise on his \$1.8 million contract; instead he was offered a 30 percent pay cut.

Bob Boone, at age 38, was playing defense better than ever, he won his third Gold Glove, and he thought that would be of some value on the open market; the Angels offered him a slight raise and promised that would be more than anyone else would offer.

Doyle Alexander had eaten up 200 innings; the Braves offered him a pay cut.

The most infuriating part for the players — as you have undoubtedly picked up — was the utter and arrogant certainty general managers and owners had that no other teams would bid. How could they be so sure? Well, the answer to that was quite clear, even then: They were conspiring with each other.

As John Helyar so entertainingly explains in *Lords*, the commissioner of baseball then was Peter Ueberroth, who apparently never missed an opportunity to lambaste the owners for their stupid free-agent signings.

Like, for example, he would go up to Atlanta owner Ted Turner in front of the other owners and say something like, “Hey, how’s that Bruce Sutter signing going?”

And he might add something like, “Hmm, paid him \$1.7 million last year for 18 innings. Now, I’m no math whiz, but what does that come out to per inning, Ted?”

Ueberroth has always denied leading baseball’s collusion, but he certainly does not deny that he strongly discouraged teams from signing free agents, particularly to long-term deals. And he did it openly, in front of the entire group, in such a passionate (or demeaning) way that it unquestionably galvanized (or frightened) the owners into inaction. And what happened to the January 8 Eight was almost beyond belief.

Not one of them got a better offer than the one they turned down.

In fact, the whole thing became a dark comedy. Tim Lincecum, after winning the batting title, was offered a PAY CUT by the San Diego Padres, Atlanta Braves and Houston Astros*. He couldn’t understand the upside-down world he was living in. “People expect you to take a 50 percent pay cut because you’re a free agent?” he asked in horror.

Lincecum eventually went back to the Expos for just a touch more than they had originally offered.

**According to Helyar, Astros owner John McMullen told Raines he shouldn't sweat the pay cut because "once you're making a million, why worry about anything over that?" Funny, that's also the line of reasoning many people use on Twitter to blame the players.*

Lance Parrish was determined, one way or another, not to go back to Detroit — so when he and his agent, Tom Reich, heard Phillies president Bill Giles mention Parrish in a television interview, they decided to go in for the kill, one way or another. Giles, of course, was severely warned by other owners* to stay off Parrish. According to reports, Detroit president Jim Campbell repeatedly called Giles and ranted, "How can you go after my player? If you make a run at him, I'll go after [Phillies star] Von Hayes."

**One of those owners who warned him was a guy in the Milwaukee car leasing business by the name of Bud Selig. But let's not expand the story too much.*

Giles tentatively still agreed to meet with Reich and Parrish ("It takes some stones for you to be here right now," Reich conceded at the meeting) and he came armed with a one-year, \$1 million deal, significantly less than Parrish wanted. But Parrish and Reich surprised him by saying that they would consider it.

"Hey, if it's a matter of money," Phillies star Mike Schmidt said, "I'd be willing to contribute \$500,000 from my salary."

Joking aside, Giles began panicking and wavering. Campbell kept calling and threatening; it finally got to the point where Reich publicly said that he would sue the living hell out of the Tigers ("And if the Phillies back out of this," he reportedly told friends, "they could be part of it too").

This led to Giles adding a clause in the contract that would prevent Parrish from suing the Phillies and MLB over the deal, which is a weird thing to ask for unless you know you're doing something pretty shady. Collusion really was an open secret. In the end, Parrish agreed to waive his right to sue the Phillies specifically (but still leaving open the possibility for the union to take legal action against the owners in general) and he signed for \$1 million, exactly what he'd made with the Tigers a year earlier.*

**In the end, Parrish was awarded more than \$1.5 million in the collusion judgment.*

Bob Horner had an equally wild ride. After Atlanta offered him the half-million-dollar pay cut, he recalled Braves general manager Bobby Cox saying, “You’re going to burn at the stake if you don’t take this.” That seems unnecessarily aggressive, but Cox was right in that nobody else offered even close to what Atlanta did. San Diego offered Horner a much steeper pay cut, and when Horner considered actually taking it, that offer was pulled.

It got to the point where Horner was offered a deal in Charlotte (for \$3,001 per month) to play minor league baseball and serve as a pro wrestling double (“If he gains 20 pounds,” wrestling promoter Frances Crockett said). Instead, he signed to play in Japan for \$1.3 million or so.

Most of the others in the January 8 Eight just went back to their teams on May 1, the earliest they were allowed to return. In the end, Ron Guidry and the Yankees split the \$50,000 difference. Rich Gedman went back to the Red Sox feeling like “a beaten dog,” and then had to endure general partner Haywood Sullivan’s lecture on the evils of greed (Gedman did get more than \$1 million in the collusion judgment). Bob Boone signed with the Angels for exactly what they had offered on Jan. 8. Doyle Alexander went back to Atlanta for less than what they had offered on Jan. 8.

WHAT IS THE MEDIAN EARNINGS FOR MLB PLAYERS?

To get this number, we’ve got to dig into two figures: how long the average service time is, and what the median MLB salary is. The Major League Baseball Players Association reported that the [average career service time](#) for an active MLB player was 3.71 years as of 2020. And the Boston Globe reported that while the average MLB salary in 2021 was \$4.17 million, [the median MLB salary](#) was at \$1.65 million.

With an average career service time of 3.71 years and a median yearly salary of \$1.65 million, **the median MLB player earns \$6.13 million before taxes, agent commissions, and union dues.**

What is the median wealth for MLB owners?

Since owners don’t really have an equivalent to yearly salaries and don’t have a “career” equivalent, we’ll stick to the next best thing: wealth. [MLB Trade Rumors rounded up a list](#) of the reported wealth of every owner, and from that list we can determine that **MLB owners have a median wealth of \$3.2 billion.**

HOUSEKEEPING

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