

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

4.17.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

I hope you are enjoying the start of the season as much as I am.

My mood is even better thanks to Wesleyan winning the Little Three baseball title—beat both Williams and Amherst 2 out of 3.

The happy mood was tempered by watching Aroldis Chapman walk four batters in 2/3 IP across two games, including walking in the winning run in Baltimore. Chapman became the only reliever in the modern era to walk all 3 (or more) batters he faced in one appearance and then issue a walkoff walk in his next appearance. Ugh. I keep repeating it's a marathon, not a sprint.

This week the usual interesting factoids plus brothers, triple crowns, pitchers pulled from no-hitters, a new kind of slider, lots of Jackie Robinson facts, the Savannah Bananas, trivia and an obit sent from a new subscriber that made me think of game 6 of the 1996 World Series—a memorable game I went to with my dad.

You also have a crowd sourcing assignment/opportunity. Many moons ago I hosted a sports trivia quiz show on radio. A local pub here in Maine that does general trivia nights to keep customers buying beer asked if I'd like to do a sports trivia gig. Trial run and if it's a hit, we will do a series through the summer.

So I am interested in your favorite baseball trivia question. Not crazy, obscure stuff. This isn't about difficult questions or showing how clever the host is—it is about entertainment, camaraderie and fun for the whole audience. So please email your favorite and if makes it into an event I will let you know. Thanks.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Since 1967 six Red Sox managers have led Boston to the World Series. Name them.

Answer at the bottom.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

April 11, 1966. **Emmett Ashford** becomes the first black umpire in MLB.

Three Tigers players to win multiple American League Most Valuable Player Awards--**Hank Greenberg (1935 and '40)**, **Hal Newhouser (1944 and '45)** and **Miguel Cabrera (2012 and '13)**.

Milestone homers. **Juan Soto** rocked an 89.5 mph cutter from Braves right-hander **Bryce Elder** a Statcast-projected 451 feet to right-center field at 112.5 mph. HR 100 at age 23. The milestone dinger was the fourth-longest of his career.

At 23 years and 169 days, Soto is just the seventh active player to belt 100 homers at age 23 and younger, per Elias Sports Bureau. He joined **Miguel Cabrera** (23 years, 127 days), **Bryce Harper** (23 years, 181 days), **Ronald Acuña Jr.** (23 years, 184 days), **Albert Pujols** (23 years, 185 days), **Giancarlo Stanton** (23 years, 221 days) and **Mike Trout** (23 years, 253 days). Soto first homered in 2018, his age-19 season.

Soto also drew a walk in the eighth frame for his 44th game with at least one home run and one walk before his 24th birthday -- which is not until Oct. 25. He trails just **Mel Ott** (68), **Ted Williams** (62), **Eddie Mathews** (61), **Jimmie Foxx** (55), Trout (50) and **Mickey Mantle** (49) on the leaderboard, dating to 1901.

The milestone home run adds to Soto's success against the team's National League East rival. He has hit 14 dingers against the Braves in 58 games, second to only his offensive production vs. the Phillies (17 home runs in 60 games). He also increased his Truist Park homer total to nine, third most at any opposing stadium behind Citizens Bank Park (12) and Citi Field (10).

Same night Albert Pujols hit career HR 680, his first for the Cards since 2011. Pujols, 42, homered in a Cardinal uniform in a regular-season game for the first time since Sept. 22, 2011 -- at a time when he had 445 home runs following his first historic stint in St. Louis from 2001-11. Now, 3,855 days later, Pujols homered again to move a step closer to 700 homers. Kansas City's **Daniel Lynch** became the 441st different pitcher Pujols has homered off -- second only to the 449 pitchers that **Barry Bonds** took deep.

Bert Blyleven is the only pitcher born after 1900 who won games as a teenager and in his 40's.

Guardians **Steven Kwan** had quite the start. On Wednesday the Guardians rookie outfielder swung and foul tipped an 82-mph **Nick Lodolo** curveball into the glove of Reds catcher **Tyler Stephenson** in the first inning on Wednesday at Great American Ball Park.

The second pitch of Kwan's first at-bat was the first time in six games this season that he swung and didn't either put the ball in play or foul off the pitch (a foul tip is considered a whiff).

It was the first time in 40 swings this season that Kwan swung and missed. Per the Elias Sports Bureau, the 116 pitches seen by Kwan are the most without a swing and miss for any batter to start his career among players to debut since 2000.

Four pitches later, he struck out looking at a 94 mph sinker, the first time he struck out in the Majors.

It was his first strikeout of any kind dating to Sept. 26 with Triple-A Columbus.

The 24-year-old was a fifth-round pick by Cleveland in 2018 out of Oregon State. His calling card: contact and hitting, hitting, hitting. That translated at High-A in 2019, and again in Double-A and Triple-A in '21. He made the Guardians out of Spring Training this year, and the baseball world might not have been ready.

With his six singles, two doubles, one triple and five walks since Opening Day, Kwan has reached base 15 times in his first four MLB games -- the most any player has logged in his first four career games since at least 1901.

Most pitches seen before 1st swing & miss in season, past 20 seasons:

2003 **Luis Castillo**: 268
2010 **David Eckstein**: 214
2008 **Jamey Carroll**: 211
2004 **Frank Thomas**: 146
2017 **Eric Sogard**: 140
2003 **Brett Abernathy**: 134
2009 **Roy Oswalt**: 128
2022 **Steven Kwan**: 116

In the Minors in 2021, he swung and missed at just 2.6% of pitches he saw, by far the lowest in the Minors (min. 300 plate appearances). The next batter on the list, **Michael Stefanic** of the Angels' organization, was at 5%.

Kwan reached base 19 times in his first six career games, the second most of any player in his first six games since at least 1901. Only 2008 Jay Bruce reached more, doing so 20 times. He became the sixth player since at least 1901 to record a five-hit game within his first three career games, joining Yermín Mercedes (2021), Cecil Travis (1933), Red Massey (1918), Jack Dalton (1910) and Judge McCredie (1903).

Those 19 times reaching base in the Guardians' first six games are also tied for the fourth most by any player in his team's first six games of a season since 1901, trailing only 1997 **Brady Anderson**, 1989 **Von Hayes** and 1945 **Mel Ott**, with 20 each. And again, these are the first six games of Kwan's entire career.

Dodgers manager **Dave Roberts** pulled **Clayton Kershaw** from a perfect game--after 7 innings/80 pitches, dominating the Twins with 13 strikeouts in 21 batters during a 7-0 victory on Wednesday afternoon. The Dodgers' **Cody Bellinger**, **Gavin Lux**, and **Austin Barnes** hit back-to-back-to-back home runs in the eighth against reliever **Dereck Rodriguez**, who made his Twins debut.

You might remember the other pitcher to throw exactly seven perfect innings — that was **Rich Hill** for the Dodgers in 2016. It was kind of a big deal. Hill had thrown seven perfect innings and just 89 pitches, and he absolutely wanted to keep pitching. But a blister had reemerged on Hill's pitching hand — he had already missed six weeks because of blister problems — and Dave Roberts pulled him.

Besides thinking about Kershaw's age, short spring training, that temps were in the 30's in Minnesota he may have also thought about **Johan Santana**. On June 1, 2012 Santana threw 134 pitches in the Mets only no-hitter ever, stopping the Cardinals at CitiField. Manager **Terry Collins** left Santana in to make history. Santana, who had shoulder surgery the season before, was never the same after that game. His career done after that season

There have been just 23 perfect games in MLB history (including 2 in the 1880s when baseball was very different—50 feet from rubber to plate, no mound, batters called where they wanted the ball pitched.

Bet you can win a few beers with the following—the only position player to be on the field for 3 perfect games? **Paul O'Neil** with the Reds for **Tom Browning** and with the Yankees for **David Cone** and **David Wells**.

Later in this issue is a list of pitchers pulled while throwing a no-hitter.

The world of pitching has changed. Between 1967 and 1972, six seasons, **Fergie Jenkins** threw 140 complete games. That's 23 complete games per season. Clayton Kershaw has only averaged 22 STARTS over the last six seasons.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Blue Jays first baseman delivered quite the performance against the Yankees Wednesday in which he hit three home runs (two off **Gerrit Cole**, one off **Jonathan Loaisiga**) and a double for a total of 14 bases in four at-bats. Vlad's HOF dad never hit 3 HRs. The two father-son duos with three-homer games in their careers--the **Griffey's (Ken in 1986; Ken Jr. in 1996, '97)** and the **Fielders (Cecil twice in 1990, once in '96; Prince in 2011)**

The Blue Jays feature sons of two Hall of Famers—Guerrero and **Cavan Biggio**. Another Toronto MLB son is **Bo Bichette**. His father **Dante Bichette** played 1704 games for the Angels, Brewers, Rockies, Red Sox and Reds from 1988 to 2001. Dante was a career .299 hitter with 274 HRs. He was second to **Barry Larkin** in the 1995 NL MVP voting when he had a 40 HR/128 RBI season for Colorado.

As for Bo, he led the league last year in hits, scored 121 runs, stole 25 bases while getting caught once and batted 29 home runs — all in his first full season in the big leagues. He just turned 24.

Two Reds pitchers have won a National League Rookie of the Year Award--**Pat Zachry** (1976) and **Scott Williamson** (1999).

With all the hype around rookie 1B **Spencer Torkelson**, a reminder that the last Tigers position player to win AL Rookie of the Year was 2B **Lou Whitaker**, 1978.

Logan Webb pitched four-hit ball over eight innings and **Luke Williams** doubled home the only runs he needed as the Giants beat the Padres, 2-1, in San Francisco. Webb (1-0), who emerged as the Giants' ace last season at age 24, allowed one run. He retired 22 of the final 24 hitters he faced, striking out seven and walking none. Through his first two starts, Webb has surrendered just two runs over 14 innings.

Webb has now gone 24 consecutive starts dating back to last year (including the postseason) without taking a loss, a franchise record.

Giancarlo Stanton and **Anthony Rizzo** are the first players in Yankees history to homer together in each of the season's first two games. They are the ninth set of teammates to do so since 1900, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Since 2015 according to Statcast, Stanton has hit 27 of the hardest hit 35 balls.

Not surprising that the only pitcher in AL/NL history with at least 300 wins, 3,000 strikeouts and fewer than 1,000 walks is **Greg Maddux** (355 wins, 3,371 strikeouts, 999 walks).

Alex Gordon was surprisingly (to me) good. He played in the big leagues for 14 years. He hit 357 doubles and 190 home runs, stole 113 bases. He posted 34.5 WAR. He won seven Gold Gloves and made three All-Star teams.

Last season, out of 2430 regular season games, there were 666 games where each team used at least five pitchers in a game.

What do **John Olerud, Dave Winfield, David Wells, David Cone, Cecil Fielder, Jesse Barfield, Vernon Wells, Tony Fernandez, Jimmy Key** have in common? They all played for the Blue Jays and the Yankees.

Shohei Ohtani is getting it under control.

First 12 starts of 2021-22

April 4, 2021 through June 30, 2021

– 14% walk rate (22nd highest of 280 pitchers)

Most recent 12 starts of 2021-22

July 6, 2021 through April 12, 2022

– 3% walk rate (6th lowest of 304 pitchers)

It's not a typo. In those first 12 starts, he walked 35 batters in 60 innings. In the most recent 12 starts, he walked 10 in 75 innings. Or, put it like this: Last year, he had two games early on (April 20 vs. Texas and May 5 vs. Tampa Bay) where he walked six batters in a single game. He's walked 10 batters *total* in his last 12 starts.

There are a ton of benefits here, aside from just “not issuing free passes.” For one thing, it simply meant *more Ohtani*, because it allowed him to work deeper into games. In those first 12 starts, through June, he averaged an even five innings per start, 60 innings over a dozen starts. In the next 12? He was up to 6.2 innings per start.

Miguel Tejada wasn't really regarded as part of that **A-Rod/Nomar/Captain Jeets** vortex, but he put together some monster seasons for the A's, winning the AL MVP in 2002 (.861 OPS, 34 homers, 131 RBIs) and driving in 150 runs in '04, when he finished fifth in the balloting. Tejada hit 307 career HRs, played 162 games in six seasons.

Alvin (Texas) High School has sent two players to the big leagues: **Nathan Eovaldi and Nolan Ryan**.

You may have noticed that Angels manager **Joe Maddon**, trailing 3-1, intentionally walked Rangers SS **Corey Seager** with the bases loaded this week. Maddon explained that he did it to fire up his club. Somehow it worked, the Angels rallied from the 4-1 deficit to win 9-6. Maddon was the Rays manager in 2008 when he had **Josh Hamilton** walked with the bases loaded (and a big lead).

Only other modern time bases loaded free pass was **Barry Bonds** when he was hitting a HR every 7 or so at bats. Bonds was also intentionally walked in the ninth inning of an 8-7 loss to the D-backs on May 28, 1998. That walk also came with two outs in the ninth, before **Brent Mayne** lined out to right field to end the game.

Every other known instance happened prior to baseball's integration in 1947: **Bill Nicholson** in 1944, **Mel Ott** in 1929, **Del Bissonette** in 1928, Nap Lajoie in 1901 and **Abner Dalrymple** in 1881.

San Francisco Giants' **Alyssa Nakken** made baseball history on Tuesday night, becoming the first female coach to make an on-field appearance in a major league game.

Nakken took over for Giants first base coach **Antoan Richardson**, who was ejected in Tuesday's game against the San Diego Padres.

Nakken, 31, joined the Giants' baseball operations department in 2014 as an intern. San Francisco made Nakken an assistant coach in January 2020.

She coached in her first major league game on July 20, 2020 during an exhibition game against the Oakland Athletics, making her the first full-time female coach in MLB history.

Prior to working for the Giants, Nakken played college softball at Sacramento State.

The Giants defeated the Padres 13-2.

Kelsie Whitmore, a member of the U.S. women's national baseball team and a dual-threat pitcher/outfielder, could become the first woman to appear in the independent Atlantic League after signing with the Staten Island FerryHawks.

Whitmore starred as a college softball player at Cal State Fullerton last spring, batting .395 with 12 home runs in 52 games. She's been a member of Team USA since 2014, winning gold at the 2015 Pan-American Games in Toronto and again in 2019 at the COPABE Women's Pan-American Championships in Aguascalientes, Mexico.

Staten Island's season begins on April 21. The FerryHawks are a new team to the Atlantic League, which is unaffiliated from MLB teams but is designated an MLB "partner league."

Two-way star **Shohei Ohtani** reached yet another impressive mark in Sunday's 4-1 loss to the Astros, as he absolutely smacked a ground-rule double to right field with an exit velocity of 119.1 mph in the third inning.

It was not only the hardest-hit ball of Ohtani's career but the hardest-hit ball by a left-handed batter since Statcast was introduced in 2015. And, of course, the previous record was also held by Ohtani, who ripped a double that left the bat at 119 mph off Royals right-hander **Scott Barlow** on April 12, 2021. Ohtani, the reigning American League MVP, became just the third player with multiple balls hit at least 119 mph since Statcast was introduced in 2015, joining Yankees sluggers **Giancarlo Stanton** (28 times) and **Aaron Judge** (six times).

Padres pitchers **Yu Darvish** and **Sean Manaea** began their season with a feat no other starting duo has ever pulled off, per MLB.com: back-to-back games with at least six hitless innings. Darvish went six (on 92 pitches) before being pulled Thursday night and Manaea seven (on 88 pitches) Saturday before he met the same fate.

Thanks to the abbreviated spring training, expect to see tight limits on pitch counts to begin the year in an effort to avoid injuries. For manager **Bob Melvin**, though, that meant starting his Padres tenure by pulling pitchers carrying no-hitters on consecutive nights.

Through the first weekend of play, 45% of all pitches were breaking or offspeed pitches, a new high. That's up from 42% the last two years, and wildly up from the 34% it was in 2008. Of those remaining pitches, the fastballs, 27% of them are 95 mph+, which is *also* a new high, and more than double what it was back in 2008.

So, if you put all that together, that 60% of pitches are either "fastballs thrown real hard" or "bendy pitches with lots of movement," that means that fastballs under 95 MPH -- i.e., the kind that hitters love to smash -- are continually on the decline.

Fastballs below 95 mph last year had a .281 average, a .479 slugging, and a 16% strikeout rate. Fastballs 95 and *over* had a .235/.380 BA/SLG, with a 26% strikeout rate. And pitches that aren't fastballs at all, the breaking/offspeed pitches? Now we're down to .218/.366, with a 29% strikeout rate.

Third base-shortstop Silver Sluggers in the American League.

- Boston's **Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts** (2021)
- Cleveland's **Jose Ramirez and Francisco Lindor** (2017-18)
- New York's **Alex Rodriguez and Derek Jeter** (2007-08)
- Baltimore's **Melvin Mora and Miguel Tejada** (2004)

Nice start to his comeback. **Justin Verlander** won his first game since beating the Mariners on July 24, 2020 -- Opening Day of the COVID-shortened season. He injured his arm during that game and attempted a comeback before undergoing ulnar collateral ligament surgery in his right elbow two months later.

Friday's win was the 227th of Verlander's career, during which he crossed the 3,000-inning career threshold when he finished the seventh inning. He's the 138th pitcher in AL/NL history to throw 3,000 innings and joins former teammate **Zack Greinke** as the only active pitchers to reach that mark.

Unlikely they will keep it up, but some fun "on-pace" numbers early in the season:

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and C.J. Cron: On pace for 88 home runs
(Based on a 600-at-bat season)

Clayton Kershaw: On pace for 465 strikeouts
(Based on his current 62% strikeout rate, 750 batters faced)

Owen Miller (Guardians infielder) and Nolan Arenado: Slugging above 1.000

Christian Yelich: 76.5 percent hard-hit rate

Hunter Greene: 100 mph average four-seamer velocity (average velocity of 99.7 mph on his four-seamer in first start, averaged 100.2 mph on the pitch in his second).

Guardians: .826 team OPS, best in MLB

Rockies: 1.53 bullpen ERA, best in NL (ranked 26th in MLB last year)

Interesting to note **Alex Cora** managing against **AJ Hinch** of the Tigers this week. Think anyone mentioned the Astros scandal?

The average age of a major leaguer on Opening Day was 29.35 years. The Red Sox had the oldest team in the American League at 30.65 years. The Guardians were the youngest at 26.73.

The Reds haven't won a playoff series since 1995 and have had only five winning seasons under the Castellini family since 2006

RINGS

I was reading about **Yogi Berra's** 10 World Series rings and came across a cool stat: Of the 26 players with 6 or more World Series champs rings, only one didn't win at least one of his rings with the Yankees. **Eddie Collins** won 6 with Philadelphia A's and Chicago White Sox (1910-1911, 1913, 1917, 1929-1930).

Some other World Series champ ring numbers you might not have guessed: **Ken Holtzman** 5, **Luis Sojo** 5, **Paul Blair** 4, **Catfish Hunter** 5, **David Cone** 5.

REMINDER OF 2022 RULE CHANGES

Universal DH

Doubleheaders scheduled for 9 innings per game

Post season expanded to 12 teams

First 6 draft picks assigned via lottery

Player options back and forth to minors limited to 5x per season

Injured list 15 days for pitchers, 10 days for position players

\$50 million bonus pool awarded to best pre-arbitration players

Umps announce replays

POSNANSKI ON CHAPMAN

You heard my frustration with Aroldis Chapman in the intro. However, as Joe Posnanski wrote...

An arm is only supposed to have so many 100-mph fastballs contained inside*, and Chapman should have passed his quota many, many, many years ago.

**The actual number of 100-mph fastballs the typical human arm is supposed to have: 0.*

According to the incredible Statcast™ search engine, Chapman threw his first 100-mph fastball against Milwaukee on Aug. 31, 2010 (he also threw his second and third 100-mph pitches that day).

And, for comparison purposes, the next day, Neftali Feliz threw a 100-mph fastball against Kansas City. He never threw another one after that season.

You see the other relievers who threw 100-mph fastballs — Henry Rodriguez, Bobby Parnell, Andrew Cashner, Bruce Rondón, Gregory Soto, Jose Alvarado, Joe Kelly, Brian Wilson, Trevor Rosenthal, on and on — and what you really see is a pile of Tommy John surgeries and torn rotator cuffs. You just can't throw 100 forever. Arms tire. Arms break.

Here's a list of the relievers who have thrown the most 100-mph fastballs in the Statcast™ era:

1. Jordan Hicks, 931
2. Kelvin Herrera, 686
3. Emmanuel Clase, 540
4. Joel Zumaya, 537

That's impressive longevity. Oh, wait, I left out Chapman.

1. Aroldis Chapman, 3,235

Chapman threw 131 pitches at 100 mph or more in 2021, this at age 33 and in his 12th season. It's not human, I tell ya.

FIRST INNING BETTING

From VISN (Vegas information sports network) funded by Brent Musburger.

The question was about betting on a Yes/No First Inning Run and about some strategies that go into it. I threw out a stat that I wanted to confirm after the show that up until 2020, the first inning had been the highest-scoring inning on an annual basis over the last decade.

So, let's run that back and see if I was right. In the interest of not taking up too much space, I'll list across instead of up and down with the number of runs, the rank and by how many runs over the next closest inning:

2021: 2696 (1st, 148) // 2020: 927 (5th) // 2019: 2814 (1st, 53) // 2018: 2657 (1st, 119) // 2017: 2775 (1st, 98) // 2016: 2692 (1st, 111) // 2015: 2656 (1st, 206) // 2014: 2365 (T-1st) // 2013: 2453 (1st, 30) // 2012: 2735 (1st, 231) // 2011: 2547 (1st, 15) // 2010: 2566 (1st, 34)

As you can see, the first inning has consistently been the highest-scoring inning since 2010. It makes sense. It is the only inning in which the top of the order is guaranteed to come up. Teams put their best hitters at the top of the lineup and those guys all bat in the first inning.

Obviously the 2020 season is an outlier, but that season was an outlier in every discernible way.

There are 2,430 games in a season, which means that most years, we've averaged over a run per game in the first inning and have every season since 2015. You still have to handicap the pitching matchups and the lineups, but there are betting opportunities to be had wagering 'Yes' on a first inning run.

MLB AVERAGE SALARY UP 5.9 PERCENT FROM OPENING DAY LAST SEASON

Via AP

The average salary in the major leagues rebounded to \$4.4 million on Opening Day, boosted by a frenzy of free agent signings before and after the 99-day lockout, according to a study of contracts by the Associated Press.

Mets pitcher **Max Scherzer** set a season record at \$43.3 million, topping the mark established last year by Dodgers pitcher **Trevor Bauer** at \$38 million. Scherzer earns more than all the current players on the Orioles combined.

The average of \$4,414,184 was up 5.9 percent from the \$4,167,164 at the start of last season and just below the record of \$4,451,508 set in 2017, before the salary slide that angered players during the labor contract that expired last December.

Major League Baseball projects Opening Day payrolls at about \$4.5 billion, up almost 10 percent from the previous high of approximately \$4.1 billion.

This year's average would have been higher had active rosters not been expanded from 26 to 28 through May 1 following the shortened spring training. Factoring out the added players who are at the \$700,000 minimum or close to it, the average would have been a record \$4.62 million.

In addition, this year's final average will be boosted by the new labor contract's \$50 million bonus pool for lower-salaried players not yet eligible for arbitration. Adding that figure and dropping the added 60 players, the average would be \$4.68 million.

The average salary declines over the course of a season as higher-paid veterans are released and replaced by lower-salaried players.

The Dodgers top the major leagues at nearly \$285 million, up from \$241 million at the start of last season. The Mets are second at \$266 million in their second season under owner Steve Cohen, up from \$186 million last year and \$154 million in 2019, the last full season under the Wilpon and Katz families. The Yankees are third at just under \$237 million, followed by the Phillies (\$224 million) and Padres and Red Sox (\$212 million each).

List of Yankees captains in the Expansion Era (1961-present):

1. **Thurman Munson**, 1976-79
2. **Graig Nettles**, 1982-84
3. **Willie Randolph**, 1986-88
4. **Ron Guidry**, 1986-88
5. **Don Mattingly**, 1991-95
6. **Derek Jeter**, 2003-2014

I wonder if Aaron Judge would deal with his contract situation any differently if he was named Captain?

TEN OLDEST PLAYERS ON OPENING DAY ROSTERS—YOU GOTTA BE AT LEAST 39 TO MAKE THE LIST

1. Albert Pujols, DH, Cardinals (age 42)

Born: Jan. 16, 1980 ... First season: 2001

2. Rich Hill, LHP, Red Sox (age 41)

Born: March 11, 1980 ... First season: 2005

3. Nelson Cruz, DH, Nationals (age 41)

Born: July 1, 1980 ... First season: 2005

4. Oliver Pérez, LHP, D-backs (age 40)

Born: Aug. 15, 1981 ... First season: 2002

5. Adam Wainwright, RHP, Cardinals (age 40)

Born: Aug. 30, 1981 ... First season: 2005

6. Yadier Molina, C, Cardinals (age 39)

Born: July 13, 1982 ... First season: 2004

7 (tie). Robinson Canó, 1B/2B/DH, Mets (Age 39)

Born: October 22, 1982. ... First season: 2005

7 (tie). Darren O'Day, RHP, Braves (Age: 39)

Born: October 22, 1982. ... First season: 2008

9. Justin Verlander, RHP, Astros (age 39)

Born: Feb. 20, 1983 ... First season: 2005

10. Sergio Romo, RHP, Mariners (Age: 39)

Born: Mar. 4, 1983 ... First season: 2008

NOT A BAD START

The way **Hunter Greene** was pitching for the Reds, it *looked* like he has been doing this for quite a while. But no, Sunday afternoon's series finale vs. the defending World Series champion Braves was the top prospect's much-hyped, much-anticipated Major League debut.

Not appearing too dialed up for a moment he's prepared for since he was a teenager, Greene, MLB Pipeline's No. 22 prospect overall, was impressive during a 6-3 Cincinnati win before 38,233 fans at Truist Park. As he threw 92 pitches over five innings, the 22-year-old right-hander yielded three earned runs on four hits and two walks to go with seven strikeouts to earn his first victory.

Greene threw first-pitch strikes to 15 of his 21 batters.

- According to Statcast, Greene's four-seam fastball (used 56 times) averaged 99.7 mph. He reached triple digits 20 times, with a maximum speed of 101.6 mph -- which **Matt Olson** lined to right field for Atlanta's first hit.

Greene threw 23 sliders with 11 swings and five misses. Average speed: 86.1 mph.

- The changeup was used 13 times with five swings and one miss. It averaged an astounding 90 mph, but was nearly 10 mph slower than the four-seamer.
- Through his first 10 batters, Greene had six strikeouts.

Most 100.0+ mph pitches as SP, single game since 2008 (pitch-tracking era, incl PS): 6/5/21

deGrom: 33 8/19/15 **Eovaldi**: 28 5/31/21 **deGrom**: 27 10/3/14 **Ventura**: 26 6/15/16

Syndergaard: 24 6/6/16 **Paxton**: 24 4/18/16 **Syndergaard**: 21 **TODAY Greene: 20**

Editor's note—I watched Greene pitch Saturday night against the Dodgers. When the dust settled, the 22-year-old top prospect had unleashed 39 100 mph fastballs – obliterating the record for the most triple-digit readings by a pitcher in a single game in the tracking era (since 2008). **Jacob deGrom** set the previous record with 33 on June 5, 2021. He was throwing bullets. But the Reds lost—**Julio Urias** looked like the 20 game winner he was last year, giving up 1 hit in five innings as L.A. beat the Reds.

EDDIE MURRAY LEADS MAJORS IN BATTING AVERAGE WITHOUT WINNING BATTING TITLE

Unquestionably, the race for the 1990 batting title was the most bizarre in MLB history.

Willi McGee, who had the Majors' highest average while playing for the last-place St. Louis Cardinals, was shipped to the Oakland A's at the trade deadline. McGee had already accumulated enough plate appearances to qualify for the batting crown, and no other NL player was able to clear his .335 batting average—giving McGee the batting crown even though he was playing in the AL at the time

Few people, however, remember that .335 was not McGee's final average.

When a player changes leagues, their seasonal totals are kept separate for league leadership purposes, so McGee's mediocre performance in Oakland (.274 BA) had no impact on his NL totals. McGee wound up winning the batting crown even though his .324 average over the entire season ranked just sixth in the Majors.

The big loser in this one, however, is Eddie Murray (L.A. Dodgers), whose .330 average finished right behind McGee in the NL race but was actually one point higher than AL champ **George Brett**.

Nobody remembers that Murray actually had the highest batting average in baseball in 1990, though fortunately it had no impact on the first-ballot electee's Hall of Fame case.

EXIT BRETT GARDNER

For the first time since 2005, **Brett Gardner** is not a member of the Yankees organization as of the start of the major-league season.

Gardner's apparent departure from the Yankees means there are no remaining members of the 2009 World Series team on the roster. After **CC Sabathia** retired after the 2019 season, it became Gardner's team to look after. At the same time, he viewed **Aaron Judge** as the clubhouse leader of the future and began passing the torch over the last few seasons.

Since his MLB debut in 2008, Gardner accumulated 44.3 bWAR for the Yankees, 22nd most in franchise history, placing him just behind **Graig Nettles** and ahead of **Bob Shawkey and Mel Stottlemire**. His 14 years as a Yankee give him the same tenure in pinstripes as **Don Mattingly and Ron Guidry**.

JOE POSNANSKI OBSERVATIONS

Just take a look at the bottom of the third inning, with the Royals down 2-0.

— Whit Merrifield grounds a ball up the middle for a single. RUNNER ON 1ST, 0 OUTS.

— Witt hits a sharp grounder to shortstop, it might have been a double play but Cleveland second baseman **Andres Gimenez** loses the ball in the exchange. RUNNER ON 1st, 1 OUT.

— **Andrew Benintendi** walks. RUNNERS ON 1st and 2nd, 1 OUT.

— **Salvador Perez** hits a line drive single to score Merrifield. RUNNERS ON 1st and 2nd, 1 OUT, 1 RUN SCORED.

— **Carlos Santana** flies out to right, Benintendi tags. RUNNERS ON 1st and 3rd, 2 OUTS, 1 RUN SCORED.

— **Hunter Dozier** flies out to left. END OF INNING, 1 run, 2 hits, 0 errors.

Pretty straightforward, right? Well, yes and no.

The last two outs did look straightforward; they were relatively bland front-of-the-warning-track outs in Kansas City. But in a larger sense, both were blasts, Santana's fly ball in particular — 391 feet, according to Statcast™. That would have been a home run in 15 parks across baseball, including at Progressive Field in Cleveland. Dozier's ball wasn't hit as far at 344 feet, but it would have been a homer in Houston and off the Green Monster in Boston at a minimum.

Same pitch. Same swing. Totally different result. In Kansas City, it seemed that Cleveland starter **Aaron Civale** did his job by getting those two guys to fly out. In other parks, Santana would have smashed a three-run homer and Dozier would have hit a double, and Civale would have been pulled from the game and asked what went wrong.

Like I say, we all know this ... but it is actually kind of funny if you think about it. There are no NFL fields that are 94 or 106 yards, and no basketball arenas where the goals are 9.5 feet high, and all the NHL rinks are exactly 200 x 85 feet. There are certainly subtle differences everywhere — lighting, sound, quality of the surface, etc. — but in baseball you're simply playing a different game in Kansas City than you are in Cleveland than you are in Colorado than you are in San Diego.

TRIPLE CROWN WINNERS

14X since 1900. Ted Williams ('47 and '42 Red Sox) and Rogers Hornsby ('22 and '25 Cards) did it twice.

Miguel Cabrera 2013 Tigers

Carl Yastrzemski 1967 Red Sox

Frank Robinson 1966 Orioles

Mickey Mantle 1956 Yankees

Joe Medwick 1937 Cards

Lou Gehrig 1934 Yankees

Jimmie Foxx 1933 A's

Chuck Klein 1933 Phillies

Ty Cobb 1909 Tigers

Nap Lajoie 1901 A's

OH BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?

There have been more than 400 combinations of siblings who played in MLB -- that's more than 400 players who also had at least one brother, if not more, make it to The Show.

Having two Major Leaguers in the family is quite an accomplishment, but even more notable is when those two experience noteworthy careers as well. With no disrespect toward any of the great families in baseball history, here's a look at some of the best sibling combos ever.

Baseball-Reference.com's Wins Above Replacement (WAR) was used as a rough guideline, with preference given to pairs in which both players achieved significant success and remained at the big league level for a while. That's why each combo on the list has at least two brothers

with at least 20 career WAR, while some other combos that include a Hall of Famer (**Henry and Tommie Aaron**, for example) were not included. If a third brother was below that threshold, he is still included if the first two brothers had at least 20 WAR.

All combos are listed in order of career WAR, which is in parenthesis.

1. Paul Waner (74.7) and Lloyd Waner (29.6)

This duo leads off the list for a simple reason: The Waners are the only brothers in the Hall of Fame as players. Paul played from 1926-45, amassing 3,152 hits with a .333 career average for the Pirates, Dodgers, Braves and Yankees. His younger brother Lloyd played in 18 MLB seasons from 1927-45, with 2,459 hits and a .316 average. Paul's nickname was 'Big Poison,' while Lloyd was 'Little Poison.' Paul was inducted in 1952 by the BBWAA, Lloyd in 1967 by the Veterans Committee. The two were teammates on the Pirates (1927-40), Braves (1941) and Dodgers (1944).

2. Joe DiMaggio (79.2), Dom DiMaggio (33.6) and Vince DiMaggio (17.8)

Vince was the eldest brother, but actually debuted second, with Joe reaching the Majors a season prior, in 1936. It was the middle brother who had the Hall of Fame career, as Joe hit .325 for his career, which spanned 1936-51, minus three seasons of military service. Dom, the youngest, debuted in 1940 and was a seven-time All-Star, also missing three years while serving in the military. Joe was a career Yankee, while Dom's entire career was as a member of the Red Sox. How's that for sibling rivalry?

3. Pedro Martínez (83.9) and Ramón Martínez (25.9)

Pedro had the Hall of Fame career, but his older brother Ramón's career was of note, too. Debuting at 20 years old in 1988, he pitched 14 seasons for the Dodgers, Red Sox and Pirates. In 1990 for the Dodgers, he led the Majors in complete games and was an All-Star, finishing second in Cy Young voting in the NL to **Doug Drabek**. Pedro debuted as a 20-year-old in '92 for the Dodgers, then was traded to the Expos, where he began to shine. An 18-year career with the Dodgers, Expos, Red Sox, Mets and Phillies yielded three Cy Youngs and a World Series title, among other numerous accolades and accomplishments. The two were teammates on the Dodgers (1992-93) and Red Sox (1999-2000).

4. Phil Niekro (95.9) and Joe Niekro (29.7)

Phil, known as Knucksie, had remarkable staying power in the Majors thanks to that signature knuckleball. He pitched 24 seasons from 1964-87, throwing 5,404 regular-season innings, including 300-plus in three straight years as a 38, 39 and 40-year-old. Joe pitched 22 seasons, from 1967-88, winning a World Series in 1987 with the Twins. They were teammates on the Braves (1973-74) and Yankees (1985).

5. Gaylord Perry (90) and Jim Perry (41.6)

Gaylord won an AL Cy Young Award in 1972 with Cleveland and an NL Cy Young Award in 1978 with the Padres. His older brother Jim won an AL Cy Young Award in 1970 with the Twins. They're the only sibling combo to both win Cy Young Awards in their careers. Gaylord had the 22-year Hall of Fame career from 1962-83, while Jim had a strong resume with 17 big league seasons and three All-Star selections, plus that aforementioned Cy Young. They were teammates in Cleveland in 1974-75.

6. Felipe Alou (42.2), Matty Alou (23.1) and Jesús Alou (0.8)

Felipe was the first of the three brothers to reach the Majors, in 1958, with Matty debuting in 1960 and Jesús in 1963. They were teammates together in San Francisco in 1963, and are the only trio of brothers to appear in the same outfield in a game. Each had at least a 15-year career, with Felipe playing 17 years before a 14-year managerial career. In addition to their time in '63, Felipe and Matty were teammates on the Giants (1960-62) and Yankees (1973), and Jesús and Matty were together on the Giants in 1964-65.

7. Ken Boyer (62.8), Clete Boyer (27.6) and Cloyd Boyer (0.6)

Cloyd played 111 MLB games between 1949-55, but his younger brothers each experienced far longer careers. Ken was an 11-time All-Star and five-time Gold Glove winner over a 15-year career, primarily with the Cardinals. He was the 1964 NL MVP with St. Louis, and won a World Series that year, too. Clete played 16 seasons with the A's, Yankees and Braves. Clete and Cloyd were both on the A's in 1955.

8. Wes Ferrell (60.1) and Rick Ferrell (30.8)

Older brother Rick was a Hall of Fame catcher and eight-time All-Star, hitting .281 for his career. His younger brother Wes was a pitcher who appeared across 15 seasons. The fun part: they were teammates on the Red Sox from 1934-37 and Senators from 1937-38, when they were traded over together. The two comprised a battery numerous times, and are one of nine brother pairs since 1900 to do so. Just like in the backyard as kids.

9. Deacon White (45.5) and Will White (34.9)

Early baseball had a number of brother combos, so at least one had to make the list here. Deacon debuted before MLB even existed, playing five years in the National Association before the National League's inaugural year in 1876. His 14 NL seasons, which are his official MLB years, included a .307 batting average, and he even slugged .545 in 1877. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2013. His younger brother Will pitched five MLB seasons and 10 total professional seasons, throwing a casual 680 innings in 1879.

10. Mort Cooper (32.7) and Walker Cooper (27.3)

Pitcher Mort and catcher Walker were teammates on the 1940-45 Cardinals and the 1947 Giants. They won two World Series together, in 1942 and '44. They, like the Ferrells, are another of the nine modern-era pitcher-catcher batteries to appear together in at least a game for the same team. Mort won the 1942 NL MVP Award in a year during which he threw the majority of his innings to his brother, to the tune of a 1.61 ERA with Walker behind the dish. Walker was an eight-time All-Star.

Some other notable combos (min. 10 WAR for at least 2 brothers):

- **Yadier, Bengie and José Molina**
- **Justin and B.J. Upton**
- **Dizzy and Paul Dean**
- **George and Ken Brett**
- **Kyle and Corey Seager**
- **Roberto and Sandy Alomar Jr.**
- **Orlando and Liván Hernández (half brothers)**
- **Harry and Stan Coveleski**
- **Ken and Bob Forsch**
- **Bret and Aaron Boone**
- **Brian and Marcus Giles**
- **Jeff and Jered Weaver**

BASEBALL IS GETTING CLOSER TO THE BEST VERSION OF ITSELF, AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON.

By Peter Abraham, Boston Globe

Pitchers no longer hit — unless you're **Shohei Ohtani** — and a growing number of them receive signals from the catcher via a small audio receiver in the sweatband of their cap to cut down on sign stealing.

Extra innings start with a runner on second base.

Rosters this month have 28 players, but that will drop to 26 on May 1, with a maximum of 13 pitchers.

If a play is reviewed by the umpires, the crew chief now has a microphone to announce the decision to the crowd.

If they choose, players can wear a small mic during games for television. Joey Votto and Francisco Lindor have already done it, and **Kiké Hernández** agreed to for ESPN on Sunday night.

How you watch games has changed, too. There were two games on Apple TV+ on Friday night and next month there will be Saturday morning games on Peacock.

Starting next season, all 30 teams will play each other at least once.

Major League Baseball promoted the start of the season with a video featuring an assortment of exuberant bat flips. Players also are free to wear customized spikes in whatever colors they want, something forbidden a few years ago.

Down in the minors, select leagues are experimenting with larger bases, pitch clocks, banning shifts and an automated strike zone. The overarching goal is to create a better rhythm to the game and more action on the field.

“We’re trying to sell a product,” Red Sox manager **Alex Cora** said Saturday before his team’s 4-2 loss to the Yankees. “We’re in a good spot with the rules. I saw the reaction of the fans [Friday] in Toronto when the umpires reversed the call and that place went nuts.

“What we’re trying to accomplish is to get this product where people buy it and see it and they enjoy it.”

In the end, that’s the hard truth baseball ignored for too long. It’s a product that competes with theaters, amusement parks, television shows, video games and other sports for your time, attention, and dollars.

Staying the same wasn’t an option. Long games and a lack of offense was draining away the entertainment value. Baseball, already an acquired taste, was getting tougher to swallow.

“The society we live in is so much different now,” Cora said.

Cora comes from a baseball family and sees how it works every day. His mother complains to him about the lack of small-ball in the game and his 4-year-old twin sons want to see home runs.

“I tell my mom when she talks about bunting and all that stuff, I say, ‘Mom you didn’t have a cell phone 30 years ago. Now you have a cell phone. Move on.’ ”

JAPAN’S PERFECT GAME DROUGHT ENDS WITH A 19 STRIKEOUT MASTERPIECE.

By Victor Mather, NYT

Roki Sasaki, 20, pitched the first perfect game in Nippon Professional Baseball in 28 years. But don’t expect to see him in M.L.B. anytime soon.

Roki Sasaki’s perfect game was a long time coming, the first in the Japanese majors since 1994. But the wait turned out to be worth it. Sasaki struck out 19 of the 27 men he faced, completing what would have to be described as one of the greatest games ever pitched.

The 6-0 victory for the Chiba Lotte Marines over the Orix Buffaloes on Sunday did not only break the Japanese record for strikeouts in a perfect game, but it also far surpassed the major league mark of 14 by **Matt Cain** of the Giants in 2012 and **Sandy Koufax** for the Dodgers in 1965.

Sasaki, 20, struck out the third batter he faced in the first inning, then struck out the side in the second, third, fourth and fifth innings. The 13 consecutive strikeouts is a Japanese baseball record. The equivalent Major League Baseball record for any game is 10 and shared by **Tom Seaver**, **Aaron Nola** and **Corbin Burnes**.

It was the first complete game of Sasaki’s young career, and even with the high strikeout total it required only 105 pitches.

He fanned **Masataka Yoshida**, the Buffaloes’ designated hitter, three times. Yoshida had struck out only 26 times last season, the lowest total for regular players. “I got beaten completely,” he told The Asahi Shimbun. “There was no point of contact.”

Surely, the youthful Sasaki benefited from a wise old hand at catcher. Not exactly. His backstop, Ko Matsukawa, is only 18.

Major League Baseball has a perfect game shortage of its own, although not nearly as long as Japan’s 28-year drought before Sasaki. There were nine perfect games in the majors from 1998 to 2012, but none since.

Of course, sticklers will point out that Sasaki’s game could have been better: Eight guys actually avoided striking out.

The University of North Texas softball pitcher **Hope Trautwein** fanned 21 of 21 in an N.C.A.A. game last year.

And in 1952, **Ron Necciai** struck out 27 batters in a nine-inning no-hitter in the Class D minor leagues for the Bristol Twins against the Welch Miners. He also had a 24-strikeout game in the minors, but rotator cuff problems limited him to a handful of major league games.

Last year, as a teenager, Sasaki made his debut in the Japanese majors with a 4-2 record and a 1.84 E.R.A. in 16 games. That and his 100-mile-an-hour fastball have enticed American scouts, but it is likely to be a while until he suits up in M.L.B.

Because of an agreement between M.L.B. and Nippon Professional Baseball, Japanese players who have signed with a club there do not reach free agency until they have nine years of professional service. Before then, players are subject to both the complicated posting system, which carries with it a series of restrictions and built-in fees, and also the international bonus pool, which caps the amount a team can spend on players born outside the United States until they are 25 and have played six years of professional baseball.

Sasaki, in his second pro year, will have to wait.

PULLED WHILE THROWING A NO-NO

Mlb.com

What about when a pitcher is removed with a no-hitter intact? Since the mound was moved to its current distance in 1893, there have been 21 instances of a pitcher throwing at least seven hitless innings in a game but *not* completing the game, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Here's a look at those 21 pitchers to be taken out with a no-hit bid intact through at least seven innings.

April 13, 2022: Clayton Kershaw (LAD) at MIN, 7 IP (perfect)

Kershaw looked like his vintage self, absolutely dominating the Twins on an April afternoon. He induced 20 swings and misses, including 17 on his slider. He racked up 13 strikeouts, his 25th career game with at least 10 strikeouts and no walks. He was perfect through seven but yielded to the bullpen after 80 pitches in his first start of the season after a short Spring Training. **Alex Vesia** came in for the eighth and retired **Jorge Polanco** before allowing a single to Gary Sánchez. After the game, Kershaw said it was "the right decision" for manager Dave Roberts to remove him.

April 8, 2022: Sean Manaea (SD) at ARI, 7 IP

In his first start for the Padres after being traded to San Diego by the A's, Manaea immediately

validated his new club's pursuit. The left-hander, who previously threw a no-hitter against the Red Sox in Oakland on April 21, 2018, stymied D-backs hitters over seven innings and 88 pitches, yielding only a second-inning walk to **Daulton Varsho** for the only Arizona hitter to reach base against him. Manaea struck out seven and threw 66 of his 88 pitches for strikes before being lifted from the contest due to his pitch count -- with a shortened Spring Training and Manaea making his first start of the season, Padres manager **Bob Melvin** didn't risk injury to his new starter by letting him go any further.

Sept. 11, 2021: Corbin Burnes (MIL) at CLE, 8 IP

The Brewers scored three runs over the first two innings at Progressive Field, and that was more than enough for their ace right-hander, who would go on to win the 2021 NL Cy Young Award. Burnes took a perfect game into the seventh inning, when he issued a leadoff walk to **Myles Straw**. But that was the only blemish on his line for the night, which came to an end after eight masterful innings and 115 pitches. Closer **Josh Hader** breezed through the ninth inning to seal the second no-hitter in Brewers history. Burnes finished the night with 14 strikeouts, one shy of his season high, which came exactly one month earlier, when he fanned 15 Cubs over eight scoreless frames at Wrigley Field.

Aug. 31, 2021: Blake Snell (SD) at ARI, 7 IP

Snell was dominant versus the D-backs in seven innings of no-hit ball before being taken out due to his pitch count. In his best performance of the season based on its 85 Game Score, the left-hander put up 10 K's and two walks. He induced 18 swinging strikes and 17 strikes looking, facing 23 batters during his 107-pitch outing. Snell understood and expressed agreement with the decision to end his no-hit bid, which reliever **Pierce Johnson** lost in the eighth inning.

April 4, 2019: Trevor Bauer (CLE) vs. TOR, 7 IP

Coming off seven strong innings in which he gave up only one run in his season debut five days earlier, Bauer was working on a no-hitter against the Blue Jays at Progressive Field. The problem was that in addition to striking out eight batters, he walked six, and at the end of seven innings, his pitch count stood at 117. Toronto picked up its first hit of the game when **Freddy Galvis** led off the ninth inning against **Brad Hand** with a single. There would be two more hits and a run scored in the inning, but Cleveland won the game, 4-1.

July 23, 2018: Daniel Ponce de Leon (STL) at CIN, 7 IP

What a story it would have been if Ponce de Leon had finished off a no-hitter in his Major League debut. On the other hand, it was already an amazing story that he was on the mound at all. A year earlier, while pitching for Triple-A Memphis, a screaming comebacker to the head fractured his skull and nearly killed him. But Ponce de Leon made it back and shut down the Reds at Great American Ball Park, although his pitch count (116) prevented him from going the distance. The St. Louis bullpen then allowed two runs on five hits in a 2-1 loss.

April 18, 2017: Wei-Yin Chen (MIA) at SEA, 7 IP

Chen's season would ultimately be cut short due to injuries -- he ended up making nine appearances (five starts) for Miami in 2017, posting a 3.82 ERA. But this was his finest start of

the year; he walked two and struck out two on 100 pitches over seven innings against the Mariners in Seattle. He yielded to the Marlins' bullpen for the eighth and ninth, with sidearmers **Brad Ziegler** and fellow right-hander **Kyle Barraclough** finishing off the Mariners, giving up a hit in the ninth that broke up the combined no-hit bid.

Sept. 10, 2016: Rich Hill (LAD) at MIA, 7 IP (perfect)

Hill pitched seven perfect innings, striking out nine, and Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said he "felt sick to my stomach" taking Hill out of the game with the opportunity to achieve a perfect game. Blister issues suffered by the veteran starting pitcher earlier that season with Oakland before he was traded to Los Angeles urged the Dodgers to be cautious with him late in the season as they pushed for a postseason run. Hill threw 62 of 89 pitches for strikes, facing the minimum 21 batters in the process. The perfect game was subsequently broken up after Hill was replaced, but he still got the win as part of a 12-5 season. He is the only pitcher besides Clayton Kershaw to be pulled from a game with seven innings of perfect baseball since 1893, and both Dodgers starters were managed by Roberts.

April 29, 2016: Adam Conley (MIA) at MIL, 7 2/3 IP

Conley threw 7 2/3 innings of no-hit ball against the Brewers before Miami manager **Don Mattingly** made the slow walk to the mound, amid a chorus of boos from the opposing crowd, to pull the 25-year-old left-hander. Mattingly said after the game that the decision wasn't tough at all. "It was easy right there," Mattingly said. "I knew he couldn't finish. We weren't going to let him finish. That was really easy, actually." Conley, whose previous career high was 106 pitches, entered the eighth at the 100 mark, and needed five pitches to strike out Ramon Flores before issuing a five-pitch walk. After a four-pitch flyout to the next batter, Mattingly had seen enough. Marlins reliever **José Ureña** took the no-hit bid one out into the ninth inning before giving up a bloop single to **Jonathan Lucroy**.

April 8, 2016: Ross Stripling (LAD) at SFG, 7 1/3 IP

Making his Major League debut against the Dodgers' bitter rival, Stripling threw 7 1/3 innings of no-hit ball against the Giants in San Francisco, striking out four and walking four. After noticing a velocity dip in the seventh, Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts strolled to the mound to pull his young starter after exactly 100 pitches. Stripling was, after all, just two years removed from Tommy John surgery. In the end, the 26-year-old right-hander was OK with Roberts' call to the bullpen. "I thought it was the right choice," Stripling said after the game. "I was tired; it was the right call. I think you could tell I was trending downward. It was a tough decision for him. I certainly had no ill feelings toward him one bit." Roberts brought in right-handed reliever Chris Hatcher, who immediately gave up a two-run home run to **Trevor Brown** to tie the game at 2. The Dodgers eventually lost the game in the 10th inning on a walk-off home run by Giants shortstop **Brandon Crawford**.

April 18, 2014: Aaron Harang (ATL) at NYM, 7 IP

Harang turned back the clock on an April night in 2014. Seven years removed from his fourth-place Cy Young finish in 2007, the 35-year-old Brave threw seven innings of no-hit ball against the New York Mets. But after walking six, including two each in the sixth and seventh innings,

his pitch count sat at 121 when his spot in the lineup came to bat in the top of the eighth. Braves manager **Fredi Gonzalez** pinch-hit for Harang, citing health concerns and a long season ahead for the tall right-hander. Harang was relieved by **Luis Avilan**, who gave up a two-out single to **David Wright** in the eighth.

Aug. 15, 2010: Kevin Slowey (MIN) vs. OAK, 7 IP

Slowey nearly made baseball history one night in August 2010. After missing his previous start with elbow issues, the Twins right-hander held the A's hitless over seven innings on 106 pitches. Slowey was just 26 years old at the time and Twins manager **Ron Gardenhire** pulled the pitcher with his recent injury in mind. Gardenhire summoned **Jon Rauch**, who allowed an eighth-inning double to **Cliff Pennington**, ending the no-hit bid.

May 3, 2002: Damian Moss (ATL) at STL, 7 IP

In his sixth career start, Moss tossed seven no-hit innings against the Cardinals in St. Louis. Manager **Bobby Cox** never gave the rookie a chance to finish it, thanks to a bloated pitch count. St. Louis couldn't get a hit off Moss despite limited control from the 25-year-old. Moss walked seven Cardinals and had only two 1-2-3 innings, leading to 116 pitches after seven frames. After the southpaw was pulled for a pinch-hitter in the eighth, Braves reliever **Mike Remlinger** gave up a one-out single to **Fernando Vina** to cut the no-hit bid short.

July 12, 1997: Francisco Cordova (PIT) vs. HOU, 9 IP

Facing an Astros lineup featuring two future Hall of Famers in **Craig Biggio** and **Jeff Bagwell**, Cordova kept Houston out of the hit column for nine magnificent innings. However, the Pirates were unable to get a run across against Astros starter **Chris Holt** or reliever **Billy Wagner**, and Cordova was replaced by **Ricardo Rincon**, having thrown 121 pitches. After Rincon got through the top of the 10th without allowing a hit, Pittsburgh's **Mark Smith** slammed a walk-off, pinch-hit three-run homer off **John Hudek** in the bottom of the frame to give the Bucs the win and the combined no-no. Cordova remains the only pitcher in AL/NL history to open a combined no-hitter by tossing nine full innings.

Sept. 2, 1996: David Cone (NYY) at OAK, 7 IP

After starting the 1996 season 4-1 with a 2.03 ERA, Cone was diagnosed with an aneurysm in his right arm that required surgery and sidelined him for four months. The righty made his return to the mound for the Yankees at the Coliseum on Sept. 2 and didn't miss a beat, firing seven innings of no-hit ball against the A's. But with Cone's pitch count at 85, Yankees manager **Joe Torre** pulled him for **Mariano Rivera** to start the eighth inning. Rivera extended the no-hit bid until the ninth, when **Jose Herrera**'s one-out infield single ended it. Cone would go on to fire a perfect game against the Expos less than three years later, recording the only no-hitter of his career.

April 11, 1990: Mark Langston (LAA) vs. SEA, 7 IP

Making his Angels debut after signing with the club the previous offseason, Langston held the Mariners hitless on 99 pitches through seven innings before being pulled at his own request. Langston hadn't been fully built up after a brief work stoppage led to a shortened Spring

Training, so he asked to be removed, and manager **Doug Rader** brought in reliever **Mike Witt**. “There’s no way I could have made two more innings,” Langston told the Los Angeles Times in a 2020 interview. “I didn’t have the base underneath me to do that.” Witt, who was responsible for the Angels’ previous no-hitter when he threw a perfect game against the Rangers in 1984, ended up getting the final six outs against Seattle to complete the fifth combined no-no in AL/NL history.

Sept. 4, 1974: Don Wilson (HOU) vs. CIN, 8 IP

Wilson managed to avoid any hits but walked five batters, hit one, struck out only three and allowed two unearned runs on a fifth-inning error. With the Astros trailing 2-1 in the bottom of the eighth, manager **Preston Gomez** pinch-hit for Wilson, and reliever **Mike Cosgrove** gave up a leadoff hit to **Tony Perez** in the ninth. Sadly, Wilson would pitch only four more games after this, as the 1971 NL All-Star died at the age of only 29 on Jan. 5, 1975. He’s now in the Astros Hall of Fame.

July 21, 1970: Clay Kirby (SD) vs. NYM, 8 IP

Once again, Preston Gomez was the manager who had to make the controversial decision to remove a pitcher who had a no-hitter going but also was trailing in the game. This time it was Kirby, a 22-year-old righty who entered the night with a 5.03 ERA on the season. Kirby walked two and gave up a run in the first, then was pulled for a pinch-hitter with the score still 1-0 in the eighth. Reliever Jack Baldschun gave up the no-no and two more runs in the ninth.

April 30, 1967: Steve Barber (BAL) vs. DET, 8 2/3 IP

Barber entered the top of the ninth with a 1-0 lead thanks to a **Luis Aparicio** sacrifice fly in the eighth. He’d already walked seven batters through eight innings but had yet to allow a hit. He walked two more to start the inning before retiring the next two. With runners on second and third thanks to a sacrifice bunt, Barber uncorked a wild pitch with **Mickey Stanley** at the plate, allowing a run to score and tie the game. Barber walked Stanley and was removed from the game, with it tied and the hurler up to 10 walks. Reliever **Stu Miller** entered and allowed a fielder’s choice that knocked in the go-ahead run, before retiring **Al Kaline** to end the inning. The O’s went down 1-2-3 in the bottom of the ninth and lost the game, 2-1, despite not allowing a hit.

May 22, 1962: Whitey Ford (NYY) vs. LAA, 7 IP

The Hall of Famer never threw a no-hitter, but he had a golden opportunity in this one, which was derailed by a strained muscle in his back that forced his exit. Ford did give up a run in the top of the first on two walks, a steal, a groundout and a sac fly, but otherwise he was cruising. The Angels broke up the no-hitter against reliever **Jim Coates**, but the Yanks escaped with a 2-1 victory on **Elston Howard**’s walk-off sac fly in the 12th.

May 26, 1956: Johnny Klippstein (CIN) at MLN, 7 IP

What did it take for a pitcher to be pulled after seven no-hit innings way back in 1956, when complete games were far more common? In this case, seven walks and a hit batter did the trick. Klippstein got himself into bases-loaded jams twice along the way, allowing a run in the second

inning on a **Frank Torre** sac fly. When Klippstein's spot in the order came up with one on and one out in the top of the eighth, Reds manager **Birdie Tebbetts** pinch-hit to try to erase the one-run deficit. It didn't work, but Cincinnati did tie things up in the ninth before the Braves won in the 11th.

PITCHCOM PROS AND CONS

Ken Rosenthal in The Athletic

Boston manager **Alex Cora** made an interesting point about PitchCom, saying he is hesitant for the Red Sox to use the system in part because he believes it will make pitchers less convicted in what they throw. As an example, he cited the influence of the Cardinals' **Yadier Molina**, who was the catcher for Puerto Rico when Cora was that team's GM in the 2017 World Baseball Classic.

Cardinals first-year manager **Oli Marmol** confirmed Molina is the reason his team is not using PitchCom, which is designed to prevent sign stealing and improve pace of play. The catcher, using a transmitter attached either to his wrist or shin guard, communicates directly with the pitcher and up to three other defenders.

"There's just this trust. Can you communicate it through PitchCom? Maybe. Maybe not," Marmol said. "As of now, Yadi and our guys are not in favor of using it. If we feel like we're getting exposed (with teams stealing signs), then we'll revisit it. But right now, it's not even a consideration. Yadi will continue to give signs the way he has forever."

Phillies catcher **J.T. Realmuto**, though, takes the opposite view. The Phillies use Realmuto's voice for English-speaking pitchers, and the voice of their Spanish language interpreter, Diego Etedgui, for Spanish-speaking pitchers.

"To be honest, we get more conviction from using it," Realmuto said. "First of all, it's my voice out there. They are hearing my voice and it's very direct in what I'm saying. It gives them a pitch and the exact location we're looking for. There's no confusion."

"Sometimes if I give them the fastball away signal (with his fingers), they don't know if I want it down and away, up and away, two-seam, four-seam. With PitchCom, I push two buttons and it tells them, 'Two-seam, down and away.' Or, 'four-seam, up and away.'"

Mets catcher **James McCann** said he occasionally experiences difficulty trying to determine whether a pitcher is shaking off the pitch type or location, though other catchers say that has not been a problem. In McCann's view, it's best for pitchers to determine whether they want to receive signs the old-fashioned way or through PitchCom.

“I tell each pitcher, whatever you want to use, if you’re comfortable using PitchCom, we’re going to go PitchCom,” McCann said. “If you want signs — and that’s what makes you feel like you, makes you feel convicted — we’ll do signs.”

WHY THE YANKEES PITCHING STAFF IS EMBRACING A NEW SLIDER AND HOW THE ‘WHIRLY’ IS DIFFERENT FROM A TRADITIONAL SLIDER

Lindsey Adler, The Athletic

There’s a new slider sweeping Yankeetown.

It’s often thrown with a two-seam grip, works the horizontal plane more than a typical slider does, and is developed to play off of true two-seam fastballs using a recently discovered scientific theory called seam-shifted wake.

Those around the Yankees organization are calling this type of slider a whirly. Elsewhere, it’s becoming known as a sweeper. Whatever it is, Yankees pitchers are finding that it’s getting them soft contact and strikeouts, and it’s a sharp example of the way the sport continues to evolve based on developments in technology and statistical research.

Yankees pitchers **Nestor Cortes Jr., Jonathan Loaisiga, Clay Holmes, Lucas Leutge, Deivi Garcia and Clarke Schmidt** are each throwing a version of the whirly. **Michael King** is throwing a pitch that gets similar horizontal movement to the whirly, but comes from **Corey Kluber**’s breaking ball. Prospects **Hayden Wesneski, Ken Waldichuk and Ron Marinaccio** throw a version of the whirly as well.

“I picked up on it last year in spring training, and it was a pitch I struggled with early on,” Cortes said, noting that it was introduced to him by Yankees pitching coaches and other pitchers. “It wasn’t until maybe mid-April, when I was in Triple A, that I actually figured it out and learned how to throw it for strikes and then as a chase pitch when I wanted to. I spent like a month and a half trying to throw it and at first I almost quit on it because I couldn’t get it down, but I’m glad I didn’t.”

The slider that Cortes was throwing in 2020 had 6.1 inches of horizontal break, per Statcast. In 2021, once he began throwing the whirly instead, he began getting 14.5 inches of horizontal break. Pair that with his sidearm fastball, which gets 12-13 inches of horizontal movement, and Cortes is essentially making hitters cover the entire width of the plate on just two pitches.

Loaisiga, who had a breakout season in 2021, said that he began developing his big slider around 2020, when pitching coach Matt Blake joined the Yankees. Loaisiga was struggling with his curveball at the time, and Aroldis Chapman suggested to him that a slider might be a good

addition to his arsenal. He began throwing a slider in 2021, getting good horizontal movement and a big swing-and-miss rate on it.

“It works well because once I started using the two-seam as a big pitch, the two-seam slider creates a better combination to attack hitters than what I was using previously,” Loaisiga said.

So, what is the whirly, and what makes it different from a traditional slider, like the one **Gerrit Cole** throws? They’re built on different phenomena of physics: Cole’s is the platonic ideal of a Magnus slider; the whirly uses a new theory known as seam-shifted wake to use air flow and spin to create horizontal movement.

Cole’s slider mostly uses gyro spin — like a bullet — to create movement. The whirly starts out with gyro spin then it’s theorized that the seam-shifted wake phenomenon transitions the axis to side spin, which helps it spin off horizontally like a spinning top toy.

The theory is that if a pitcher can get the ball to spin on a specific, tilted axis, the aerodynamic effects on the seams will help create that effective horizontal movement. The Yankees are using the two-seam grip to help get their pitchers to throw the ball to that effect; each pitcher is using their own mental cue when releasing the ball. One pitcher is thinking cutter when he throws it, another is thinking curveball, one other is focused on keeping the pinky side of his hand toward the plate as long as possible before releasing it.

The results are not uniform, but are broadly similar: Big, sweeping horizontal movement across the strike zone for whiffs.

“It’s been a collaborative effort,” said Yankees assistant pitching coach **Desi Druschel**, whose area of expertise is in pitch design. “We began talking about it in 2020, during quarantine. We had been working on a completely separate pitch at the time, but we started to notice some spin similarities that we thought were causing the break. I’m not convinced we really know why it moves the way it does, but seam-shifted wake is one theory. But there’s enough difference when you watch different people throw the same pitch that I’m not convinced we totally understand it yet.”

As with many organizational philosophies for the Yankees, the minor leagues were the original breeding ground for the whirly. Players like Waldichuk and Wesneski in particular have used the big sweeping slider to start racking up huge strikeout totals.

Many of the Yankees pitchers who are throwing the whirly or another version of a sharply horizontal slider are pairing it with a two-seam fastball, giving them a way to fool hitters with East and West movement within the strike zone. Over the last near-decade, it has become common for pitchers with certain spin and movement profiles to work in a North-South fashion instead. The two-seam went a bit out of style, a hoppy four-seamer became all the rage.

This is a result of baseball's technology and information boom over the last fifteen or so years. Technology like PITCHf/x, Trackman and Rapsodo came along and gave researchers a way to study the effect that spin has on the movement of a baseball. Spin has always been important to pitchers, but suddenly it could be quantified and compared against movement profiles. That technology was able to track spin by using inferences, though, and it led to a better understanding of four-seam movement than it did two-seam.

Teams began hunting for pitchers with certain spin profiles — guys who could get backspin on their four-seam to create that “rising” effect. That is the Magnus effect: The spin creates an upward airflow that keeps the ball from sinking due to gravity as quickly as one would expect. The fastball doesn't rise, it just doesn't drop as a hitter's eyes may expect. A big breaking ball that is spun forward gets the opposite effect: Extreme drop. Pair those two pitches well and you can get a lot of movement separation between the fastball and the breaking ball, leading to swings and misses and — pitchers hope — an approach that makes it difficult for hitters with powerful uppercut swings to barrel up the ball.

“Visually, if you watch it in the game, you're not gonna see any type of rise,” Druschel said of the whirly. “But a lot of the time, it's going to miss the bat. And it's often going to wind up above the bat, the way a four-seam with a lot of rise does at the top of the zone.”

MLB replaced Trackman technology in its ballparks with Hawk-Eye in 2020, which doesn't just infer spin on a baseball — it actually measures it. A researcher named Barton Smith, who is now employed by an MLB team, then began working to understand the way spin affects movement on the ball, and developed a theory of aerodynamics that he calls seam-shifted wake. Essentially, he wanted to know what impact the actual seams of a baseball have on the movement of a pitch in motion. (Baseball Prospectus has a thorough story about seam-shifted wake and the way technology has affected the research around spin and the development of the seam-shifted wake theory.)

The theory is difficult to explain to a layman — most pitchers who are throwing the sweeping slider do not care about why the pitch tends to move the way it does, they have just worked to figure out how to create that action.

Druschel said his shorthand for understanding what is known about the effect of seams on pitch movement is that it works like a scuffed ball. The seams make it so that the baseball is not a uniformly smooth surface, therefore disturbing the way the air flows around it as it spins toward the plate.

“I think that is the simplest way to think about it is that we have always known that if you scuff a ball, you create an uneven surface and that changes the way the ball moves,” Druschel said.

The seams give a baseball an inherently uneven surface, something on which the air it is traveling through catches on, disturbing the trajectory a ball would have had if it were a

perfectly smooth sphere. The seam-shifted wake theory allows pitchers to try to get the most out of the effects the seams are already having on the ball in flight.

This is the context under which a bunch of Yankees, along with many others around the league — notably the Dodgers — have begun working on a big, horizontal breaking slider that often starts with a two-seam grip.

But it isn't that the concept of a sweeping slider is new to the game: Veteran pitchers **Sergio Romo, Adam Ottavino and Collin McHugh** have been throwing big sweeping horizontal sliders with good results for years. It's that information about spin and movement has evolved so that pitchers can have a better path to replicating some of the good results that they have long known can come with strong horizontal movement.

"In 2017, Kluber was throwing this slider, but people hadn't seen it on high-speed cameras yet," Blake said. "I think as people start studying what they knew about seams-shifted effects for the two-seamer, they revisited what Kluber and some others were doing. Even **Zack Britton**, with his sinker, they were seeing these effects line up in a weird way. They knew it was a weird looking spin and thinking, 'How do we replicate those concepts?'"

Right-hander Michael King said he spent the winter before the 2020 season developing a slider that got immediate negative feedback from the hitters he faced in spring training. He began working with Druschel and Yankees director of pitching **Sam Briend** on throwing the whirly in 2021, but couldn't get a feel for the pitch. During the season, Kluber, who was a Yankee in 2021, noted to King that they threw from similar arm slots and he should try his version of the horizontal slider.

"The Kluber is very similar to the whirly, and as it comes off my fingers, I think it ends up having the same seam orientation that gets the movement," King said. "I think the whirly is easier for a guy who has an over the top grip to really feel that he's on the side of the ball, but Kluber and I throw from a lower slot. This version lets us feel like we're on the ball the way the whirly guys feel from their release points."

Ahead of last season's trade deadline, the Yankees acquired relievers **Clay Holmes and Joely Rodriguez**. (Rodriguez was recently traded to the Mets.) Both pitchers rely heavily on their two-seam, and their acquisitions by the Yankees looked to be a harbinger of a shift in the way that clubs valued pitch usage. If the Yankees were targeting these guys and looking to get better results out of their arsenals, what, then were they seeing?

Holmes is working on the whirly this spring, which he said is a work-in-progress but comes from a desire to have a better weapon to pair with his two-seam.

"Essentially, with my sinker, I'm using the seams to get the movement," Holmes said. "That's the whole concept of this slider, too. It's a really good movement profile — if I can figure out what cues I need to throw it consistently."

Holmes said he is friends with former reliever **Jared Hughes**, who was one of the earliest players to dive into the research on seam-shifted wake in an attempt to learn how to implement it into his arsenal. Each pitcher's level of comfort with the science between their pitch movement, be it seam-shifted wake, Magnus force, or any other phenomenon, is different. Many Yankees pitchers who are throwing the whirly don't care how it works, just that it does. Holmes is on the more investigative side of the spectrum, and he's approaching the development of his new pitch with a pretty firm understanding of what he is trying to replicate in his two-seamer.

The slider Holmes threw in 2021 got good vertical drop, but not much horizontal movement — 2.5 inches, per Statcast, 31 percent less break than the average slider thrown with similar velocity, extension and release. In an exhibition game on March 29, Holmes' whirly was getting 13, 16 and 17 inches of horizontal break, giving it a completely different movement profile and ability to play off his sinker.

Realistically, a better understanding of how to use the horizontal plane of the strike zone should expand the types of pitchers who are seen as valuable in the contemporary game: Cole, who transitioned from a two-seam heavy approach in Pittsburgh to a North-South approach in Houston, may not need to go back to the two-seam or change his slider if the league does begin to value East-West movement again. Instead, he can continue to use his four-seam and vertical slider approach while being followed by a relief pitcher who uses a two-seam and horizontal slider to deceive hitters.

"It's important to know what a guy's pitching fingerprint is," Blake said. "Now, it's like, how do we accentuate that in a more aggressive manner?"

Still, baseball is a game where any seemingly new discoveries tend to spread like wildfire. Players see what their peers are using to create success and try to adopt it for themselves. The whirly has set the Yankees' minor-league and major-league pitching roster ablaze. Some will probably stick with the pitch, others may abandon it if it ultimately does not get them the results they like. But how we got here — a number of established and developing pitchers learning a big new slider — is the result of the way baseball works now: Technology and research change the way that players and coaches can exploit the game's finer points, like spin rate and seam orientation.

FOUR LESSONS ON INNOVATION FROM THE MOST CREATIVE TEAM IN BASEBALL

How the Savannah Bananas are rewriting the rules of the game (and business).

Bill Taylor in Fast Company magazine

Opening Day of the baseball season offers the chance to reflect on the arrival of spring, the childhood pleasures of skipping school for the ballpark—and, for people like me, who think about creativity and innovation, how hard it can be to change an institution that is in desperate need of reimagination and renewal. Most everyone agrees, as a recent *Sports Illustrated* analysis made clear, that Major League Baseball games take too long and move too slowly, that the so-called unwritten rules of on-field behavior wind up ruling out fun and spontaneity, and that the rise of analytics has replaced human drama with algorithmic tyranny. No wonder MLB now ranks behind the NFL and the NBA in terms of popularity and star power.

Which is why it was so eye-opening and instructive to make a trip to Savannah, Georgia—far away from the problems of the big leagues—to visit with an entrepreneur who is devising a different future for baseball by rewriting the rules of the game. He’s also developing some intriguing rules for innovation that apply far beyond the diamond.

Jesse Cole is the owner of the Savannah Bananas. The Bananas play in the Coastal Plain League, a 15-team amateur summer league where highly ranked college players hone their skills and showcase their talents in the hopes of being drafted. Cole bought the team in October 2015 when it was known as the Savannah Sand Gnats and functioned as a minor-league affiliate of the New York Mets. As a business, the Gnats were sinking in quicksand. The team generated no buzz and had hardly any fans. A few hundred spectators turned out for home games, which were played at 4,000-seat Grayson Stadium, a legendary ballpark that opened in 1926 and has hosted games played by immortals such as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jackie Robinson, and Hank Aaron.

Since Cole bought the team, the Bananas have sold out virtually every game, and there is a 15,000-person waiting list for tickets. There is also a 1,200-name list of people who want to play or work for the team. The Bananas have 1.5 million followers on TikTok, twice as many as the most popular MLB team, and devoted fans who start gathering at the ballpark at 3 PM for games, four hours before first pitch. A feature in *USA Today* told the stories of fans who traveled to Savannah from Illinois, Indiana, and even Alaska, to see a game. ESPN’s *SportsCenter* devoted a seven-minute segment to how the Bananas “have become the greatest show in baseball.”

What explains the soaring popularity of the Bananas in a world where “no one watches baseball anymore?” What have Jesse Cole and his colleagues learned about breathing new life into a dying business that might apply to other businesses? I’d highlight at least four lessons.

A winning business strategy begins with originality

The goal is not to be the best at what lots of others already do, it’s to be the only one who does what you do. It’s hard to overstate the Bananas’ different, distinctive, one-of-a-kind financial model. Tickets to the games are general admission, which is one reason fans line up early. Tickets are also all-inclusive (well, other than beer), which means you get to see a game, eat plenty of hot dogs and peanuts, and not be nicked-and-dimed for nine innings. Cole has even

done away with corporate sponsorships and inside-the-ballpark advertising—no messages on the outfield walls, no logos spray-painted on the field. “No one comes to the ballpark to be sold to or advertised to,” he told me, “so we got rid of it.” Today, 97% of the team’s total revenue comes directly from fans; merchandise sales bring in six times what sponsorships once did.

Even a familiar product can be transformed into an unforgettable experience

Successful organizations create memorable customer encounters. This lesson is at the heart of what happens at Grayson Stadium. The Bananas may have to play by the established rules of baseball on the field, but the team has elevated everything surrounding the game to unimaginable levels of energy and entertainment. Sure, plenty of minor-league baseball teams have fun gimmicks. But the Bananas put on a show. The team has its own pep band, a group of male cheerleaders, and a beloved over-65 female dance team called the Banana Nanas. Cole himself is a huge presence at every game—outfitted in a blinding yellow tux and top hat, greeting fans outside the stadium, leading cheers inside the stadium. “The game has become too long, too slow, too boring, for too many people,” he tells me. No one would apply any of those words to the experience of visiting Grayson Stadium.

If you’re going to put on a show, get everyone into the act

Performances can happen any place where you interact with customers. College players sign up with the Bananas to compete hard in a 55-game season that runs from late May into early August. But even they are performers. Players have walked on stilts to greet fans before games; they’ve worn kilts over their uniforms during games; they sing songs, perform skits, and otherwise show off their personality. A favorite of mine is a locker-room video where a player recites Jonah Hill’s slam-poetry tribute to Cynthia from the movie *21 Jump Street*, and fellow players snap their fingers in approval.

Cole says there are “five stages” on which the Bananas organization has an opportunity to perform for its fans—the parking lot, the front plaza to the stadium, the concourses inside the stadium, the grandstand, and on the field—and that the team must deliver something memorable on each stage at every game. There is also a sixth stage, which is year-round conversations with fans. Team personnel make 300,000 thank-you calls annually to customers who buy tickets, order merchandise, and otherwise engage with the organization.

Even the most creative groups have to keep pushing the limits of innovation

The Bananas are constantly rethinking the logic of their success, and this lesson is key to the future of the team and to any organization that wants to keep moving and changing with the times. A few years back, even as the Bananas were shattering records for attendance in the Coastal Plain League, Cole realized that the rules of amateur baseball prevented him from addressing the deeper strategic challenge—the failure of the game itself to adjust to the attitudes and sensibilities of younger audiences and modern times. So he established a professional team, also called the Savannah Bananas, that plays against a rival team that he

started, called the Party Animals. The rosters of both teams include former college players and past MLB players, plus guest appearances by the likes of two-time World Series champion pitcher Jake Peavy and Red Sox legend Bill “Spaceman” Lee.

Most importantly, the teams play a new version of baseball called Banana Ball, with nine rules that utterly reshape the game. For example, games have a two-hour time limit. Also, every inning counts; after the top and bottom of an inning, the team with the most runs gets one point, but the runs themselves don’t carry over. There are no walks; after four balls, a batter “sprints” to first base and beyond, and can be tagged out only after all nine players on defense have touched the ball—a rule that leads to wild on-field choreography. Cole compares the professional version of the Bananas to the Harlem Globetrotters, although, unlike the hapless Washington Generals, the Party Animals are allowed to win. Cole has been testing this new business model with a 14-game “World Tour” that brought the Bananas and the Party Animals to Montgomery, Alabama, Daytona Beach, Florida, Kansas City, Kansas, and other cities. Every game thus far has sold out.

I’m not sure any sports league has been more resistant to change than Major League Baseball, with its self-satisfied owners, huge player contracts, and high-stakes TV deals. I’m certain that no baseball team has been more open to change than both the amateur and professional versions of Savannah Bananas, who play far outside the national spotlight.

Perhaps that’s one more lesson in innovation from Cole and his colleagues: Sometimes the most creative ideas emerge in the least-expected places. The very fact that an organization operates on the periphery, outside the bright lights and harsh pressures, creates a freedom to experiment and innovate that is not available to big-time, big-league organizations.

Maybe that’s why MLB Opening Day can feel like a walk down memory lane, and a Savannah Bananas game feels like a glimpse into a possible future.

CONTRACTS STUFF FOM KEN ROSENTHAL

Trying to explain a complex trade

Upon learning that the Twins sent the Padres \$6.6 million in their recent five-player trade, my first reaction was, “Wow, the Twins must be getting a pretty decent player to be named.”

Actually, the deal was more complex than I thought.

The PTBN was the final piece in the exchange that sent left-handed reliever **Taylor Rogers** and outfielder **Brett Rooker** to the Padres for right-hander **Chris Paddack** and right-handed reliever **Emilio Pagán**. But there was a greater context to the Twins’ payout, which was motivated by

the Padres' luxury-tax considerations and desire to acquire Rogers at essentially the minimum salary.

Rogers, a potential free agent, is earning \$7.3 million. Paddack, with three years of club control remaining, and Pagan, with two, are earning a combined \$4.55 million. The Padres preferred to trade Paddack for Rogers straight up, with the Twins including enough money to make the deal cash-neutral, a source said. But even though three years of Paddack might have been worth one of Rogers, the Twins wanted Pagán as well to help compensate for the loss of their All-Star reliever.

The way the Twins calculated it — and I'd lose you if I tried to explain the math — the net add to their payroll was about \$3 million. The PTBN, according to the source, will not be a top prospect, but the Twins estimate the value of the player they will get from the group they are considering to be \$2 million-plus.

So for the Twins, the trade amounted to one year of Rogers plus the payroll increase of about \$3 million for a combined five years of control on Paddack and Pagán plus a flier on the prospect — an exchange that, in the end, they deemed worthwhile.

Information from major-league sources:

- One problem some on the players' side had with **Ke'Bryan Hayes'** eight-year, \$70 million contract with the Pirates is that it limits his financial upside if he develops into an accomplished hitter. Hayes, 23, already is an accomplished defender at third base.

The deal also delays Hayes' entry into the free-agent market until prior to his age-34 season if the Pirates exercise their club option for a ninth year. While the contract does not include escalators, Hayes will be eligible to receive money from the new pre-arbitration bonus pool if he reaches certain performance levels in the next two years.

- It's fairly rare for a pre-arbitration extension to be front-loaded, but Mariners shortstop **J.P. Crawford** will be paid \$10 million in each of the first four seasons of his five-year, \$51 million deal, and \$11 million in the final year.

In a more typical structure, Crawford's salaries might have gone from \$5 million to \$7 million to \$9 million during his arb years, then risen to \$15 million in each of his two free-agent years. But the Mariners might have preferred to pay him more earlier in the deal, before the salaries of younger players such as **Logan Gilbert, Jarred Kelenic and Julio Rodríguez** start to rise.

75 FACTS ABOUT JACKIE ROBINSON, 75 YEARS AFTER HE INTEGRATED MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Rhiannon Walker, *The Athletic*

Friday marks the 75th anniversary of **Jackie Robinson** integrating baseball on April 15, 1947. There are very few figures from the last century who had as much of an impact, created the kind of conversation and claimed the amount of attention that Robinson did.

To celebrate, *The Athletic* combed through Robinson's life to find 75 of the most interesting and, in some cases, lesser-known facts about him.

1. Jackie Roosevelt Robinson was named after President Theodore Roosevelt, who died 25 days before Robinson was born on Jan. 31, 1919, in Cairo, Ga.
2. In 1934, at age 15, he won the Pasadena (Ca.) City Ping-Pong tournament.
3. The John Muir High School baseball team in Pasadena, for which Robinson played three years of shortstop and one season at catcher from 1935-1938, became the first team with Black players invited and allowed to participate in the 1935 Pomona Tournament. This was a big deal at the time; Gov. Frank Merriam was in attendance, while comedian Joe E. Brown served as the guest speaker and Mickey Rooney tossed out the first pitch for the championship game. Every evening, however, Robinson had to return home to Pasadena, because hotels would not allow him to stay. He finished with a tournament-high 11 stolen bases.
4. The first time Robinson played in the Pacific Coast Negro Tennis Tournament, he reached the semifinals. A year later, in 1936, he took home the title for the junior boys singles championship.
5. Robinson returned to the Pomona Annual Baseball Tournament again in 1936, but this time as an All-Star team member. Fellow Hall of Famers **Ted Williams** (Boston Red Sox) and **Bob Lemon** (Cleveland Indians) also played in that game. Robinson and Pasadena Muir faced off against Williams and his San Diego Hoover squad in the championship game, which included three hits and a stolen home base from Robinson, and a towering 450-foot home run from Williams, who helped lead Hoover to an 8-7 victory.
6. The first time a newspaper mentioned Robinson's pro prospects was in April 1936 following this game, according to historian Jim McConnell. In a recap of the game, the Pomona Progress-Bulletin's David Meiklejohn noted how deserving the shortstop was of a major league deal, if the color of his skin had not been an impediment.
7. During the summers in high school, Robinson played a litany of other sports, including golf. The first time he set foot on Pasadena's Brookside Park Course, he shot 90.
8. Matthew "Mack" Robinson, Jackie's older brother, not only raced in the same 200-meter sprint as Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, but finished second to the eventual gold medalist. Despite battling a heart condition throughout his athletic career, he finished with

a 21.1-second time to earn the silver, 0.4 seconds behind Owens. In the long jump, four years later, Jackie would top his brother's record, but whether he would've participated in the 1940 Summer Games, we'll never know, because it was canceled due to World War II.

9. After high school, Robinson enrolled at Pasadena Junior College to further pursue his interests in sports. In 1938, Robinson was voted the region's Most Valuable Player and was named to the All-Southland Junior College Team for baseball.

10. That same year, PJC's Order of the Mast and Dagger — Omicron Mu Delta — which awards students for "outstanding service to the school and whose scholastic and citizenship record is worthy of recognition," selected Robinson and nine other students to its 1938 class.

11. One of the main motivations for Robinson to attend UCLA was to remain near his family after his older brother, Frank Robinson, died in a motorcycle accident in 1939. Robinson, 20, wanted to be close to Frank's family so he could help them after his brother's death.

12. Robinson played on the most integrated team in college football as a member of the 1939 UCLA Bruins' football team. He was one of four black players — Woody Strode, Kenny Washington, and Ray Bartlett were the others — on that undefeated squad, which went 6-0-4.

13. Washington, Robinson's teammate in the backfield, broke the color barrier in the National Football League as the first African American to sign a contract with a team in the modern era. He signed with the Los Angeles Rams on March 21, 1946 — a little more than a year before Robinson debuted with the Dodgers. Strode was also signed by the Rams in 1946 and played for the team as well.

14. In 1940, Robinson won the NCAA Championship in the long jump with a 24-foot 10+1/4 in (7.58 m) result.

15. Robinson had already established himself as a successful multi-sport athlete, and he took it a step further at UCLA, becoming the first player to earn varsity letters in four sports — football (1939 and 1940), basketball (1940 and 1941), track (1940) and baseball (1940) — in a single year. In addition to that, Robinson was All-Pac 10 on the gridiron, the West Coast Conference MVP in basketball and, of course, set the long jump record.

"The first player who I ever saw dunking as part of his game was Jackie Robinson," former New York Renaissance player John Isaacs told the Sporting News.

16. The first time Robinson played for the Bruins' baseball team, he went 4-for-4 at the plate and stole home plate twice. He did all of this in the sport he was considered the worst at, and in that lone season he hit .097.

17. Following his final game with UCLA, Robinson didn't play organized baseball for five years. The prime years of his athletic career were interrupted, like those of many others, due to the

war and his military service. The next time he played an organized game was when he joined the Kansas City Monarchs in 1945 for his one season in the Negro Leagues.

18. Just before Robinson was set to graduate from UCLA, he decided to take a job as the assistant athletic director at the National Youth Administration. This was a part of the New Deal initiative started by the government, but it folded not that long after its inception due to the impending war.

19. “After two years at UCLA, I decided to leave. I was convinced that no amount of education would help a black man get a job.” — Robinson, from his autobiography, “I Never Had it Made.”

20. Even though Robinson’s baseball career was on pause for five years, he didn’t step away from sports entirely. After the NYA ceased operations, Robinson traveled to Honolulu to play for the semi-professional and racially integrated Honolulu Bears football team on Sept. 1, 1941, and these were the first checks he ever cashed as a pro athlete. On the weekends, he’d play for the team, while during the week, Robinson worked construction near Naval Station Pearl Harbor. The 22-year-old returned to Los Angeles to play running back for the Los Angeles Bulldogs of the Pacific Coast Football League on Dec. 5, 1941, two days before Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor.

21. Heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and Robinson were both stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas. The two met during basic training in 1942, and the Brown Bomber eventually used his good standing in the Army to help Robinson and other Black soldiers gain entrance to the Army’s Officer Candidate School. Initially, they were either denied or held in a holding pattern, but Louis’ insistence helped propel those applicants forward. This was the start of a long-term friendship between Robinson and Louis, who played golf together during their downtime. Ten years after Louis and Robinson met, in 1952, Louis broke the color barrier on the PGA Tour after being invited to play as an amateur on a sponsor’s exemption in the San Diego Open.

22. Robinson never saw combat during WWII, because he was prohibited from being deployed while battling charges stemming from an incident on July 6, 1944. On that day, Robinson got on an unsegregated military bus, but the driver demanded he sit at the back of the bus. Robinson refused. When he reached the end of his ride, Robinson was arrested by military police after a duty officer requested their assistance, and subsequently asked for Robinson to be court-martialed.

23. As it would turn out, Robinson’s former unit, the 761st Tank Battalion, became the first Black tank unit to see combat in World War II. The unit’s deployment preceded Robinson’s honorable discharge in November 1944, and the battalion ultimately suffered many casualties in the war effort.

24. Following his acquittal, Robinson was assigned to Camp Breckinridge in Union County, Ky., where he worked as an athletics coach. It was during this period that Robinson reunited with baseball thanks to a chance encounter. During his time at the camp, Robinson met **Ted**

Alexander, a fellow soldier and pitcher for the Kansas City Monarchs, who encouraged Robinson to try out. Robinson then promptly wrote to Thomas Baird, the Monarch's co-owner, of his interest in joining the team.

25. "I was walking across the camp recreation field when a baseball arched high into the sky and was carried toward me by a strong breeze. As it hit the ground and bounced toward me I leaned over and scooped it up with one hand. I saw a player running in my direction so I pegged a perfect strike to him. As it plopped into his glove he shouted, 'Nice throw!' ...

"He said he had heard of me as a football player and a track man," Robinson recalled, "but not as a baseball player. Then he explained that he pitched for the Kansas City Monarchs ... and that the team needed good players. He suggested that I write if I thought I could make the grade. I wrote." — Robinson, from his 1960 autobiography, "Wait Till Next Year: The Life Story of Jackie Robinson."

26. Rev. Karl Downs, the pastor at Scott United Methodist Church, where Robinson attended service at PJC, reached out to his mentee in late 1944 to offer him a job as Sam Huston College's athletic director. Downs was the president of the school at the time, and wanted Robinson to come down to Austin, Texas, to help the Southwestern Athletic Conference school in its athletic endeavors, including its upstart basketball team. Robinson ended up playing in several exhibition games as a result of low numbers for the team's tryout.

27. In February 1945, Robinson's team, though outmanned severely, played with heart against far-superior Southern University in a tournament. The Jaguars would pay down the line, however, for humiliating Robinson's squad. Watching in the stands that day was Langston University's Marques "The Dribbler" Haynes, the future Harlem Globetrotter. When it was the Lions' turn to face the Jaguars in the tournament, not only did Langston embarrass Southern, but Haynes personally showed off. Up to that point, he had kept his ability as a virtuoso dribbler under wraps, but on that day, for more than two minutes to close out the game, he showed off all of his skills. This is how Haynes began his friendship with the coach he had met earlier in the tournament.

28. That spring, Robinson finally received correspondence back from the Monarchs, who wrote to offer him a place on their team at shortstop. It came with a \$400 per month deal, which Robinson accepted. He played a total of 47 games for Kansas City and recorded a batting average of .387, five home runs and 13 stolen bases.

29. On April 16, 1945, the Boston Red Sox gave a tryout to Jackie Robinson, **Sammy Jethroe** and **Marvin Williams**. Jethroe was the Negro American League batting king, while Williams was a standout second baseman for the Philadelphia Stars. Boston councilman and anti-segregationist Isadore H. Y. Muchnick had worked with Wendell Smith of the Pittsburgh Courier to come up with the three candidates to present to Red Sox general manager **Eddie Collins** and Boston Braves general manager John Quinn. After giving the players, Smith and Muchnick the runaround on fulfilling their promise to hold a tryout, the councilman called both organizations

out for their tactics. The tryout was only ever meant to appease Muchnick, who had the power to withhold a waiver allowing the Red Sox and Braves to play on Sundays. Even though the only people in attendance for the tryout were members of the Red Sox organization, the players were still subjected to racist barbs.

30. “We can consider ourselves pioneers,” Robinson told Smith on April 21, 1945. “Even if they don’t accept us, we are at least doing our part and, if possible, making the way easier for those who follow. Some day, some Negro player or players will get a break. We want to help make that day a reality.”

31. Selected for the 1945 East-West All-Star Game, held on July 29, Robinson did an excellent job in the field, according to multiple media outlets’ recaps of the game. But he had a poor showing at the plate, going 0-for-5.

32. A little more than a month later, on Aug. 28, Robinson was sitting in the headquarters for the Brooklyn Dodgers Baseball Club at 215 Montague St. This is where he met team president and general manager Branch Rickey to sign the deal that got the ball rolling for him to become the first African American in the majors. Today, the building is a TD Bank that has a plaque commemorating the historical landmark. For almost 20 years, from 1938 to 1957, this was the headquarters for Dodgers officials, until the team’s move to Los Angeles following the 1957 season.

33. Experiencing racism from segregated Florida and future Brooklyn Dodgers teammates, some of whom threatened to sit out if they had to play with Robinson, the future big-league player gained a reprieve from civil rights activist, educator and Bethune-Cookman founder Mary McLeod Bethune. She agreed to host Robinson in Daytona, Fla., because multiple cities in Florida refused to have him. Robinson and his wife, Rachel, stayed at the home of Joe and Duff Harris during Robinson’s first spring training in 1946. Joe was a local pharmacist and Black leader in the community.

34. When Robinson stepped up to the plate against the Dodgers at Daytona Beach’s City Island Ballpark on March 17, 1946, that made him the first African American to play for a minor league team against a major league ballclub.

35. His official minor-league debut wouldn’t happen until a month later on April 18, 1946, at Roosevelt Stadium, when the Montreal Royals faced off against the Jersey City Giants in the season opener. Robinson broke the color barrier in the minor leagues, too.

36. Robinson actually faced a familiar opponent that game in pitcher **Warren Sandel**. The pair played against one another when they lived in California. Sandel’s catcher, **Dick Bouknight**, wanted him to bean Robinson at the plate, but Sandel refused. Instead, the pitcher was able to force the rookie into a groundout, but it was the only trip to the plate where Robinson didn’t record a hit. In fact, his first hit was a three-run shot in the third inning, and by the day’s end, Robinson scored four runs, brought in three and stole two bases in a lopsided 14-1 win.

37. While it took some time for Robinson to openly admit to it, Rachel understood the mental and emotional toll of all the abuse her husband was taking. It even contributed to a slump he experienced while he was going through spring training. “Jack was very angry in Florida, but he had to restrain himself,” Rachel told Smithsonian Magazine in 2015. “He also wasn’t eating or sleeping well, so we took time off. After he rested and reclaimed his faculties, he was fine for the rest of the season.”

38. After toiling through that slump, when Robinson did finally get a hit, which sparked a return to his usual form, Bethune sent Rachel food and other supplies to put together a celebratory dinner for Robinson.

39. Unfortunately for Robinson, one of the cruelest fan bases involved a team up north he’d see on a regular basis, the Syracuse Chiefs. Racist episodes included the team trying to take the field in blackface, heckling from both the bench and fans and catcher **Dick West** telling the local Post-Standard newspaper that he said to Robinson, “I don’t feel sorry for you. You can go to hell.” But one of the more notable incidents involved the players throwing a black cat on the field, and exclaiming, “Hey Jackie, there’s your cousin.” Robinson would respond with both actions and words, hitting a double and then scoring, before retorting back, “I guess my cousin’s pretty happy now.”

40. During that July game when West made the remark, Robinson displayed one of the skills for which he received less acclaim: his bunting ability. Pitcher **Jim Prendergast** was working on a no-hitter into the top of the ninth inning. With two outs and a man on third, Robinson stepped up to the same plate where West made his first remarks. The hitter pulled the rug from under the Chiefs defenders, who were expecting a big swing. Instead, Robinson laid down a bunt, and then showed off those exceptional track skills to quickly reach first base. West not only forgot to defend home plate against the man on third, but threw so far wide at first base that Robinson was easily able to round the bases and tag home to make it a 3-2 deficit. The Chiefs got the win, but Robinson clearly got the last laugh.

41. Two months later, in September, Robinson signed with Chet Brewer’s Kansas City Royals, an all-Black postseason barnstorming team in the California Winter League.

42. For a second consecutive offseason, Robinson did a barnstorming tour in South America. The year before, on Oct. 26, 1945, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune reported that Robinson would fly to Miami to join both his Black and White teammates before they did a two-month stint on the continent. Within that same announcement, Robinson revealed that in January 1946, he’d marry his college sweetheart, Rachel Isum, who he met as a freshman at UCLA.

43. Also in the fall of 1946, Robinson returned back to Los Angeles to briefly play professional basketball for the independent Los Angeles Red Devils. The season started on Nov. 8, 1946, and in the Red Devils’ first two games, Robinson scored 28 points combined. On Nov. 15 and 16, Los Angeles welcomed the world champion Harlem Renaissance to Olympic Auditorium, and on a flyer advertising the event, Robinson was listed as a headliner. The Red Devils were one of the

first integrated professional basketball teams. When Robinson left the team in January 1947, he received offers from several other pro basketball teams, including the Harlem Globetrotters. Their founder and owner, Abe Saperstein, reportedly offered Robinson a \$10,000 contract, that included bonuses, to suit up for his squad. That would've been twice as much as what Robinson earned with the Dodgers — \$5,000, the major-league rookie minimum — and yet, Robinson turned down the offer.

44. Among his contemporaries, Robinson was not considered the best player in the Negro Leagues, and while Black players were happy to have that door finally open, the prevailing thought was that players like **Josh Gibson** and **Satchel Paige** had overpaid their dues and deserved their chance. Both were upset that they didn't get their shot to join the majors, even though their play clearly made them worthy candidates.

45. Gibson didn't even get to see the color barrier broken by Robinson, as he died almost three months before the historic day. **Larry Doby**, who broke the color line in the American League the same year as Robinson and was one of his close friends, said that "one of the things that was disappointing and disheartening to a lot of the black players at the time was that Jack was not the best player. The best was Josh Gibson. I think that's one of the reasons why Josh died so early — he was heartbroken."

46. Robinson's first hit when he joined the Dodgers a few months later was actually a bunt, and in his debut season he'd lead the majors with 28 sacrifice hits. In total, he finished with 46 bunts in 1947, and only four didn't register as a base hit or sacrifice.

47. There were more than 14,000 Black spectators in the stands when Robinson made his debut on April 15, 1947, at Ebbets Field. They were the majority of a reported attendance of 26,623.

48. His first season in the league, Robinson played exclusively at first base, because veteran **Eddie Stanky** held second base his first season. Robinson moved over to second the following season, after Stanky was moved to the Braves in March 1948.

49. Following his rookie season, Robinson did a vaudeville tour down South, where he answered pre-planned questions about his life. The tour actually made him more money than he'd earned playing baseball, but all of that Southern hospitality did catch up with Robinson the following spring.

50. Even though he was able to replicate his numbers from his first year, he reported to spring training 25 pounds overweight in 1948. Rachel told author Arnold Rampersad, "He used to put away a pint of ice cream at one sitting. That stopped, along with the pies and cakes."

51. "It is true that I had stored up a lot of hostility. I had been going home nights to Rachel and young Jackie, tense and irritable, keyed up because I hadn't been able to speak out when I wanted to. In 1949 I wouldn't have to do this. I could fight back when I wanted. That sounds as though I wanted to get even, and I'm sure that is partly true. I wouldn't have been human

otherwise. But, more than revenge, I wanted to be Jackie Robinson, and for the first time I would be justified because by 1949 the principle had been established: the major victory won. There were enough blacks on other teams to ensure that American baseball could never again turn its back on minority competitors.” — Robinson, from his autobiography, “I Never Had it Made.”

52. Robinson returned to form the following season and came into the 1949 training camp not only in shape, but uninhibited, too, now that he didn’t have to quietly take the jeers. His batting average jumped from .296 to a career-high .342 and his 37 stolen bases also ended up being a personal best. By season’s end, he won the batting title, was voted the inaugural Most Valuable Player for the league and helped lead the Dodgers to another pennant.

53. The FBI and Cincinnati police swarmed the buildings surrounding Crosley Field after the police and Cincinnati Enquirer were sent letters on May 19, 1951, from an author calling themselves the “Three Travelers.” In this letter, the writer said that before that day’s game, they’d be stationed in a nearby building and, with a scoped rifle, would shoot Robinson once he stepped foot on the field. The writer was never discovered, and Robinson blasted a shot out of center field that day.

“I don’t believe that a guy who intended to shoot me would write a letter to the police about it in advance,” Robinson told the New York Daily News on May 21, 1951. “Although, I don’t doubt that someday some screwball might try something.

“I told the boys not to get too close to me on the field today. ... The fellows were kidding me about how they’d confuse the shooter by all wearing No. 42 today. I told them, they’d have to paint their faces, too.”

54. If one looks closely at the picture following **Bobby Thomson’s** “shot heard ’round the world,” from the final game of the three-game, 1951 National League championship series, they’ll see Robinson’s teammates all walking off the field with heads dropped. The one man standing to watch Thomson touch each base was Robinson, who was known for his extreme competitiveness.

55. In the final three years of Robinson’s career in the majors, he became more and more of a utility player year after year. **Jim Gilliam**, who won the 1953 Rookie of the Year award, displaced him at second base. From there, Robinson primarily split time between third base and left field, but over the course of those final years played every position except for pitcher, catcher and center field. In his final All-Star appearance, Robinson played in left field.

In the lone World Series that Robinson won, in 1955, he didn’t see the field at all in the pivotal Game 7.

56. Rampersad, author of “Jackie Robinson: A Biography,” wrote that Robinson learned he was diabetic “about the time of his retirement,” during a routine physical. ““He left in high spirits,’ ”

said his friend, Jack Gordon. 'But when he came back ... he was very quiet. He said that the doctor had told him that for someone who had played sports for so long and didn't smoke or drink, he had never seen a body so badly deteriorated. Jack found out he had diabetes. It was very, very sad.'"

57. With Branch Rickey no longer a part of the Dodgers as the general manager, Robinson was left without support in the front office of the organization. His final at-bat was a strikeout in the 1956 World Series, when he went 0-for-3 in Game 7, and the New York Yankees cruised to a 9-0 win. Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley, who had called Robinson "Rickey's prima donna," was quick to deal the 37-year-old to the New York Giants for a pitcher and \$30,000. The deal was voided, because Robinson refused to report, and instead elected to retire.

58. Unofficially, Robinson stole home 19 times. It makes him one of the all-time leaders, and he ranks first for players who debuted after 1920.

59. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robinson were awarded degrees in the same class as one another, and there are even pictures of the ceremony. On June 7, 1957, both men were awarded honorary doctorates in law from Howard University.

Five years later in September 1962, Robinson spoke to the Southern Christian Leadership Council at its annual Freedom Dinner in Birmingham, Ala., in which he levied tremendous praise on King: "People used to tell me a lot of things about Dr. King, that he was trying to take over the world, that he was making money on the civil rights issues. I didn't believe them, of course. I knew this was a dedicated man and that he has made tremendous personal financial sacrifices in the cause. I sort of wondered why people would stoop to talk about him. Then I realized that the world has always talked against great men. The best way to keep from getting talked about is to do nothing."

60. Part of the reason Robinson was able to walk away from the game is that he had a job lined up with Chock Full o'Nuts to become the vice president of personnel. That made him the first Black person at the president level of an American company of that size.

61. Earning 77.5 percent of the vote during his first year of eligibility for the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Robinson was inducted into Cooperstown in 1962, and he became the first Black player to enter the Hall.

62. "I never thought at all that I would have this wonderful honor coming to me so early in my lifetime. And to have the writers elect me on the first time is a thrill that I shall never forget. We have been up in cloud nine since the election. I don't ever think I'll come down. But I want to thank all of the people throughout this country who were just so wonderful during those trying days. I appreciate it at no end. It's the greatest honor any person could have and I only hope that I'll be able to live up to this tremendously fine honor. It's something that I think those of us who are fortunate, again, must use in order to help others — because it's such a tremendous

honor that we should be able to go out and do things to help,” Jackie Robinson, Hall of Fame speech, July 23, 1962

63. Alongside businessman Dunbar McLaurin, Robinson co-founded the Black-owned and operated Freedom National Bank in 1964. He was first chairman of the Harlem, N.Y. bank, and Rachel stepped into that role until the bank shuttered in 1990. In 1965, he made history again when he joined ABC-TV Sports as the nation’s first Black baseball announcer.

64. “Jackie Robinson made my success possible. Without him, I would never have been able to do what I did,” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said shortly before his assassination in 1968.

65. Ray Lamb, a pitcher called up from the minors in 1969, was the last Dodger to wear the No. 42 jersey, and expressed discomfort wearing it when he opted to give up the number at the end of the year.

66. “As long as they keep digging down and hiring guys who have already failed in one city, I’m not encouraged,” Robinson told the Baltimore Afro-American on Sept. 16, 1972. This remark was made in regard to the Hall of Famer’s level of optimism that MLB would employ a Black manager anytime in the near future. Robinson grew weary and impatient with how the sport dragged its feet on not only creating opportunities for but giving chances to those who aspired to be a skipper of a big-league team.

67. On the 25th anniversary of Robinson integrating baseball, MLB commissioner Bowie Kuhn invited him to throw out the first pitch for Game 2 of the 1972 World Series. Robinson declined the offer, because he was severely disenchanted with the absence of African American managers and front office executives in the sport. Kuhn was able to talk Robinson into coming, promising that the league was working on the matter, but Robinson, as he always had, used his platform to speak out about the issue.

68. American astronomer Schelte John Bus named an asteroid after Robinson, his favorite player growing up. Bus made the discovery of asteroid “4319 Jackierobinson” while working at the Siding Spring Observatory in New South Wales, Australia, on March 1, 1981.

69. Fifty years after Robinson integrated baseball, MLB retired his No. 42 jersey for the entire league, making it the first sports league to do so. At the time this was announced, there were 14 players sporting No. 42. The last player to wear the number? Yankees closer **Mariano Rivera** wore the jersey until he retired from the league in 2013. He told Barry Bloom, formerly of MLB.com: “I’m honored to wear it, to use it. It’s wonderful. As a minority, being the last one to use No. 42 is tremendous. I’m really, really proud and thankful to wear No. 42.”

The only other sport to retire a number across the league is the National Hockey League, which did so in 2000 with Wayne Gretzky’s No. 99.

70. Sixteen months before Robinson died, his eldest son, Jackie Robinson Jr., died in a car accident en route to visit his parents. He lost control of his vehicle speeding through Norwalk, Conn., ran into a fence and then crashed into the abutment near Route 123 on the Merritt Parkway, The New York Times reported. Robinson was on his way to pick up Rachel, an assistant professor at Yale School of Nursing, from a conference in Massachusetts. David Robinson, Jackie Jr.'s younger brother, was the one who identified his body at the hospital on June 17, 1971. At the time, Jackie Jr. had turned his life around after a battle with drug addiction, becoming sober and then going on to help those who also struggled with addiction. He was 24.

71. "I am extremely proud and pleased to be here this afternoon," Robinson, who died nine days later, said during the World Series before 53,224 people at Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati in 1972, "but must admit, I am going to be tremendously more pleased and more proud when I look at the third-base coaching line one day and see a black face managing in baseball." He went on to elaborate, "It is a shame baseball does not have a black manager. **Frank Robinson** has had managerial experience in the Caribbean. Jim Gilliam would make an ideal manager. There are Elston Howard and others."

That was the final public appearance made by Robinson. He died on Oct. 24, 1972, in his Connecticut home.

72. "They note that the white players get jobs in the power structure when they cannot hit or run any longer, but black players like **George Crowe and Gene Baker** and — yes — Jackie Robinson have been allowed to drift out of baseball never to return," wrote George Vecsey of The New York Times. "If blacks are good enough to sweat, then surely some of them must be smart enough to scout or manage or administer. Paid well for their bodies, they want to be loved for their brains, too."

73. "I actually think it's so revealing that it was Jackie Robinson calling them out, because it speaks to how Major League Baseball has and continues to rely on the symbols of racial progress in absence of racial progress," said David J. Leonard, a professor in the Department of Critical Culture, Gender, and Race Studies at Washington State University, in 2018. "So here we have Jackie Robinson pointing out the persistence of the color line in baseball, and he continues to be used by Major League Baseball as a symbol of change, yet he isn't even heard. That his concerns and protests and demands weren't heard over the last 46 years, I think it speaks to an investment in the symbolic change in absence of actual change or the embrace of a truly equitable playing field."

"If baseball really wants to honor [Robinson], then it will look in the mirror and see how the absence of progress across the league in every aspect of its organizations needs to be rectified. What we see often is a refusal to confront this reality and excuse-making."

74. "It was going to be part of our legacy as well," Sharon Robinson, Jackie's daughter, said in Biography.com's Jackie Robinson — Last Words segment. "Baseball has a responsibility. They

helped change America, now you just make sure that you remain active in that role and supportive in that role.”

75. “The fundamental questions that faced Jack in 1947 are abounding today,” Rachel wrote in an essay honoring her late husband. “We’ve got to go beyond celebrating the past and use our emotions, sentiments, ideas and analysis to move forward. This would be the greatest tribute to Jackie Robinson.”

ELEGY FOR BASEBALL—AND FOR A CLUB OF ENTHUSIASTS WHO STILL LOVE THE GAE

A group of Red Sox fans in exile have gathered to celebrate their team since 1965. As the sport’s fortunes wane, one member reflects on the benefits of rooting together anyway.

Robert Sullivan, Boston Globe

I first wrote about the Benevolent Loyal Order of the Honorable Ancient Red Sox Diehard Sufferers (BLOHARDS) in 1986, when I was a cub reporter at Sports Illustrated. They were Red Sox fans exiled in Yankee territory, and they had yet to see the Sox win the World Series. There’s camaraderie in being the beleaguered.

The club, which today is dubiously honorable but well-nigh ancient, had its roots, as I wrote in SI, in J.J.’s Cellar on East 55th Street in New York City circa 1965. Jim Powers, an Uxbridge, Mass., native and lifelong Red Sox fan, lived in Connecticut and worked in Manhattan. As he told me back then, “We’d get 12, 14 guys together and have a couple of cocktails. We didn’t call ourselves the BLOHARDS then. That came a couple years later.” The club’s name, Powers told me, is a nod to the fraternal-order men he saw heading for the local Grange Hall when he was a boy. “I was thinking about that benevolent loyal order stuff of the Grangers back in Uxbridge.”

The club grew considerably — the membership list was in the hundreds — and began to hold luncheons in fancy places. The Big Club on Yawkey Way played ball, sending down managers and players as guest speakers. The BLOHARDS’ home opener bus trip from Westport, Conn., to Fenway became a sacred annual rite starting in the spring of 1968.

After my piece ran and I could ditch the journalistic objectivity, I joined, too. Actually, what happened was, Powers turned and said, “Sully, m’lad, buy the next one and you’re a lifetime member.” My investment currently amortizes at 34.36 cents per annum, my best-ever bet.

I’ve enjoyed all BLOHARDS adventures. I enjoyed our lunch with a large rookie named **Roger Clemens**, sweetly shy. I enjoyed our lunch with another heavy-haunched young pitcher named **Jonathan Papelbon**, who presented as similarly aw-shucks. I enjoyed our yearly bus trips to Fenway. I really enjoyed our gathering when during warm-up drinks, manager **Butch Hobson**

took poorly to barbs tossed **Don Zimmer**'s way: "Anyone who boos my third-base coach has to fight me!"



We were experienced losers, so we knew good times when they arrived. In 2004, our club exploded: two buses; SRO lunches; face time with us, speaking publicly as BLOHARDS, on national TV. Whoa, baby!

Recently we, like everyone — but particularly us in the at-risk-seniors category — were restrained in our reveling by the plague. We had a few Zoom lunches and made *de rigueur* jokes about the state of our union. If you muted the laugh track, though, one thing became plain: Our worry, second perhaps to illness, was: How to save our beloved game?

In our cheerful, un-blowhardy way, we don't promote any tonic as sure-fire, though we agree that four-hour contests seem sacrilegious. We doubt keypads on catchers' kneepads and the imminency of robo-umps will cure all.

Our related worry has been: How do we save ourselves — the BLOHARDS? The club's fortunes have mirrored those of the game we love. Ahead of this year's home opener bus trip, I asked Peter Collery, one of our execs, how the club is doing. "Financially, fine. Demographically, catastrophic." He mentioned something about the average age of a Rolling Stones band member paling in comparison with that of a BLOHARDS member. "We are a charming anachronism," he said.

It's a shame, really. Baseball's struggle to attract younger fans and our parallel failure to recruit many young people into our ranks makes us sad — for ourselves and for the kids. "Any number of studies have shown that people's lives are happier and longer if those people are engaged with others in a common purpose," Collery said. "Communal faith in the face of adversity enriches life, especially when it is, in the end, gloriously vindicated." Ah, yes: If those young'uns had waited as long as we did for the catharsis and thrill and celebration parties of '04, surely they would be in the honorable fellowship today!

But they aren't.

When I first wrote about the BLOHARDS, 36 years ago, I opened with an epigraph drawn from Aeschylus's "Agamemnon:" "I know how men in exile feed on dreams of hope."

It fit my tongue-in-cheek, behind-enemy-lines theme.

Today, in a politically divided, COVID-ravaged America watching a despot lay waste to a foreign land, and with our club members' collective memory of having seen the passage of many seasons, the quotation seems apt in a deeper way.

My fellow members and I find that in addition to the unrelenting news that at times lays us low, we have suffered friends passing from our midst, unreplaceable and unreplaced. And yet, isn't it always great to be at Fenway? Whither the BLOHARDS? Whither baseball? Those are questions for tomorrow.

Every time the bus arrives back in Connecticut — I would never say "home" — we survivors shake hands in the parking lot and offer earnestly, "Great fun as always. Hope to see you next year!" No mention of exile. Emphasis on hope.

Robert Sullivan has written about sports for Sports Illustrated, Time, Life, and The Economist. He is the author of "Our Red Sox: A Story of Family, Friends and Fenway."

OBIT FROM THE BOSTON GLOBE

KARP—JEFFREY RANDALL

My relationship with my father often revolved around baseball. And by God, we would talk baseball until the end. For us, baseball always had two key lessons at its core: (1) Baseball is timeless, constant; (2) baseball is molded by fathers and sons, just as fathers and sons are molded by baseball. I know baseball is timeless because I am still at Game 6 of the 2009 World Series. My dad and I arrived four hours early, to get a glimpse of batting practice in the sacred month of November. We wear our tickets around our necks like nervous freshmen anxious not to lose their dorm keys. Our seats in the second level, obstructed by the foul pole and thousands of New Yorkers, too long overdue for a championship to sit. **Jeter, Pettitte, Posada, Rivera**, all long past their prime, take this new and strange field to complete their mission. No need to put unnecessary drama into the mix, the Yankees take care of the Phillies 7-3. **Matsui** finds himself as the MVP, but I am more impressed with the stalwart man who had stood next to me for every second of the last nine innings, with a mind encyclopedic enough to answer every trivia factoid my mind could fathom from the long history of baseball.

The Yankees were perfect, the air was perfect, and you, dad, were perfect. I didn't know then that my dad's mind was deteriorating. I didn't know he would slowly lose access to his higher functions, his speech, his sight. I didn't know I wouldn't be able to go to him for cogent thought when I applied to college, got my first girlfriend, picked my major, got my first job. All I knew was my dad and I saw the Yankees win the World Series, and we loved each other. That was the last time the Yankees played in a World Series game. I always wanted to go back to the next one with my father, but it never happened. It is better this way.

I know the next World Series wouldn't have been this fairytale, only possible from the mind of a son, not yet aware of his father's mortality (or his own). It would have been like the last game we went to. A Mets game, routed by the Dodgers 14-4. My dad unable to eat a hotdog without me wiping his chin of copious mustard, unable to even find the hotdog stand not 20 feet from our seats. A pleasant time, but painfully obvious that he struggled to keep track of the score. His body barely a sack of bones as I guide him to the 7 train. No, we never made it to the World Series, so that game will stay preserved, untouched by time and disease. It will always be that special November batting practice. We will always be standing behind the foul pole. The Yankees will always be winning 7-3. I will always love my dad, and he will always love me.

TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Since 1967 six Red Sox managers have led Boston to the World Series. Name them.

Dick Williams '67 vs Cards, **Darrell Johnson** '75 vs Reds, **John McNamara** '86 vs. Mets, **Terry Francona** 2004 vs Cards and 2007 vs. Rockies, **John Farrell** 2013 vs. Cards, **Alex Cora** 2018 vs. Dodgers

HOUSEKEEPING

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