

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

4.24.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Fun stuff this week so grab your coffee, tip your cap to **Miguel Cabrera** and dive into trivia, skydivers, best players never to win MVP, more baseball betting hints, a glossary of stats Vegas expert use. Enjoy.

WEEKLY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Seven members of the 3,000 hit club were born outside the continental U.S.,

Two are active.

Last season played for the other 5:

2019

2018

2005

1985

1972

Name the seven players.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

You know Fenway Park and Wrigley Field. Did you know Dodger Stadium is the third oldest ballpark in the majors?

Only three players to hit HRs in 6 consecutive games against the same team: Yogi Berra 7 against Kansas City A's, Babe Ruth 6 against the Philadelphia A's, Giancarlo Stanton 6 against the Boston Red Sox.

Only Marlins pitcher to lead MLB in ERA for a season--**Kevin Brown** (1.89 ERA in 1996)

With universal DH, **Max Fried** of the Braves won the last silver slugger for a pitcher last year.

Last week in Houston, **Shoei Ohtani** became the first pitcher in MLB history to get two at bats in a game before he threw his first pitch. Then he pitched 6 innings, struck out 12 and gave up 1 hit.

Phillies-Marlins last week...first time in MLB history 6 HBP thrown by 6 different pitchers.

Last time a manager was fired mid-season? 2018 when the Cards hired **Mike Shildt** to replace **Mike Matheny** and the Reds removed **Bryan Price** in favor of **Jim Riggleman**.

I was surprised this is **Terry Francona**'s 10th season as manager of the Indians/Guardians. He managed the Red Sox for 8 seasons and the Phillies for 4.

Think spring training was short? There wasn't a single hitter in the state of Florida who even got 40 at-bats this spring. There were only four pitchers – three of them on the Red Sox – who even threw 15 innings. There was no reliever in Florida who even faced 40 hitters.

There were 159 non-Covid Injured List placements in the first 12 days of this season – an average of more than 13 per day. In the first 12 days of this season, exactly one starting pitcher threw 100 pitches or more in any game: **Nathan Eovaldi** for the Red Sox, on April 13. How many were there in the first 12 days of 2021? That would be 17.

There were 16,686 appearances last season by relief pitchers. That's not merely the most ever in any season. It's nearly 3,000 more relievers than we saw as recently as 2011.

RELIEF APPEARANCES PER SEASON

2021: 16,686

2011: 13,894

2001: 12,767

Then there are starters.

2014 pitchers with 25+ starts 104

2021 pitchers with 25+ starts 78

2014 pitchers with 200 IP 34

2021 pitchers with 200 IP 4

The San Diego Padres announced a deal with Motorola on Tuesday that will include a jersey patch with the phone manufacturer's logo.

The Padres will wear the circular patches starting in 2023. The patch will be located on the right sleeve and appears to be roughly the size of a baseball.

MLB and the players association agreed to introduce jersey advertising in the latest collective bargaining agreement. The NBA was the first major North American sports league to allow ads on jerseys, which started appearing during the 2017-18 season. NHL jerseys will include patches starting next season.

More on the Reds **Hunter Greene**'s outing in Los Angeles against the Dodgers highlighted in last week's newsletter:

- He launched 39 fastballs at 100 mph or swifter. And in the 14-season pitch-tracking era, no other human has ever put up that many triple-digit lasers in any game. Not **Jacob deGrom**. Not **Noah Syndergaard**. Not the young **Justin Verlander**. Nobody. In fact, according to Statcast, last year there were only 10 teams that threw 39 pitches at 100-plus – over the entire season.
- In the first two innings, 14 of Greene's first 15 fastballs were clocked at 100-plus – and the "slow" one was at 99.6.
- Of his first 51 fastballs, 50 were measured at 99.2 mph or higher. Yes, this happened. In real life.
- And of his first 14 fastballs of the evening, eight of them logged in *at 101 mph* or harder – plus three more at 100.7, 100.8 and 100.9.
-

Oakland's fan turnout has looked sad of late. Paid attendance in the A's last three home games was 3,748, 2,703 and 4,429. Think Las Vegas, Nashville and Montreal are watching? Oakland's Triple A affiliate in Las Vegas had a crowd of 5,174 on Wednesday. The Athletics had 2,703.

Danny Murtaugh's managerial record certainly seems to warrant inclusion in Baseball's Hall of Fame. His Pirate teams finished first or second seven times. Murtaugh helped Pittsburgh to 5 division championships and won two World Series titles. His career winning percentage was better than eight managers already enshrined.

April 18-19, 1981: Anyone with a deep knowledge of Minor League history might recognize those dates. For it was then that the Pawtucket Red Sox and Rochester Red Wings began, continued, but did not finish the longest professional baseball game in history -- a 3-2, 33-inning Pawtucket win at McCoy Stadium. The game began at 8:25 p.m. on April 18 and was tied 1-1

after nine innings. Both teams didn't score again until the 21st frame, and at 4:07 a.m. on April 19, the game was halted still tied 2-2 after 32 innings. The PawSox finally walked away with the victory in the 33rd when play resumed on June 23. The marathon featured a pair of future Hall of Famers at third base in **Cal Ripken Jr. and Wade Boggs**. The two combined to go 6-for-25 in that single game alone.

To this point, only five players from the 2020 draft have reached the majors. Three were first-rounders — Tigers first baseman **Spencer Torkelson** (first overall); Angels left-hander **Reid Detmers** (10th); and White Sox lefty **Garrett Crochet** (11th).

The other two 2020 selections to reach the majors are right-handers with the Braves, and neither was a high pick. **Spencer Strider** was a fourth-rounder out of Clemson, **Bryce Elder** a fifth-rounder out of the University of Texas. They went 126th and 156th overall, respectively.

Mike Piazza had 19 multi-HR games for the Dodgers—most by anyone after the team moved west from Brooklyn.

The Rangers designated **Greg Holland** for assignment Tuesday, a few days after the 36-year-old righthander reached 10 years of service time. Why was that significant? Ten years of service time fully vests a player in MLB's pension system. That means \$220,000 a year if you wait until age 62 to collect. (Boston Globe)

Also spotted in the Globe-- According to Major League Baseball, 275 players on Opening Day rosters (out of 975, including those on the injured list) came from 21 countries or territories outside the United States. That the Dominican Republic (99), Venezuela (67), and Cuba (23) have the most is no surprise. There were nine countries with one: Aruba, Australia, Brazil, Germany, Honduras, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Taiwan, and the US Virgin Islands.

The US Capitol and several surrounding buildings were briefly evacuated early Wednesday evening because an unidentified aircraft was approaching the area. It proved to be a small plane carrying US Army Golden Knights paratroopers toward Nationals Park as part of the pregame ceremony on Military Appreciation Night. Capitol Police did not get notified of the flight—oops.

The Rays no-hit the Red Sox through 9 on Saturday, gave up 2 runs in the top of the 10th but rallied for 3 in the bottom of the 10th to win 3-2. According to ESPN Stats & Information, this marks the first time in baseball history that a team has lost a no-hit bid in extra innings and gone on to win in walk-off fashion.

Two other teams won a game in which their no-hit bid was broken up in extra innings, but they were the road team on both occasions: the 1995 Montreal Expos against the San Diego Padres and the 1904 Chicago Cubs against the New York Giants.

J.P. Feyereisen pitched two perfect innings as Tampa Bay's opener, striking out two. **Javy Guerra** then got two outs before **Jeffrey Springs** pitched two innings. **Jason Adam** got four outs, **Ryan Thompson** pitched the seventh and **Andrew Kittredge** worked the eighth and ninth.

The Sox broke up the no-hitter and the shutout with two runs in the top of the 10th. **Kevin Kiermaier** belted a walk-off home run to right field in the bottom of the 10th inning for the Rays win.

LENGTH OF CAREERS, NUMBER OF TEAMS PLAYED FOR

It started with a visit to see my grandson (at age 3 ½ he has a pretty sweet lefty swing off a tee so I am predicting great things). Side by side screens with Cardinals and Yankees games playing. Lots of talk about **Miguel Cabrera** coming up on 3,000 hits and 600 doubles (to go with .300 average and 500 HRs). My son-in-law said unless you were into steroids, 3K hits should be automatic qualifier for the Hall of Fame. I agreed—15 seasons x 200 hits or the equivalent should get you a trip to Cooperstown. He wondered how many players play long enough to have even a shot.

So he did some digging and:

Career Length: The average career length of a MLB player is 6.06 years per player, while the median is five years. 23.1% of players play for only one season while 55.2% of players will play five seasons or less. There are a total of 4,009 players who had at least 10 years between their first and last games (23.3% of all players). Incredibly, there are 235 players (1.4%) who had a career spanning 20 or more seasons.

Net effect—very few players ever come close to enough plate appearances to think about 3,000 hits.

A piece (featuring heavy math) analyzing average number of teams played is the final entry below. The career length numbers were pulled from that.

CLUTCH

Many discussions of what makes a hitter “clutch” including those who feel the concept isn’t real. One way you can look at it is Batting Average with Runners in Scoring Position. Here are career leaders since 1969.

Tony Gwynn	.349
Rod Carew	.346
Joe Mauer	.334
Melky Cabrera	.330
Freddie Freeman	.327
Manny Ramirez	.327
Mike Sweeney	.327
Joey Votto	.324

A BAD NIGHT FOR UMPIRE JEFF NELSON

From yahoo sports--It was an afternoon to forget for the [Toronto Blue Jays](#) and home plate umpire Jeff Nelson on Saturday.

The [A's beat the Blue Jays 7-5](#) at Rogers Centre, tying the series at one game apiece prior to Toronto's 4-3 win in the rubber match on Sunday.

One storyline from Saturday's game was Nelson, who ended up missing a whopping 27 calls per the Umpire Auditor on Twitter.

Jeff Nelson

OAK vs. TOR
7 - 5



Saturday,
04/16/2022

@UmpScorecards
www.UmpScorecards.com

Overall Accuracy



Called 138 of 160
taken pitches correctly

Overall Favor

+1.41
runs for OAK

OAK: minus 0.11
TOR: minus 1.52

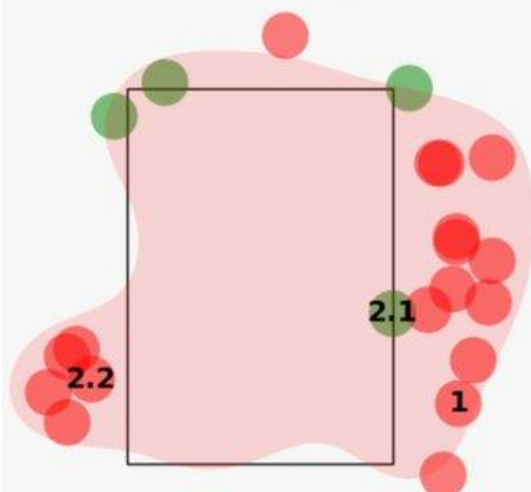
Overall Consistency



16 called balls inside EUZ
4 called strikes outside EUZ

All Missed Calls

true zone and Estimated Ump Zone (EUZ)



Impactful Missed Calls

largest changes in run expectancy

- 1: Bottom of the 8th
Jimenez to Gurriel Jr.
No outs, bases empty
3-2 count, ball is called a strike
- 2.1: Top of the 1st
Jin Ryu to Pinder
No outs, bases empty
2-0 count, strike is called a ball
- 2.2: Top of the 9th
Merryweather to McKinney
No outs, bases empty
1-2 count, ball is called a strike

Called Ball Accuracy



4 of 104 called balls
were true strikes



Called Strike Accuracy

18 of 56 called strikes
were true balls

EXIT JAKE ARRIETA

Jake Arrieta, now 36 years old, retires after a 12-season MLB career. A fifth-round pick of the Orioles out of TCU in 2007, he made it to the majors midway through the 2010 campaign.

Traded to the Cubs, by 2014, Arrieta had emerged as a top-of-the-rotation starter. He tossed 156 2/3 innings of 2.53 ERA ball, earning a ninth-place finish in NL Cy Young balloting. That was an unexpected age-28 breakout, but rather than showing any signs of regression, Arrieta took his game to another height the next season. In 2015, the right-hander tossed a personal-high 229 innings with an incredible 1.77 ERA. He led MLB with four complete games and three shutouts, allowing a league-low 5.9 hits per nine frames.

Arrieta had a very strong first half that year, posting a 2.66 ERA in 121 2/3 innings. Yet it's the second half of that 2015 season for which he might best be remembered, as he orchestrated one of the most overpowering runs by any pitcher in MLB history. After that year's All-Star break, Arrieta threw 107 1/3 frames and allowed just nine earned runs (0.75 ERA). Opposing hitters posted a laughable .148/.204/.205 line in just shy of 400 plate appearances during that stretch, as the Cubs won 97 games and earned a postseason berth.

During that year's Wild Card game, Arrieta continued his run of absolute dominance, tossing an 11-strikeout shutout in that season's Wild Card game against the Pirates. He wasn't as excellent during starts in the NLDS or NLCS, but he had launched himself into the upper echelon of starting pitchers. Arrieta won that season's Cy Young award, and he'd pick up a third consecutive top ten finish the following season.

In 2016, Arrieta worked to a 3.10 ERA in 197 1/3 frames. He again allowed a league-low 6.3 hits per nine, picking up his first All-Star selection in the process. Alongside **Jon Lester** and a career-best season from **Kyle Hendricks**, Arrieta played a key role in the Cubs team that snapped their 108-year title drought. Chicago won both of his starts during the seven-game triumph over the Indians, during which he tossed 11 1/3 innings of three-run ball.

From 2014-16, only future Hall of Famer **Clayton Kershaw** bested Arrieta's 2.42 ERA among qualified starters. He played a pivotal role on the most successful teams in the past century of Cubs baseball and leaves the game with a Cy Young and a World Series title. Over his 12-year run, he won 115 games, and struck out upwards of 1400 batters in 1612 1/3 innings.

RICH HILL

On Patriots Day 42 year old **Rich Hill** started for the Red Sox, just three days after his father died. Per the Boston Globe-- Major League Baseball allows for bereavement leave, but Hill decided to stay with the Red Sox and take his turn in the rotation as scheduled.

Lloyd Hill, who was 94, ran the Boston Marathon 37 times. So you can bet his son took the ball on Patriots' Day.

Lloyd Hill was a 205-pound All-America tackle at Brown from 1948-50 known for his fierce determination on the field.

He signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers, but the Korean War took precedence, and Hill served with distinction as a first lieutenant with the infantry.

He came home, earned two advanced degrees, then became a teacher and coach. He spent 25 years as principal of Quincy HS.

Rich Hill is in his 18th season. Going back to 1935, the only Massachusetts native with a longer career is **Tom Glavine**, who played 22 seasons.

Mark Belanger and Richie Hebner also played parts of 18 seasons.

YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHO FLIRTED WITH A PERFECT GAME IN NPB, AGAIN

One week after throwing Nippon Professional Baseball's first perfect game in 28 years, **Roki Sasaki** nearly did it again.

The Chiba Lotte right-hander struck out 14 over eight perfect innings against Nippon-Ham before being pulled. The 20-year-old struck out the side in the eighth inning while reaching 101 mph, but was lifted with the score tied 0-0 after throwing 102 pitches. Chiba Lotte would go on to lose the game, 1-0, in 10 innings.

Sasaki has retired the last 52 batters he has faced and lowered his ERA to 1.16 in four starts this season. He has allowed seven hits and two walks while striking out 56 in 31 innings pitched.

JUAN SOTO

I make no excuses. I love **Juan Soto** of the Nationals. I believe Soto is a generational talent. Look back 75 years:

Ten off the charts outfielders—**DiMaggio-Williams-Mantle-Mays-Aaron-Musial-Bonds-Griffey Jr.-Trout** and Soto.

Yes you can argue for **Clemente or Gwynn or Rickey Henderson**. There are some exciting outfielders now—**Betts-Judge-Harper-Acuna Jr.-Tatis Jr.** but Soto is elite.

If I were Steinbrenner & Cashman I would trade the 6 best Yankees prospects to Washington provided Soto would sign a 12 year, \$480 million extension. He would put up unworldly numbers at Yankee Stadium.

Some thoughts from The Athletic's Jayson Stark--

The Magic Number: 501

WHAT IT MEANS: *There are hitters who control the strike zone. There are hitters who have a knack for getting on base. And then there's Juan Soto – a man who had a .501 on-base percentage over his last (gulp) 97 games last season. As my friend, Paul (Hembo) Hembekides, of ESPN, has reminded me, the last qualifying NL hitter not named **Barry Bonds** to have a .500 OBP over a full season was ... **Rogers Hornsby** ... 98 years ago. So **Juan Soto** can't possibly do that over the next six months, right? Or can he?*

The more I've thought about this number – a .500 on-base percentage – the more I've come to understand what it truly means. It's the stuff of legends.

Here's the list of every qualifying hitter in the last 100 seasons who had a .500 OBP over any full season (or multiple seasons):

Barry Bonds
Ted Williams
Babe Ruth
Rogers Hornsby

Whoever they are.

Just for fun, let's add three extra names – of hitters who never did that in a calendar year but did have a .500 OBP over a 162-game span across multiple seasons (with at least 450 plate appearances: **Lou Gehrig, Mickey Mantle and (naturally) Jason Giambi**. (H/T: [baseball-reference/Stathead](#))

So now ask yourself this: Does Juan Soto belong in that group? Is it really humanly possible for a guy who is just 23 years old to reach base more times in a season than not reach base?

"I'd be surprised if he did it," said one AL exec. "But if there's anybody in our game who *could* do it, it would be him."

And also, there's this: If ever there were a set of circumstances where the planets lined up to make it feasible, it's happening right now. A genius-level hitting prodigy. Elite pitch recognition. And a lineup around him where there is basically no one else to fear.

“How can he *not* get the Bonds treatment?” wondered one NL exec. “It’s so easy to say, ‘We’re not letting that guy beat us.’”

We’re only two weeks into this season. But are we hearing the Nationals’ opponents saying that? C’mon. Loud and clear.

- Percentage of pitches Soto saw in the strike zone in the Nats’ first 13 games, according to FanGraphs: Just 34.7 percent (10th lowest rate in baseball).

- Percentage of first-pitch strikes thrown to Soto in those first 13 games: Only 39.7 percent (lowest rate in MLB).

Now here is what that means: Pitch-tracking data goes back just 20 years. Want to guess how many other qualifying hitters have ever been under 40 percent over any full season in both of those categories? If you guessed none, excellent work!

Next question. Want to guess the only hitter who even came close? Barry Bonds would be another excellent guess. In 2004, he had a 41.3 zone percentage and a 39.5 first-pitch strike percentage. In a related development, he wound up that season with a .609 OBP – not to mention 232 walks.

Now we’re seeing teams treat Juan Soto with even more avoidance. So can Soto channel enough Bonds-ian discipline to take full advantage of the pure terror his opponents obviously have of giving him anything to hit – at least on purpose – in a big spot?

“My question is: Can he stay on point over a full season like Barry did?” the same NL exec wondered. “And when he gets those three pitches to hit a week, can he do the damage that Barry did?”

AND MORE NUMBERS FROM JAYSON STARK—MIGUEL CABRERA

The Magic Number: 3,000

WHAT IT MEANS: *The meaning of baseball’s most storied numbers may not be what it used to be. But we can reflect on that some other time, because 3,000 hits is one of those numbers that hasn’t faded, that may never fade. And the artist still known as Miguel Cabrera finished his game Wednesday just a single hit away – but not just from that 3,000-Hit Club. If you add those 3,000 hits to his other remarkable accomplishments, he’s in staggering company. These numbers are always a reason to reflect on the talent of the men who achieve them. So what do you say we do that now with Miggy?*

With every stroll toward the batter's box at Comerica Park, Miguel Cabrera's spectacular collection of numbers shine brightly on the giant video board and on the milestone marker in leftfield. Have we fully comprehended them? I think we should.

3,000 HITS, 500 HOMERS – Only six other men in history are a member of this club. Two have PED asterisks (**Alex Rodriguez, Rafael Palmeiro**). The others, you may have heard of: **Henry Aaron, Willie Mays, Albert Pujols, Eddie Murray**. But let's keep rolling.

3,000 HITS, 500 HOMERS, .300 AVERAGE – It'll be just Aaron, Mays ... and Miggy in this cool club.

3,000 HITS, 500 HOMERS, 600 DOUBLES – Aaron and Pujols to Miggy: "Come on down!"

3,000 HITS, 500 HOMERS, 2 MVP AWARDS – Miggy gets to join just Mays, Pujols and A-Rod in this group.

MULTIPLE BATTING TITLES AND HOME RUN TITLES, PLUS 3,000/500 – For half a century, only one man could say he'd done all that: Henry Aaron. He's about to get company.

3,000 HITS, 500 HOMERS AND A TRIPLE CROWN – So who else has done this? No one else has done this. Only Miguel Cabrera. What a career.

"I've tried to always remind our players," his manager, **A.J. Hinch** told me recently, "we're playing with – and I'm managing – a living legend."

AND THE GREAT ST. LOUIS GOOD-BYE

Adam Wainwright, Yadier Molina and Albert Pujols have rolled up a combined 58 seasons in the big leagues. They have won a World Series together. They've played together in three different decades. And now they'll finish up three remarkable careers together, as teammates. So how rare is that? Let's tell you exactly how rare.

THE 17-YEAR REUNION – These three first became teammates in September of 2005, when Wainwright arrived in the big leagues for the first time. So imagine three men playing their first season and last season together as teammates – 17 years apart.

Only one other teammate trio in history has done that. Their names might sound familiar: **Derek Jeter, Mariano Rivera and Andy Pettitte**, whose first season with the Yankees was 1995 and final season together was 2013. Good company.

For the record, this note did not also require them to finish their careers in that final season together. So if this is really it for Molina, Wainwright and Pujols, they'll be the only threesome ever to go out with a 17-year reunion.

THE 17/17/17 CLUB – OK, let's look at this another way – and just hone in on trios ending their careers with the same team. According to STATS, these are the only four teams in history that had three players, all with at least 17 seasons in the big leagues, who played their final game for the same team in the same year.

1928 Philadelphia A's **Joe Bush, Tris Speaker, Ty Cobb**

1967 California Angels **Jimmy Piersall, Curt Simmons, Lew Burdette**

1975 Kansas City Royals **Vada Pinson, Lindy McDaniel, Harmon Killebrew**

1984 Oakland A's **Joe Morgan, Tom Burgmeier, Mike Torrez**

But none of those triumvirates consisted of players who also had extensive histories with each other or with that team. So can we remind you again that this journey of Molina, Wainwright and Wainwright is historically unique?

Or we could spin this wheel in yet one more direction. STATS looked at every combination of three players with at least 58 combined seasons who went out with the same team. Those 1928 A's and 1975 Royals are two of them. The other three:

1935 Boston Braves **Larry Benton, Babe Ruth, Rabbit Maranville**

1986 Cincinnati Reds **Tony Perez, Pete Rose, John Denny**

1988 Minnesota Twins **Steve Carlton, Joe Neikro, Tippy Martinez**

But once again, this wasn't a sneak preview of the Yadi/Waino/Albert Show. Only Perez and Rose had extensive history with their franchise and each other – but Denny played just that one season with the Reds. So who else has done what these three Cardinals icons have done? Right. Nobody.

COOLER BY THE DOZEN – Granted, Pujols has been away for a decade. But this will still be his 12th season with the Cardinals, meaning that all three of these men have at least a dozen seasons wearing this uniform. So what would it mean for them to do that *and* play the final game of their careers with this team?

You undoubtedly know precisely what it means. According to STATS, no other set of three teammates has ever played at least 12 seasons for any team (even if they weren't all together) – and then finished their careers with that team in the same season.

So take a deep breath and consider what you're watching. You might never see it again.

"They're like one of those classic rock bands," one NL exec quipped. "And now they're getting the band back together and going on tour again. They don't sound quite the same. They don't party quite as hard. But it's still great to see them. And it means you could have two of them (Pujols and Molina) go into the Hall of Fame together in five years. It's so special. What great payback to the greatest fans in baseball."

AND FREDDIE FREEMAN

He plays 12 seasons for the Braves. He bops 270 home runs for the Braves. And then in his first AB for the Dodgers against the Braves he hits a home run.

12+seasons, 270+ HR for a team, Then HR in first *game* against that team? OK, that happens. According to our friends from STATS Perform, five other players in NL/AL history have had that surreal moment in their first *game.* it has happened 5 times:

Jim Thome against the Indians

Eddie Murray against the Orioles

Frank Thomas against the White Sox

Willie Mays against the Giants

Juan Gonzalez against the Rangers

YANKEE MEMORIES

Some of my Yankee fan friends have been grumbling about lack of offense, that Hal is cheap and Boone is boring in the dugout. Want turnover in the dugout?

Lest we forget, **Lou Piniella** had managed New York to winning records in 1986 and '87, but that obviously wasn't good enough and Steinbrenner called him "the worst evaluator of talent I have ever seen." For the 1988 season, Steinbrenner fired Piniella (well, moved him to general manager), brought back **Billy Martin** for the fifth time, watched the Yankees lose three consecutive walk-off games and Martin get into a brawl in what the papers called "a topless bar," fired Martin for the fifth time and brought back Piniella.

Then at the end of the season, Steinbrenner fired Piniella again and hired **Dallas Green**.

But Piniella was still under contract with the Yankees — in fact, the papers were reporting that Piniella was getting paid more to NOT manage the Yankees than Green was getting paid to actually manage the Yankees.

Fun Times.

ALWAYS THE BRIDESMAID: THE BEST PLAYERS TO NEVER WIN MVP.

From Beyond the Boxscore

Constructing a lineup of the best players to never win MVP while diving into how close they came to the hardware

As each season comes to a close, fans, analysts, and writers alike all bicker and argue about awards for weeks leading up to their reveal. While only one person gets to take home the hardware when all is said and done, many get votes each year. While merely getting votes is not often cause for celebration and may even be forgotten about, it is still something we can track and measure. This is the purpose of MVP shares, a statistic that measures the portion of possible MVP votes a player receives. Looking at career MVP shares can give us an idea of how well a given player performed in voting throughout their career, properly giving credit for high finishes, as opposed to simply looking at award wins. A leaderboard for this, as well as the career Cy Young shares, can be found [here, on Baseball-Reference.](#)

This exercise builds a starting offensive lineup (8 players in the field plus a DH) of players to never win the MVP award, hence they have been “always the bridesmaid, never the bride”, except the groom is the MVP trophy. Career MVP shares served as a guiding light in building this team but were not the only factor considered. A player’s overall career production, as well as whether or not a player was ever “robbed” of the award also played roles.

C: Mike Piazza

Highest finish: 2nd (Twice: 1996 (**Ken Caminiti**), 1997 (**Larry Walker**))

Honorable Mentions: **Gary Carter**, **Bill Dickey**

Given that it’s exceedingly rare for catchers to win MVP (only 11 unique MVP catchers since 1931), it should be no surprise here that some of the very best to ever do it behind on the dish are still on the board. While Carter’s 70.1 career bWAR is second among all catchers, the nod for the starting backstop went to Piazza, who more wholly encapsulates the spirit of the bridesmaid team. Piazza’s 3.16 career MVP shares ranks him second among the bridesmaids and 31st overall, ahead of over a dozen 2-time winners and even ahead of three-time winner and fellow catcher **Roy Campanella**.

Neither of Piazza's second-place finishes were robbery by any means. Both Caminiti and Walker had Piazza beat by a healthy margin in bWAR. His best chance for hardware likely came in 1995. Despite finishing fourth, Piazza had the winner, **Barry Larkin**, beat in several key statistics, including OPS, home runs, and WAR. The second and third-place finishers, **Dante Bichette** and **Greg Maddux**, each had their own baggage that could have led to Piazza taking home the hardware. Dante Bichette's park and era-adjusted stats fall flat compared to his terrific traditional statistics. Greg Maddux, on the other hand, has baggage simply by being a pitcher. In some alternate timeline, these factors all lineup for Mike Piazza to take home the hardware.

1B: Eddie Murray

Highest Finish: 2nd (Twice: 1982 (**Robin Yount**), 1983 (**Cal Ripken Jr**))

Honorable Mentions: **Johnny Mize, Bill Terry, Paul Goldschmidt, Mark McGwire**

We found our second-biggest shareholder behind the dish, and his sole superior is found here at first base. Murray racked up over three awards worth of votes (3.33 shares) throughout his career without ever being named the winner. This is good enough for 24th all-time, ahead of figures such as **Reggie Jackson** and **Ken Griffey Jr**. While Mize, Terry, Goldschmidt, and McGwire all had fascinating careers in their own right, the leader of the bridesmaids was always going to have a spot in the starting lineup.

Much like Piazza, it's difficult to be upset about either of Murray's runner-up performances. Robin Yount more than doubled Eddie's WAR total in 1982, a clear runaway. In 1983, Ripken and Murray finished very close in voting, but Ripken's defensive value ultimately made up for his slightly worse performance offensively Perhaps Murray's best chance at winning came in 1984, when he placed fourth in the voting. The three to top his total (Ripken, **Dave Stieb**, and **Lloyd Moseby**) all failed to receive more than 1% of the vote. Instead, Murray was overshadowed by two relievers (**Dan Quisenberry** and **Willie Hernandez**) and Minnesota's **Kent Hrbek**. With a modern group of voters, this would never have happened, although that same group most certainly wouldn't have let Cal Ripken's 10 WAR season receive just a single down-ballot vote.

2B: Robinson Cano

Highest Finish: 3rd (2010 (**Josh Hamilton**))

HM: **Billy Herman**

Second base is the thinnest spot we have on this roster, but there's still plenty of talent. Cano would likely be destined for enshrinement in Cooperstown sometime in the next decade if not for his positive drug test and suspension. His 2.14 career MVP shares are good enough for 89th overall and 20th among bridesmaids.

There are not really any seasons to point to as Cano's best chance. It might be his 3rd place finish, but it's difficult to imagine voters ignoring Hamilton's monstrous .359/.411/.633 slash

line, which bested each leg of Cano's. He again had terrific seasons in 2012 and 2013 but was up against some tough competition. 2012 saw **Miguel Cabrera** win a triple crown while **Mike Trout** put up 10.5 bWAR as a rookie. Hardly any room for anyone else to win the award. 2013 had the same duo out ahead, albeit by a lesser margin, but nobody else was catching either of them.

3B: Adrian Beltre

Highest Finish: 2nd (2004 (**Barry Bonds**))

HM: **Jose Ramirez, Pie Traynor, Nolan Arenado**

Adrian Beltre is set to hit the Hall of Fame ballot in 2024 and should be inducted that July. The 3000 hit club member is one of the greatest to ever do it, and his inclusion here was an easy choice. His 2.27 career shares rank him 81st all time, just below the great **Sandy Koufax**, and 17th among bridesmaids.

Adrian Beltre had a season that would win MVP *almost* every single season. He accumulated 9.6 bWAR while slugging 48 home runs and slashing .334/.388/.629. Unfortunately, he ran into the human buzzsaw that is 2004 Barry Bonds, who was busy putting together arguably the greatest offensive season in baseball history. As amazing as his season was, he never had a chance. His only other top-5 finish came in 2012 when he finished 3rd. Once again Beltre was beaten by historically great seasons, this time falling victim to the aforementioned Triple Crown and 10 WAR seasons produced by Miguel Cabrera and Mike Trout, respectively.

SS: Derek Jeter

Highest Finish: 2nd (2006 (**Justin Morneau**))

HM: **Rabbit Maranville, Vern Stephens, Luke Appling, Joe Cronin**

Jeter's resume is long enough that it's difficult to believe that an MVP award isn't on there, but the Captain never took home that particular hardware. His 2.77 shares crack the top 50, as he is tied at 47th all-time with 2-time MVP winner **Johnny Bench**. This is also good enough for 7th among bridesmaids.

Jeter's career was one of consistency rather than many peaks and valleys. As a result, he doesn't have any season that sticks out as his best chance to win MVP. While Jeter may have been more deserving than Morneau in '06, Jeter ranked just 9th in WAR in the American League. Instead, I'd look to 1999, when **Ivan Rodriguez** narrowly beat out **Pedro Martinez** for the award, while Jeter placed sixth. This was the best campaign of Jeter's career by WAR at 8.0, which was only beaten by Pedro that season. Given this set of voters' clear aversion to voting for a pitcher, this could have been Jeter's best shot.

LF: Manny Ramirez

Highest Finish: 3rd (Twice- 1999 (Ivan Rodriguez), 2004 (**Vladimir Guerrero**))

Honorable Mentions: **Al Simmons, Albert Belle, Lance Berkman**

Manny Ramirez may not ever get a plaque in Cooperstown, but he's got a home in left field on this team. The slugger is the bronze medalist of the bridesmaids, as his 3.06 career shares put him behind only Murray and Piazza, the only three to eclipse 3.00 shares.

Manny had a similar opportunity to win in 1999 as Jeter did, although with the caveat of trailing Jeter in WAR (8.0 to 7.3). The 2004 voters favored Guerrero's superior batting average (.337 to .308), despite Ramirez having the edge in OBP and Slugging. However, a more modern group of voters likely doesn't vote for either, as neither cracked the top 5 in WAR in the American League.

CF - Kirby Puckett

Highest Finish: 2nd (1992 (**Dennis Eckersley**))

Honorable Mention: **Duke Snider**

While Snider likely had a better overall career than Puckett, Kirby gets the nod here due to a healthy lead in MVP shares. Puckett's 2.56 shares rank him 54th overall, and 9th among bridesmaids. Duke Snider's 1.97 shares would have been the lowest on the team by a considerable margin.

Puckett managed to rack up those shares in just 12 seasons by earning votes in nine of them. This includes a second-place finish, two third-place finishes, and four more finishes in the top 10. Puckett's best chance to win was clearly in 1992. Losing to a reliever, as he did, must be one of the tougher pills to swallow in regards to awards voting. As great as Eckersley's season may have been, his 80 innings pitched could hardly have the impact of Puckett's 160 games played. Puckett's 7.1 WAR led position players but did trail starters **Roger Clemens** (8.7) and **Mike Mussina** (8.2).

RF: Mel Ott

Highest Finish: 3rd (1942 (**Mort Cooper**))

Honorable Mentions: **Al Kaline, Gary Sheffield, Dave Winfield, Enos Slaughter, Tony Gwynn**

This was easily the toughest group to choose from on this team. This group of six includes 5 Hall of Famers, 3 members of the 3000-hit club, and 2 members of the 500 home run club. Ott ultimately gets the nod as his slight deficit to Kaline in shares (2.87 and 2.93, respectively) is more than made up for by his lead of nearly 20 WAR over the next best of this group.

Ott earned votes in 13 seasons, finishing in the top 10 six times. It seems that the voters got it right with Ott's closest finish in 1942. Cooper dominated in St. Louis's rotation, to the tune of 1a 1.78 ERA with nearly 280 innings. His 8.3 WAR was the only mark to trump Ott's 7.1. A decade earlier, Ott finished a distant 10th place in voting but was quite arguably robbed. Ott posted 8.3 WAR, 38 home runs, 100 walks, a .424 OBP, and a 174 OPS+, all of which led the league. Unfortunately for Ott, Philadelphia's **Chuck Klein** matched Ott's home run total while leading him in runs, hits, RBI, steals, average, slugging, and OPS. While the vote could have justly gone to either one of them, Ott's finish in 10th place is one of the more eyebrow-raising MVP results discussed here.

DH: David Ortiz

Highest Finish: 2nd (2005 (**Alex Rodriguez**))

In case Hall of Fame induction wasn't a big enough honor for David Ortiz, now he's properly recognized on this list as well. The slugger had a phenomenal run from 2003 through 2007 which featured five consecutive top-5 finishes. That stretch allowed Ortiz to rack up 2.95 career shares, 39th overall and 4th amongst bridesmaids, just behind his longtime teammate Manny Ramirez.

Given Ortiz's role as a DH, it's difficult to argue that he was robbed in any given season. In 2005, Rodriguez led Ortiz in home runs, WAR, average, OBP, and slugging. Ortiz's best chance to win clearly came in 2006. He led the entire league in home runs, RBI, and walks, while also leading the winner (**Justin Morneau**) in OBP and slugging. If not for the Red Sox missing the playoffs while Morneau's Twins won their division, this award likely goes to Ortiz, knocking him out of eligibility for this list.

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STARTERS GO DEEP

The Major Leagues used to see starters record outs past the ninth inning upwards of 150 times per season in the 1910s, and it still happened between 40 and 50 times in several years during the 1980s. But as bullpens gained prominence and teams paid more credence to starters' pitch counts, nine-plus-inning starts have taken a nosedive.

In fact, since the start of the Wild Card Era in 1995, MLB has seen a starting pitcher get an out in the 10th inning or later just 13 times (by 12 different hurlers). On Aug. 23, 2017, then-Dodgers lefty **Rich Hill** showed just how hard it can be to get outs past the ninth. Hill carried a no-hitter

into the 10th that night, only to watch the Pirates' **Josh Harrison** hit a walk-off homer in the first at-bat of the inning.

Nobody has come as close as Hill since then, which means that Monday will mark the 10th anniversary of the last time a starting pitcher recorded even a single out in the 10th inning or beyond. Here's a look back at those 13 most recent marathon-man performances, going back in reverse chronological order:

Cliff Lee, Phillies (at Giants, April 18, 2012)

Final line: 10 IP, 0 R, 7 H, 7 K, 0 BB (1-0 loss)

Lee was still near the peak of his powers on this April night by the Bay, when he twirled 10 scoreless innings against the eventual World Series champions before watching teammate Antonio Bastardo give up a walk-off single to **Melky Cabrera** in the bottom of the 11th. Lee was nearly matched zero for zero by Giants starter **Matt Cain**, who threw nine scoreless innings and allowed just two hits before yielding the mound to four San Francisco relievers. This game was pitched so efficiently by both sides that it lasted just two hours and 27 minutes, making it the fastest 11-inning Major League contest in 26 years.

Philly's loss made Lee winless in his first three starts of the season, despite allowing just five combined runs in those contests. He became the first pitcher to throw 10 scoreless innings in a team loss since **Bret Saberhagen** did so for the Mets in 1994.

Aaron Harang, Reds (vs. Brewers, July 23, 2007)

Final line: 10 IP, 1 R, 7 H, 10 K, 0 BB (2-1 win)

This game was more than a statistical achievement for Harang, as he had just returned from his grandfather's funeral. The righty came back to the mound and became the first Reds pitcher to throw 10 or more innings in a ballgame since **Rick Mahler** in 1989, fanning 10 Brewers and walking none before a trio of Cincinnati relievers held down Milwaukee long enough for **Javier Valentin** to deliver a walk-off single in the bottom of the 12th. Harang's only run allowed came off the bat of Brewers rookie **Ryan Braun**, who homered for the 16th time in his first 51 career games.

Roy Halladay, Blue Jays (vs. Tigers, April 13, 2007)

Final line: 10 IP, 1 R, 6 H, 2 K, 0 BB (2-1 win)

Doc was operating at optimal efficiency on this night at Rogers Centre, pitching to contact as only he could while besting Tigers starter **Jeremy Bonderman** (nine innings, one run allowed) in an excellent duel. Halladay's two strikeouts were the fewest of anyone on this list, but he snuffed out several Detroit scoring opportunities to make sure **Magglio Ordonez** (second-inning solo homer) was the only man who came around to score. At the time, Halladay's career record against the Tigers stood at 11-2 with a 1.83 ERA.

Bartolo Colon, Angels (vs. Athletics, Aug. 30, 2005)

Final line: 9.1 IP, 1 R, 6 H, 3 K, 1 BB (2-1 loss)

Though this was ultimately a game the Halos lost, it was performances like these that helped Colon capture his lone American League Cy Young Award in 2005. The right-hander pitched to contact throughout the night, piling up four ground-ball double plays and needing just 105 pitches to get 28 outs.

Unfortunately for Colon, it wasn't enough. **Barry Zito** nearly matched Colon with nine one-run frames of his own, and Angels closer Francisco Rodriguez coughed up a solo homer to **Bobby Kielty** to start the top of the 11th. A's closer **Huston Street** wiggled out of a jam in the bottom half to hand the Angels a tough loss.

Mark Mulder, Cardinals (vs. Astros, April 23, 2005)

Final line: 10 IP, 0 R, 5 H, 5 K, 0 BB (1-0 win)

This was one of several classic contests between a pair of NL Central heavyweights that staged back-to-back NLCS showdowns in 2004 and '05. And it featured a pair of heavyweights on the mound in Mulder and Astros ace **Roger Clemens**, who finished this contest with seven scoreless innings of his own to lower his season ERA to 0.32.

But Mulder was that much better on this 43-degree afternoon in St. Louis, outlasting The Rocket and putting the Cardinals on his back for 10 brilliant innings. The chilly Cardinals hitters needed every ounce of Mulder's effort until **Larry Walker** broke the scoreless tie with an RBI single off **Brad Lidge** in the bottom of the 10th.

Roy Halladay, Blue Jays (vs. Tigers, Sept. 6, 2003)

Final line: 10 IP, 0 R, 3 H, 5 K, 1 BB (1-0 win)

Sensing a pattern? Halladay is the only two-timer on this list, and both of his hard-earned victories came against the Tigers in Toronto. And get this: The losing pitcher in *both* contests was **Fernando Rodney**, who surrendered a walk-off sac fly to **Alex Rios** in the 2007 game, and a walk-off single to Kielty in this '03 contest. Both walk-offs came off Rodney in the bottom of the 10th.

Halladay was even more dominant in this one, outdueling another hard-luck Detroit starter in **Nate Cornejo** (nine scoreless innings) in a game that took just two hours and three minutes to complete. He held the Tigers hitless through 7 2/3 innings, five years after he had a no-hitter broken up against Detroit with two outs in the ninth. Halladay needed just 99 pitches to complete this gem, the fewest thrown in any 10-plus inning shutout dating back to the start of complete pitch-count data in 1988. This was the Majors' first extra-inning shutout since **Jack Morris'** famous Game 7 of the 1991 World Series.

Kevin Millwood, Braves (at Cardinals, Aug. 28, 1999)

Final line: 10 IP, 0 R, 2 H, 9 K, 1 BB (3-0 win)

Millwood probably wasn't the pick for a 10-inning masterpiece out of a Braves rotation that included Hall of Famers **Tom Glavine, Greg Maddux and John Smoltz**. But Millwood surprised all season long in 1999, finishing with the lowest ERA (2.68) on Atlanta's star-studded rotation and placing third in NL Cy Young Award voting.

Darryl Kile, Rockies (at Padres, Sept. 20, 1998)

Final line: 10 IP, 0 R, 3 H, 7 K, 2 BB (1-0 win)

These Padres were about a month away from reaching the World Series, but they had no answer for the late Kile on a Sunday afternoon in San Diego. Kile had won 19 games the previous season with the Astros, earning him a three-year, \$24 million deal with the Rockies, but his struggles in 1998 (a Major League-most 17 losses and a 5.20 ERA) made him a seemingly unlikely candidate to go the distance. The right-hander looked determined to put those trials behind him on this day, however, as his trademark breaking ball was on point throughout while he stifled the Padres to just three hits.

Kile was brilliant enough to outduel a strong NL Cy Young Award candidate that year in Padres righty **Kevin Brown**, who went nine scoreless innings on his own. But Kile needed only 103 pitches to complete his 10 frames, making him the first pitcher in Rockies history to go past the ninth.

Brad Radke, Twins (vs. Brewers, Sept. 21, 1997)

Final line: 10 IP, 1 R, 6 H, 9 K, 0 BB (2-1 win)

This was one heck of a way for a pitcher to get his 20th win of the season, but it didn't look like greatness in the beginning. Radke coughed up a solo homer to Milwaukee's **Jeff Cirillo** in the second at-bat of the game before he began to settle, retiring the next eight men he faced in order. The Twins tied the game at one in the sixth, and Radke kept mowing down the Crew until former Brewers star **Paul Molitor** walked it off with an RBI triple in the 10th.

Alex Fernandez, White Sox (vs. Twins, Oct. 1, 1995)

Final line: 10 IP, 1 R, 5 H, 6 K, 3 BB (2-1 win)

Fernandez was an anchor for Chicago in the mid-1990s, topping 170 innings in six consecutive seasons on the South Side. And he was an absolute workhorse in a game where he didn't need to be -- this was the final game of the 1995 season, and the White Sox were far from contention at nine games below .500.

Still, Fernandez refused to yield the ball, battling Minnesota's **Rich Robertson** in a scoreless duel until he gave up a sac fly in the top of the ninth. Luckily for Fernandez, slugger Frank Thomas led off the bottom half with a game-tying homer, allowing Fernandez to come back out

and work a scoreless 10th. Reliever **Roberto Hernandez** took over in the top of the 11th, and **Robin Ventura** walked it off a half-inning later with a single. Fernandez's brilliant afternoon extended his scoreless streak to 25 2/3 innings to end the season.

Todd Stottlemire, Athletics (vs. Royals, June 16, 1995)

Final line: 10 IP, 1 R, 5 H, 15 K, 1 BB (3-1 loss)

Stottlemire's 15-strikeout night against Kansas City ranks among the most dominant starts in A's history, but it didn't result in a win. This game stayed tied at one until the top of the 13th, when two Royals came home on an ugly throwing error by A's first baseman **Mark McGwire**, and held on to win, 3-1.

But victory or not, Stottlemire was on point, surrendering his lone run on the first career homer for Royals center fielder Tom Goodwin in the top of the ninth. Stottlemire shrugged off that dinger immediately, fanning Wally Joyner to end the inning and picking up two more punchouts in the 10th before yielding to reliever **Rick Honeycutt** in the 11th.

Bobby Jones, Mets (vs. Astros, June 16, 1995)

Final line: 10 IP, 2 ER, 8 H, 5 K, 0 BB (7-5 loss)

Jones outlasted his opposing starter, **Greg Swindell**, by three innings, but he had time to shower and eat a meal by the time **Jeff Bagwell**'s bases-loaded single in the top of the 16th gave Houston a marathon 7-5 victory at Shea Stadium.

Nearly five hours before that, Jones got off to a ho-hum start by allowing runs in each of the first two innings. But he was magnificent after that, scattering three Astros hits and escaping jam after jam. The Mets came back to tie the game twice in extra innings -- and squandered their own runners-in-scoring-position opportunities three times after the ninth -- before Bagwell put an end to things.

Tim Wakefield, Red Sox (vs. Mariners, June 4, 1995)

Final line: 10 IP, 1 R (unearned), 6 H, 5 K, 2 BB (2-1 win)

Wakefield made quite the first impression, allowing just one run in his first two starts in a Boston uniform leading up to this Sunday afternoon at Fenway Park. The knuckleballer kept Seattle's powerful lineup (sans **Ken Griffey Jr.** on this day) off the scoreboard for nine straight innings, trading zeroes with Mariners starter Tim Belcher until Wakefield committed a throwing error that allowed Seattle's **Felix Fermin** to come home in the top of the 10th.

It was shaping up to be a difficult day for Wakefield, with his magnificent effort doomed by his own miscue, until Troy O'Leary picked up his teammate with a walk-off, two-run homer in the bottom half off **Bobby Ayala**. Wakefield's memorable day lowered his ERA to 0.37 after three starts with Boston, and the Red Sox matched their best start since 1971 with a 23-11 record.

Honorable mentions (pre-1995)

Jack Morris, Twins (1991 World Series Game 7)

Final line: 10 IP, 0 R, 7 H, 8 K, 2 BB (1-0 win)

In perhaps the most famous pitcher's duel of all-time, Morris outlasted Braves starter **John Smoltz** and shut down Atlanta until **Gene Larkin** walked it off with a 10th-inning single to give the Twins a title-clinching 1-0 victory.

Nolan Ryan, Angels (vs. Red Sox, June 14, 1974)

Final line: 13 IP, 3 R, 8 H, 19 K, 10 BB (4-3 win)

Ryan was doing plenty of superhuman things at this time in his career -- he threw four no-hitters between 1973-75, and struck out a Major League record 383 hitters in '73 -- but this was quietly one of his most remarkable achievements. Game recaps from the time counted 235 *pitches* out of Ryan's right hand as he tallied his second of three 19-strikeout performances in the '74 season alone.

Though the Angels won in 15 innings, Ryan didn't get the win. Nor did he throw the most frames on the mound that day; his adversary, **Luis Tiant**, went 14 1/3 innings for Boston before surrendering **Denny Doyle**'s walk-off double.

Harvey Haddix, Pirates (at Braves, May 26, 1959)

Final line: 12.2 IP, 1 run (unearned), 1 H, 8 K, 1 BB (1-0 loss)

A strong contender for the most painful loss for any pitcher in history saw Haddix string together an unprecedented 12 perfect innings before it all came apart. Braves starter **Lew Burdette** (12 hits allowed) matched Haddix zero for zero until the bottom of the 13th, when Pirates third baseman **Don Hoak** booted a ground ball to break up Haddix's perfect game.

Eddie Mathews bunted the runner over and Haddix intentionally walked **Hank Aaron**, setting up **Joe Adcock**'s double -- the Braves' first hit of the night -- to walk it off. Rumor has it that Haddix wandered the streets of Milwaukee alone that night in dismay.

JOE POSNANSKI ON DUSTY BAKER

in this 75th anniversary season of **Jackie Robinson** breaking the color barrier — **Dusty Baker** is going to win his 2,000th game as a big-league manager. He was sitting at 1,993 victories entering Friday, which is poetic because he began his managing career with the San Francisco Giants in 1993.

That year, the Giants — after going 72-90 the year before — won 103 games. They also failed to make the playoffs because Atlanta won 104 games.

In so many ways, that season is a microcosm of Dusty's managerial career.

Two thousand wins. It's an astonishing feat, accomplished by only 11 managers, the greatest of the greats — **Mack and McGraw, La Russa and Cox and Torre, Sparky and Bucky, McCarthy and Durocher and Alston**. All 10 of them are in the Hall of Fame. The 11th is **Bruce Bochy**, who won his 2,000th game almost at the end of the 2019 season, when the Giants won 11-3 in Boston. He will be in the Hall of Fame soon.

(black managers in the majors who came before Dusty Baker were **Frank Robinson** 1975 Indians, **Larry Doby** 1978 White Sox, **Maury Wills** 1980 Mariners, **Hal McCrae** Royals 1991, **Cito Gaston** Blue Jays 1992, **Don Baylor** 1992 Rockies.)

JAYSON STARK

The Magic Number: 12

WHAT IT MEANS: *Until a little over a half-century ago, baseball had just two “playoff” teams. Then four. Then eight. Then 10. And now, thanks to one of the most visible and impactful aspects of the new labor deal, we’ve reached a dozen teams. On one hand, that’s still two fewer than the NFL, four fewer than the NHL and eight fewer than the NBA if you count “play-in” teams as “playoff” teams. But why do we have a feeling that adding those two playoff teams is going to leave its mark on more than just the first week of October?*

We transport you now to an alternative universe, where 2021 is being played under 2022 rules. In other words, suppose there had been an extra playoff team in each league last year? A week before the trading deadline, here's what you would have found:

- The Cubs – who became a massive seller – would have been just one game out of that last wild-card spot.
- The Indians – who unloaded five big leaguers before the deadline – would have been 2 1/2 out, but only one back in the loss column.
- The Nationals – who dealt away *eight* players – would have been just three games out.

So imagine how much the addition of only one playoff spot could have changed the shape of that deadline, and all that came afterward. Do the Dodgers wind up with Max Scherzer and

Trea Turner? Do the **Braves** get the chance to trade for the NLCS MVP, **Eddie Rosario**? Do the **Giants** win 107 games – and hold off the Dodgers – without **Kris Bryant**?

“I think what 12 (playoff) teams does, more than anything, is push back decision-making at the deadline,” said an NL exec. “I can definitely see more teams saying, ‘If we’re this close, how can we sell?’”

Here is what other execs see:

A DIFFERENT KIND OF DEADLINE BUYER: One AL exec wondered if that extra spot – plus having the wild-card round go from one-and-done to best-of-three – could inspire more teams in the middle to go for it: “Baseball has become more of a have/have-not sport. More 100-win teams. More 90-win teams. But also more 60-win teams. So adding an extra two playoff teams may create a new middle group that feels like, if they can just get there, in a short series, anything can happen.”

A NEW MARKET FOR RENT-A-PLAYERS: “The easy answer,” said one NL exec, “is that there will be more buyers and fewer sellers.” But think of the ripple effects of that, not just at the deadline but in the offseason. If there is more demand for the players sellers are dangling in July, he said, then “the middle-class rental free agents (e.g., think **Nelson Cruz**, **Tommy Pham**, etc.) may just become a tad more sought after in future offseasons.”

LESS 89-WIN HEARTACHE: There *will* no doubt be a year where some 80-82 team makes the playoffs. That sounds like some quality talk-show programming waiting to happen. But the truth is, the extra wild-card team would have averaged 87 wins in the Wild Card Game era (2013-21). So what that really means, in many cases, is the potential for less injustice, for legit contenders that have gotten squeezed out through the years: “When you win 89-90-91 games, that’s a good season,” said one exec. “You should feel excited about a season like that. But when you do that and don’t make the playoffs – and we’ve been there – it’s hard for fans or anyone else to feel good about that. So anything that creates more playoff teams like that, I think, is a great thing.”

LIST OF THE WEEK—300 STRIKEOUTS IN A SEASON

Only 19 pitchers in the modern era (since 1900) have reached the 300-K plateau within a single season.

SIX 300-K SEASONS

Randy Johnson, LHP

Years: 1993, '98, '99, '00, '01, '02

Nolan Ryan, RHP

Years: 1972, '73, '74, '76, '77, '89

THREE 300-K SEASONS

Curt Schilling, RHP

Years: 1997, 1998, 2002

Sandy Koufax, LHP

Years: 1963, 1965, 1966

TWO 300-K SEASONS

Pedro Martinez

Years: 1997, 1999

J.R. Richard

Years: 1978, 1979

Sam McDowell

Years: 1965, 1970

Walter Johnson

Years: 1910, 1912

Rube Waddell

Years: 1903, 1904

ONE 300-K SEASON

Justin Verlander

Year: 2019

Gerrit Cole

Year: 2019

Max Scherzer

Year: 2018

Chris Sale

Year: 2017

Clayton Kershaw

Year: 2015

Mike Scott

Year: 1986

Steve Carlton

Year: 1972

Mickey Lolich

Year: 1971

Vida Blue

Year: 1971

Bob Feller

Year: 1946

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MIGGY'S 3,000 HITS

Mlb.com

On June 20, 2003, a 20-year-old left fielder named **Miguel Cabrera** -- four years removed from signing out of Venezuela -- made his Major League debut. This was long enough ago that the team he played for was called the Florida Marlins, while the opponents went by the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. The starting lineups included current Twins manager **Rocco Baldelli** and Hall of Famer **Ivan Rodriguez**.

Cabrera hit eighth in the lineup, and after starting the night 0-for-4, he blasted a two-run, walk-off homer to dead center field in the 11th inning off reliever **Al Levine**.

That was career hit No. 1.

Fast-forward 19 years, and Cabrera has added 2,999 more knocks to his ledger. His single on Saturday against the Rockies' **Antonio Senzatela** made him the 33rd member of the exclusive 3,000-hit club -- the latest accomplishment in a career full of them.

In honor of Cabrera's major milestone, here are 16 facts and figures you need to know about his path to 3,000.

- We already mentioned that first career hit, but what about some other important numbers along the way? Here's a sample, including the opposing pitcher and hit type:

No. 100: April 20, 2004, Marlins at Phillies (**Roberto Hernandez**) -- single
No. 500: May 12, 2006, Marlins at Pirates (**Victor Santos**) -- single
No. 1,000: Sept. 7, 2008, Tigers at Twins (**Glen Perkins**) -- home run
No. 1,500: July 15, 2011, Tigers vs. White Sox (**Gavin Floyd**) -- single
No. 2,000: April 4, 2014, Tigers vs. Orioles (**Ryan Webb**) -- home run
No. 2,500: Sept. 18, 2016, Tigers at Cleveland (**Trevor Bauer**) -- single

- Cabrera already recorded his 500th career home run on Aug. 22, 2021, at Toronto. He now joins an extremely select group of seven players to reach both 500 home runs and 3,000 hits. The others are **Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Eddie Murray, Rafael Palmeiro, Albert Pujols and Alex Rodriguez.**

- How do all those hits break down? Cabrera has recorded 1,882 singles, 599 doubles, 17 triples and 502 homers. If you're thinking to yourself that you haven't seen a Miggy triple in a while, you'd be right. The last one came nearly six years ago, on May 17, 2016, against the Twins' **Phil Hughes**. Cabrera has recorded more than 500 hits since that last three-bagger.

- Cabrera obviously authored a number of fantastic seasons on his way to 3,000 hits, but one that clearly stands out is 2012, when he hit .330 with 44 homers, 139 RBIs, the first of back-to-back American League MVP Awards and the first Triple Crown in either league since 1967. Cabrera is one of 10 players to win a Triple Crown since RBIs became an official statistic in 1920, and now is the second of those -- along with **Carl Yastrzemski** -- to also record 3,000 career hits.

- Cabrera already passed **Omar Vizquel's** previous record for the most hits by a Venezuelan-born player (2,877) and now is the first hailing from that country to reach 3,000. Among active Venezuelan players, Oakland's **Elvis Andrus** (1,875 hits entering Saturday) is next on the list.

- Cabrera's 3,000 hits have come in 9,665 at-bats, resulting in a .310 career batting average that is the best among active players. Miggy's membership in the .300 batting average / 3,000 hit / 500 homer club is safe -- he'd have to go 0-for-his-next-352 to drop below .300.

- Of Miggy's 3,000 hits, exactly one has been a bunt hit. That was all the way back on June 9, 2006, when he was a 23-year-old with the Marlins. It came against **Chris Young** and the Padres, a perfect bunt down the third-base line. Cabrera even went on to steal second base right after, one of his 39 career stolen bases.

THE BASEBALL TEAM TRYING TO PROVE THAT DEFENSE DOESN'T WIN CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Phillies have one of the worst fielding teams in the league. They think they can score enough to overcome any amount of errors, flubs and miscues.

Jared Diamond, WSJ

The 2022 Philadelphia Phillies have become an experiment designed to provide the long-awaited answer to one of baseball's most debated and perplexing questions: How important is defense, really?

Philadelphia's defense was dismal last season—worst in the major leagues, according to the popular “defensive runs saved” metric. The statistic, which Sports Info Solutions has been calculating since 2003, attempts to measure how many runs a player prevented or cost his team compared with an average defender. For the Phillies last year, that number was minus-54. The five National League playoff teams averaged 52 DRS.

The Phillies did nothing to improve their defense this winter. If anything, they might have made it worse, committing \$179 million to free-agent outfielders **Nick Castellanos** and **Kyle Schwarber**—a pair of sluggers who, to put it nicely, aren't being paid that amount of money because of their gloves.

What they're left with is a lineup that could be among the best in the National League—and the hope that they can score enough to overcome any amount of errors, flubs and miscues out in the field.

So far, the results have been uninspiring. The Phillies entered Tuesday's action with a record of 4-7. They had already committed seven errors. Only two NL teams had more.

“There have been clubs that have not had great defensive metrics in the past that have won,” Phillies president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said before the season began. “I've been part of a couple of those clubs.”

Dombrowski, a veteran executive who has worked in baseball since 1978, was referring to the rosters he built a decade ago as the general manager of the Detroit Tigers. From 2011 through 2014, those Tigers compiled an average DRS of minus-40.5. They still managed to win four straight division titles and an American League pennant during that stretch.

They were able to do that because they also had a ridiculous amount of elite talent in every other area: a pitching rotation led by **Justin Verlander** and **Max Scherzer** and a lineup featuring **Miguel Cabrera** at his peak. Evidently, having two Hall-of-Fame starters and perhaps the best right-handed hitter of his generation matters more than having a shortstop and center fielder with limited range.

That's roughly the model the Phillies want to follow. Their rotation includes **Zack Wheeler**, who finished second in Cy Young voting last season, and All-Star **Aaron Nola**.

More importantly, the lineup should produce a ridiculous amount of runs. Reigning MVP **Bryce Harper**, first baseman **Rhys Hoskins** and catcher **J.T. Realmuto** are returning, and now they have added Castellanos and Schwarber, who combined to hit 66 home runs and drive in 171 in

2021. The Phillies also made moves to improve a bullpen that tied for the MLB lead with 34 blown saves last season, adding **Corey Knebel**, **Jeury Familia** and **Brad Hand**.

On defense, the Phillies have more limited expectations. Knowing they are below average at just about every position, manager **Joe Girardi** isn't asking his defenders to end up on highlight reels. His goals are more modest: Just catch the balls hit directly at them.

"The important thing is to secure the baseball—catch the balls and field the balls that you're capable of fielding," Girardi told reporters during spring training. "If you do that, your defense is going to be fine, right?"

The Phillies think so, and the makeup of their team serves as a reminder that even in this era of analytics, where everything is measured and calculated and dissected, defense remains elusive. Though many new defensive statistics exist, all are fallible, and researchers remain unsure about how much of a player's worth actually comes from his defensive skills.

Still, the reality is that, despite Dombrowski's positive results with Detroit, achieving success with bad defense isn't all that common. Fifty-four teams have had a DRS of minus-50 or worse. They averaged 74 wins. Only eight of them, or 15%, reached the postseason, including Dombrowski's Tigers in 2013 and 2014. None appeared in the World Series. (That said, the team with the worst DRS on record—the 2005 New York Yankees—went 95-67 behind a MVP campaign from **Alex Rodriguez**.)

On the other end of the spectrum, 71 teams have had a DRS of 50 or better. They averaged 87 wins. Thirty-six, or just shy of 51%, reached the postseason. Ten appeared in the World Series, and four won it, including last season's Atlanta Braves and the Phillies themselves in 2008.

That's what the Phillies are up against by relying on such a leaky defense. They were below average at almost every position last season, particularly with shortstop **Didi Gregorius** and third baseman **Alec Bohm**.

"A lot of times you're in a situation where you say, 'OK, well, our defense is a little bit down, we need to score runs,'" Dombrowski said.

Bohm is particularly indicative of the Phillies' plight. He is off to a red-hot start at the plate, going 8 for his first 14. The problem has been his defense. In one game last week, he made three errors in the first three innings, drawing the ire of Philadelphia fans. At one point, television cameras caught him saying to a teammate, "I f—ing hate this place." He apologized afterward.

Still, Bohm's defense has been enough of an issue that Girardi has had trouble finding a spot for him in the lineup, despite his strong bat. Monday marked his first start at third base since the three-error performance on April 11.

The Phillies believe they have a few elements in their favor that could allow them overcome their weakness in the field. For starters, the Phillies' home stadium, Citizens Bank Park, is one of the smallest in baseball, meaning outfielders don't have much ground to cover.

Second, with the DH now implemented in the National League in 2022, Schwarber and Castellanos won't have to play in the outfield together. Schwarber said he thinks his defense in left field has "improved tremendously" during his career, and even if the metrics indicate otherwise, "I can tell those things to go kick rocks, right?"

But perhaps the main factor in the Phillies' favor goes back to the core question: Does defense still matter in baseball? The game has changed dramatically in a very short time. Last season, 35% of all plate appearances ended in either a strikeout, a home run or a walk, meaning there are fewer chances for fielders than ever before. Wheeler, the Phillies' best pitcher, led the NL with 247 strikeouts.

So maybe the Phillies will struggle on defense this season. They will also score a ton of runs. And maybe the baseball world will learn something along the way.

"You have to take what is your strength and see what you think is the best way to win," Dombrowski said. "There's been all different types of clubs that have gone out there and won."

MORE BASEBALL BETTING INFO FROM VISN (VEGAS INFORMATION AND SPORTS NETWORK)

Stay ahead of MLB line moves with these tips

The baseball betting market is unique. Of the six major sports, it is one of two that predominantly feature moneyline wagering and the only one affected so much by a singular player — the starting pitcher. With 15 games per day most days and 162 games overall, the daily MLB grind is one that can take up a lot of your time.

Fortunately, there are some things that pop up in the betting markets on a daily basis that can help you get ahead of line moves or at least project which way a line is going to go before deciding whether or not you want to make a wager. I'll discuss these things related to specific games as the season goes along, but here are some general thoughts before opening day.

Aces up

Aces generally have their overnight lines bet up very quickly. Most of the influential bettors in the baseball market are looking to take positions based on the odds and then decide if they want to hold them or not. A Guardians game with **Shane Bieber** on the mound may go from -180 to -220 overnight before we start to see any resistance. We've seen **Gerrit Cole's** lines go up 30, 40, 50 cents or more right at the open.

Public bettors typically piggyback these moves at worse numbers, putting the ace pitchers into moneyline parlays or chalky straight bets. If you see a line move against an ace on an overnight line, you should take notice.

Waiting for buyback

As I just mentioned, influential bettors are looking to take positions. In a moneyline sport like baseball, there is no spread to worry about. All you have to do is decide which team is going to win. It's easier said than done and not as simplistic as it looks, but there are a lot of groups out there that manipulate the market in hopes of getting the best price on each side.

For example, with the Bieber line that goes from -180 to -220, sharp individuals and groups will get that line at -180 and may decide to bet back on the other side at 190. This is called "arbitrage." If the group bets \$180 to win \$100 at -180, they can bet \$100 to win \$190 at 190 after the line move. If the favorite wins, they break even. If the underdog wins, they make 10 cents on the dollar.

The goal with this strategy is to get the best of the line both ways to make it worthwhile. It may not seem like much, but change \$180 to \$180,000 and you start talking about some more significant money.

As a result, we've seen a lot of big line moves one way come back down as a result of action on the other side over the last several years. If you miss a good line, you may see something close to it come back.

ERA-FIP discrepancy

This is one of my favorite quick tips for MLB betting. With so many bettors now using sabermetrics to handicap, this one has lost some of its equity over the last five or so years because it is now just a race to hit the first sportsbook that posts a number.

Just about all baseball fans are familiar with ERA. FIP is a little bit different. FIP stands for Fielding Independent Pitching and the formula uses strikeouts (K), walks (BB), hit by pitches (HBP) and home runs (HR). The idea behind FIP is that it features outcomes that a pitcher can control.

ERA is subject to a lot of things — such as defense, sequencing (timing of hits) and also things like relief pitchers allowing inherited runners to score. Many believe that FIP is a better indicator of a pitcher's talent and that a high ERA will positively regress toward a low FIP and that a low ERA will negatively regress toward a high FIP.

If you see a starting pitcher coming up with a 2.50 ERA and a 4.50 FIP, you can expect money to come in against that pitcher and his team. On the flip side, if you see a pitcher with a 4.50 ERA and a 2.50 FIP, you can expect money to come in on that pitcher and his team.

It isn't foolproof and it won't happen 100% of the time, but it will more often than not, so if you can isolate those games, you can get some line value or at least know which way the line will move. A lot of times we see this with ERA and xFIP as well, which is Expected FIP. If a pitcher's xFIP is significantly higher or lower than his ERA, the line is likely to move accordingly.

These are some shortcuts and starting points for the MLB card to make it easier to digest and track during the long season. Bettors will go off of the previous season's numbers for the first few weeks and then transition into the current season's numbers with starting pitchers, so you'll want to do some homework now and then keep tabs as the games get played.

A glossary of MLB stats to know for the 2022 season

My go-to line when explaining baseball stats and analytics to people is to say that "they quantify what the eyes can see." Advanced stats simply paint a better picture than the traditional stats and provide more layers of context to help explain how much a player is helping or hurting his team.

You may watch a game and notice that the center fielder isn't very good defensively. He's getting a late read on fly balls and doesn't have the speed to compensate. He's got a "noodle arm". Well, the advanced metrics can look at things like "Outs Above Average" or "Defensive Runs Above Average" to show how much worse than "average" fielder that player is.

A lot of traditional metrics fall short. Think about on-base percentage, which is walks plus hits divided by plate appearances $((BB + H) / PA)$. That stat really came to prominence around the time that the Michael Lewis book Moneyball was released in 2003. Batting average had always been the go-to stat, but the whole goal as a hitter is not to make an out. Walks are a big part of that equation, thus OBP became a better indicator of offensive output than BA.

But, let's think more about OBP. Should a home run count the same as a single? Should a double count the same as a walk? With OBP, there is no distinction between the ways of reaching base. Enter wOBA, or weighted on-base average, which is an OBP variant that assigns run values to the manner in which a hitter reaches base. For example, in 2021, a single was worth .879 runs, while a home run was worth 2.007 runs in the formula for wOBA. A walk was worth .692 runs, but a double was worth 1.242. Why? Because doubles increase the chances of scoring a run or driving in a run more than a walk does.

The way I analyze baseball is to utilize the metrics and the statistics to try and find betting opportunities. I don't want readers or listeners to be overwhelmed by the numbers. It's my job to explain what they mean, why they are important and how we can use them in our handicapping to find smart bets to make.

I know these stats and abbreviations can be daunting. My only request is that you keep an open mind throughout the season.

The following are some of the stats that I use in my team previews and will use throughout my daily article and my on-air appearances over the course of the season:

Alternate Team Standings Metrics

BaseRuns: In my season previews, I talk about the BaseRuns record. BaseRuns is a “context-neutral environment” that takes all of the individual outcomes, puts them together and spits out expected runs for and against.

Think about these six events in an inning: HR, 1B, 1B, K, K, K. Depending on the order, a team might score three runs (1B, 1B, K, K, HR, K), two runs (1B, HR, K, 1B, K, K), one run (HR, 1B, 1B, K, K, K). The same six outcomes, just in different orders. BaseRuns removes “sequencing”, which is largely random. This also eliminates the randomness of hitting or defending with runners in scoring position. A big disparity between actual record and BaseRuns record might show that a team got lucky or won a lot of close games.

Pythagorean Win-Loss: Pythagorean Win-Loss is a standings metric based on run differential. A team’s runs scored and runs against are put into a formula and an expected record is produced. This concept is used across all sports and is sometimes just labeled “Expected W-L”.

Team and Player Stats

FanGraphs Wins Above Replacement Player (fWAR): Wins Above Replacement Player (WAR) is one of the most comprehensive individual player statistics available. It shows how much value a player has provided relative to his peers. The “f” stands for FanGraphs, which is where I pull my player WAR data from, since I think they do the best job of calculating it.

A player with a fWAR under 1.0 is a replacement-level player, or not a very good one. A player with a 1-2 fWAR is a decent role player or a platoon type of guy. A player with a 2-3 fWAR is a solid player that any team would be happy to have. The scale goes up from there and separates the bad players from the good players and the good players from the great players.

Weighted On-Base Average (wOBA): wOBA is one of my favorite stats because it does add more context than on-base percentage (OBP). Much like OBP, a high wOBA is good and a low wOBA is bad for hitters. On the flip side, a low wOBA is good and a high wOBA is bad for pitchers. Once again, it just adds another layer of context where the outcomes of reaching base are weighted differently based on their importance.

Weighted Runs Created Plus (wRC+): Using wOBA, we can get to a stat called wRC+. With this stat, a player that has a 100 wRC+ is exactly league average. A player with a 120 wRC+ is 20% more productive than a league average player. A player with an 80 wRC+ is 20% less productive than a league average player. Anything over 100 is good, anything under 100 is bad.

The “Plus” means that the stat is park-adjusted and league-adjusted for the run environment. “Park-adjusted” means that there are factors within the formula that account for the way that Coors Field is a better hitter’s park than Miller Park or that Fenway Park is a better hitter’s park than Tropicana Field.

“League-adjusted” basically means grading on a curve. If a lot of runs are being scored, batters have to be that much productive to be above average. If it is a low run environment, then great hitters will stand out that much more.

K% and BB%: I don’t like using raw strikeout and walk numbers or strikeouts per nine innings (K/9) or walks per nine innings (BB/9). I prefer to use K% and BB%, which is simply the percentage of plate appearances that end in a strikeout (K%) or a walk (BB%). This can be used for both pitchers and hitters.

Last season, the league average K% was 23.2% and the league average BB% was 8.7%. Because of the ban on foreign substances, the K% actually dropped from the previous season for the first time 2005.

Fielding Independent Pitching (FIP): ERA is subject to a lot of things that a pitcher can’t necessarily control, like batted ball luck and sequencing (the timing of hits, are there runners on base, etc.). FIP takes fielders and balls in play out of the equation by producing a pitcher metric using strikeouts, walks, hit by pitches and home runs, which are believed to be things a pitcher *can* control.

There is a follow-up metric called **xFIP**, which stands for “Expected Fielding Independent Pitching”, which is calculated by assuming a pitcher has a league average home run rate per fly ball rate (HR/FB%). This is an indicator used by a lot of bettors that move lines. The idea is that a pitcher with a low ERA and a high xFIP is overperforming and is in line for “Negative Regression” and a pitcher with a high ERA and a low xFIP is underperforming and is in line for “Positive Regression”.

I do a lot of regression analysis handicapping, looking for stats and metrics that focus on pitchers that are seemingly getting lucky or unlucky.

Batting Average on Balls In Play (BABIP): This is a really strong indicator of luck. Think of this as batting average minus strikeouts and home runs. A strikeout is not a ball in play and a home run cannot be fielded, thus it is not a ball in play. The league average BABIP last season was .292. Extremes one way or the other are likely to “regress to the mean”.

Left On Base Percentage (LOB%): This is different from LOB in the box score. This is calculated using a pitcher’s actual hits, walks and runs allowed and the percentage of runners that they have stranded. Think about ERA and how subjective it can be to something like this. The timing of hits (sequencing) matters a lot. LOB% can be a really good stat to use for positive or negative regression.

League average was 72.1% last season. Like BABIP, extremes one way or the other are likely to regress. High-strikeout pitchers typically carry higher LOB% marks because they are going to strand more runners than guys that allow more balls in play.

GB%/FB%/LD%: These are batted ball types, with ground ball percentage (GB%), fly ball percentage (FB%) and line drive percentage (LD%). These are the percentages of balls in play and the distribution of each type. Guys with a high GB% are likely to give up more hits, but fewer home runs. Guys with a high FB% will give up more home runs, but fewer hits, because more ground balls go for hits than fly balls. Line drives are bad for pitchers to give up because they are harder to field.

The league average GB% last season was 42.9%.

HR/FB%: As mentioned with xFIP, HR/FB% is home run per fly ball percentage - How often does a fly ball become a home run. The league average last season was 13.6%. Anything on the high end is likely to come down and anything on the low end is likely to go up.

There are major exceptions. Pitchers with a high GB% could have a higher HR/FB% because they don't have the sample size of fly balls needed to lower the rate. Similarly, pitchers with a high FB% may give up a lot of homers, but have a lower HR/FB% because they have a larger sample size of fly balls.

You can see most or all of these stats at places like FanGraphs (for a library with more detailed explanations - <https://library.fangraphs.com/>) or Baseball-Reference.

Statcast Data

In recent years, more and more data has been posted for public consumption. Statcast data falls under that category. Housed at BaseballSavant.com, you can see a lot of really detailed statistics for both pitchers and hitters.

I won't hit on them all, but here are several that I use:

Average Exit Velocity (EV or exit velo): This is a measure in miles per hour of how hard the average batted ball is hit. League average last season was 88.8 mph. Pitchers that are 90 mph or higher give up a lot of hard contact, which is harder to field and often much more damaging. Pitchers that are 87 mph or lower tend to give up softer contact, which is easier to field and less damaging.

Hard Hit%: This is one of my favorite indicators for pitchers. Hard Hit% is the percentage of batted balls hit at least 95 mph. With each mile per hour increase in exit velocity, a batted ball has a higher batting average and a higher slugging percentage.

For example, batted balls hit at least 95 mph last season led to a batting average of .500 with a SLG of 1.015. Batted balls hit at least 94 mph led to a batting average of .484 and a SLG of .970. Batted balls hit at least 93 mph led to a batting average of .469 and a SLG of .930.

As you can see, with each mph you go down, the numbers start to get better for pitchers. On the flip side, the higher you go, the worse the numbers get. This is a good indicator of pitchers that are commanding their pitches well. The less hard contact, the better a pitcher's chances of limiting hits and runs.

Of course, you can also look at this for hitters or teams and see teams that make more hard contact than others. The top teams in Hard Hit% last season? Red Sox, Yankees, Blue Jays, Twins and Braves/Astros. Some pretty good offenses there. There is a high correlation between contact quality and success.

The lowest teams in Hard Hit% last season? Pirates, Angels, Rangers, Diamondbacks and Rockies. A lot of bad teams there.

Barrel (Barrel%): A "barrel" is a batted ball hit at least 95 mph with an optimized range of launch angle. All you need to know is that a barreled ball has an expected batting average of at least .500 and an expected slugging percentage 1.500, so think doubles and home runs.

There were 9,638 barreled balls last season, leading to a .772 BA and a 2.591 SLG. Pitchers that give up a lot of barrels are not in good shape.

Barrel% is the percentage of batted balls that are "barreled". Something around or above 9% is pretty concerning here.

Spin Rate: With starting pitchers, I'm always looking for decreases or increases in spin rate. A decrease in spin rate can be a good indicator of injury. When foreign substances were banned last season, we saw a lot of decreases in spin rate because pitchers didn't have sticky substances to stay on the ball later and create more friction and spin.

Spin rate matters because it affects the movement of a pitch. A fastball with a high spin rate will appear to "rise" because it isn't as affected by gravity on the way to the plate. Breaking balls with higher spin rates will move tighter and break later. There is a high correlation between pitcher spin rate and hitter success in terms of things like batting average and slugging percentage.

Decreases in spin rate will also affect control and command because pitchers are used to throwing in a certain spot. The ball won't move as much and won't do what the pitcher wants. It's why Coors Field is such a hard place to pitch. The thin air and elevation don't produce as much friction on the ball, so pitches move less, thus making them easier to hit.

Again, all I ask is that you keep an open mind and take the time to try to incorporate some of these metrics or at least read to understand what they mean and why they are important.

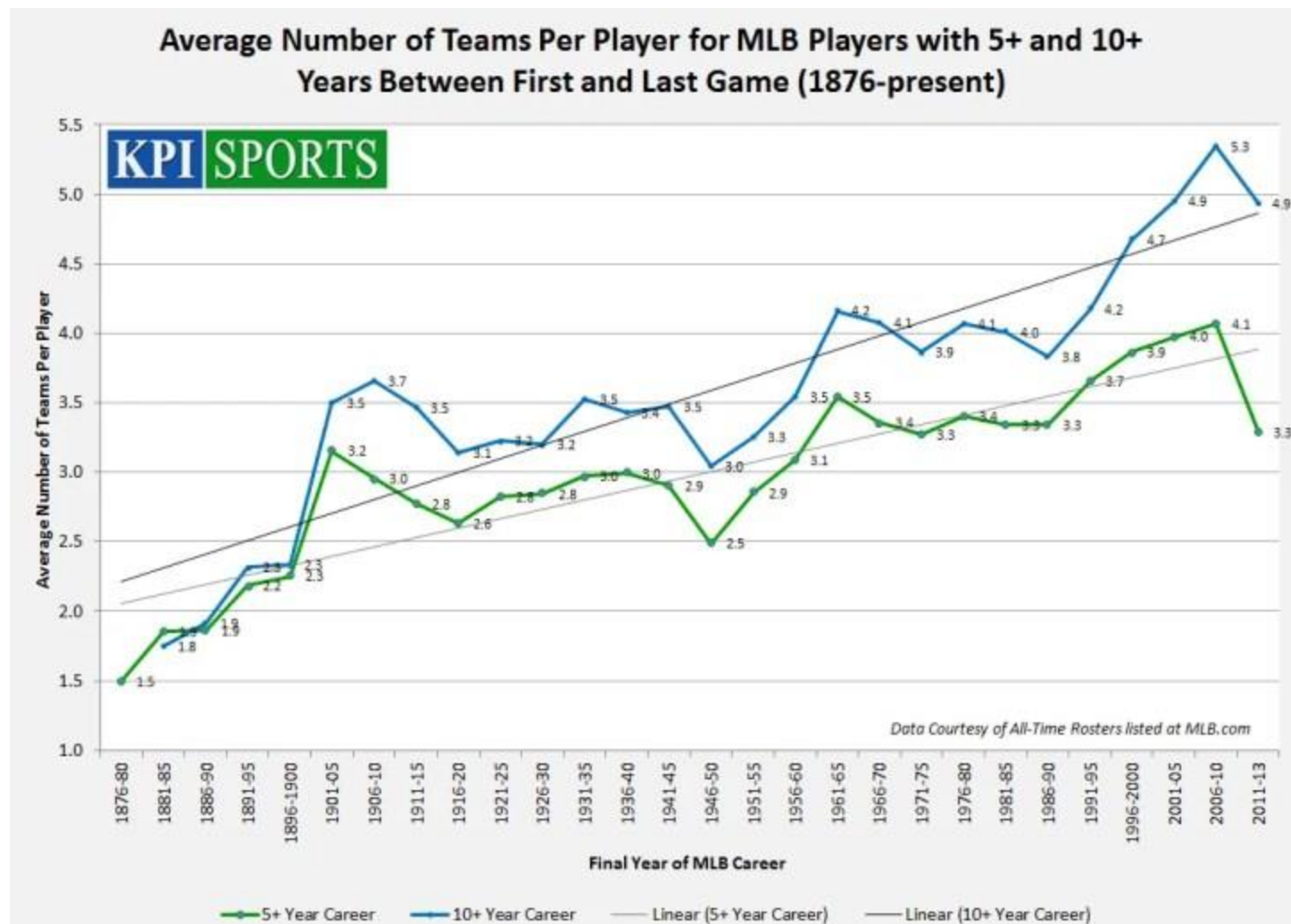
KPI STUDY: MLB PLAYERS PLAYING FOR MORE TEAMS

Posted on [January 6, 2015](#) by [Kevin Pauga](#)

Data shows increase of 1.5 teams per MLB player from 1990-2010

(Editor's Note: A few discrepancies were found in data, resulting in an estimated margin of error of 1.29%. Please reference the Methodology at the end of the post for the details as to how data was obtained and calculated.)

KPI Sports study of more than 17,000 Major League Baseball players who at one point played for one of the current 30 Major League Baseball franchises showed that players (as many assumed) are in fact playing for more teams now than ever before. For players with a career length of 10 or more years, there was an increase of 1.51 teams per player for careers ending between 1986-90 and 2006-10.



here are several noteworthy points in the data showing the number of teams per player:

Creation of the American League: As the American League began to establish itself as a major league in 1901, the number of teams players could play for increased (as did the number of active players in MLB). That number stabilized at 16 teams and remained that way from 1901-60. Players with a career of 10+ years played for between 3.0 and 3.7 teams during every five-year interval from 1901-60.

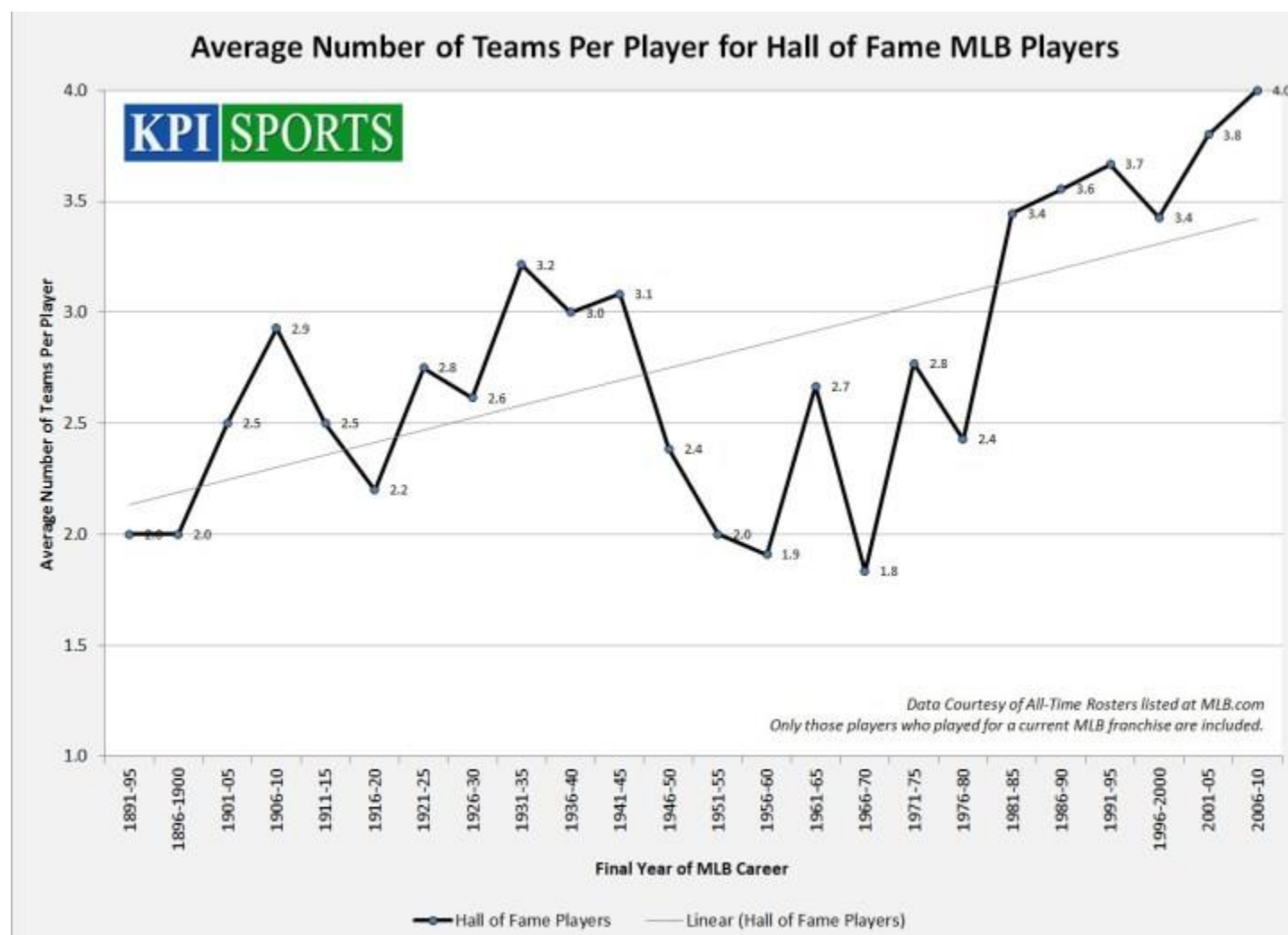
World War II: There was, however, a slight dip in the number of teams per player just after the end of World War II. Many careers were interrupted by the war as players honorably served their country. Players with 10+ year careers ending from 1946-50 played for 3.0 teams per players (2.5 teams per players for players with 5+ year careers over the same period), the fewest teams per player since 50 years earlier.

Expansion: From 1961-69, MLB expanded from 16 to 24 teams. Both the expansion drafts (there were eight teams to fill) and the additional opportunities on new rosters for players cut

contributed to an increase in the number of teams with which a player could sign. 228 players moved to new teams as a direct result of the expansion drafts for the new teams entering MLB in the 1960s.

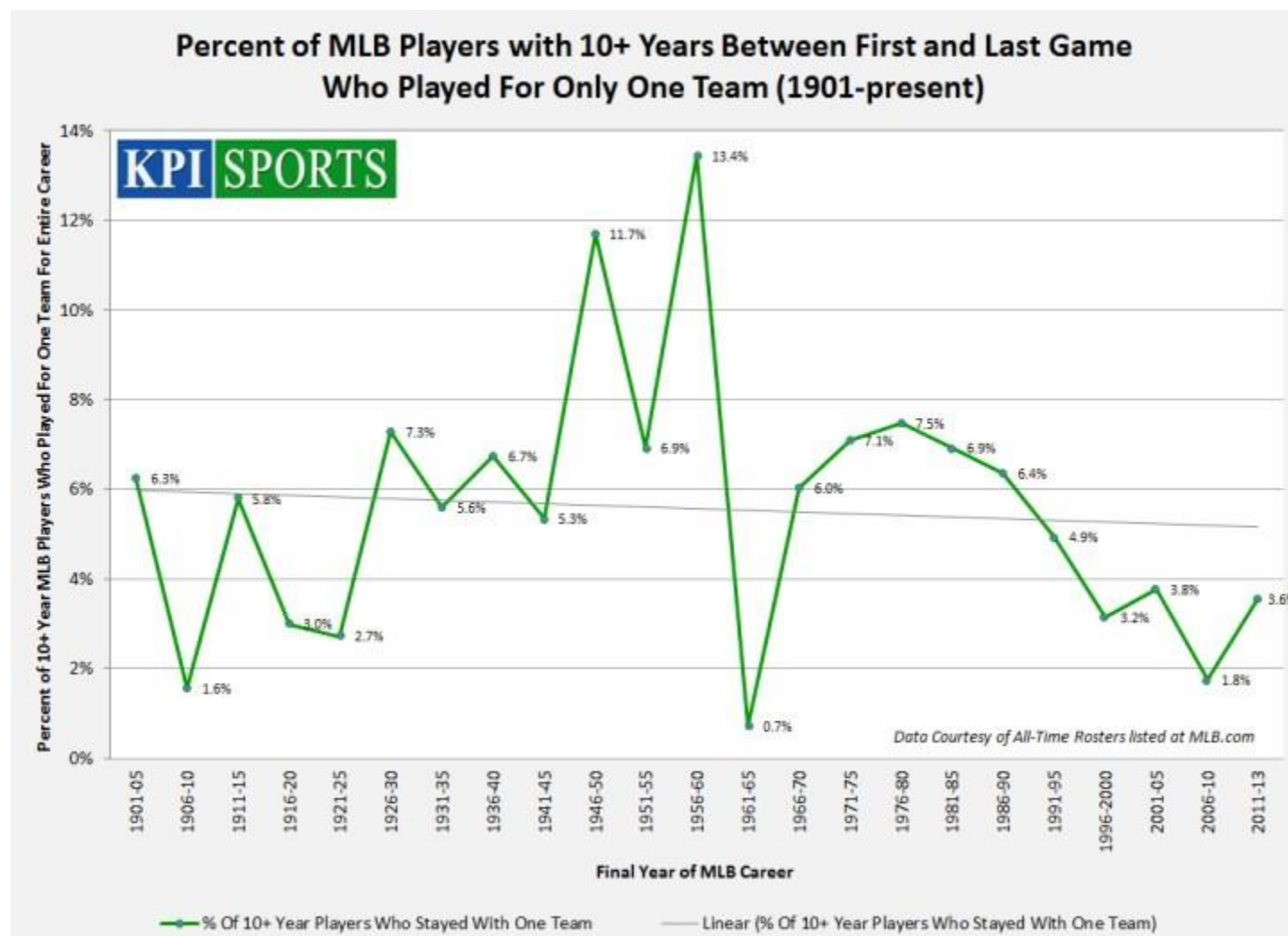
Free Agency: Free agency essentially began in 1976. It ended baseball's reserve clause and opened the door to far fewer restrictions on player movement between teams. Players who played 10+ seasons averaged 3.8 teams in 1986-90, a number that steadily grew to 5.3 teams per player by 2006-10. Note: Because data is tracked based on retirement date, the resulting increase from free agency was not immediate.

The Future: There is a slight dip (and trend reversal) in teams per player for 5+ and 10+ year career players since 2011. Until the five-year interval is complete after 2015 (with data coming after 2016), it is premature to know whether this is an actual trend developing or simply incomplete data. Players still have more time during the current five-year period to see if they will change teams. Players like former Phillies shortstop Jimmy Rollins have already changed teams this offseason.



KPI Sports also reviewed data from 215 Hall of Fame players who were enshrined in the Hall of Fame as players and played for a current MLB franchise. That group averaged 2.81 teams per player dating back to careers ending as long ago as 1891. The average career length from this group was 18.1 years.

There has been an increase over the last 20+ years in the number of teams for which each Hall of Fame member has played as well. Since most Hall of Fame players were not affected by the expansion drafts of the 1960s, the trend during that time period is different from the larger group of all MLB players. The sample size in each five-year interval is often times small, ranging from four to 16 players in a given interval.

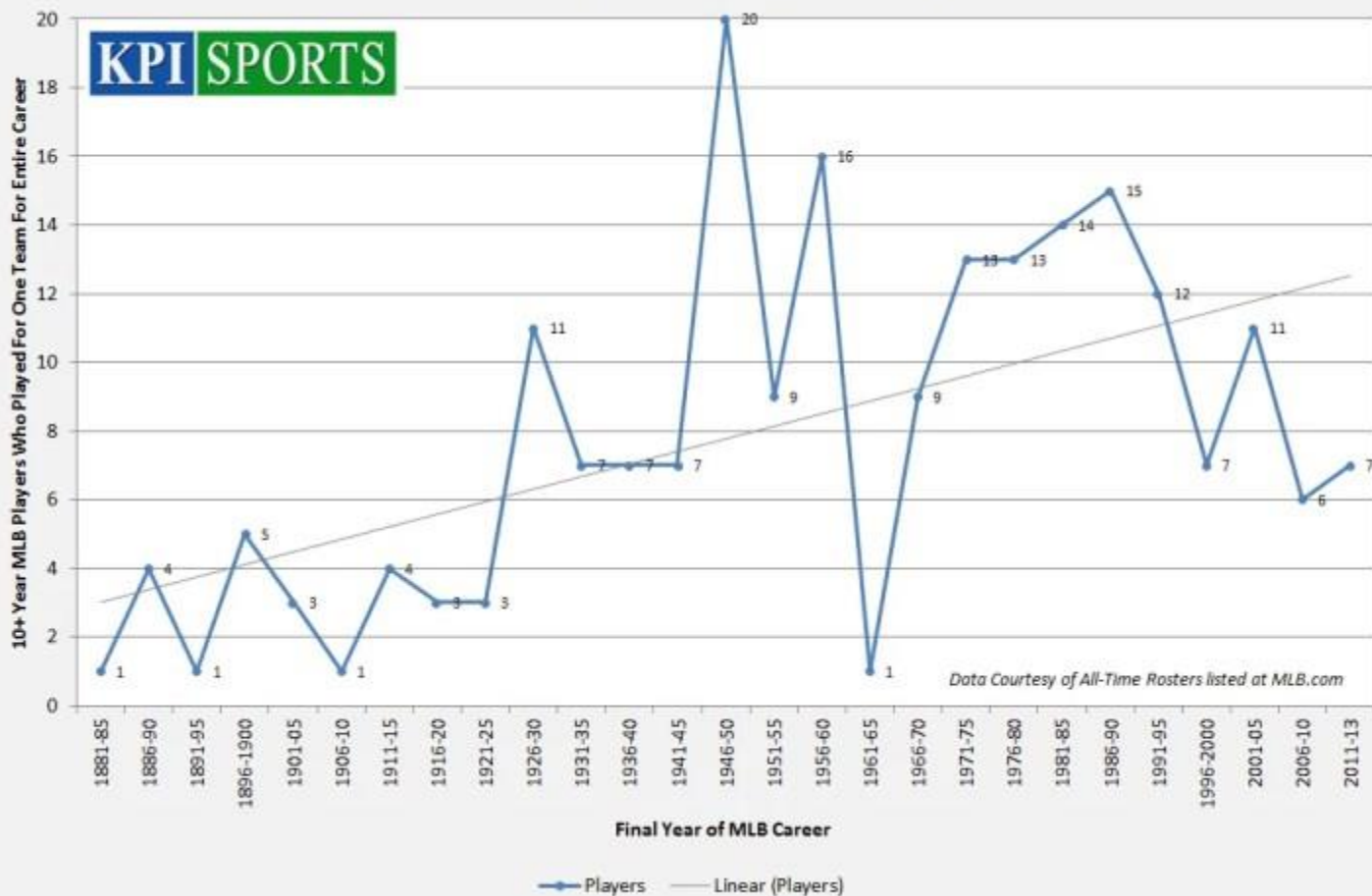


here are very few players who play an extended career in MLB with one team. 227 players with 10+ year careers (5.7% of all 10+ year players) stayed with one team for their entire career. With data again tracked over five-year intervals, there has been a decrease in the percentage of players who play with only one team since the start of free agency. There is an inverse relationship between the number of 10+ year career players playing for only one team and the increase in number of teams for which the average player plays.

he total number of players playing for one team (rather than a percentage of players) can be a bit misleading because of the increase in the number of teams (from 16 in 1960 to 30 by 1998). Still, the data shows that while by no means is the one-team player dead, it is becoming slightly rarer. Of the active players with career lengths of 10 or more years who have played for one team their entire career, Derek Jeter has retired and Jimmy Rollins was traded. Jeter will become the eighth player in the current interval to finish a career with one team (Note: The last interval stops at the end of 2013.)

Number of Teams: 46.1% of MLB players will only play for one team during their career (many of those players will only play for one or two seasons). 67.5% of players will play for two or fewer teams, while 81.4% will play for three or fewer teams. The average player will play for 2.25 teams over the span of their major league career. Three players (Matt Stairs, Mike Morgan, and Ron Villone) all played for 12 teams during their careers. MLB.com does not list Octavio Dotel as playing the 1999 season with the New York Mets, which would in fact make Dotel a 13-team major leaguer.

Total Number of MLB Players with 10+ Years Between First and Last Game Who Played For One Team (1881-present)



MLB.com does not list **Octavio Dotel** as playing the 1999 season with the New York Mets, which would in fact make Dotel a 13-team major leaguer.

Stints with Teams: 2,243 players (12.4% of those tracked) have had two or more non-consecutive stints with a team. A total of 99 players (0.6%) made three stints with the same team while four players (0.02%) had four stints with the same team. Those four players were **Bobo Newson** (Washington Senators), **Kent Mercker** (Cincinnati), **Terry Mulholland** (San Francisco), and **Tony Fernandez** (Toronto). Both Mercker and Mulholland's fourth stint technically came with a year of no games played over an extended single stint, so some may consider it three stints depending on the parameters chosen for such data.

Career Length: The average career length of a MLB player is 6.06 years per player, while the median is five years. 23.1% of players play for only one season while 55.2% of players will play five seasons or less. There are a total of 4,009 players who had at least 10 years between their

first and last games (23.3% of all players). Incredibly, there are 235 players (1.4%) who had a career spanning 20 or more seasons. [The University of Colorado commissioned a study in 2007 to look at the length of a Major League player's career](#). Tracking data from 1902-93, the average career lasted 5.6 years based on their findings.

Methodology

The data was initially obtained from the "All-Time Roster" pages for each Major League Baseball team at mlb.com. Hence, only players who played for one of the current 30 MLB teams at some point in their career are included (that means a few players who played only for now defunct National League teams prior to contraction in 1900 are not counted). Also, any errors from those rosters (I found very few) are carried over into this project. I believe most, but likely not all, of these errors were caught. Some data (like MLB.com listing Everth Cabrera's career as 2005, 2008-14 and Octavio Dotel's career number of teams) has remained as is in order to maintain consistency in how MLB.com generated their data.

There are several players who have the same name as other MLB players. Excel doesn't like when two values mean two different things! In order to identify and separate these players, I ran three different passes through the data (by position, by year played, and by team). I believe I have correctly separated most if not all like-named players, but there's always a chance that I missed someone along the way. Many names were known (there were two players named **Alex Gonzalez** playing from 1991-2014, both playing shortstop, for example), but many weren't (there were four **Bob Smith**'s!!). It is also important to note that the length of a player's career is measured as the time between that player's first and last games. For example, **Adam Greenberg** played briefly in 2005-06, then again for the Marlins in 2012. The length of his career is tracked as eight years.

The data was moved into Microsoft Excel and converted into sortable cells. I sorted the data and wrote several formulas to identify start and end dates of both stints with individual teams as well as track each player's career. The spreadsheet totals 657,560 cells of numbers (38,680 rows x 17 columns) and tells a fascinating story of a typical Major League Baseball career by era.

The data is not perfect. Discrepancies in data do exist as outlined above. The margin of error is estimated at approximately 1.29%.

TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Seven members of the 3,000 hit club were born outside the continental U.S.,

Two are active.

Albert Pujols

Dominican Republic

Miguel Cabrera

Venezuela

Last season for the other 5

2019 **Ichiro Suzuki**

Japan

2018 **Adrian Beltre**

Dominican Republic

2005 **Rafael Palmeiro**

Cuba

1985 **Rod Carew**

Panama

1972 **Roberto Clemente**

Puerto Rico

HOUSEKEEPING

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