

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

4.10.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

The season is finally underway. This week a ton of interesting bits, past and present. Longer pieces from The Athletic – Peter Gammons on Opening Day and Theo Epstein on improving the game on the field. And trivia. Enjoy.

WEEKLY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Three teams have never had an MVP. Name the teams.

Bonus question, name the last MVP for 10 of the other 27 teams

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Class move by the Red Sox with uniform patch honoring the late Jerry Remy.

It was twenty years ago John Henry, Larry Lucchino and Tom Werner purchased the Red Sox from the Yawkey Family Trust.

In case you missed it, the Yankees beat the Red Sox twice in a row to start the season. Giancarlo Stanton became the first Yankee to homer in six straight games against the Red Sox. Sunday's blast broke a tie with Hall of Famer Mickey Mantle, who homered in five consecutive contests against Boston in 1954.

Most Opening Day starts at one position in MLB history--**Willie Mays**, with 21 starts in center field.

Most career wins on Opening Day--Hall of Famer **Walter Johnson** (9-5 on Opening Day)

Jack Morris' 14 straight Opening Day starts are a record.

Tom Seaver holds the record for most overall Opening Day starts, with 16. He pitched 11 for the Mets, three for the Reds and two for the White Sox. "Tom Terrific" proved successful

opening the season, posting a 7-2 record. The Hall of Famer was more than up to the challenge, going 6-0 with a 2.13 ERA and 68 strikeouts in those 11 outings with New York.

That included a one-run, nine-strikeout complete game against the Phillies in 1975, when he outdueled Steve Carlton (who is tied for second most with **Randy Johnson**, Walter Johnson and Jack Morris with 14 opening day starts—others on the list **Roger Clemens 13, Robin Roberts 13, Justin Verlander 12, Grover Cleveland Alexander 12, Bert Blyleven 12, Felix Hernandez 11, CC Sabathia 11, Fergie Jenkins 11, Dennis Martinez 11.**

Clayton Kershaw won three Cy Young awards and finished top five in the voting seven straight years.

Something for the Braves to be thinking about-- No World Series champion has repeated since the Yankees from 1998-2000.

The Tigers have **Miguel Cabrera** batting fifth. That may not seem like a big deal, but Cabrera has batted second, third, or fourth in every game he has started for Detroit since 2009.

Last NL MVP to repeat-- NL since **Albert Pujols** with the Cardinals from 2008-09.

Koji Uehara (47) and **Hirokazu Sawamura** (34). They are two of the nine Japanese-born players the Red Sox have had. Eight were pitchers, with the exception being **Dave Roberts** in 2004. The others were **Tomo Ohka** (1999-2001), **Hideo Nomo** (2001), **Hideki Okajima** (2007-11), **Daisuke Matsuzaka** (2007-12), **Takashi Saito** (2009), and **Junichi Tazawa** (2009-16).

The Mets and Yankees completed the 16th trade in their collective histories, sending right-handed reliever **Miguel Castro** to the Bronx and lefty **Joely Rodríguez** to Queens. The vast majority of those deals have been minor, with one notable exception: **David Justice for Robin Ventura** in 2001.

Joey Votto has 14 Opening Day starts at first base for the Reds--only player in franchise history with more starts at one position is **Barry Larkin** (17 Opening Day starts at shortstop).

Early Wynn. 23 seasons with Senators, Indians, White Sox. He had 289 CG to go with his 300 wins, 49 shutouts

Would you have guessed the Arizona Diamondbacks are starting their 25th season in MLB?

Most recent pitcher to throw a no-hitter in both the AL and NL--**Randy Johnson** (6/2/1990 with Seattle and 5/18/2004 with Arizona).

Red Sox have 28 people in their research & development department. Up from 14 three years ago. The Rays have 37.

Former umpire **Terry Cooney** died last month at the age of 88. He is best remembered for ejecting **Roger Clemens** from Game 4 of the 1990 ALCS in Oakland.

With the Sox down, 3-0, in the series, Clemens arrived at the mound wearing eye black and green Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle laces in his cleats.

Cooney tossed Clemens in the second inning, saying the big righthander cursed him out after a walk. The game was delayed by a series of arguments, and **Marty Barrett** tossing a Gatorade bucket and a cooler full of sunflower seeds on the field.

Aaron Nola has made five consecutive Opening Day starts for the Phillies. The only pitchers in Phillies history with more are Hall of Famers **Steve Carlton** (10 from 1977-86) and **Robin Roberts** (12 from 1950-61)

2021 RECOLLECTIONS AND OPENING DAY NOTES FROM MLB.COM

Blue Jays led the Majors with 262 home runs in 2021. But the team also exhibited great plate discipline, led by Guerrero's discerning eye. Toronto's 1,218 strikeouts at the plate were the fewest in MLB. They became just the fifth team since 1900 to boast both the most homers and fewest K's, along with the 1995 Guardians, 1909 Giants and 1904-05 Giants.

Camden Yards will look a bit different this year, with a left-field wall that's 26 1/2 feet further back and almost six feet higher. There were 277 home runs there in 2021, tied for the fourth most in a season all-time, behind only 1999 Coors Field (303), Camden in '19 (289) and Minute Maid Park in '19 (282). To be clear, that's combined homers at the venue by both the home team and visitors. MLB.com's Mike Petriello took a look at the potential impact this could have and found that 196 home runs over the last four seasons at Camden Yards would have remained in the field of play under the 2022 dimensions.

Wander Franco was a lightning rod for the Rays last year, tying a record held by **Frank Robinson** for the longest on-base streak for a player before turning 21. Oh yeah, he also hit .368 and slugged .789 in four postseason games before Tampa Bay was eliminated.

There have been 44 players with at least 200 plate appearances in a season since 1980 in their age-20 season or younger. Of those, Franco's strikeout rate was the second lowest, behind only 1989 **Gary Sheffield** (8.1%).

Third baseman **Rafael Devers** has been an extra-base-hit machine in his time with the Red Sox. He's amassed 263 career extra-base hits so far, and he just turned 25 in October. That's the second-most extra-base hits by a Red Sox player before turning 25, trailing only **Ted Williams'** 314.

Two powerful sluggers by the names of **Aaron Judge** and **Giancarlo Stanton** play in the Bronx, and they'll be swinging away yet again this season. In 2021, they ranked first and second in MLB in hard-hit rate – Judge at 58.4% and Stanton at 56.3% – among 207 batters with at least 250 batted balls. Why focus on how hard they hit it? Here's why: In 2021, hard-hit batted balls led to a .500 batting average and 1.015 slugging percentage, league-wide. Those hit with an exit velocity of 94 mph or slower, *not* hard-hit? A .218 batting average, .256 slugging percentage.

The Cleveland squad is young. There are just two players aged 30 or older: 31-year-old **Anthony Gose** and 34-year-old **Bryan Shaw**. They're just the fifth team in the last 30 years to have as few as two players 30 or more years old on the date of their season opener, according to Elias. They join the 1997 Pirates (**Dale Sveum, Kevin Elster**), '98 Marlins (**Jim Eisenreich, John Cangelosi**), '99 Marlins (**Dennis Springer, Kirt Ojala**) and '00 Marlins (**Ricky Bones, Alex Fernandez**). The Guardians' roster averages 26 years, 253 days old. It's the fifth-youngest Opening Day roster over the last 30 years

Zack Greinke. After Kansas City drafted him No. 6 overall in 2002, he debuted for the club in '04 and pitched there through 2010 before a trade to the Brewers, winning the '09 AL Cy Young along the way. He started Opening Day for the Royals, 12 years after last doing so for the team in 2010. That's the largest gap between a pitcher's Opening Day starts for the same team, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, surpassing **Bert Blyleven** with the Twins (1976-87).

White sox can manage another first-place finish, it would mark the first time in 122 years of franchise history that the club did so back-to-back.

Robbie Ray will lead the Mariners' pitching staff in '22 on the heels of a Cy Young Award-winning campaign with the Blue Jays last season. What should Mariners fans keep an eye out

for? Try his four-seamer and his slider. He got 239 swinging strikes on the four-seamer and 237 on the slider. That was the second-most and fourth-most swinging strikes, respectively, by any pitcher on a single pitch type in 2021. And, you guessed it, he was the only pitcher to appear *twice* on that top-five list.

The Rangers signed **Marcus Semien** to a seven-year, \$175 million contract and **Corey Seager** to a 10-year, \$325 million pact in the offseason. With that, Texas became the first team to sign two players to deals of at least \$175 million in the same offseason. Only one other team had ever even done this with the threshold lowered to \$150 million: the Yankees entering 2009, with **Mark Teixeira** (\$180 million) and **CC Sabathia** (\$161 million).

Expect homers galore at Citizens Bank Park and on the road for the Phillies this year. With **Bryce Harper** and new acquisitions **Nick Castellanos** and **Kyle Schwarber**, the Phillies have three players who hit at least 30 home runs in 2021. The last time the Phillies had multiple players with at least 30 home runs in a season was in 2009, when they had a franchise-record four: **Ryan Howard**, **Raúl Ibañez**, **Chase Utley** and **Jayson Werth**. Overall, they've had at least three 30-homer hitters three other times: 2008 (**Pat Burrell**, **Howard**, **Utley**), '07 (**Burrell**, **Howard**, **Jimmy Rollins**) and 1929 (**Don Hurst**, **Chuck Klein**, **Lefty O'Doul**).

Miami's young rotation may be its most exciting feature in 2022, but don't forget about 24-year-old second baseman **Jazz Chisholm Jr.** He's fast, flashy and full of potential. The best example? He and Boston's **Rafael Devers** are the only players in the pitch-tracking era (since 2008) with multiple homers off pitches 100 mph or faster. And Chisholm is the only one to do that in a single season, having gone upper-deck off **Jacob deGrom** last April 10 before turning around some heat from Phillies lefty **José Alvarado** on May 18.

Pete Alonso led MLB outright in homers with 53 in 2019 as a rookie. No Mets player has ever led the NL in home runs multiple times *or* had multiple 40-plus homer seasons.

Juan Soto, the 23-year-old superstar in the nation's capital, is the best hitter in baseball. How does he do it? Glad you asked. The combination of his discerning eye and power play a big role. In 2021, he had a 35.0% swing rate, lowest in MLB (min. 1,750 pitches seen). Add to that a 12.2% chase rate, also the lowest (min. 750 out-of-zone pitches). But when he *did* swing, the results were powerful. 23.9% of his swings produced hard contact, the highest such rate (min. 250 batted balls).

Milwaukee's **Corbin Burnes** and **Brandon Woodruff** became the first pair of qualifying pitchers under age 30 to post ERA+ figures of at least 165 since **Luis Tiant** and **Sam McDowell** for Cleveland in 1968.

Future Hall of Famer **Albert Pujols** is back for one last hurrah with the Cardinals, a team he left in free agency after 2011. When Pujols plays his first regular-season game with the Cardinals on Opening Day, he will have gone 10 seasons between a World Series win (2011) and playing again for the club. That will be the most seasons in between a World Series win and a player's next game with a franchise, according to Elias.

Last year, the Dodgers became the fourth team to have four former MVPs appear for them in a season, with **Mookie Betts, Cody Bellinger, Clayton Kershaw and Albert Pujols**. New season, new fourth MVP, with Freddie Freeman replacing Pujols on the list. The '22 Dodgers will be the fifth team to have four former MVPs play for them in a season, joining the '21 Dodgers, '96 Red Sox, '82 Angels and '78 Reds.

Arizona's **Daulton Varsho** in 2021 was almost unheard of. Playing in his second MLB season at age 24, Varsho became only the third player in the previous 100 years to log at least 30 games apiece at catcher and in center field in the same season, joining the Cardinals' **Eli Marrero** (2002) and the Astros' **Craig Biggio** (1990).

Giants ace **Logan Webb** racks up strikeouts, including 10 K's and no walks in his postseason debut in NLDS Game 1. The only other pitchers to do that: **Jake Arrieta, Don Newcombe and Deacon Phillippe** ... in the *very first* World Series game in 1903.

Fernando Tatis Jr., who is out with a broken left wrist until roughly midseason. The Padres have the talent to do just that, but his absence is still a big blow. In 2021, Tatis tied **Alex Rodriguez's** 1998 record for home runs (42) by a shortstop age 22 or younger -- but did it in 208 fewer at-bats.

In 2021, Brewers ace **Corbin Burnes** ignited a run to NL Cy Young Award honors by racking up 49 strikeouts and zero walks over his first five starts. In fact, Burnes faced 126 batters before issuing his first free pass. So what happened with Burnes on the mound for Opening Day at Wrigley Field? He walked Cubs leadoff man **Rafael Ortega**, because of course he did. Burnes finished with three walks in five innings -- more than he had over his first seven outings last year.

Adam Wainwright mostly cruised through six scoreless innings against the Bucs, and he did it at 40 years and 220 days old. That made him the fourth-oldest AL/NL pitcher to post a scoreless outing of at least that length on Opening Day, going back to 1901. He trails only Rip Sewell of

the 1949 Pirates (41 years, 343 days), **Charlie Hough** of the 1989 Rangers (41 years, 89 days) and **Roger Clemens** of the 2003 Yankees (40 years, 239 days).

Shohei Ohtani can do it all on a baseball field. He hit 25 homers with at least a 110 mph exit velocity, four more than anyone else. He also allowed just an .087 batting average in at-bats ending on his splitter, the lowest of any pitcher on any pitch type (minimum 120 plate appearances).

Then history was made on both sides in the Astros-Angels Opening Day matchup, but Houston's achievement involved winning the game, whereas the Halos' was another individual feat for reigning AL MVP Shohei Ohtani.

Ohtani became the first player in AL/NL history to both throw his team's first pitch of the season and then take his team's first plate appearance of the season on Thursday night, striking out nine batters over 4 2/3 innings but going 0-for-4 at the plate.

The Astros, meanwhile, tied an AL/NL record by winning their 10th consecutive Opening Day contest thanks to back-to-back homers from **Alex Bregman** and **Yordan Alvarez** in the eighth inning. Houston's 10 consecutive Opening Day victories are tied with the Boston Beaneaters' run from 1887-96.

On National Beer Day, **Seth Beer** smashed a walk-off three-run homer off the Padres **Craig Stammen** to lift the D-backs to victory on what was undoubtedly Beer's day. It was Beer's second career home run after he homered in his first career at-bat on Sept. 10 of last season, and his first career walk-off shot. Beer also became the first rookie in MLB history to hit a walk-off homer with his team trailing on Opening Day.

Before **Jurickson Profar** started in left field for the Padres on Thursday, San Diego had started a *different* player in left field on Opening Day in 17 straight seasons. That streak, which ended Thursday, was the second-longest streak of consecutive Opening Days starting a different player, with no repeaters, at any particular position since 1900, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

The longest such streak belongs to the Browns/Orioles from 1937-55, also at left field – a whopping 19 straight Opening Days with a different individual manning the position.

The Giants have started a different player in left field each year since 2007, a 15-season streak entering '22 that dates to **Barry Bonds'** final year. That's tied with the 1936-50 Phillies at pitcher and 1929-43 Reds, also in left field, for third on the list.

However, unlike the Padres, whose new-faces-in-left streak ended, the Giants are sure to push this to at least 16 straight, and gain sole possession of third on the list. Austin Slater, a righty, started in left last year, and manager **Gabe Kapler** has already committed to starting a lefty against the Marlins' **Sandy Alcántara**.

Bonds started 14 of 15 seasons in left field for the Giants from 1993-2007, missing only '05, due to injury. Thus, the streak begins with his final season in 2007, followed by: **Dave Roberts, Fred Lewis, Mark DeRosa, Pat Burrell, Aubrey Huff, Andres Torres, Mike Morse, Nori Aoki, Angel Pagan, Jarrett Parker, Hunter Pence, Connor Joe, Alex Dickerson and Slater**.

R.I.P. TOMMY DAVIS

(another of my childhood baseball cards has died)

Tommy Davis, a former Brooklyn-born baseball prodigy who became a two-time All-Star, won two consecutive National League batting titles and led the star-studded Los Angeles Dodgers to a World Series championship in 1963, died on Sunday in Phoenix. He was 83.

At 23, Davis, a right-handed hitter, had his breakout season in 1962, batting a league-leading .346 with 230 hits, 27 home runs and 153 runs batted in — a Dodgers team R.B.I. record that still stands. He finished third in the Most Valuable Player voting and joined **Sandy Koufax**, another Brooklyn product who had emerged as one of the era's dominant pitchers, to lead the team on a run at the pennant. In 556 plate appearances that season, he struck out just 59 times.

The Dodgers and Giants finished the regular season with identical 101-61 records, but the Giants, led by **Willie Mays**, won the pennant in a three-game playoff. Davis, an All-Star that year, won the National League batting title on the regular season's final day by getting two hits to reach .346.

The playoff disappointment fueled a Dodger run to the pennant in 1963 as Davis, again selected as an All-Star, followed up with another batting title — the last Dodger to win one — hitting .326. The Dodgers swept the Yankees in the World Series behind the overpowering pitching of Koufax and **Don Drysdale**. Davis led the Dodgers with a .400 batting average for the Series.

After his departure from the Dodgers, Davis embarked on a long, multi-stop tour of the majors. Though his speed and power were diminished, his batting eye remained as potent as ever. He batted .302 for the 1967 Mets, but was traded the following season to the White Sox, who left him exposed to the 1969 expansion draft. He was eventually snapped up by the Seattle Pilots, where he lasted five months before being traded again, this time to the Houston Astros. Davis

went on in 1970 to hit a combined .284 for three clubs, including the Chicago Cubs, before the Oakland A's released him.

Then with the Orioles, his 10th team in 15 seasons, Davis flourished as the full-time D.H., batting .306, the top average in the league at that position. In 1974, he was once again the leading designated hitter, finishing with 181 hits and a .289 average.

"The designated hitter is taking care of this old man," Davis told The Times. "It sure has helped me bring home the paychecks."

When he failed to make the Yankees in 1976, he finished that season as the D.H. for the Kansas City Royals. In his final game, the 1,999th of his career, in October, he had two singles and finished with a lifetime .294 batting average, 153 home runs, 1,052 RBIs, and 2,121 hits.

TOOD FRAZIER HANGS 'EM UP

Todd Frazier, the pride of Toms River, NJ retired this week. (Frazier retired on the same day that right hander Toms River native **Ron Marinaccio** made the Yankees roster.)

Frazier has appeared in the majors in each of the past 11 seasons. A supplemental first-round pick out of Rutgers by the Reds in 2007, Frazier emerged as one of the sport's most promising prospects within his first couple pro seasons. He debuted in the big leagues in 2011 and cemented himself at the hot corner in Cincinnati not long thereafter.

In 128 games in 2012, Frazier hit a productive .273/.331/.498 en-route to a third-place finish in NL Rookie of the Year balloting. The rebuilding Reds moved Frazier to the White Sox as part of a three-team deal with the Dodgers the following winter. He spent a season and a half in Chicago, not quite reaching his peak Cincinnati level but still offering solid production. The Sox moved him to the Yankees midseason in 2017, and he spent the following two years in Queens after signing with the Mets that offseason.

He signed with the Rangers over the 2019-20 offseason, then ended up back in Flushing when the Mets acquired him at the trade deadline. Frazier struggled down the stretch, though, and New York bought him out that winter. He hooked on with the Pirates last offseason and played in 13 games before being released in March.

Frazier was among a handful of respected veterans to represent the U.S. as part of last summer's Silver Medal-winning team at the Tokyo Olympics.

Frazier wraps up his career with a .241/.318/.445 slash line in a bit under 5,000 MLB plate appearances. He suited up for six different clubs, combining to hit 218 homers and drive in 640 runs.

At the age of 12 and measuring 5 feet 2 inches and 104 pounds Frazier was a star on the Toms River East American Little League All-Star team that won the New Jersey state championship and then the US East regional championship, to advance to the 1998 Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Dubbed the "Beasts of the East" for their skill, power and lucky-charm, stuffed gorilla, the team went undefeated in the tournament, and Frazier saved his best performance for the world championship game against the Far East and International-champion Kashima Little League from Kashima, Ibaraki, Japan, on August 29 at Howard J. Lamade Stadium. Beginning the game at shortstop, not only did he go 4–4 with a leadoff home run, but he was also the winning pitcher and recorded the game-winning strikeout that sealed a 12–9 Toms River win and the world championship – the first American Little League world championship since 1993.

To celebrate their world championship, the Toms River team was invited by the New York Yankees to Yankee Stadium on September 1, 1998, as the Yankees faced the Oakland Athletics, and each Toms River player was introduced publicly to the crowd and invited to stand next to his Yankee position counterpart during the national anthem, which meant that Frazier, as shortstop, was standing next to New Jersey-born **Derek Jeter**.

Frazier attended Rutgers University and played college baseball for the Rutgers Scarlet Knights. In 2005 and 2006, he played collegiate summer baseball for the Chatham A's of the Cape Cod Baseball League. In 2007, he started all 63 games for Rutgers, posting a .377 batting average, a .502 on-base percentage, and a .757 slugging percentage. He won Big East player of the year in 2007

MORE EL TIANTE

Several emails in response to last week's comparison of Hall of Famer **Catfish Hunter** vs. **Luis Tiant**.

On July 19, 1964, Tiant debuted in the major leagues for the Cleveland Indians with a four-single, 11 strikeout, 3–0 shutout victory against the defending AL Champion New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium. The losing pitcher was **Whitey Ford**. Tiant finished his rookie season with a 10–4 record, 105 strikeouts, and a 2.83 ERA in 19 games.

Tiant broke through in 1968, after he altered his delivery where he turned away from home plate during his motion, in effect creating a hesitation pitch. According to Tiant, the new motion was a response to a drop in his velocity due to a shoulder blade injury. Twisting and turning his body into unthinkable positions, Tiant would spend more time looking at second base than he did the plate as he prepared to throw. In that season, he led the league in ERA (1.60), shutouts (nine, including four consecutive), hits per nine innings (a still-standing franchise record 5.30, which broke **Herb Score**'s 5.85 in 1956 and would be a Major-League record low until Nolan Ryan gave up 5.26 hits/9 innings in 1972), strikeouts per nine innings (9.22), while finishing with

a 21–9 mark. His four consecutive shutouts are matched by only four other pitchers in the 50-year expansion era, with **Don Drysdale** (six, 1968), **Bob Gibson** (five, 1968), **Orel Hershiser** (five, 1988) and **Gaylord Perry** (four, 1970) being the others. Besides this, opposing hitters batted just .168 off Tiant, a major league record, and on July 3 he struck out 19 Minnesota Twins in a ten-inning game, setting an American League record for games of that length. His 1.60 ERA in 1968 was the lowest in the American League since Walter Johnson's 1.49 mark during the dead-ball era in 1919, and was eclipsed that season only by National Leaguer (St. Louis Cardinals) Bob Gibson's 1.12—the lowest ever during the live-ball era. With **Sam McDowell**, **Sonny Siebert**, and others, the Indians staff led the AL in strikeouts for five consecutive years, including a record 1189 strikeouts in 1967, a record that would stand for 30 years. He wrapped up his career with 187 complete games and 49 shutouts.

MONEY MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

Eight of the last 12 World Series winners have had a payroll in the top 10 in Major League Baseball in the season in which they won. The exceptions: the 2011 St. Louis Cardinals, the 2015 Kansas City Royals, the since tainted 2017 Houston Astros and the 2021 Atlanta Braves.

Of the three top 2022 payrolls, the Yankees (\$262 million) haven't won a World Series, or even appeared in one, since 2009. The Mets' (\$287 million) last title came in 1986, but their most recent trip was in 2015. The Dodgers (\$293 million) have appeared in three of the past five, winning in 2020.

In 2021, the \$4.05 billion spent on payroll was the lowest in a fully completed year since 2015, according to The Associated Press's calculations. Only two teams — the San Diego Padres and the Dodgers — paid the luxury tax. Nine teams spent \$92 million or less in payroll. The median M.L.B. salary was \$1.15 million, down from the record-high \$1.65 million in 2015. And the average career length was about four years, with salary arbitration, which provides significant raises, generally not starting until after a player had accrued three years of service time.

Those numbers, though, are expected to go up in the current agreement because the sides agreed to raise the league-minimum rate, which the majority of players make, from \$570,500 in 2021 to \$700,000 in 2022. There will also be a \$50 million bonus pool for top young players who are not yet eligible for arbitration. This off-season, owners spent more than \$3 billion on new player salaries, breaking the previous winter record, which was set in 2016.

Max Scherzer, who will make \$43.3 million this season after signing with the Mets, is expected to earn more than the entire estimated opening day payrolls of the following teams, according to Cot's Baseball Contracts: the Baltimore Orioles, the Athletics and the Pirates. The Cleveland Guardians aren't far ahead of Scherzer, with a projected payroll of \$52 million.

TOP PICKS

No. 1 overall Draft picks were the name of the game last Sunday as the Tigers took on the Phillies at BayCare Ballpark. In the bottom of the first, 2010 No. 1 overall pick **Bryce Harper** homered off **Casey Mize**, who was taken first in '18. Then, in the top of the second, 2020 No. 1 overall pick **Spencer Torkelson** went yard for Detroit. In the bottom of the fourth, it was 2016 No. 1 overall pick **Mickey Moniak**'s turn – also off Mize.

Harper and Moniak also each added another homer later in the game, which the Phillies won, 8-7.

There have been just five games in the regular season or postseason where three No. 1 overall picks each homered, and four of them happened in the same year -- 1998. On April 15, 1998, **Darin Erstad** (1995), **Darryl Strawberry** ('80) and **Phil Nevin** ('92) all homered in an Angels-Yankees game. On April 30, **Alex Rodriguez** ('93), Strawberry and **Ken Griffey Jr.** ('87) did so in a Yankees-Mariners game, a feat they'd repeat on Aug. 29. And on June 2, 1998, Rodriguez, Griffey and **B.J. Surhoff** ('85) all homered in a Mariners-Orioles game.

The only occurrence not in 1998 was Sept. 10, 1978, between the Dodgers and Braves, with homers from **Bob Horner** ('78), **Jeff Burroughs** ('69) and **Rick Monday** ('65, the first amateur draft in MLB history).

And as for the fact that two of the homers were off a pitcher who was a No. 1 overall pick in Mize, that's something that's never happened in a regular-season or postseason game. No first overall pick has ever allowed homers to two different No. 1 picks in the same game.

MILESTONES

Last year, we saw **Max Scherzer** reach 3,000 strikeouts and **Miguel Cabrera** notch 500 home runs. Looking ahead to this season:

Miguel Cabrera: 3,000 hits

This milestone was on the list for Cabrera last year, too, when he joined the 500 home run club. He had 121 hits last year, bringing him to 2,987 for his career. His impressive resume already includes a Triple Crown, two MVP awards, 500 home runs and 11 All-Star selections, not to mention a World Series title in 2003 with the Marlins. But 3,000 hits would put him into even further rarefied air. There are 32 members of the 3,000 hit club and 28 individuals with 500 home runs. Only six players check both boxes: **Alex Rodriguez, Albert Pujols, Rafael Palmeiro, Eddie Murray, Willie Mays and Henry Aaron**. Cabrera will be the seventh.

Albert Pujols: ninth all-time in hits, third in total bases and extra-base hits, 700 HR

Pujols is, like last year, approaching the top 10 all-time in hits and top threes for total bases and extra-base hits. He enters the year 11th in hits, with 3,301. Here's the top 10, according to the Elias Sports Bureau:

1. **Pete Rose**: 4,256
2. **Ty Cobb**: 4,192
3. **Henry Aaron**: 3,771
4. **Stan Musial**: 3,630
5. **Tris Speaker**: 3,514
6. **Derek Jeter**: 3,465
7. **Honus Wagner**: 3,430
8. **Carl Yastrzemski**: 3,419
9. **Paul Molitor**: 3,319
10. **Eddie Collins**: 3,313

Pujols enters the year with 6,042 career total bases, trailing only **Willie Mays** (6,066), Stan Musial (6,134) and Henry Aaron (6,856). And he has 1,367 career extra-base hits, fourth behind only Musial (1,377), **Barry Bonds** (1,440) and Aaron (1,477). The context here needs very little parsing: an all-time great can continue to climb some noteworthy lists.

And then there are the homers. Pujols has 679, with Alex Rodriguez's 696 on the horizon, and the rarefied air of 700 homers just beyond it.

Almost all of these seem within reach for Pujols in 2022. He needs 19 hits to vault from 11th all-time to ninth, passing Molitor. As noted above, passing Yastrzemski would take another 100 hits -- so that eighth-place mark is more of a stretch. ZiPS projects Pujols for 71 hits in '22.

Those total bases and extra-base hit milestones seem very reachable as well. Pujols had 119 total bases last year, and he's 39 shy of passing Mays on the list, and 93 shy of passing Musial for second. Depending on his playing time, second could be realistic, too. He's 11 extra-base hits shy of passing Musial there, and projected for 21. As for the homers, he's projected for 13, which would give him 692 -- still trailing Rodriguez and the big 700.

Clayton Kershaw: Dodgers' all-time strikeout leader

Kershaw is very close to **Don Sutton**'s Dodgers franchise record for strikeouts, and likely would have gotten there in 2021 if not for injury. Now, having re-signed with the Dodgers in free agency instead of playing elsewhere, he gets his chance. Sutton notched 2,696 during his time in Dodger Blue. Kershaw enters the year at 2,670. The only active pitcher who is his team's franchise strikeout leader is **Stephen Strasburg**, at 1,718, more than anyone else in a Nationals or Expos uniform.

Adam Wainwright & Yadier Molina: most games as battery, plus more for Yadi

It's the dynamic duo that's been together for what seems like ever. Last year, Wainwright and Molina reached a round-number milestone with their 300th game as a starting battery. But the real prize is the top of the list: **Mickey Lolich** and **Bill Freehan**'s 324 games as a starting battery.

Most common regular-season starting batteries since 1900, per Elias:

Mickey Lolich-Bill Freehan: 324

Warren Spahn-Del Crandall: 316

Red Faber-Ray Schalk: 306

Adam Wainwright-Yadier Molina: 304

Molina's workload on its own is of note, too. He's currently caught 2,107 career games, which ranks fourth, 120 shy of passing **Carlton Fisk** and **Bob Boone** to reach second all-time behind **Iván Rodríguez**.

Both the duo record and the solo placement for Molina seem doable. Wainwright made 32 starts last year and Molina caught 30 of them. And they're just 21 starts shy of passing Lolich and Freehan. Molina caught 118 games last year – very close to the 120 he'd need to pass Fisk and Boone, or the 119 to pass just Boone. **Adam Wainwright** started on Opening Day for the Cardinals and **Yadier Molina** caught him. It was Molina's 18th consecutive Opening Day start, tying **Stan Musial** for the franchise record. Molina is the only catcher to make 18 Opening Day starts for one team.

Juan Soto has 98 career home runs, fourth-most by a player before turning 23 – and who knows where he might've been on the list if not for the 60-game 2020 season. Looking ahead to this year, 133 career homers would be one ahead of **Ken Griffey Jr.** for most before turning 24. As for Soto and the third-most before turning 24, if he hits 35 this season it would give him 133 on the dot, one ahead of Griffey. **Mel Ott** and **Eddie Mathews** lead that list, by the way, with 153 each.

Ohtani is third among Japanese-born players with 93 career homers, trailing **Ichiro Suzuki** (117) and **Hideki Matsui** (175).

JOE POSNANSKI NOTES

Julio Urias of the Dodgers was baseball's only 20-game winner last year — he went 20-3 — which in another era, surely would have made him the Cy Young award winner. The writers CERTAINLY would not have voted for Milwaukee's **Corbin Burnes** over Urias. Burnes went 11-5 in 167 innings pitched — in those old days when won-loss record was everything, Burnes would not have gotten a single first-place Cy Young vote and maybe no down-ballot votes either. We

don't always appreciate just how much our appreciation of pitching has changed over the last 30 or so years.

One thing that's baffling about **Trea Turner** is that he hit into 18 double plays in 2021. That's baffling because Turner is one of the fastest players in baseball — in fact, by Statcast™ Sprint Speed he IS the fastest player in baseball. His 4.13 time from home to first base is elite, right at the top of the game.

So why all the doubles plays? It seems to come down to this: Turner hits the ball on the ground quite a lot. And he tends to hit the ball very hard. It doesn't matter how fast you are or if you slide like Fred Astaire, if you hit hard ground balls, you will hit into double plays.

Nobody in the National League has played more games since 2018 than **Freddie Freeman**.

Lots of people know **George Brett**'s older brother **Ken Brett** pitched in the majors. I did not know **Vlad Guerrero**'s older brother **Wilton** played 8 years in the bigs. **Robin Yount**'s older brother **Larry** pitched one year for the Astros.

D'backs used 16 starting pitchers last year. Lost 110 games.

Guys north of age 35 with most seasons 200 IP:

Justin Verlander, age 37 has pitched over 200 innings 12 times

David Price, age 35, 6x

Adam Wainwright age 39 6x

Zack Greinke age 37 9x

Max Scherzer age 36, 6x

Guys younger than age 35 with most seasons 200 IP:

Madison Bumgarner: 7

Corey Kluber, Clayton Kershaw: 5

Gerrit Cole, Chris Sale and Jose Quintana: 4

Jacob deGrom, Chris Archer, Dallas Keuchel, Patrick Corbin, Lance Lynn, Ian Kennedy: 3

For perspective, **Don Sutton** had 20 seasons of 200 IP.

Would you believe that leftfielder **David Peralta** has been a regular with the Diamondbacks since 2014? It's really quite incredible. He signed with St. Louis as a pitcher, washed out, and in 2011 decided to reinvent himself as a hitter with Rio Grande Valley of the North American League, where he hit .392 with 17 home runs. He later played independent ball in Wichita and Amarillo, and at age 25, the Diamondbacks decided to take a flyer on him.

The next year, he was up in Arizona to stay.

And he has stayed and stayed; his 891 hits place him third in team history, behind only **Luis Gonzalez** and **Paul Goldschmidt**. And over that time, he has won a Gold Glove, he won a Silver Slugger Award AND he has led the league in triples ... twice, including last year.

Colorado Rockies. 29 seasons. They've made the postseason five times, which is nice, and they even crashed the World Series party back in 2007, when they went on a striking seven-game postseason winning streak against Philadelphia and Arizona. But was that a great team? Nah. Were any of those five teams that made the postseason a great team? Nah. Not one of them won the division. Not one of them won more than 92 games in a season.

The Rockies have had great PLAYERS — or more specifically great POSITION PLAYERS, quite a few of them, in fact. **Larry Walker. Todd Helton. Nolan Arenado. Trevor Story. Troy Tulowitzki.** You could even argue that **Charlie Blackmon and Matt Holliday and DJ LeMahieu** were, well, if not great players then certainly very good ones.

Bud Black has spent 14 years managing, perhaps, the two least-thought-about teams in baseball, the San Diego Padres and Colorado Rockies. So you probably have not thought much about him. He has had just four winning records in those 14 years

Twins **Joe Ryan**, became just the third pitcher in the last 50 years to start on Opening Day having made five or fewer big-league starts. The other two, you will be glad to know, are:

— **Steve Busby**, Kansas City, 1973. Buzz went into spring training that year just hoping to make the team — he'd gone 3-1 with a 1.58 ERA in five big-league starts in '72. Instead, he dominated spring training, no-hitting the Tigers, and with the Royals opening on the road in Anaheim, Kansas City manager Jack McKeon decided to let Busby start just nine minutes away from where he grew up in Fullerton.

— **José Guzmán**, Texas, 1986. Well, this was more of a fluke. Guzman was not supposed to be the Opening Day starter. It was supposed to be knuckleballer **Charlie Hough**. But — and it just doesn't get much funnier than this — Hough broke his pinky finger the day before the game, opening it up for Guzmán. Why is this funny? Because Hough broke his finger ... by doing some goofy trick handshake with a friend.

Miguel Sanó will be at 1B for the Twins, where every indication is that he will strike out a lot, blast 30 home runs, carry the team for two-week stretches and play subpar defense. We should stop for a moment to talk about the strikeouts. Sano became the fastest player in baseball history to reach 1,000 strikeouts, getting there in just 661 games, which is an astonishing number. That's WAY ahead of the pace of strikeout legends **Mark Reynolds** (747 games), **Chris Davis** (816), **Rob Deer** (828) and **Ryan Howard** (843).

It took **Reggie Jackson**, the all-time strikeout king, 1,083 games to get to 1,000. That's more than 2 1/2 seasons longer than it took Sanó.

A special word about **Wade Davis**, who announced his retirement at the end of last season. The Royals got him as sort of the throw-in back when they made the controversial **Wil-Myers-for-Big-Game-James-Shields** trade. The Royals will tell you that they targeted Davis, and maybe they did, but they expected him to be a starter. And that didn't work out at all.

What did work out was Wade Davis in the bullpen. From 2014 through 2016, counting the postseason, Davis pitched 207 2/3 innings, which you might think of as a full season for a starter. Here is what that season would look like:

22-4, 1.12 ERA, 272 strikeouts, 64 walks, 3 home runs allowed (!), 0.876 WHIP.

That's **Bob Gibson** meets **Sandy Koufax** meets **Mariano Rivera** meets **Walter Johnson**.

The Royals don't win either pennant without Wade Davis. They don't win the World Series without Wade Davis.

HISTORY LESSON

The National League's starting centerfielder in baseball's first All Star Game, **Wally Berger** made the four consecutive Mid-Summer Classic squads. From 1930-1937 toiled in relative obscurity for the lowly Boston Braves.

In his first season Berger set MLB's record for homers by a rookie. He received votes in MVP balloting each of his campaigns from 1932-1936.

Berger finished his 11-year big league career with 1,550 hits, 299 doubles, 242 homers, and 898 RBI. His lifetime marks include an even .300 batting average, a .522 slugging percentage, and a 138 OPS+.

If not for the brevity of his career, Wally Berger's continued production would have put him in Cooperstown.

HIGH TECH

MLB informed clubs in a memo today that it is moving forward with regular-season use of PitchCom -- a wearable device that transmits signals from catcher to pitcher -- in 2022. The technology, which will be optional, was approved by the MLB Players Association after receiving generally positive feedback in experimental usage at the Single-A level last year and in big league camps during Spring Training this year.

Aimed at both improving pace of play and preventing opponent sign-stealing, PitchCom eliminates the need for a catcher's traditional finger signals. Rather, the catcher wears a forearm sleeve -- resembling a remote control -- with nine buttons for calling the pitch and location. The pitcher has a receiver in his cap, the catcher has one in his helmet and receivers

can also be worn by up to three other fielders (typically, the two middle infielders and the center fielder) to adjust fielder positioning.

An encrypted channel can be used in multiple languages, and teams can also program in code words to replace pitch names such as “fastball” or “curveball.”

Last year’s average nine-inning game was a new record high at three hours, 10 minutes, 7 seconds. The game is often slowed when teams have a runner or runners aboard, particularly at second base, where the runner can attempt to decode a catcher’s signals. Pitchers and catchers will typically switch up their signs in those situations to try to shield their calls.

With PitchCom, the communication between catcher is more seamless and straightforward. The technology can also conceivably reduce the number of mound visits in which pitchers and catchers go over signs.

PitchCom is the creation of ProMystic, a modular technology company that typically caters to mentalists and magicians. ProMystic approached MLB with its idea for a pitch signal communication device in 2020.

MLB executive Theo Epstein explained to *The Athletic*'s Jayson Stark on Tuesday how the devices may help speed baseball games up dramatically.

"We've all seen what happens to the flow of the game when runners get on second base," Epstein said. "Things grind to a halt, because there's a real cat-and-mouse game – with runners on second trying to figure out the sign sequence and get the pitch and pass it on to the hitter."

"The catcher has to come out from behind home plate. He has to get on the same page with the pitcher about whichever sign sequences they're using. You sometimes have to change sign systems that you're using ... if you think the runner has picked up on (the signs). So the game is ground to a halt with runners on second base. And with the PitchCom technology, that would be eliminated from the game."

The first official application of PitchCom came last August, when MLB announced it would be available for use in the Low-A West League.

COACHES AND MORE COACHES

The New York Times

Before the San Francisco Giants rolled to a best-in-baseball 107 wins last year, ended the Los Angeles Dodgers’ eight-year run of National League West titles and looked like geniuses, there was a seemingly wild idea that had come a year earlier.

What if, Manager **Gabe Kapler** asked his new boss, we expanded the coaching staff? Like, really expanded it, to 13 total coaches? Kapler, who had been given the seemingly impossible task of replacing **Bruce Bochy**, explained his vision, likening it to the importance of having a robust pupil-to-teacher ratio in school. The smaller the class size, the more the students benefit.

The Giants, indeed, pumped up their staff to 13 coaches (not including the manager) for the 2020 season. Instead of one hitting and one pitching coach, they employed three each: A hitting coach, a director of hitting/assistant hitting coach and an assistant hitting coach; and a pitching coach, a director of pitching and an assistant pitching coach. They listed the traditional roles (bench coach/infield coach and first- and third-base coaches) and a nontraditional one (quality assurance coach). There was a bullpen/catching coach, plus two assistant coaches, one of whom was **Alyssa Nakken**, the first female coach in Major League Baseball.

For most of Bochy's 13 years, in which he piloted the Giants to three World Series championships in a five-season span, he worked with what had been the standard in baseball for decades: six coaches. They were bench, hitting, pitching, first base, third base and bullpen. By 2019, his final season, the Giants had added an assistant hitting coach and, in deference to the new replay rules, a "coach/video replay analyst."

Indeed, in an industry in which success begets copycats, 13 teams list coaching staffs in double digits this year. Cincinnati has matched San Francisco with 13 coaches. The Phillies, the Cubs and the Diamondbacks are at 12 each; the Red Sox and the Angels have 11.

"You have a big group of players, and they all have different communication styles, they all have different backgrounds, they all come from different parts of the country and from different parts of the world," Kapler said. "The goal for us was and is to give everybody in our clubhouse somebody to relate to and somebody they can connect with."

The idea is to tailor agendas to the needs of individual players and to make sure communication flows two ways. When **Brandon Belt**, **Darin Ruf** and **LaMonte Wade Jr.** take ground balls at first base, each may want to focus on a different skill on a particular day. Perhaps shortstop **Brandon Crawford** wants a lighter workload, but **Mauricio Dubón** wants more strenuous pregame preparation. New hire **Pedro Guerrero** gives the Giants a Spanish-speaking hitting coach to serve those players in the dugout during games, bypassing the need for a translator.

A crucial philosophy is having the players become "co-pilots" in their careers, said **Kai Correa**, the bench and infield coach, who added that the Giants want them to become "just as much chefs as consumers" in their ongoing development.

Just three of the coaches played in the majors — **Andrew Bailey** (pitching coach), **Brian Bannister** (director of pitching) and **Antoan Richardson** (first-base coach). Only five of the 13 had even been on a major league coaching staff. Kapler got to know some of them during his four years as the Dodgers' director of player development from 2014-17. Others he knew of,

either by reputation or the five-star reviews of colleagues, and he made it a point to recruit them.

M.L.B. regulations allow for one manager and eight coaches in a dugout during games (when rosters expand in September, clubs are allowed nine coaches on the bench). Giants coaches who are not in the dugout are stationed in the clubhouse or behind the dugout in the indoor batting cage to assist where needed. Nakken, for example, makes sure potential pinch-hitters know which rival pitchers are warming up in the bullpen. One of her other duties is breaking down opponents' ground-ball percentages so the Giants can deploy a five-man infield at the proper times.

Overall, Kapler likens Nakken to a traffic director who makes sure the communication among the coaches, and between coaches and players, is seamless.

HOW DOES J.D. MARTINEZ DO IT? THE RED SOX SLUGGER REVEALS THE SECRETS OF HIS 'TOY BAG'.

By Julian McWilliams Boston Globe Staff

J.D. Martinez remembered the moment vividly.

It took place during a time in which Martinez knew what it felt like to be doubted. A time when he still had to prove what type of hitter he could potentially be.

His journey has been well chronicled. Released by the Astros in March 2014, Martinez totally revamped a swing that was too steep and produced too many ground balls. If he got the ball in the air a bit more with his body type — 6-foot-3, 240 pounds — he could be more successful. But that was only part of his quest. Just a small smidge of it.

Ultimately, Martinez would have to take his findings in front of others to critique. Teams, coaches, managers, general managers. He had to be ready for the doubt. That was the most important piece.

Martinez, seated at his locker at JetBlue Park one morning this spring, recounted one instance where he received some pushback from a coach.

"J.D.," the coach uttered, "we gotta find you a routine."

Martinez didn't back down.

"I was like, 'I totally disagree.' "

Martinez didn't reveal the particular team or coach. That would be punching down after three Silver Slugger awards and four All-Star Games, the last three at designated hitter.

The back-and-forth between the two is what really mattered. If Martinez really wanted to become a successful hitter, he would have to lean on his own understanding and be confident in it, even when others questioned the philosophy.

The routine had to be engineered or structured within the unpredictable. The different variables and different movements were all a part of a routine.

"One day, I wake up and my shoulder hurts. The next day I wake up, my knee hurts. The next day, I wake up, my ankle hurts," Martinez said. "Then your body starts to compensate and then you start doing different things."

Inside Martinez's locker, at the very top, is a two-by-four. He uses that to ensure he doesn't dive over the plate. Inside a green bag, there's a stick attached to a towel. Martinez will use that to ensure he's snapping his swing instead of getting out and around the baseball.

There are balls Martinez will put under his feet during drills that remind him to stay in the ground when he hits. The feet and legs are at the fulcrum of the foundation to hitting.

There are deflated balls.

Slides he puts under his feet.

Softballs.

The list goes on.

"There are little things that I do that just help me," Martinez said. "They call it J.D.'s toy bag."

Martinez has always said his swing had to be built from the ground up. He admitted not everyone should do the drills he does. That sometimes, it can be too much information. **Bobby Dalbec** became interested last year as he tried to find his footing during his first full year in the big leagues.

But Martinez knew it wasn't for Dalbec.

"He would tell me, 'I am not a natural hitter. I'm a trained hitter. These things I have to do,'" Dalbec said.

Xander Bogaerts said he doesn't know if he could do the drills or inherit Martinez's routine. **Christian Vázquez** laughed when asked.

“He’s crazy,” Vázquez said. “But it works for him.”

That’s the key. He’s a reminder that each hitter is different, with the contrast between Martinez and his peers distinct.

There are feel hitters and then there are visual hitters. Martinez, in some odd way, falls on the extreme of both spectrums. He uses a 32-ounce Old Hickory J143M to start the year, then drops in weight to about 31 ounces as the mileage and swings of a season pile up on his muscles and shoulders. That’s feel.

During drills or in the cage, those are feel movements, too. Martinez’s two-by-four doesn’t just keep him from diving over the plate.

“Sometimes I put it between my feet. Other times I put it on the front of my foot,” he said. “Other times I put my toe on it, just to feel myself in my heel. And other times, I put my heel on it so I can feel myself on my toe.”

The feel, though, turns to visual. If something feels good in the game, but is wrong when Martinez looks at it on video between at-bats, he’ll correct and sometimes force that movement. Even if it doesn’t feel right, if it’s the proper mechanics, Martinez can live with it.

He understands that feel, for him, won’t equal success during the height of competition. Instead, being in the right position mechanically will.

“I say it’s like the constant pursuit of perfection in his game,” hitting coach Peter Fatse said. “You’re never perfect, right? But it’s the constant pursuit for him. He’s very objective with the way in which he looks at things.”

The randomness in the preparation? For Martinez, that’s the routine. He worked through it on his own when some of those closest to him didn’t see the vision, then with former Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers prior to his departure this winter to take the same job with the Rangers.

To hear Martinez, though, Hyers didn’t go to the Rangers empty handed. The toy bag is a little light.

“I feel like Tim took half my stash when he went to Texas,” Martinez said with a smile. “I have to call him up.”

THEO EPSTEIN

(a long piece from The Athletic—Epstein always has something interesting to say).

Theo Epstein discusses how rule change process could impact the future of baseball

Like the rest of us, Theo Epstein can't truly predict the future. But he can see it. And even better, he can do something about it. At least the baseball part of it.

In his previous life, as the president of baseball ops for the Red Sox and Cubs, his job description was "Team Builder." Not to mention "Curse Buster." That went well.

Now, though, in his new gig as a special consultant to Major League Baseball, Epstein has a whole different job description, but one just as important: "Visionary." That works. "Game changer." That, too. But somewhere on his new business card, can we make sure to include this line, too: "Lover of baseball."

On a fascinating new visit to Starkville, via [The Athletic Baseball Show](#), Epstein dropped that word, "love," on us 36 different times. He also shared many of his visions for the future, near and far, with me and Doug Glanville. It's worth listening to in full.

More importantly, it's worth paying attention to. Some of what he sees is this:

- A tennis-like instant challenge of ball/strike calls, which will be tried out in the Florida State League this season.
- A tight, 14-second pitch clock that could restore the rhythm of baseball without sacrificing any of the action or artistry. That will be trotted out across all minor leagues this year.
- Catchers calling pitches on a wrist pad — a change coming to the big leagues this season — to wage war on sign stealing and, even more impactfully, on the now-interminable pace of games any time a runner reaches second base.
- A shift-proof universe where infielders can't roam around the outfield, meaning they'll have to rely on their (gasp) instincts and athleticism — as opposed to just consulting that index card in their caps.
- A redefined strike zone, lower and wider, that could make a dent in all those swings and misses on 97-mile-per-hour four-seamers at the letters. That would go hand in hand with experiments in electronic ball-strike calling, which will now show up in Triple A for the first time, this year.
- And one especially intriguing idea that could bring back the disappearing doubles and triples, by requiring outfielders to play 15 to 25 feet shallower than they set up today.

But those are merely the highlights. We'll have more on all of that in a moment. But first, we need to pass along this incisive message from Theo on why baseball needs to think about all those changes (and many more).

Contrary to what you might see on, say, Twitter, it's not because people like him enjoy playing the role of mad baseball scientists. It's because they remember what it was that attracted them to baseball when they were kids — and now they're trying to get back to that.

So “to some extent,” Epstein said, “change means restoring the great things about the game that we fell in love with in the first place.” Restoring. Not the same thing as changing. Got it!

But how does he mean that? Here’s how.

“When we grew up,” Epstein said, “you could watch a game and you’d see a ball in play every couple of minutes. And now a fan has to sit there for well over four minutes just to see a ball put in play. So when I hear people say ... ‘Don’t change the game. Leave it exactly the same,’ I totally get where that’s coming from. There are elements of the game I don’t ever want to touch, or I get uneasy when people start talking about changing it.

“But I think I fall into that trap — and maybe many of us do — where we’re focused on the change itself, we’re focused on the rule itself, when we should really be focusing on: What is this going to mean for the action on the field? What are the outcomes? What are the impacts of the rule?

“So for instance, let’s talk about a different sport, the NBA, and the shot clock. When they instituted the shot clock, I doubt there was anyone saying, ‘This is great. I love to go to a basketball game where I can watch the clock count down and my attention is going to be diverted from the court.’

“But what it created was free-flowing, faster-paced offense, with a lot more action, a lot more back and forth in the game, a lot more speed and rhythm to the game. So it’s the outcome of the rule, the impact of the rule, what it creates, that I think (makes it) a successful rule change that we’re all fans of.”

How exactly could that same principle work in baseball? Epstein delved into that, point by point, rule change by rule change, experiment by experiment.

The Pitch Clock

ON WHAT IT COULD MEAN (based on last year’s California League trial): “It’s not just the pace and not just shorter games. A pitch timer also just creates a little bit better rhythm and a little bit better action. With the pitch timer, strikeout rates have gone down. That means the ball’s in play a lot more with the pitch timer. Walk rates have actually gone down. So pitchers just get into a better rhythm and throw more strikes. And that’s a really good thing, too. And with the pitch timer, fielders are on their toes. They’re more into the game. They’re engaged. You’re making better plays. And fans are more into the game. Because much like in the ‘70s, or ‘80s, you’d see a pitch every 10 to 15 seconds instead of every 20 to 30 seconds. And that’s just a better natural rhythm and flow and aesthetic for the game.”

ON WHY THEY SETTLED ON A 14-SECOND PITCH CLOCK: “So last year, the rule (in the California League) was 15 seconds with nobody on base and 17 seconds with runners on. And what we realized were a couple things — from the player feedback and from observation.

“One is that with nobody on, we actually weren’t getting all the way down on the clock very often. So we thought we could go even quicker with nobody on base, so that we’re now at 14 seconds with nobody on base. And importantly, we realized — and this came largely from players and from coaches — that with runners on base, 17 seconds was often a tick too short, for the pitcher and catcher to be able to go through signs, maybe change the pitch, get on the same page, while also controlling the running game. That too often, they were rushed at the end and just weren’t quite able to get on the same page.

“So in response to that feedback, we decided we’re going to save a second with nobody on base and we can give a second or two more with runners on, to try to alleviate those concerns and just create a little bit more time for pitcher and catcher to get on the same page. So it’s going to be, at Triple A, 14 seconds with nobody on but now 19 seconds with runners on base ... and the other levels will be 14 and 18.”

Catchers Giving Signs Via New Technology

ON HOW THE NEW PITCHCOM DEVICES, WHICH CATCHERS WILL WEAR ON THEIR WRIST, COULD SPEED UP GAMES DRAMATICALLY: “We’ve all seen what happens to the flow of the game when runners get on second base. Things grind to a halt, because there’s a real cat-and-mouse game — with runners on second trying to figure out the sign sequence and get the pitch and pass it on to the hitter. That’s something that’s as old as the game itself.

“And you can debate the merits of whether there’s anything wrong with it. I think it’s accepted within the game, because it’s gone on so long, that if the runner on second can figure out the sign and pass it on, then great, more power to him. But it’s really impacted what happens to the game. That’s the problem.

“It’s not necessarily you’re passing along the sign from second base. It’s the fact that now, because it’s such a big part of the game, the game slows down. The catcher has to come out from behind home plate. He has to get on the same page with the pitcher about whichever sign sequences they’re using. You sometimes have to change sign systems that you’re using ... if you think the runner has picked up on (the signs). So the game is ground to a halt with runners on second base. And with the PitchCom technology, that would be eliminated from the game.”

The Hidden Benefit of Limiting Shifts

ON WHY BANNING SHIFTS WOULDN’T ONLY BENEFIT HITTERS: “There’s one argument that I think doesn’t get enough attention in favor of shift restrictions, and that is what it does for the infielders themselves. We talk all the time about what it means for hitters. ... But very rarely do we talk about the fact that what we saw last year (with Double-A shift limits) was, the shift restriction is great if you love athletic, dramatic, infield defense.

“(It’s a chance for) the best infielders in the world, having room to roam instead of being bunched up, to make do-or-die plays at the end of their range. That’s something that, in a shift-

heavy league, you just don't see as much of as we used to, because now you've got three infielders bunched together on the right side of the field. They're perfectly positioned. ...

"Well, when you have shift restrictions, and you have two infielders on either side of second base, now all of a sudden the fielders are spread out. Second base becomes an extremely important defensive position. And range is at a premium. Athleticism is at a premium. The ability to make plays at the end of your range, where you're diving or sliding ... that becomes extremely important. So the feedback we got from fans, and importantly from infielders, was that they really liked the shift restrictions because it brought back athletic, rangy, middle infielders, who were diving all over the field."

ON WHY FANS AND PLAYERS SHOULD PREFER THAT: "Yes, there are arguments to make, philosophically, about whether defenses should have the ability to strategize and position themselves wherever they want. But don't forget about what it means for the action that comes with great defensive infielders. And ultimately, it's really putting the game back in the hands of the players,

"I think fans prefer a game to be won or lost by whether a second baseman can range all the way up in the middle and make that diving play and throw the runner out at first base, versus 'did my team have the proper algorithm to perfectly position that third infielder on the right side and so that ball was hit right at him and we got the out that way.'"

Adding a Challenge System to Complement Robot Umps

ON HOW THE FLORIDA STATE LEAGUE CHALLENGE SYSTEM WOULD WORK: Instead of the automated ball/strike technology calling every pitch, "the home plate umpire, the human being, would call balls and strikes, like normal. But ABS would be running in the background. And each team would have three challenges per game, where the pitcher, the hitter or the catcher could challenge the ball/strike call. And they would have to challenge it right after the pitch, and then the home-plate umpire would instantaneously get the correct pitch call from the ABS operator in an earpiece."

ON WHY THIS MAKES SO MUCH SENSE: "The rationale for considering something like a challenge system is that it could potentially provide a lot of the key benefits of ABS without some of the potential drawbacks. And so for example, a challenge system would still give you the ability to get the calls right, which is the whole point of ABS in the first place. ... Every high-leverage call that you think goes against you, you could challenge under the challenge system and make sure you get the call right.

"But one criticism of ABS is that perhaps it's too much automation in the game, that there's a lot of benefit to ... the home-plate umpire calling balls and strikes. Home-plate umpires do a fantastic job of managing the game. ... If you have a blowout game, the strike zones are going to get a little bit bigger to keep the game moving.

“Another potential drawback of ABS is that some people are concerned that the catching position is going to fundamentally change, that ... framing and receiving will become something of a lost art and that the catching position will be all about the bat and throwing arm. Well, this preserves the importance of framing and receiving because it’s still a human being calling pitches.”

Still More From Epstein.....

As insightful as all those explanations are, they merely scratch the surface of the many areas Epstein was able to shed light on — in ways that make so much sense. So if you’re one of those traditionalists who greets every rule-change idea by screaming, “Why does Rob Manfred hate baseball?” you need to listen to this show. Every word.

Hear this guy out — on all this and much more. Then head for the minor leagues this summer and watch some of these changes with your own eyes. But just promise that when you do, you’ll focus on the kind of game those changes produce instead of the rules they’re messing with.

If you pledge to do all that, as you’ll hear on Starkville, Epstein actually welcomes your feedback. What a concept. So is it really possible for someone like him to want to change baseball without hating baseball? We asked him that very question.

“Yes,” Epstein told us. “I can definitely confirm that.”

For more from Epstein — on tweaking the strike zone, on an idea to bring back The Gapper, on whether catchers can also order a pizza on those PitchCom devices, on whether this new technology is hackproof, on why he passed on the chance to run the Mets or any other team and lots more, check out the new Starkville episode of The Athletic Baseball Show.

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PETER GAMMONS: LEAVING SCHOOL EARLY, TONY C., BOBBY WITT JR., AND 9 OPENING DAYS I’LL NEVER FORGET

When I was 10, I lived in the town of Groton, Mass., with less than 2,000 folks. The biggest holiday of the year was Memorial Day, when all the students from Groton School and Lawrence Academy and most everyone too young to vote marched in the parade. When Red Sox player Harry Agganis died at 26 in 1955, the ceremonies for the Groton Tricentennial were postponed

for a day. When I got off the school bus in the afternoon, my mother would have written down any Red Sox news that she'd heard on WBZ 1030; on a snowy December day she skipped the Christmas cookies and went right to the news that the Red Sox had traded **Tom Umphlett** and Mickey McDermott to the Senators for **Jackie Jensen**, who would become my favorite player as he led the American League in RBIs the next eight years.

Everyone knew that McDermott once had crashed his car into the stairs of the nearby Ayer Police Department. News in Groton traveled quickly. Agganis was from Lynn, hometown of **Jim Hegan, Mike Pazik, Ben Bowden, and Derek Falvey**. East of the Connecticut River in those days, all things were Red Sox and politics, and all of it, as Tip O'Neill reminded us, was local. Somewhere in my house I have three framed letters on House of Representatives stationery from O'Neill, arguing the Hall of Fame qualifications of **Smokey Joe Wood and Dominic DiMaggio**.

Following the Korean War, my parents left me and two friends at nearby Fort Devens one day to see **David "Vinegar Bend" Mizell**, the St. Louis Cardinals lefty who served in the army after the conflict ended, pitch in an exhibition featuring the base's baseball team. If one's parents picked you up, Florence Roche, first-grade teacher and principal of the Groton Elementary School, would allow you to leave a half-hour early to watch the World Series, so in 1952 I watched the seventh game between the Dodgers and Yankees in the barber's chair of Billy Sambito — whose nephew Joe became an exceptional relief pitcher — and I saw **Willie Mays'** catch and Dusty Rhodes' homer in Game 1 of the 1954 World Series, a big deal because I grew up with Red Sox and Giants hats.

Miss Roche instituted another of her baseball-friendly rules in 1955, this one dictating that on Red Sox Opening Day one could leave school at 10 a.m. to go to the game. In those days, even if the team had played one game on the road, the home opener was considered Opening Day. Period. The Red Sox had technically played a game in Baltimore on April 12 to officially begin their season, but this home game against the Yankees on April 14 was the real opener, so my parents picked me up on a Thursday at 10 and we drove in, walked through what seemingly was a street mob to our seats, and with peanuts and a Coke I watched the players prepare for the Yankees.

Willard Nixon was the Red Sox starting pitcher, and The Boston Herald that morning reminded us that he was nicknamed "the Yankee Killer." For his career, Nixon was 12-12 against the Yankees, but the Yankees were a dynasty then, and 23 years later **Don Zimmer** passed on **Bill Lee**, who would go a career 12-5 against the Yankees, and started **Bobby Sprowl** in the final game of The Boston Massacre in 1978. I joyfully filled out the 15-cent scorecard my father bought me to record **Sammy White and Jim Piersall** homers and the 22 outs Nixon registered against a Yankees lineup that included four eventual Hall of Famers — **Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Phil Rizzuto, and Enos Slaughter**. My father was a classical and ecclesiastical musician, organist and carillonneur, and architect who wouldn't have known who Yogi was, but reminded me as we drove the 40-something miles to Fenway that only one year since I began watching the World Series had I'd witnessed one without the Yankees, and hence I had to respect them,

not boo them. When Slaughter was announced, fans all around us booed. I asked him why they were booing. He didn't know.

This week, Opening Day arrives at last, after a winter where there were real fears that it might not arrive this year. Those home openers, be they in Cincinnati — the best Opening Day of all opening days — or San Francisco, Wrigley or Baltimore or Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, all offer promise, no matter what PECOTA projections say about how many games the local nine will win. Opening Day offers a chance to see something new every time, and to witness the birth of great careers, as I once did with Robin Yount and hope to do this year with players like **Bobby Witt Jr. and Julio Rodríguez**. Opening Day comes once a year, 30 cultures, 30 histories, 30 traditions, 30 Rushmores, 30 variances of hot dogs, 30 beers, from Iron City to Labatt's to Old Style.

My first Opening Day as an MLB beat writer was 1972, so this is my 51st season, and moments from those many new beginnings bounce around in my mind. Memories from some of those that weren't part of the job sometimes stand out more, though. I went to the home opener at Fenway in 1957, a 4-1 Yankees win. I was home from college in 1964 and went to the home opener against the White Sox when 20-year old **Tony Conigliaro** hit his first home run. I went to the opener at Fenway in 1967 and sat in the bleachers to see **Dick Williams'** debut, watch **Jim Lonborg** win the first of his 22 games in a Cy Young season and witness **Reggie Smith** play second base.

I went as a fan to Fenway opening days in 1969 and 1970. In 1969, Conigliaro was playing his first game at Fenway since he was struck in the eye by a pitch by Angels reliever **Jack Hamilton** and missed not only the World Series, but the 1968 season. In the 10th inning of that 1969 opener, he hit a two-run homer for a 4-2 lead against the Orioles, and after Baltimore tied it in the top of the 12th, he led off the bottom of the inning with a walk and scored the winning run. "Tony C's Miracle" is how the great columnist Harold Kaese described it. In 1970, the Red Sox played their first five games on the road, went 2-3 and returned to play the Yankees, so they still drew 34,002. Conigliaro, Smith and **George Scott** homered.

There are thousands of New Englanders — including esteemed columnists Steve Buckley and Dan Shaughnessy — who have long begged for Conigliaro's No. 25 to be up on the right-field roof with **Ted Williams, Bobby Doerr, Carl Yastrzemski, Wade Boggs**, et al. Tony C, who died in 1990, is a legend for what they called The Olde Towne Team. He graduated from St. Mary's High School in Lynn in June 1962, and on April 17, 1964, was starting in right field in the Red Sox home opener. That day's proceeds were earmarked for a foundation dedicated to building a library in memory of Brookline-born president John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated months earlier. Conigliaro, 19, hit a three-run homer off Chicago's **Joel Horlen**, which decided the 4-1 Boston victory. The crowd was 20,211, including Robert F. and Ted Kennedy, **Stan Musial**, Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, Carol Channing and Frederick March, and according to New England Sports Museum curator Dick Johnson, afterward, Tony C said, "It's the least I could do after

they all showed up for my home debut.” Soon his first 45 record (“Why Don’t They Understand,” with the B-side “Playing the field”) would be out.

Then the pitch hit him in the eye, and he lost 1968, before that triumphant return in the 1969 home opener. He hit 36 homers in 1970 and was then traded to the Angels, but by early 1972 had to retire, only to try one last comeback in 1975 with a Boston team featuring two rookie outfielders named **Fred Lynn and Jim Rice**. Opening Day in Boston that year against the Brewers saw the American League debut of Hank Aaron. Conigliaro batted cleanup as DH; Rice was not in that lineup. Conigliaro got three standing ovations: one when his name was announced, one when he singled in the first inning and, finally, when he was on the back end of a double steal.

Three days later, he hit the team’s first 1975 homer, in Baltimore, off **Mike Cuellar**. But between hamstring pulls and vision problems, getting up and doing it again became increasingly difficult. He was ever optimistic, tough in a young boy’s manner. We’d sit together on busses and he’d have plans for variety shows and ideas for entertainment venues he hoped to open, but he hit only one more homer in his last 20 games — off **Vida Blue** in Oakland — and in June played his final game.

When I watch the great young players and thank them for who and what they are after a work stoppage best fitting a dark Dickens novel, I’ll think of Tony C and how baseball careers can be stalled or shattered by one random pitch. The only player to hit 100 home runs at a younger age was **Mel Ott**. Even today, there are thoughts about bringing together Tony’s friends and teammates — like Dennis Gilbert, who was both — and trying to make a Netflix movie of his tragic story, which was largely ended in 1982 when he suffered a heart attack and fell into a coma after being driven to the airport by his brother Billy not long after learning that he had earned a local television job.

When the Red Sox have their home opener on April 15 against the Twins — whose manager, Rocco Baldelli, grew up an hour from Fenway, and whose president of baseball operations, Derek Falvey, is from Lynn — it seems like some Opening Day film montage of Tony C would be welcome, ending with a clip from a **Mike Yastrzemski** 2017 interview on MLB Network when Yaz said, “Tony was a no-doubt Hall of Famer, *no doubt*. In that park, Opening Day is Tony C Day.

The memories of those Opening Days as a kid, and as a fan, are special, but those gleaned in 51 years covering the game have their own resonance. And some do stand out more than others.

1. Fenway Park, Boston, 1971: I began my full-time job at The Boston Globe in February 1969, which meant in my first month I met Jim Calhoun, Bill Kearns (later a scouts’ Hall of Famer who predicted when **Mike Mussina** was in high school that he would end up in Cooperstown), Ron Perry, Kevin Mackey and Rollie Massimino, but it wasn’t until two years later that I got to cover

my first Red Sox home Opening Day, in 1971, Yankees-Red Sox. It was a game that reminded us the Yankees were on their way down, with the likes of **Frank Tepedino, Horace Clarke and Jim Lyttle** in the lineup. **Carlton Fisk** was still in Louisville, so there was no **Thurman Munson**-Fisk rivalry in place. Ray Culp pitched a dandy complete game, and I excitedly wrote a glowing sidebar about Culp, which included a quote from Yankees manager **Ralph Houk** that “Culp can’t pitch every game.” It was a lesson implanted in my brain to remember that it was 1/162nd of a season, and in those days, you were better off not thinking about who pitched the next day.

Hence I think of that day and the 1973 opener against the Yankees as part of the same lesson in a young writer’s career. Two openers later, I was the beat writer as the Red Sox beat the Yankees 15-5 in a windstorm that helped Fisk hit two homers on a day remembered for the debut of the DH — including the first DH at-bat, by **Ron Blomberg**, and in a game with 20 runs and 28 hits Blomberg and Boston DH **Orlando Cepeda** were a combined 1-for-9. Forty-nine years later, Opening Day 2022 will mark the DH rule becoming universal.

2. Tiger Stadium, Detroit, 1972: The season had been delayed for a week because of the sport’s first strike, which occurred on the last day of March at the end of the only night game — Red Sox at Tigers, Joker Marchant Stadium. Opening Day in Detroit was cold, the press box seemed as if it were on the top floor of the Pontchartrain Hotel, and in the first inning of the game a **Rico Petrocelli** bases-loaded single scored **Tommy Harper** from third and seemingly would score **Luis Aparicio** from second. Problem was, when Aparicio rounded third as **Willie Horton** fielded the ball, third base coach Eddie Popowski held Aparicio because Horton made a clean pick and throw. Yastrzemski didn’t see Popowski, rounded second and was headed to third to join Aparicio, who fell down stopping. **Mickey Lolich** pitched a complete game, the Tigers won, and as Calvinist New Englanders remember, the Tigers played one more game than the Red Sox and won the division by a half-game. The Tigers finished 86-70, the Red Sox 85-60, ruing the day Aparicio didn’t score the tying run.

3. County Stadium, Milwaukee, 1974: All I remember is that when I went to the workouts on April 4 at the ballpark, Brewers manager **Del Crandall** broke the news that 18-year-old **Robin Yount** — drafted in 1973 with 64 games of experience in Newark of the New York-Penn League after signing — was starting at shortstop for the Brewers in lieu of **Tim Johnson**. Yount looked about 12 years old, but it didn’t matter. He became a great player. One Toronto advance scout watched Yount in 90 games over two seasons and had his fastest time home-to-first at 3.9 seconds, his slowest at 4.0. Told of that stat 41 years later, Mike Trout had Angels coach Dino Abel go through his home-to-first times. Abel noted Trout getting jammed and falling back and other times when he crushed the ball to the right side and had a running start, and concluded that in close to 98 percent of times when he put the ball in play in the field, Trout was 3.9/4.0 like Yount. Trout, as Yount would do, wanted that to be the one stat I remembered about him.

4. Exhibition Stadium, Toronto, 1977: The first game in Blue Jays history. I was in Toronto for the Maple Leafs-Philadelphia Flyers series, which had become interesting when the Leafs won the first two games in Philly and Leafs winger Dave (Tiger) Williams, in a locker room speech channeling “Lafayette, we are here,” announced, “the Flyers are done like dinner.” I couldn’t

pass on Toronto baseball history, so I went to the game, and on a snowy, blustery day, **Doug Ault** hit two home runs off **Ken Brett**. **Pete Vukovich** got a two-inning save in relief of **Bill Singer**. But Singer pitching at all in that game was history of a sort, because a few days earlier, Jays GM Pat Gillick — who had been with the Yankees prior to taking over the Jays — thought he had a Singer trade for a young left-handed pitcher named **Ron Guidry**, but Toronto President Peter Bavasi thought it was a bad idea since Singer was their one identifiable pitcher. Guidry went into the Yankees rotation April 29, went 16-7 and won two postseason games as the Yankees won the World Series, then was 25-3 and won two more postseason games and another ring in 1978. Considering that in 1978 the Yankees had to beat the Red Sox in a 163rd game (that Guidry started), it's possible the Yankees could have gone from 1962 to 1996 without a world championship had Gillick gotten his way.

5. County Stadium, Milwaukee, 1980: Milwaukee is one of the best baseball towns in America, and in the old County Stadium, Brewers owner Bud Selig would come into the press box and watch the game with the scribes, delivering a good-spirited running commentary. The Brewers were coming off a strong second-place finish and had high expectations for 1980; even though the game-time temperature was 43 degrees, the crowd was 53,313. This, however, was a three-day opener. **Sixto Lezcano** hit an opposite-field walk-off grand slam in the opener for a 9-5 Brewers win. The Crew won the second game 18-1, and that evening at dinner at The English Room at the Pfister Hotel — suspected to have ghosts — **Carlton Fisk**, who was supposed to be out of the series with an injury, announced he couldn't stand any more of the Brewers' swings.

Bob Stanley went out for the final game, with Fisk catching. **Paul Molitor** got hit in the ribs. Stanley had his sinker running. So it got to the ninth with Boston up 3-1, when the first two Milwaukee hitters reached base. **Charlie Moore**, a good catcher-outfielder known for some odd wanderings in games, pushed a ball to the right side. **Jerry Remy** fed **Rick Burleson** for the force.

Moore blanked running to first, thought he'd laid down a sacrifice bunt, and when he reached the bag veered to the first base dugout. When he realized what he'd done, he went up the steps and started running across foul territory toward the bag, and Burleson began sprinting toward first. Then each player began sliding, Moore coming from the dugout, Burleson from shortstop. Burleson's slide got to the bag ahead of Moore. Out. One last grounder ended the game. It's the only time I ever remember seeing two players slide in from similar places and reaching first base near-simultaneously. Actually, there was a rule about abandonment and Moore likely would have been called out, but it would have killed the thrill of a play fulfilling one's hope that any day one can see something one's never seen before.

6. Fenway Park, Boston, 1981: The winter of 1980-81 was a difficult one for Red Sox part-owner and General Manager Haywood Sullivan. After the Basic Agreement and free agency had been worked out at the All-Star break in 1976, Boston signed **Fred Lynn, Carlton Fisk and Rick Burleson** to five-year contracts with their agent, Jeremy Kapstein. The contracts included a clause giving the club the right to pick up options for 1981, which the union had challenged and had deleted. The club was told by the Commissioner's Office that the clause would likely hold

up. At the winter meetings in Dallas, Sullivan traded Lynn to the Dodgers for **Mike Marshall, Steve Howe and Joe Beckwith**, pending the Dodgers being able to sign Lynn. They could not, and the deal was canceled. The deadline on offering Fisk a contract was supposed to be Dec. 20, but Sullivan was advised by the Commissioner's Office that he could send it Dec. 22, which he did, but that turned out to be too late. Soon thereafter, at a February 1981 hot stove luncheon in the press dining room at Fenway, Sullivan had to stand and announce Fisk was a free agent. He ceremoniously turned, uttered "open the damn bar," and months later Fisk signed with the White Sox and Yawkey.

On April 13, Fisk returned to Fenway, now traveling with Tony La Russa and the White Sox. In the seventh inning, he added to the horrors by blasting a three-run homer off **Bob Stanley**, and Chicago had a 5-3 win — Fisk's most famous homer he could watch, because it was a fair-or-foul proposition. This one he claimed he thought might not get out, so he had to keep his head down and run, and he didn't know it was gone until he reached second and saw the umpire motioning that it was a homer. The first defined a decade. This one defined that that decade was gone, solid gone.

7. Tiger Stadium, Detroit, 1986: It is hard not to have fond memories of the late Tiger Stadium. **Kirk Gibson** hit a homer off Mike Brown that cleared the transformer Reggie Jackson hit in the 1971 All-Star game by 20 feet. But that Opening Day in that park, **Dwight Evans** hit the first pitch in all of baseball for a homer, a feat in 2018 matched by **Ian Happ**. Gibson hit two homers that day in '86, and while the Red Sox were on their way to Game 6 in Shea Stadium that season, the aging Tigers did just enough to believe that the next season, 1987, they had a chance to make one more run with a team that won 98 regular-season games en route to an ALCS loss. Problem is, that run prompted them to trade **John Smoltz** for **Doyle Alexander**.

8. Memorial Stadium, Baltimore, 1989: **Roger Clemens** rode into town to face an Orioles team that had had a nightmare season in 1988. But these also were Edward Bennett Williams' Orioles, with Roland Hemond as GM. Williams' guests were President George Herbert Walker Bush — Yale baseball captain — and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. In the Memorial Stadium press box, Hemond's booth was right next to the last row of the media. I suggested that it would be great if Hemond traded for Egyptian-born — and talented — shortstop **Sammy Khalifa** from the Pirates and put it up on the video board, then trade him back the next day. Hemond came out in the third inning, exasperated. He actually tried dealing with Pittsburgh GM Larry Doughty, but Doughty didn't get it and kept insisting on a list of players for the trade. Mubarak and Bush left after the sixth inning, after **Cal Ripken** hit a game-winning three-run homer off Clemens. The Orioles, under **Frank Robinson**, weren't ultimately eliminated until the final weekend in Toronto.

9. Fenway Park, Boston, 1998: The Red Sox started the 1998 season with a three-city road trip, which warmed up the thirst for **Pedro Martinez**, whom they had acquired the previous November. He opened the season in Oakland with a three-hit, 11-strikeout shutout, which prompted Bob Ryan to write, "You better get used to this, because that is what this place is going to be for the foreseeable future."

But Martinez wasn't on the mound for the April 10 home opener against the Mariners and **Randy Johnson**. I mentioned to a friend that I was sitting in my same box seat behind home plate years earlier when the Mariners traded **Mark Langston** to Montreal for Johnson and two other pitchers, and that **Harold Reynolds** and other M's were upset because Langston was really good and absolutely one of them. That day, it was Johnson versus **Brian Rose**, the first rookie to start a Red Sox home opener in 50 years. Johnson threw 132 pitches and had fanned 15 when he turned the ball over to **Heathcliff Slocumb** with a 7-2 lead in the ninth inning. It wasn't hard to remember that a day before the trading deadline the year before, 1997, the Mariners had blown a 7-2 lead as the Red Sox scored six runs in the eighth, ninth and 10th innings for the win, while then-Red Sox pitcher Slocumb blew the Mariners away in his one inning of relief. The next day, minutes before the trade deadline, GM Woody Woodward traded **Jason Varitek and Derek Lowe** for **Slocumb**.

So the next season, **Lou Piniella** had Slocumb back at Fenway. Then **Tony (The Mechanic) Fossas**, back at home at Fenway, 1.2 miles from where he grew up, and then **Mike Timlin**, back at home at Fenway, and, finally it was 7-5, two outs, lefty **Paul Spoljaric** in to face **Mo Vaughn** with the bases loaded.

Gone. 9-7.

Johnson finished the season with the Astros, who were eliminated in the NLDS by the Padres and **Kevin Brown** — who pitched the Padres into the World Series, which enabled Larry Lucchino to raise the capital to build Petco Park and eventually “free the Brookline Two” he'd say, getting Theo Epstein and Sam Kennedy to the Red Sox.

Opening Day ends whatever ailed a team six months earlier, as, to paraphrase Bill Belichick, “we're on to 2022.” It is the beginning, again, and this year, we want to see stadiums filled, unmasked cheers and memories, and eventually **Fernando Tatis Jr. and Ronald Acuña Jr. and Chris Sale and Jacob deGrom** on the way to complete health.

I'm lucky. I got two minutes of conversation in with **Henry Aaron and Tony Conigliaro** on an opening day, I saw **Robin Yount's** first game, Dick Williams' first managerial game and the first day of the designated hitter. And on April 15 at Fenway Park I'll see **Carlos Correa and Trevor Story** continuing the next chapters of their glorious careers, 67 years after watching four Hall of Famers playing for the Yankees on another brisk April Opening Day afternoon. Magic like that will happen all over the country this week, whether it's in Southern California with **Shohei Ohtani** doing it all or in Chicago with **Corbin Burnes** on the mound or on an afternoon in Kansas City, one which someone from Blue Springs, Mo., 30 years from now will remember as **Bobby Witt Jr.** Day.

WEEKLY TRIVIA CHALLENGE--ANSWERS

Three teams have never had an MVP. Name the teams.

Bonus question, name the last MVP for 10 of the other 27 teams

The D-backs, Mets and Rays have never had a league MVP. Last MVP for the other 27 teams:

Yankees	A-Rod, 2007
Red Sox	Betts, 2018
Blue Jays	Donaldson, 2015
Orioles	Ripken, Jr., 1991

White Sox	Abreu, 2020
Tigers	Cabrera, 2013
Royals	Brett, 1980
Twins	Maurer, 2009
Indians	Rosen, 1953

A's	Tejeda, 2002
Angels	Ohtani, 2021
Rangers	Hamilton, 2010
Astros	Altuve, 2017
Mariners	Suzuki, 2001

Phillies	Harper, 2021
Braves	Freeman, 2020
Nationals	Harper, 2015
Marlins	Stanton, 2017

Cubs	Bryant, 2016
Reds	Votto, 2010
Pirates	McCutcheon, 2013
Cards	Pujols, 2009
Brewers	Yellich, 2018

Padres	Caminiti, 1996
Dodgers	Bellinger, 2019
Giants	Posey, 2012
Rockies	Walker, 1997

HOUSEKEEPING

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