

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

4.3.2022

Good morning baseball fans. Opening Day this coming week. Celebrate with some fun tidbits, Peter Gammons on how the Blue Jays built a contender, TV blackouts, messing with second base, trivia, obit for Joan Joyce, legendary softball pitcher (even if you just skim the piece make sure you check out her off the charts stats). Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

1972-2021—50 Years. 10 teams have won 1, and only 1 World Series. (So Yankees (7) and Red Sox (4) would be incorrect). Name the teams. Answer at bottom of the newsletter.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Entering 2021, **Salvador Perez**'s career high in homers was 27 in 129 games (twice), and **Vladimir Guerrero Jr.** had 24 career home runs in 183 games. Then, each went out and hit 48 homers in '21 to tie for the MLB lead, with Guerrero becoming the [third-youngest player to have at least a share of the MLB lead in homers for a season.](#)

From 2017-21, no one hit home runs more frequently than **Mike Trout** when he was healthy. The only trouble is, he's missed significant time due to injury in four of the last five seasons. In that span, the three-time AL MVP has averaged a home run every 11.7 at-bats, the best home run per at-bat ratio in baseball (**Joey Gallo** is second, at a homer every 12.5 at-bats).

In 2019, Trout's HR/AB ratio was one every 10.5 at-bats. That translated into 45 homers in 470 at-bats (136 games). If he had been healthy all season and gotten 600 at-bats, at that rate, he'd have hit 57 homers. But, he has not played 150 games since 2016.

Lou Gehrig and **Harmon Killebrew**—both hit 49 HRs in a season twice, neither ever hit 50 HRs.

Most Opening Day starts at DH in MLB history--**David Ortiz** (13 Opening Day starts as DH).

Bob Uecker, 88, is heading into his 52nd season calling Brewers games on radio

Luis Tiant

Best HOF vote 31%, dropped off ballot 2002 with 18%.

229 wins

2,416 strikeouts

66.1 WAR

114 ERA+

Catfish Hunter

Elected HOF 1987, his third ballot.

224 wins

2,012 strikeouts

40.9 WAR

104 ERA+

I guess I wasn't paying attention. New Oakland manager **Kevin Kotsay** had a better playing career than you might think — he played 17 years in the big leagues and had more than 1,700 hits.

I didn't have a clue that Angels outfielder **Justin Upton** is seventh on the all-time strikeout list. The Angels cut Upton yesterday. The Angels now have seven days to either trade the 34-year-old outfielder or place him on irrevocable outright waivers. Upton has one year and \$28 million remaining on his five-year, \$106 million contract, and Los Angeles will be on the hook for that money if no team trades for him or claims him off waivers.

(The Angels made a similar move last season when they designated Albert Pujols for assignment. Pujols, who was in the final season of a 10-year, \$240 million deal, went unclaimed and was released before signing with the Los Angeles Dodgers.)

Upton was 5-for-15 with three homers in Cactus League games, but he hit .211 with a .705 OPS last season and was on the injured list twice with back problems. Selected first overall by Arizona in the 2005 MLB Draft, Upton played for the D-backs, Braves, Padres and Tigers before the Angels acquired him from Detroit in a '17 trade. Upton signed a five-year deal with the Angels after the '17 season.

In 15 big league seasons, Upton has hit .262 with 324 homers, 1,000 RBIs and an .814 OPS, including 75 homers and a .764 OPS over 366 games with the Angels.

Back to the career strikeouts. At age 34, assuming he catches on with another team (28 HR power may be attractive when the Angels are on the hook for his salary), he probably doesn't have enough time left to break that incredible **Reggie Jackson** record of 2,597 Ks — he's still 650 away — but if he can stay healthy, he should move past **Andres Galarraga** this year, and he will then have **A-Rod** in his sights.

Career whiff leaders Top Ten

Reggie Jackson	2,597
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Jim Thome	2548
Adam Dunn	2379
Sammy Sosa	2306
A Rod	2287
Andres Galarraga	2003
Justin Upton	1948
Jose Conseco	1942
Willie Stargell	1936
Miguel Cabrera	1930.

For reference a few examples:

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Ken Griffey Jr.	1779	(25 th)
Mickey Mantle	1710	(37 th)
Barry Bonds	1539	(61 st)
Willie Mays	1526	(66 th)
Hank Aaron	1380	(116 th)
Albert Pujols	1349	(130 th)
Babe Ruth	1330	(139 th)

Speaking of things I did not know, **Jack Morris** pitched two seasons (1975-76) for BYU before turning pro.

Quite a 10 days of spring for **Trevor Story**. Agreement to join the Red Sox on a six-year, \$140 million contract, to the official arrival in Fort Myers last Wednesday, to the late-night phone call Thursday that his wife was in labor, to the early-morning flight Friday to get to Texas in time for the birth of their son, to the two nights he got to spend with his family, to his return to spring training Sunday, to his sort-of Red Sox debut in an intrasquad game Monday.

The [Savannah Bananas](#) are a unicorn in the world of baseball: a team — and a fan experience — built on having fun and enjoying the absurd.

Absurd and hilarious was on the menu Tuesday night, as former Red Sox pitcher **Bill Lee** [ambled down the stands and onto the field, toting a beer](#), for a bit of pitching. Yes, Lee, a 75-year-old Hall of Famer, pitched in a game. Struck out a guy, too.

They made the post season in 2021 but interestingly the Red Sox made the second most errors in baseball with 108—second to the Marlins 122.

It's been a little less than 12 years since [Zack Greinke](#) last took the mound for the Royals. But on April 7, he will pick up back where he started: As Kansas City's Opening Day starter. At 38 years, 168 days old on Opening Day, Greinke will be the oldest Opening Day starting pitcher in Royals history, surpassing 36-year-old **Tim Lincecum** in 1998.

Interesting pre-season game between the Cards and the Nationals this week. Cards collected 26 hits and routed the Nationals, [29-8](#). St. Louis put up four runs in both the first and second innings.

But it was the Cards' 15-run eighth inning that really overshadowed any other story line.

The record for [most runs in one inning](#) in a regular-season game in the Modern Era (since 1900) is 17, a record held by the 1953 Red Sox (seventh inning). Spring Training stats don't carry nearly the same weight, but it shows just how impressive the Cards' big inning was.

St. Louis sent 19 batters to the plate in the eighth inning, where the Cards racked up 10 hits and four free bases (two walks and two hit-by-pitches), and the Nationals didn't record an out until the eighth batter.

The 2007 Rangers hold the record for the [most runs scored in a regular-season game](#) in the Modern Era, after they beat the Orioles 30-3 on Aug. 22. Even with the Cardinals' 29 runs coming in Spring Training, that box score is nonetheless awe-inspiring.

Amazingly the combined 37 runs scored on Wednesday matched the 37 runs scored on two weeks ago between the Rangers (25) and Guardians (12).

INTERESTING ITEMS FROM PRESEASON PREVIEWS

Jayson Stark in The Athletic and Joe Posnanski

Jose Altuve is not quite the offensive machine he was from 2014 through 2018, when he hit .331 and won three batting titles and twice led the league in stolen bases.

2016 Cubs---piecemealed a pitching staff through free agency (**Jon Lester, John Lackey and Jason Hammel**, among others) and minor trades that turn out shockingly well (**Jake Arrieta and Kyle Hendricks**). The Cubs did not develop a single starting pitcher on their World Series championship team.

Stephen Strasburg had a neck injury and was listed as day-to-day. He has pitched 26 innings since the World Series victory in 2019, and the Nationals will pay him \$175 million for the next five years,

Juan Soto has somehow, in a completely different time, recaptures the hitting genius of **Ted Williams**. In the age of strikeouts, he walks more than he whiffs (and last year walked A LOT more than he whiffed). In the age of low batting averages, he hit .351 in the COVID year and last

season, after the All-Star break ... well, let's talk about what he did in 72 games after the All-Star Break last year.

.348/.525/.639, 11 doubles, 1 triple, 18 homers, 87 walks, 41 strikeouts.

Joe Maddon is 68 years old now ... how does that compare with older managers of the past, like **Sparky Anderson and Earl Weaver and Tommy Lasorda**?

Answer: He's quite a bit older than those guys. It didn't seem that way when I was growing up. Those guys seemed older than they were, especially Sparky. It was probably the white hair.

But the reality is that, for the most part, those managers were all much younger than Maddon is now. Weaver was 51 when he retired the first time. Sparky seemed to manage forever, but he was only 61 when he finally stopped managing the Tigers. **Billy Martin** was in his 40s and 50s when the Yankees kept hiring and firing him. Even Lasorda, who seemed to be manager of the Dodgers for two centuries, was Maddon's age when he retired.

This is not to say that Maddon is too old. He still seems quite spry, and anyway he's not even the oldest manager in the division — **Dusty Baker** is almost 73.

The Mariners were outscored by more than 50 runs in 2021 ... and they still won 90 games. A big contributor-- 33-19 in one-run games, 14-7 in extra-inning games.

Speaking of the Mariners, did you know that **Scott Servais** (6 seasons) is the third-longest-tenured manager in the American League — behind only **Terry Francona and Kevin Cash**?

BTW **Craig Counsell** has been the Brewers' manager since 2015, making him the longest-tenured manager in the National League.

Oakland A's:

2007-2011: Rebuild, five seasons, no winning records, acquire prospects, develop talent.

2012-2014: Perform, average 93 wins per year, make the playoffs each year, lose every playoff series.

2015-2017: Rebuild, three dreadful years, average 91 losses per year, acquire prospects, develop talent.

2018-2021: Perform, make the playoffs three straight years, lose the wild-card game twice and lose the Division Series in the COVID year.

2022 And so it Cycles.

The Brewers did something in 2021 that might soon be standard practice around baseball — they almost always worked their pitchers on at least five days' rest. **Corbin Burnes** and **Brandon Woodruff** finished first and fifth in the Cy Young voting, and each of them made only two starts on four days' rest all season. **Freddy Peralta**, who had made the move from hard-throwing reliever to starter, was only slightly less effective, and he made just four starts on four days' rest.

They did some of this with a six-man rotation, some of it by taking full advantage of the off-days, and some of it by simply holding their pitcher back and using a fill-in. On the surface, the idea of all this is to keep pitchers healthy — and it's true that Burnes and Woodruff did not miss any time with arm injuries — but I think if you dig a little deeper, you will find there's a deeper reason. In today's game, you want to send a fresher and more effective pitcher to the mound every single time.

That seems more important in 2022 than squeezing an extra two or three starts out of a pitcher.

Over the last decade, only the Los Angeles Dodgers have drawn more fans than the St. Louis Cardinals, at which point you really do have to show this part:

Metropolitan populations, according to the 2020 census:

Los Angeles: 13,200,998

St. Louis: 2,920,253

The Cardinals never really lose; the team has had one losing record this century and has not lost 90 games in more than 30 years.

And more Cardinals

Here's are the players with the highest National League bWAR over the last 10 years:

1. **Paul Goldschmidt**, 50.3 (won his fourth Gold Glove, hit 30-plus homers for the sixth time, stole 12 bases without getting caught)
2. **Nolan Arenado**, 44.3 (34 home runs)
3. **Joey Votto**, 42.8
4. **Freddie Freeman**, 41.7
5. **Bryce Harper**, 40.1

Cubs—My how things have changed. Think back to how exciting that team was in 2015, when **Jake Arrieta** was the best pitcher on earth and **Anthony Rizzo**, **Kris Bryant**, **Kyle Schwarber** and **Javy Baez** (and, let's be honest, **Addison Russell**) were all 25 or younger and potential MVPs, and Theo was in the box, and Joe Maddon was in the dugout. It just felt like anything was

possible for that team. They went to the NLCS much sooner than expected and became the favorites to win the 2016 World Series.

And then they WON the 2016 World Series in the most dramatic way. And now all those players are gone.

Cincinnati has for baseball. From 2001 to 2009, they had a losing record every season. Enter Walt Jocketty and **Dusty Baker**, and from 2010 through 2013, the Reds won 90-plus games three times, made the postseason three times, and lost their first-round playoff series three times.

And then they fired Dusty Baker.

The Reds immediately dropped below .500 and then lost 94-plus games for four straight years. Attendance cratered. Interest dissipated. Then the Bengals got Joe Burrow, and the city became theirs.

Great **Joey Votto** story. Abigail is a 6-year-old fan who adores Votto as we all do. On June 19, her family traveled from Los Angeles to San Diego just so they could watch Votto play.

And in the first inning — the first stinking inning — Votto loudly disagreed with a checked-swing call from third base ump Chris Guccione and got himself tossed.

Poor Abigail. I actually think about this sort of thing a lot, think about people who come to the ballpark once a year to see their favorite player only to watch them get intentionally walked with the game on the line or pulled from a game early or whatever. It's a problem. In basketball, in football, in hockey, you're pretty much guaranteed to see your favorite player do SOMETHING. In baseball, you might come to 10 games and never see your favorite player do anything.

Anyway, Abigail's mother tweeted a photo of her daughter crying and wrote: "When it's your first MLB game and your favorite player of all time gets thrown out of the game in the first inning." Then there were some crying emojis.

Of course, this is Joey Votto's story so you know it ends happily. He sent Abigail a signed baseball which read: "I am sorry I didn't play the entire game." Which is just awesome. And

later he arranged for Abigail to come back and he went to talk to her because, yeah, he's Joey Votto and that's just what he does.

Reds manager **David Bell** gets thrown out of a lot of games. He was ejected five more times in '21, this after leading the league in ejections in 2019 and the COVID year. I didn't appreciate this, but that's a family trait — his father, Buddy, led each league in ejections as a manager. It's so weird because the Bells, when you meet them away from the field, are very nice people.

I think about those Pittsburgh Pirates fans who were born on Oct. 15, 1992. If that's you, hey, you're turning 30 years old this year. Congratulations!

In your lifetime, the Pittsburgh Pirates have never, ever been any good.

Oh, yeah, there was the brief three-year window in the mid-2010s, we'll get back to that, but generally speaking, no, they've been terrible. Hopeless, even.

And you were born on the day it all started.

If you're a Pirates fan, I don't need to tell you the significance of Oct. 15, 1992 — you already know that the Pirates led 2-0 going into the ninth inning of NLCS Game 7 against Atlanta. You already know that **Doug Drabek**, the former Cy Young Award winner, was dealing. You already know that after Atlanta's **Terry Pendleton** doubled, **David Justice** grounded to second and **Jose Lind** booted the ball, putting runners on first and third. You already know that after **Sid Bream** walked to load the bases, **Stan Belinda** came in to pitch and **Ron Gant** hit a long sac fly to score one run and make it 2-1. You already know that **Damon Berryhill** walked to load the bases again.

You already know that Brian Hunter popped out in the infield to make it two outs.

And up came **Francisco Cabrera** ...

... I can't do this to you, Pirates fans. You know what happened.

And it has been a disaster ever since. For the next 20 years — TWENTY YEARS — the Pirates had losing records. And then, after the brief **Andrew McCutchen** reprieve, they have gone 141-238 the last three years, and this season they seem to be planning on spending roughly **Mike Trout**'s salary for their entire Opening Day roster. It's not the best.

1. from 2013 through 2015, the Pirates were a wild-card team three straight seasons. They cashed in on three high draft picks — getting Andrew McCutchen (11th pick), **Neil Walker** (11th pick) and **Gerrit Cole** (No. 1 overall pick). Obviously, McCutchen was the big one, as he developed into, probably, the best player in the National League over that stretch. But Walker was very good, and Cole in 2014 finished fourth in the Cy Young voting. And they also hit the jackpot when they signed **Starling Marte** out of the Dominican Republic for \$85,000.

2. They were shrewd about picking up some useful veterans like **Francisco Liriano**, **Mark Melancon**, **Russell Martin** and **A.J. Burnett**.

3. They won more than their share of the close games. This was particularly true in 2015, when they went 36-17 in one-run games. But every year, they outperformed their Pythagorean expected record, which is calculated by runs scored and allowed.

Only to crater again. 30 years of ugly.

BALANCED SCHEDULE 2023

Excerpted from a piece by Jayson Stark in The Athletic

Yes, the (more) balanced schedule is coming. Not this year. Not until 2023. But it's on the way. And it will mean that starting next year, all 30 teams will play every one of the other 29 teams every season. So it's a major, sport-changing development.

Yet very few people have paid much attention to it, possibly because 50 free agents were signing every day for a couple of weeks there. But I'm here to reveal one group that definitely has contemplated the meaning of life after the unbalanced schedule. By which I mean ...

The AL East!

And I'm especially talking about the portion of the AL East known as Toronto and Tampa Bay. You can probably deduce why.

For some reason, they are not going to miss playing nearly 50 percent of their games against the other teams in their division.

For some reason, they are not going to miss playing nearly 25 percent of their games just against the [Yankees](#) and [Red Sox](#).

They also do not seem saddened that instead of making three trips apiece to the Bronx and Fenway every season, they will now be asked to make only two.

For two decades now, these teams have been beating on each other 19 freaking times apiece, season after season. Starting next year, that number will shrink to 14 times. Which means 20 fewer division games a year. Here's how the 2023 schedule will look:

56 Games in Division — 14 vs. each division rival

60 Games vs. Rest of League — 6 vs. each remaining team in league

46 Games of Interleague Play — 3 games apiece vs. 14 teams in other league; 4 games vs. "natural" rival

For the record, baseball didn't decide to blow up the schedule for the specific purpose of giving the Rays and Blue Jays (or, one of these years, the Orioles) a reason to celebrate. According to sources familiar with the labor talks, the balanced schedule came about for two important reasons:

MORE EXPOSURE FOR THE STARS: As baseball's leaders assessed their landscape, they saw A) a sport bursting with transcendent young stars and B) a heavily regionalized audience of fans who mostly pay attention to the team they root for. So how do you make sure people in Kansas City and Baltimore get a close-up view of [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#)? How about you let him play against their team *every year*. And for anybody in Milwaukee or Cincinnati asking, "What's the deal with that [Shohei Ohtani](#) guy?" here's an idea: How about we let him face their teams every year, too. Makes sense on every level. But also ...

MORE TEAMS MAKE THE PLAYOFFS NOW: **The** unbalanced schedule came about two decades ago, at a time when there was only one wild-card team in each league. Now we're up to three wild cards per league. So when MLB negotiators presented this change early in the labor talks, they said one of the biggest rationales was that, with this many teams competing for those extra playoff spots, the schedule shouldn't be this lopsided. That also makes sense.

Here is how the more balanced schedule could have an outsized impact on the Rays, the Jays and the AL East:

THE 90-WIN CLUB: Over the past decade, since baseball went to two wild cards per league, there have been six times that a team won 90-plus games but still didn't win enough to make the playoffs. Here's how that breaks down:

Rays and Jays — 3 times
All 27 other teams — 3 times

BLUE JAYS VS. THE BEHEMOTHS: Let's look at how life in the AL East has directly impacted the Blue Jays over the past 10 years:

Blue Jays vs. AL East — 40 games *under* .500
Blue Jays vs. everyone else — 16 games *over* .500

RAYS VS. THE BEHEMOTHS: It won't come as a surprise to the rest of the AL East that the Rays have a winning record within the division over the past decade — especially over the past two years (during which they've gone an incredible 78-38 against the East). But when we break down their record just against the Yankees and Red Sox, it paints a different picture over those 10 seasons:

Rays vs. Yankees/Red Sox — 2 games *under* .500
Rays vs. everyone else in MLB — 119 games *over* .500

Here's how gigantic the challenge can be of playing 76 games a year just against the AL East.
Correct answer: Ginormously gigantic.

To do that, let's compare the schedules of the 2021 Blue Jays and [Mariners](#) — the two AL teams that won at least 90 games but still missed the playoffs. This sums it up nicely.

Games vs. teams that won 90-plus games

Blue Jays 75. Mariners 59.

Got it? Cool. But one more thing. The Blue Jays played six *more* games against that [Braves](#) team that won the World Series. Add it all up, and that works out this way: The Blue Jays played 52 percent of their games against those teams that won 90-plus AND the Braves, and *still* won more games than the team that won the World Series, and *still* missed the playoffs.

The Rays, meanwhile, won 100 games last year — in a season in which games against teams that won 90 times or more *made up 48 percent of their schedule*. So why would they be interested in playing a schedule that bears a closer resemblance to everyone else's schedule? That about covers it.

HE'S BACK

[Albert Pujols](#) will be [suiting up in a Cardinals uniform](#) again this season, for the first time since the 2011 World Series.

That means his milestone chases will come in the colors he wore to start his career and when he won two World Series, and that he gets to reunite with **Adam Wainwright** and **Yadier Molina**.

Here are 11 things to know about Pujols' return to St. Louis for what he said will be the final season of his legendary career.

- When Pujols plays his first regular-season game with the Cardinals, it will have been 10 seasons since he left after winning the 2011 World Series with the club. That will be the most seasons between a World Series win and a player's next game with a franchise, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The previous longest such span was nine seasons, for **Tony Phillips** with Oakland -- a 1989 World Series win followed by his next game with the club in '99.
- Pujols is 21 home runs away from joining the 700 club. He'd be the fourth member, along with **Barry Bonds** (762), **Hank Aaron** (755) and **Babe Ruth** (714).

He'd also pass **Alex Rodriguez** (696) and move into fourth place on the all-time leaderboard with 18 more homers.

Another home run milestone on Pujols' radar? That would be the one at the end of the game. He's one walk-off homer shy of tying **Jim Thome** for most all-time, at 13. Pujols' last walk-off homer was Aug. 3, 2016, with the Angels, and his last in a Cardinals uniform came on June 5, 2011.

- Pujols could soon enter the top 10 on the all-time hits list. He ranks 11th in MLB history with 3,301, and he's about to pass some big names. Pujols is just 12 hits behind **Eddie Collins** (10th, 3,313 hits) and 18 behind **Paul Molitor** (ninth, 3,319).
- Pujols, with 2,073 hits as a Cardinal, is 37 away from tying **Rogers Hornsby** (2,110) for fourth on the Cardinals' all-time list. (Molina is just ahead of Hornsby with 2,112).

Pujols is also 30 home runs away from tying **Stan Musial** atop the Cardinals' franchise leaderboard. Pujols has 445 home runs with St. Louis; Musial hit 475.

It's mind-boggling to think about how far back Pujols' time with the Cardinals stretches. He was a 13th-round Draft pick by the team in 1999, back when the D-backs and Rays were in their

second seasons of existence, the Astros were NL Central champions and **Mark McGwire** was months removed from breaking **Roger Maris'** single-season home run record.

Speaking of stretches, the trio of Pujols, Wainwright and Molina will have played on the Cardinals in 2005, when Wainwright debuted to join the other two, and in 2022. Those 18 seasons will be the second-largest span between a trio's first season playing for a team and their last season playing for the same team in the last 40 seasons according to Elias. The only trio with a longer span: **Derek Jeter, Andy Pettitte and Mariano Rivera** with the Yankees, a 19-season span from 1995-2013, according to Elias. The trio need not have played together for all years in the span -- this just quantifies their first and last year together on said team.

- Pujols debuted on April 2, 2001, batting in front of **Mike Matheny**, who is now entering his 10th season as a Major League manager.
- Pujols' new teammate and 2021 NL Rookie of the Year Award finalist **Dylan Carlson** was less than 1 year old when Pujols was drafted, and he had just turned 3 when Pujols took 2001 NL Rookie of the Year honors. **Jordan Walker**, [the Cardinals' No. 1 prospect](#), was born on May 22, 2002, the day Pujols went 2-for-4 for the Cardinals in his 206th career MLB game.
- How long has Pujols been gone? Since Game 7 of the 2011 World Series, 32 players have appeared in a regular-season game at first base for the Cardinals.
- In 11 seasons from 2001-11, Pujols hit 445 home runs for the Cardinals. In the 10 seasons since then, the top four Cardinals home run hitters (**Matt Carpenter**, Yadier Molina, **Paul DeJong** and **Matt Holliday**) have combined to barely top that number, with 460 total homers.

JOSE CRUZ VS. JIM RICE. REALLY?

Joe Posnanski

For a long time, "Houston Astros" meant **Jose Cruz**. Remember that awesome batting stance he had? The high leg kick? The way he held the bat as far from his head as possible? We don't talk enough about Jose Cruz. More to the point, we don't talk enough about guys LIKE Jose Cruz. I mean, think about how many times in your life **Jim Rice** has come up in conversation. Probably quite a bit if you're close to my age. Now think about how many times Jose Cruz has come up in conversation. Probably never.

Was Jim Rice that much better a player than Jose Cruz?

Or for that matter, was Jim Rice ANY better a player than Jose Cruz?

Jim Rice: .298/.352/.502, 2,452 hits, 373 doubles, 79 triples, 382 homers, 58 steals.

Jose Cruz: .284/.354/.420, 2,251 hits, 391 doubles, 94 triples, 165 homers, 317 steals.

So, Rice has the higher batting average and more than twice as many home runs.

Cruz has a slightly higher OBP, more doubles and triples and almost six times as many steals.

Rice played half his games at Fenway Park, which was a ludicrous hitters' park then (much less so now).

Cruz played about half his games in the Houston Astrodome, which was a hitters' dungeon.

Cruz was a better outfielder and hit into fewer than half as many double plays.

I don't know who was better. Baseball-Reference WAR has Cruz well ahead (54.4 WAR to 47.7 WAR). FanGraphs has them with identical WAR (50.8). Rice is certainly much more famous. He won an MVP award. He played in four times as many All-Star games. He played in Boston. And it is true that fame is a big part of the Hall of Fame. But that doesn't mean that we should overlook how good Jose Cruz was.

Justin Verlander has pitched one big-league game in two years and he's 39 years old. So what can you really expect here? Before answering that, you should know that Verlander has proven the doubters wrong time and again over his career, and he insists that now he's feeling good, really good, so good that he insists he has a chance to win 300 games. Really.

He currently has 226 wins, which isn't very close to 300. It seems to me that his best path to 300 would be:

1. To win 20 games in each of the next four years (well, if he followed this path he'd have to win only 14 games in his age-42 season .. win-win!).
2. To win 15 games in each of the next five seasons (again he'd have to win only 14 in the last of those seasons).

3. To win 10 games a year until he's 45 (and then he'd have to win only four games in his age-46 season).

Are any of these possible?

ROCKY MOUNTAIN MOVES

From mlb.com

I don't follow the Rockies much, but did read a bunch of criticisms about letting **Nolan Arenado** walk and then spending on **Kris Bryant**. Here is another way to view it...

The Rockies [signing Kris Bryant](#) to a seven-year, \$182 million deal this month raised some eyebrows around the league. If Colorado was willing to spend for Bryant, why did the club find it necessary to trade [Nolan Arenado](#) a year ago, sending \$50 million along with the third baseman in a trade with the Cardinals?

On the surface, this was a fair question. Arenado had six years and \$199 million remaining on his deal, terms not altogether different from what Bryant got from the Rockies.

But a closer look at the financials could help explain Colorado's actions. Arenado was set to earn \$35 million per year from 2021-24, then \$32 million in 2025 and \$27 million in 2026. Bryant will earn \$17 million this season, \$27 million per year in 2023-24, then \$26 million in each year from 2025-28.

Rather than paying Arenado \$35 million this season, the Rockies will pay Bryant, shortstop [José Iglesias](#), reliever [Alex Colomé](#) and starter [Chad Kuhl](#) a combined \$36 million, allowing them to strengthen multiple spots for roughly the same price.

There's another thing to consider: while the Rockies did send \$50 million to the Cardinals in the Arenado deal, Colorado was going to be on the hook for the third baseman's \$35 million salary if he wasn't traded. By sending that money along with another \$15 million to St. Louis, the Rockies were able to net left-hander [Austin Gomber](#) and four prospects including infielder [Elehuris Montero](#) (Colorado's No. 4 prospect) in the deal.

Compared to the alternative -- which was Arenado opting out of his deal at the end of 2021 -- it came down to paying him \$35 million and receiving a compensatory Draft pick if he left, or paying \$50 million to receive a nice package of prospects.

The Rockies also recently [signed Ryan McMahon](#) to a six-year, \$70 million extension, locking a key piece into place through 2027, then acquired [Randal Grichuk](#) via trade, continuing their

focus on adding experienced offensive players to supplement their young roster. With prospects including [Zac Veen](#), [Drew Romo](#) and [Benny Montgomery](#) coming down the road -- not to mention a rotation anchored by [Germán Márquez](#), [Kyle Freeland](#) and [Antonio Senzatela](#) -- the Rockies believe they're building a sustainable contender.

IVY LEAGUER'S BIG DAY—4 HRS, 2 SLAMS, RBI RECORD

Jake Gehri entered Sunday's game between Yale and Princeton hitting .184 on the season. When the Yale catcher left the field following the contest, that batting average was 57 points higher, and he was walking away with the all-time Ivy League record for RBIs in a single game.

Gehri had the game of his life in Yale's [13-6 victory](#) at Clarke Field in Princeton, New Jersey, going 4-for-5 with four home runs and 11 RBIs for the Bulldogs. The senior launched a two-run shot in the second inning, a grand slam in the third, a solo homer in the sixth and another grand slam in the seventh.

Going into this season, Gehri had hit 10 homers in his collegiate career between 2019 and '20 (the '21 Ivy League season was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic). He increased that career total by 40 percent in a single day.

After that historic performance, we should probably start calling him Jake Gehri(g) from now on.

The Cardinals [are bringing back Albert Pujols](#) on a one-year, \$2.5 million deal.

Pujols, 42, ended last season with the Dodgers after the Angels cut him midseason. He was still a decent hitter (.254 average with a .759 OPS with L.A.) but a shell of his former self, which is true of anyone at 42.

It's a very fun thought. A franchise legend who left on bad terms gets to come back and say goodbye the right way. He's just 21 homers shy of 700. He would be a bench bat who plays a couple of times a week.

I just can't get over giving Pujols a roster spot over a younger player with more potential. Yes, as Woo points out, sending a young talent down to the minors for consistent at-bats is a legitimate argument, but still. Over the last six years, Pujols has:

- A negative WAR (-0.4)
- A 93 OPS+ (by definition, 100 is the league average)
- Hit above .250 once

Woo also points out what sticks in my mind: Imagine if Pujols comes back, struggles, and the team has to release the franchise legend it feted a few months earlier.

WHY BASEBALL IS MOVING SECOND BASE AND WHAT THIS EXPERIMENT COULD MEAN FOR THE GAME

Jayson Stark, *The Athletic*

“I’m not sure if you’ve heard,” a minor-league instructor said to me the other day, “but they’re moving second base.”

Wait. What? They’re moving second base? Where would it be moving, exactly? Into a VIP suite? Into a cool little beach house?

No, no, no. It isn’t *that* big a move, it turns out. But sources tell *The Athletic* that in the second half of this season, baseball will be moving second base inward — so it will be closer to first base and third base, by about 13.5 inches.

Not in the big leagues, at least not yet. But this *will* happen in most ballparks at every level of the minor leagues, as part of sweeping minor-league rule-change experiments that will include pitch clocks, [shift limits](#) and robot umpers — all of which could be coming to a big-league ballpark near you one of these years. Or not.

But how did the location of second base get mixed up in all this? Well, there isn’t one quick explanation. It isn’t to mess with [Jose Altuve](#) or [Ozzie Albies](#). It’s not some mysterious curse that traces back to the ghost of Rogers Hornsby or something. So let’s lay it out this way:

The reason — traces back more than a century to the weirdness of where second base was originally located on the diamond. Spoiler alert: There has *never* been a distance of 90 feet between first base and second base, or between second and third, for that matter. That’s part of this. I’ll explain. But first ...

The goal — is to create a shorter distance between the bases. And what’s the point of that? To encourage more base stealing and maybe even more thrilling first-to-third base-running action. What else? I can help you with how that would work, too. But before I do ...

You should know that there *will* be some math here. It’s unavoidable, but I promise to try to keep it as simple as possible. Now what do you say we begin with ...

Why second base has always been lost

Ever hired a contractor who made a seemingly logical assumption about the dimensions of your yard or living room, and then the work turned out to be slightly off center? That's kind of what happened to second base.

Did you know that for 135 years, this bag has *always* been in the wrong darned spot on the field?

If you'd like to delve far deeper into this glitch, I refer you to [this fascinating analysis](#) by baseball researcher Tom Shieber from 2010. But here's the upshot:

Since 1887, second base has never been positioned quite the same way as the other bases. How can that be, you ask? I asked the same question. Just take a look at this diagram from the [official rulebook of baseball](#). Hopefully, you'll see that one of these base things is not like the others.

See where first base and third base are located? They're nestled into their natural corners on each side of the diamond. But now check out second base. It looks lovely, positioned aesthetically in the middle of the infield. Just one problem.

It's *not* nestled into its own natural corner of the diamond.

Instead, it's too deep (geometrically speaking), positioned so that the imaginary corner runs right through the middle of the bag.

Why? How even? I knew you'd ask.

The short explanation is that first base and third base were repositioned to help umpires make fair/foul calls. How? Because once they were moved to their current locales, any ball that hit the bag was obviously fair. Very helpful. Joe West's thank you note is in the mail.

But that's not an issue with second base, since no fair/foul lines run through the middle of the field. So when first base and third base were moved in the late 19th century, second base stayed put.

That honestly doesn't matter for pretty much any reason, except this: It has created an opportunity for baseball. And now this sport is about to take advantage of it. But why? That's the important part. So here's ...

Why second base is on the move

Pay attention now. This is what's about to happen in the second half of the season, across the minor leagues: Second base will move inward, so that the outer edges of the bag will (finally) line up with the imaginary corner of the diamond mentioned earlier.

And why, exactly? What's the point? There is always a point. Everyone out there who thinks the rules of baseball were once handed down to Moses — or possibly Abner Doubleday — on a stone tablet should remember that.

The point is that the effective distance between first and second base will shrink by more than a foot. Remember, it was never really 90 feet in the first place. So it will work like this:

"Old" distance — 88 feet, 1.5 inches

"New" distance* — 87 feet

That asterisk involves another minor-league rule experiment you should keep in mind. At every full-season level of the minors, the size of the bases will increase from 15 inches square to 18 inches square at the start of the season. Now these two changes will work together. Here is how:

Just those larger bases alone were always going to shorten the distance between first and second base. Now the combination of larger bases *plus* moving second base will combine to reduce that distance even more — to that total of 13.5 inches.

And once it does ...

Let the track meet begin

So is baseball making all the right moves? That would be the pivotal question. We can't answer it yet. But that's exactly the reason to experiment with this in the minor leagues. So everyone can find out.

The funny thing is, baseball also tried this, on a limited basis, *last* season. Did you even know that? Did anyone? I didn't. I've read the small print on every announced minor-league rule change for the past two years. I've talked to numerous baseball officials about the thinking behind those changes. And ...

Nobody ever mentioned this. Not once.

But it turns out baseball moved second base in the second half of last season in what used to be the Pacific Coast League (known last year as "Triple-A West"). That league also tried out the larger, 18-inch bases in 2021, so it made sense.

And the result was ...

Well, almost nothing of significance.

The success rate on stolen bases increased from 74.8 percent to 77.0 percent. But the rate of base-stealing attempts barely changed at all. There's a logical reason for that.

Because this change was done quietly, with zero fanfare, teams never dug into the possibilities. So virtually none of the base-running incentives that were supposed to be created wound up happening.

But this year, that figures to be different. All 30 organizations were alerted to this change — and to its potential significance — by [Major League Baseball](#) this month. So now this gets interesting.

What's so interesting about it, you ask? Let's sum it up this way: In the big leagues in recent years, base-stealing has transformed itself from an art to a math equation. So instead of signing some Vince Coleman type and letting him run wild, teams mostly just calculate the percentages.

They know the speed of the runner on first base. They know all about how easy it is to run on the pitcher on the mound. They know exactly what the average pop time is of the catcher behind the plate. If all that tells them that the runner on first has a great mathematical chance of stealing second, off he goes.

But now think about how it changes that math if second base is more than a foot closer to first base. Seems logical that you'll see more base stealing, right? And hopefully more first-to-third derring-do on balls that drop in the outfield, wouldn't you think?

We can't be certain of that — yet. But guess what? In the second half of this season, we're about to find out.

So ... does everyone understand this now? It's a subtle, imperceptible change — one you might not even have noticed if I hadn't just broken this news. But now you know why baseball is looking at that second-base bag, innocently hanging out in the middle of the infield just the way it always has, and saying:

It's your move!

JOAN JOYCE, DOMINANT IN WOMEN'S SOFTBALL, DEAD AT 81

Her pitching feats — including striking out **Ted Williams** — were legend. And with her prowess extending to basketball, volleyball and golf, many saw all-around athletic greatness.

On a warm August night in 1961, Ted Williams, the “Splendid Splinter” who had finished his Hall of Fame baseball career the year before as the last hitter to bat .400 in a single season, strode to the plate before an overflow crowd at Municipal Stadium in Waterbury, Conn., to face a young softball pitching phenom by the name of Joan Joyce.

The occasion was a charity fund-raising exhibition. Williams was in his Boston Red Sox uniform, No. 9. Joyce stood on the mound 40 feet away (regulation in women’s softball, as opposed to 60 feet 6 inches in major-league baseball), clad in the red-and-white jersey and shorts she wore as the premier pitcher for the [Raybestos Brakettes](#), one of the top teams in the women’s game, with its home field 30 miles to the south in suburban Stratford, Conn.

It was one of several such exhibitions in which Williams and Joyce faced off in the early 1960s, but the one in Waterbury — Joyce’s hometown, where the fans were chanting “Joanie, Joanie Joanie!” — proved to be the most memorable. It would become an oft-told tale in the lore that enveloped Joyce over her long career as, many would say, the most dominant player in the history of women’s fast-pitch softball and — given her prowess in basketball, volleyball and golf as well — as one of the greatest female athletes of her generation.

With a slingshot-like underhanded delivery, Joyce, a couple of weeks shy of her 21st birthday, took her full arsenal of blazing pitches to the mound that night: curveballs, sliders, fastballs and her trademark “drop ball,” which sunk over the plate. And while she warmed up, Williams, who was approaching 43 but coming off a sterling, age-defying final season in Boston (hitting .316 and swatting 29 home runs), studied the movement of her ball.

To no avail, as it turned out.

For 10 to 15 minutes, Williams, a left-handed hitter, swung at and missed almost everything Joyce, a right-hander, threw at him (save for a couple of foul tips).

“Finally,” Joyce later recalled, “he threw the bat down and said, ‘I can’t hit her’” and walked away.

Mighty Williams had struck out.

Years later, Joyce would tell her biographer, Tony Renzoni, how she once met a man who had fished with Williams off the Florida Keys. The man told her that he had asked Williams to name the toughest pitcher he had ever faced. “And he said,” she recalled, “‘You won’t believe this, but it was a teenage girl.’”

Her many fans would not have been so surprised. Joyce, who died on Saturday in Boca Raton, Fla., at 81, was, at the time, in the midst of a Hall of Fame career of her own. And when that

career ended, after almost two decades of softball at a national and international level, she had amassed a staggering set of accomplishments.

Over 19 seasons she compiled a herculean 753-42 win-loss record, tossing 150 no-hitters and 50 perfect games and striking out more than 10,000 batters while accruing an astonishingly low lifetime earned-run average of .090.

In one season she won 42 games. She recorded strings of consecutive scoreless innings, including 123 in 1971 and 229 in 1975-76, and won eight Most Valuable Player awards in championship tournament play, mostly with the Brakettes, a perennial powerhouse that took its name from its company sponsor, a Stratford manufacturer of brake lining for automobiles.

She also struck out [Hank Aaron](#) in another exhibition, in 1978 in West Hartford, Conn. Aaron was 44, two years removed from his playing days, and Joyce was 37, but the face-off was [billed](#) as something of a heavyweight fight.

“She was something else,” Aaron was quoted as saying afterward. “That softball comes at you and rises up around your head by the time you swing at it.”

And, for good measure, Joyce, like Aaron, could hit: She had a career batting average of .327.

She went on to coach the women’s softball team at Florida Atlantic University, in Boca Raton, and was in her 28th season there at her death, which the university [announced](#) without giving a cause. At F.A.U., where she was the program’s founding coach, she built a towering record of 1,002-674-1 as she coached the team to 11 conference championships and 11 N.C.A.A. postseason tournaments. She was voted the conference coach of the year eight times.

But softball was not the only arena in which Joyce excelled. As a rangy 5-foot-9 forward (some sources say 5 foot 10), she took multiple all-American honors in basketball playing for Connecticut teams in the Women’s Basketball Association and the Amateur Athletic Union. She set a national A.A.U. tournament record scoring 67 points in one game and three times was voted an A.A.U. All-Star. She had a career scoring average of 30 points per game (and this was before the three-point shot was introduced).

She was also a standout volleyball player. After starting her own team, the Connecticut Clippers, she competed in the United States Volleyball Association’s national tournament from 1969 to 1974 and was selected for an All-East Regional team. Less than a month after taking up bowling, she won the Connecticut state title in the sport and, by her account, later turned down an offer to go professional.

And at 35, an age when many athletes are retiring, she tried her hand at golf. Within two years, she qualified for the Ladies Professional Golf Tour — while still pursuing her softball career. At age 42 she set an L.P.G.A. record for the fewest putts in a single round: 17 (a number matched in men’s professional golf only by Bob Brue, on the PGA Champions Tour).

Joyce, known for her powerful drives if not her accuracy, continued as a pro golfer for 19 years, until she was 55, remaining a contender though never recording a tournament win. At Florida Atlantic, she was also the women's head golf coach.

Inducted into as many as 19 Halls of Fame, Joyce was frequently compared to [Babe Didrikson Zaharias](#), who, with triumphs in track and field, swimming, baseball, basketball and golf in the 1940s and '50s, has often been cited as the greatest female athlete in American history. But to Jane Blalock, the L.P.G.A. star who persuaded Joyce to embrace golf, "Joan was even better."

"Joan was the greatest female athlete in sports history," Renzoni quoted Blalock as saying. "Actually, she's one of the greatest athletes of all time — male or female."

Joan Joyce was born in Waterbury on Aug. 18, 1940, and grew up there, the eldest child of Joseph and Jean Joyce. Her parents worked at rival brass factories (her father as a foreman) and purposely worked different shifts so that one parent would always be at home with their three children.

Her father, an accomplished amateur basketball and softball player, taught Joan both sports when she was a child, and her athleticism quickly became apparent. She was the star of her girl's basketball team at Crosby High School in Waterbury and, after playing in local organized softball games as a girl, she tried out for the Brakettes at 13 and won a spot on the roster.

Her feats with the team soon became legend. In 1961, in tournament play for the national championship, she pitched in three straight games in a 24-hour period, striking out 67 batters over 32 innings before losing to a team from Whittier, Calif., in the final game, a marathon decided in the bottom of the 19th inning at 3:30 in the morning. (Even with the loss, she was named the tournament's M.V.P.)

In 1974, the Brakettes became the first United States team to win the Women's Softball World Championship, first held in 1965 in Melbourne, Australia. Playing at Raybestos Memorial Field in Stratford, with the factory's familiar oily smell wafting across the floodlit field, Joyce threw a one-hitter (a bunted blooper) against a powerful Japanese team to take the title. She had made five appearances in the tournament, three of them no-hitters.

Joyce left the team in 1963 to attend Chapman College in Orange, Calif., graduating in 1966. While there, she played for one of the Brakettes' chief rivals, the Orange Lionettes, leading them to a national championship in 1965. After rejoining the Brakettes in 1967, she went on to pitch four consecutive no-hitters for them in 1968.

In 1976, she teamed up with the tennis star [Billie Jean King](#) and a sports entrepreneur, Dennis Murphy, to found the International Women's Professional Softball League. Joyce became the player-coach of the Connecticut Falcons, a team she owned with King and Blalock. The Falcons took the W.P.S.L. crown in four straight years before the league went out of business. In its last year, Joyce took the team on a six-game exhibition tour in China, winning all six and dazzling Chinese fans.

She also appeared on the television game show “To Tell the Truth” in the 1960s and competed with other elite athletes in a decathlon-like format on ABC’s “Superstars Competition” in the 1970s.

She is survived by a sister, Janis Joyce; and a brother, Joseph.

Spending most of her softball career as an amateur, Joyce was compelled to take various jobs to pay the bills — teaching, refereeing, serving part-time as a community college athletic director and running a travel agency. But she did not complain about the lack of remuneration.

“A lot of people feel I should be bitter about not being able to get the big-time money that a man with talents comparable to mine would receive,” she told The New York Times in 1975. “I don’t care about the money, I enjoy the game, and that’s the most important thing. I’d play this game even if it meant being broke the rest of my life.”

Never one for self-promotion, Joyce nonetheless put modesty aside in her own self-assessment.

“I would have hated to bat against me,” she said.

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Baseball and Blackouts

I'm going to break away from the baseball previews because I got an email from my good friend Brian, who recently moved to Nashville, and it fired me up.

Brian is, I would say, a more-than-casual baseball fan. He's not a Level 10, Ellen Adair, sort of fan. But I'd say in a typical year, back when he lived in Los Angeles, he'd go to a handful of Dodgers games, and he'd watch some on television.

He's a big enough baseball fan that when he and his family moved to Nashville, he got the MLB.tv package to keep up with the games.

He has not signed up yet for the package this year, and on Thursday he forwarded me a rather brash and presumptuous email from MLB about that. "We Miss You," the subject line began, which is kind of sweet. And then, like a hammer, came the next part in parentheses: "(And You're Missing Out)."

Well, that's ... bold. It sounds a bit like the kid in high school who's throwing the party nobody wants to go to. "Fine," the kid whines. "But you're missing out."

MLB doesn't want Brian to miss out. So, in an effort to get him back into the fold, they're offering \$10 off the annual \$139.99 subscription price — a 7.1% discount! — which is quite the deal when the offer is to "Stream out-of-market MLB games live or on demand on your favorite supported devices. PLUS, enjoy select 2022 Spring Training games, MLB Big Inning and select Pregame and Postgame coverage.."

I mean, that does sound great, and obviously Brian wanted to click the big red START NOW button.

But then he was reminded below of the five words (in very small letters) that made him decide to drop the package in the first place.

BLACKOUT AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS APPLY

As mentioned, Brian lives in Nashville. There's no team in Nashville. There's no team within 250 miles of Nashville. So he was shocked to find out that Braves games are blacked out on the baseball package. That's a problem. He is, as mentioned, a Dodgers fan, and the Dodgers-Braves games this year will be some of the most interesting and fun of the entire season. I mean, you have Freddie Freeman going to the Dodgers, you have Kenley Jansen going to Atlanta, you have the rivalry that heated up during the NLCS last year, he'd like to see those games.

Can't see them on the package.

But it was more than that. He also saw that Cincinnati Reds games are blacked out in Nashville. What? How? Cincinnati is even farther away than Atlanta.

And he insists that last year, he tried to watch a few different Cardinals games, and those too were blacked out. This doesn't actually sound right — Cardinals games are supposed to be blacked out in Memphis but not Nashville — but who even knows anymore.

The big point is ... Brian isn't getting the baseball package.

And this blackout thing is unquestionably crushing an entire generation of potential baseball fans in some of America's biggest cities ... the last thing that baseball needs right now.

So, in John Oliver style, I'm going to try (with some help from television friends) to talk about baseball's blackouts, where they exist, why they exist and what can be done about it. The answer to the last question will be depressingly negative, but we'll get there.

First off, if you live in a big city anywhere in America that does not have a team, you are subject to the baseball blackouts. For example, I live in Charlotte, the 14th-largest city in America now. When we first moved here, I was in high school, and back then Charlotte was

a professional sports wasteland. I'd say the biggest rooting interests in town back then were, in order:

1. North Carolina Tar Heels basketball
2. Probably N.C. State Wolfpack basketball (this was when Coach K was just starting)
3. Dale Earnhardt
4. Ric Flair
5. The American Dream Dusty Rhodes

Whatever baseball interest there was in town was pretty scattered — some Yankees fans, a few Orioles fans, Charlotte has always had a lot of transplants — but if there was a favored baseball team, it was the Atlanta Braves, just four hours away down I-85.

It goes without saying that Atlanta baseball is blacked out in Charlotte.

What doesn't go without saying is that the Baltimore Orioles are also blacked out in Charlotte. And so are the Washington Nationals. And, impossibly, so are the Cincinnati Reds. What is the deal with the Reds, anyway? They don't want to be seen anywhere? They want to keep Joey Votto that much of a secret? Cincinnati is an eight-plus hour drive away! I could get to Cleveland faster.

As you will see, though, the distance to Cincinnati is not at all the point.

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Joe

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Charlotte is an extreme blackout example, but not the most extreme. Here are the top 30 cities in America that don't have baseball (with their population rank). And listed with them are the blackout teams.

1. San Antonio: Astros and Rangers.
1. Austin: Astros and Rangers
1. Jacksonville: Tampa Bay Rays and undefined.*
2. Charlotte: Orioles and Nationals and Reds and Braves.
3. Columbus: Reds and Guardians and Pirates.
4. Indianapolis: Cubs and White Sox and Reds (those dang-blasted Reds!).
1. El Paso: Astros and Rangers
2. Nashville: Reds and Braves.
3. Oklahoma City: Astros and Cardinals and Royals and Rangers.
4. Las Vegas: Angels and Dodgers and Padres and Diamondbacks and Athletics and Giants.**
5. Portland: Mariners
6. Memphis: Reds and Braves and Cardinals
1. Louisville: Reds

**I don't know what "undefined" means when it comes to Jacksonville blackouts but I suspect it means that MLB will periodically just choose teams to black out there for no obvious reason.*

***How about SIX TEAMS being blacked out in Las Vegas? There's a winning plan for the future.*

Pure madness, right? And just cherry-picking a few other major American cities: The Guardians, Pirates, Mets and Yankees are blacked out in Buffalo; the Astros and Rangers are blacked out in New Orleans; the Angels, Athletics, Giants, Dodgers and Padres are blacked out in Honolulu (???); the Diamondbacks and Rockies are blacked out in Salt Lake City; and in Des Moines, get this, the Cubs, Cardinals, White Sox, Royals, Twins AND Brewers are all blacked out.

Hi, Des Moines baseball fans! Here's our middle finger.

Anyone can see this is a big, fat, annoying problem. How in the world can you expand baseball's reach by preventing people from seeing baseball? It's infuriating.

So, what we should obviously do is start screaming at MLB commissioner Rob Manfred.

Except — and believe me, I would never discourage you from screaming at the commissioner for any reason — in this case, it isn't his fault. And there's really not a whole lot he can do about it.

See, they called it the MLB blackout policy, but it isn't exactly that. Yes, there was a time, years ago, when blackouts were put into place to protect attendance, and many think that's still the reason — this is why it's so exasperating and maddening for fans in Honolulu or Las Vegas or Nashville to be cut off from watching teams that are nowhere near.

But attendance has absolutely nothing to do with the blackouts.

And MLB as a whole has little to do with it either. See, in baseball, unlike the NFL, teams negotiate their own television deals. That sounds kind of small — it's often called "local television revenue," which sounds Mayberry quaint. But these are huge-money deals. These are Brian Koppelman deals (Billions!). The Dodgers' deal alone is worth \$8 billion. The Yankees' deal is worth almost \$6 billion. The details from some of the deals are kept pretty hush-hush, but probably half the league has a 10-figure deal with a regional sports network.

And, these are LONG deals too. The Dodgers' deal was for 25 years. The Yankees deal was for 30 years. These will not be ending anytime soon. I will be 75 (hopefully) when the Yankees' deal ends.

So all of this is really complicated, but the basic two themes are not.

Theme 1: Regional sports networks spent alarming amounts of money to broadcast baseball games.

Theme 2: Regional sports networks need to get onto as many platforms — cable and otherwise — to recoup that money.

Take the Cincinnati Reds. In 2016, they signed a 15-year-deal with Fox Sports Ohio — now Bally Sports Ohio — for probably around \$600 million. It might be a bit more than that, might be a bit less, but I think we can all agree that's a huge chunk of change for the 36th-largest television market in the United States.

So, how does Bally Sports Ohio make money on this deal? Well, right, Cincinnati is just a tiny part of their plan. They need to be on cable in Columbus. In Indianapolis. In Nashville, In Louisville. In Charlotte. In Memphis. They need to have people buy the DirecTV regional sports packages in those places.

And they might not get any of that if the Reds are available to stream via MLB.tv.

Now, think about that for 30 teams, all those regional networks, every one of them scrambling around, trying to recoup the enormous (and, let's be honest, inevitably doomed) investment they made. People in the know tell me that the regional sports network model is crumbling, even now, and will only crumble more as more people move away from cable and DirecTV and go to streaming services.

I don't know enough about that to comment. But I do know this: The blackouts aren't going anywhere.

It's so bad for baseball and baseball fans. But, is anyone really surprised that the teams would chase the last dollar to the detriment of the sport and the fans? Is anyone really surprised that MLB would put Las Vegas and Des Moines in the territory of six different teams? Is anybody really surprised that an Orioles fan in Charlotte — assuming the Orioles' tanking has not forever turned them off — has no way of watching the team play? Is anyone really surprised that four different teams are fighting to get on Honolulu's cable TV package?

I'm sure you have your own horror story to share.

Is anyone really surprised? No. Nobody is surprised. This is baseball. If it weren't the best sport going, they would have killed it off a long time ago.

GAMMONS: THE BLUE JAYS HAVE BEEN BUILDING TO THIS MOMENT, AND THEY ARE READY TO CAPITALIZE

Peter Gammons in The Athletic

"To sustain a championship-caliber team that competes — passionately, relentlessly and professionally — and in the process makes a positive statement about its collective vision and core values." — Mark Shapiro, The Cleveland Indians Mission Statement, 2000.

The team now known as the [Cleveland Guardians](#) has still not achieved its first World Series title since 1948. They were up 3-1 on the Red Sox in the 2007 ALCS before crashing out, and then after Shapiro had moved on to become President and CEO of the [Toronto Blue Jays](#) in 2015, his former club went to the 10th inning of the seventh game of the 2016 World Series under the leadership of Chris Antonetti, Mike Chernoff and Terry Francona.

Although the 2016 Blue Jays were 89-73, many Jays fans saw it as the residue of the work of fellow Canadian Alex Anthopoulos. Anthopoulos took the Jays to the postseason in 2015, ending a drought that had persisted since their 1993 World Series title, and then left to work for Andrew Friedman in Los Angeles before moving on to Atlanta and winning the World Series himself.

As Cleveland was playing the [Cubs](#) in the World Series, Shapiro and general manager Ross Atkins recognized that even though they had a winning team in Toronto, they were flying into headwinds when it came to crafting that kind of championship-caliber team — and organization — they had sought to build in Cleveland. In this case, it was also a matter of restoring the kind of culture that once led to continued success in the Pat Gillick days, on top of the need to as reconstruct the organization and modernize both the Rogers Centre and the Florida player development facilities for the 21st century.

[Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#) was already in the organization, signed in July 2015 by Anthopoulos. Shapiro brought in Ben Cherington and Steve Sanders to run development and scouting, and retained Tony Lacava, with whom he'd worked in Cleveland, to help both departments. Yes, this was to be a reset of the major-league team, and of scouting and development. Beyond Guerrero, the only players now remaining from the 2015 organization are catcher [Danny Jansen](#) and relievers [Tim Mayza](#) and [Trent Thornton](#). In 2016, their international department signed **Lourdes Guerriel Jr.**, [Alejandro Kirk](#) and **Gabriel Moreno**; there are those who feel Moreno is the single best catching prospect in the minor leagues today.

In 2016, Sanders drafted [Bo Bichette](#) in the third round, [Cavan Biggio](#) in the fifth. The next season they traded Francisco Liriano to a Houston team that was shooting for the World Series for [Teoscar Hernández](#), and drafted [Nate Pearson](#). At that point, they were on the road back to Gillick World, back to that heady era of 1989-93, one that was aided and abetted by the novelty of the '89 opening of the SkyDome, which allowed them to field the highest payroll in the game in '93.

What is remarkable, as they begin a season for which they are considered one of the World Series favorites, is that the road to get back here only saw them endure three losing seasons, those from 2017-19.

And there are some interesting trends in that rebuild. In 2017, 2019 and 2021, they took pitchers with their first draft picks — Pearson, [Alek Manoah](#) and **Gunnar Hoglund**, respectively.

In 2020, Shane Farrell's first year as the scouting director, they took Vanderbilt shortstop **Austin Martin** with the fifth pick in the draft, even though he was then a mere year younger than the 21-year-old Bichette. Then in January 2021, they signed shortstop [Marcus Semien](#) to a one-year, \$18 million deal to play second base; all he did was hit 45 homers, earn a Gold Glove at second and lead all position players in WAR. From the moment he arrived in spring training, Semien worked daily with Bichette and Martin on defense at shortstop, which Bichette went out of his way to point out. "Marcus has had an impact on my career," Bichette said. If someday Bichette gets to 3,000 hits and is still playing in the middle infield, he will likely still be citing Semien's influence. At the end of the season, Semien signed a \$170 million deal with Texas.

By the end of 2020, the Jays were back in the postseason, and Shapiro, Atkins, Lacava and the organization knew they were close to being back in the high life, again. So they were ready to spend on prominent free agents. Shapiro has long believed that a team's best players have to be leaders. With **Grady Sizemore**, **CC Sabathia** and **Victor Martínez** on the Indians, they were almost there, but the injuries to Sizemore, a legitimate star, were devastating. When they had to trade Sabathia and Cy Young winner **Cliff Lee**, [Michael Brantley](#) and [Carlos Carrasco](#) were the substance of their return.

In post-rebuild Toronto, Semien was their second marquee signing. The first was [George Springer](#). "We took a long look at him, then asked, 'Is he a winner?'" Shapiro said. "Who more embodies a winner? Everyone who knows him says the same thing. If we are looking for someone who is a leader, he embodies all of the best. He plays really hard. He loves to win. Relishes being the leader." In Houston, A.J. Hinch got that, knew Springer was the Alpha Dog, moved him to leadoff and the [Stros](#) won it all. Toronto saw that and invested \$150 million in Springer — and \$42 million in Springer and Semien for just last year — and went 91-71 playing in Dunedin, Buffalo and Toronto and barely missed the postseason.

This spring training, they are the popular favorite in the American League East, ahead of Tampa Bay, Boston and the New York Yankees.

In baseball, teams tend to hoard draft choices as if they have The Amazing Kreskin in the scouting room and he can predict the future. In the NFL, NHL and NBA, teams routinely trade first-round draft choices to try to win that season's championship. In the NHL this season, the Boston Bruins traded their first-round pick, two future second-rounders and two defensemen for defenseman Hampus Lindholm. In the NFL, the Broncos traded two first-round picks, two second-rounders and a fifth-rounder *plus* three players for Russell Wilson — and not to have him play second base again for the [Rockies](#).

When the Blue Jays realized during last season that eventual Cy Young winner [Robbie Ray](#) and [Steven Matz](#) would likely depart in free agency, they needed a young top-of-the-rotation starter. [José Berríos](#) seemed the perfect guy, so they traded Martin and pitcher **Simeon Woods Richardson**, a 2018 second rounder with the [Mets](#), for the 27-year old Berríos, then signed him to a seven-year contract during the winter. They lost Ray and Matz and signed [Kevin Gausman](#) and [Yusei Kikuchi](#). In Manoa, they have one of the best young starters in the game, plus [Hyun](#)

[Jin Ryu](#), [Ross Stripling](#) and Buffalo depth in **Anthony Kay**, **Thomas Hatch** and Pearson, if he doesn't slide to the bullpen. The pen seems one of their remaining concerns, and after being in on free agent [Kenley Jansen](#) to the end, they will be looking to add more depth and a late-innings reliever in-season.

Having lost Semien left an infield hole, and they had Biggio and the valuable [Santiago Espinal](#) to play second base, so they traded 2021 first pick pitcher Hoggan and three other prospects to Oakland to get 28-year-old [Matt Chapman](#), one of the best defensive basemen in the sport (two Gold Gloves) with 97 homers in the last five seasons.

What's common to both Berríos and Chapman? "They truly love to play," Shapiro said, referring to one of the traits most valued in the organization. They also picked up a lefthanded bat in outfielder [Raimel Tapia](#) from Colorado, although with Hernández, Springer and Gurriel in the outfield, he may not see many starts, barring injury.

To some extent, the Jays have replaced Semien's 45 home run power with Chapman, who has a good hitting ceiling even if the power expectations don't fully match. The Jays led the majors in homers last season, which without Semien is difficult to replicate, but they were also first in slugging, fourth in on-base percentage and second in lowest strikeout rate; Guerrero was second in the MVP voting, won the Home Run Derby, led the league in homers, slugging, OPS and OPS-plus, and his hand-to-bat skills are astounding, as evidenced by leading the league in on-base percentage with a mere 15.8 percent strikeout rate.

Springer spent much of the season troubled by injuries, but said this spring he is fully healthy. "I think the best thing is that we are so close as a team," the 2017 World Series MVP said. "Everyone here is focused on one thing — winning. Everyone plays for one another. We have a team of gamers. Sure, it was a little rough playing in three different parks, small crowds until late in the season in Toronto, but we focused on winning and we played as a team." Those three venues were a spring training/A-Ball park, Triple-A Buffalo and, for a while, the Rogers Centre with attendance limitations restricting them to 15,000 fans.

"We never talked about excuses," Springer said. "When our Toronto home is packed, it's incredible. The fans in Toronto are tremendous."

Berríos has thrown between 190 and 200 innings in each of his last three full seasons, and he is one of the best fielders in the game. His former manager **Rocco Baldelli** said: "He's a shortstop on the mound."

Technically, Baldelli is right: "I was a shortstop-pitcher until a few months before the (2012) draft," Berríos said. "I love PFP drills, I like to try out things, or just practicing. "Opposing managers say he is so athletic, anticipates out of his delivery and plays so hard he actually allows the shortstop and second baseman to spread out a step or two further away from the second base bag, which can only benefit Bichette and Biggio.

Adding Chapman allows Bichette to play closer to second base, as playing the hole was a slight issue at times last season. The Toronto staff thinks Chapman can cut off balls that may require Bichette to throw from the hole.

Then there's Chapman's arm. During spring training, coaches have been shooting balls out of the high-speed pitching machine to Guerrero at first to prepare him for the power Chapman's arm. They feed high-rising, high-velocity balls that sail, then high velo balls near the knees that dip and run. Chapman's arm is a force among third basemen; at Long Beach State he pitched and threw close to 100 miles per hour. In fact, in one game this spring, Chapman went to a late-inning gathering on the mound with pitching coach Pete Walker and teammates, and Chapman suggested that he could close out the game.

"Whoever is playing second base had better be on time on potential 5-4-3 double plays or a potentially close force play at second," cracked one teammate. "He gets rid of the ball quickly."

Chapman is another of those players who lives to play, as is Manoah. "I can't think of anything better than playing in the major leagues, no matter where," he said.

Start with Manoah's presence. In off seasons, he might try earning a living at Disney as the world's largest, friendliest teddy bear. He can also really pitch. When he joined the Jays in May for his debut at Yankee Stadium, he had made nine minor league starts good for 35 innings; he was Toronto's first pick in 2019, and there was no 2020 minor-league season. Yet he adapted quickly to the majors, and by the end of 2021 was 9-2, 3.22 with 127 strikeouts in 111 2/3 innings. In September, one opposing pitching coach said, "he may have the most devastating breaking ball of any righthander in our league." A pitch that runs and sinks. Batters hit .146 against that pitch, and righthanded batters struck out 53 times in 140 at-bats.

Back in Dunedin, Shapiro negotiated the funding for and headed the creation of a player Development center that looks as if Graham Gund, Paul Allen and the creators of the Burj Khalifa in Dubai collaborated to overhaul and improve a complex that had been so basic that players' cars were often hit by batting practice foul balls, including one black Rolls Royce with gold trim.

The next project is to renovate the Rogers Centre, which in 2001-04, when known as SkyDome, drew 12.7 million fans. Baseball is a better game when Toronto's team is really good, and this 2022 Blue Jays team should be that, and maybe more.

Spend a couple of days around this club, and you'll hear a lot about the clubhouse and teammates and you'll hear Springer and others talk about the way the players and the whole organization are respected. One of the things I remember most about the previous generation of successful Jays teams is that during the 1993 postseason, Gillick, Paul Beeston and owner Peter Hardy brought everyone who worked in the organization — even members of the Dunedin and Dominican League ground crews — in for the World Series. And if (and/or when) this generation of Blue Jays gets to lift another trophy, we can hope that history repeats itself.

HOW MUCH LONGER CAN BASEBALL'S 100 YEAR MONOPOLY LAST?

The Supreme Court has exempted the majors from antitrust claims because of the sport's unique status, but challenges are mounting

Ross Ufberg in WSJ

Many Americans still regard baseball as our national pastime, a bridge to sweeter days when players barnstormed across the country and fans listened to games on the radio. What few probably know is that a quirk of legal history has uniquely helped baseball to thrive: the game's court-created exemption from the country's antitrust laws. One hundred years ago, the Supreme Court made a determination about the nature of the game that would stick like rosin through the century.

This legal protection has given baseball a privileged position and largely protected it from competition—so far. Challenges have been brewing recently. Last year three Republican U.S. senators sought to remove the exemption as punishment for Major League Baseball's decision to move the All-Star game out of Georgia to protest the state's new voting law. This year a Democratic senator also endorsed the idea, out of frustration with the team owners' lockout of players that delayed Opening Day until April 7. Neither complaint, though, had much to do with the antitrust exemption's origin or effects.

In the early 1910s, the upstart Federal League was trying to establish itself as a third major baseball league alongside the American and National leagues. It enticed players away from the two established majors, but the leagues fought back in court and held players to their contracts, which all contained a "reserve clause" binding them to their teams for life. On top of that, the established ball clubs snapped up some of the Federal League's teams and either shut them down or imported them into their own leagues.

The new league folded in 1915 but not before suing the other two leagues and their club owners, claiming that baseball operated as a monopoly in violation of the Sherman Act, adopted in 1890. At the heart of the suit was the clause that gave teams the exclusive and perpetual right to re-sign, trade or "reserve" the player from being raided by any competitor. Players couldn't shop around; they couldn't apply for a job elsewhere or gain leverage for raises. The owners all committed not to poach each other's players. Monte Ward, a player and Columbia Law School alumnus, described the system as giving "one set of men a life-estate in the labor of another."

The judge in the lawsuit delayed his ruling until the Federal League teams went bankrupt and mostly settled; he admitted in the courtroom that he was afraid an adverse decision would have harmed the game. Four years later that judge, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, was chosen by the club owners to be their first baseball commissioner.

One Federal League team refused to settle, however, and brought a new antitrust suit. The team won at the trial level, but the decision was overturned on appeal, and the case finally made its

way to the high court. In 1922, the Supreme Court decided that baseball wasn't the type of interstate commerce intended to come under the Sherman Act, which at the time was primarily applied to trade in commodities. Eventually, the court's understanding of interstate commerce expanded to include businesses more like baseball, including other sports. But as any slugger understands, timing is everything.

In the century since, the Supreme Court has reconsidered its decision on a few occasions but has stuck to its precedent. The most memorable challenge, *Flood v. Kuhn*, came in 1972. Curt Flood was a star outfielder for the St. Louis Cardinals who woke up one day to discover that he had been traded to the Philadelphia Phillies. Flood objected, but he had little bargaining power. "I do not feel I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes," Flood wrote to baseball's commissioner, Bowie Kuhn. When that failed, he sued, claiming that the reserve clause violated antitrust law.

The civil-rights movement loomed large in the background. Flood, a Black man, thought of himself as advancing economic rights of ballplayers, whose wages were being suppressed by a group of all-white owners. On television, sportscaster Howard Cosell challenged him: "You're a man who makes \$90,000 a year, which isn't exactly slave wages." Flood famously replied, "a well-paid slave is nonetheless a slave."

Baseball's defense was, and has always been, that without the antitrust exemption the game could hardly survive. Clubs contend they need a guarantee that they'll recoup their investment in players; that baseball is inherently different from other businesses and more worthy of protection, because of its role in nurturing a cherished pastime at the heart of American culture; and that the sport has already relied on the exemption for a century. However, none of the other three major sports leagues in the U.S. enjoy such a privilege, and one of them, the National Football League, has higher revenues.

The lower-court decisions in *Flood v. Kuhn* predictably followed the Supreme Court's precedents. "The game is on higher ground; it behooves everyone to keep it there," wrote the trial judge. Curt Flood's biographer Brad Snyder archly observed, "There was something about baseball that turned cerebral judges into pennant-waving schoolboys."

The Supreme Court again decided to keep the exemption. Before Justice Harry Blackmun, who wrote for the majority, got to any of the legal issues in his opinion, he recounted "the ensuing colorful days" since baseball's founding, quoted two baseball poems and listed 88 legendary players by name.

"To non-athletes, it might appear that petitioner was virtually enslaved by the owners of major league baseball clubs who bartered among themselves for his services," wrote Justice Thurgood Marshall in dissent. "But athletes know that it was not servitude that bound petitioner to the club owners; it was the reserve system."

Though Flood lost the battle, the players ultimately won the war. Over time, the strength of the reserve clause was reduced through arbitration. Free agency was introduced in 1976, and in

1998, Congress passed the Curt Flood Act, which took away the exemption as it applies to major league players themselves.

But baseball still enjoys the exemption in other ways. Under the MLB constitution, each baseball club is assigned an exclusive geographical area. In any other industry, this would be patently illegal— [McDonald's](#) can't veto a Burger King on the same block. When the Oakland A's were considering a move to San Jose, which is in the San Francisco Giants' territory, San Jose filed a lawsuit alleging that this territorial carve-up was illegal under the Sherman Act. It was thrown out of court.

And the exemption still benefits MLB in the minor leagues, where players make starvation wages and have virtually zero bargaining power. The latest court challenge, in fact, comes from minor-league owners accusing major-league teams of colluding in cutting affiliations with 40 minor-league teams. If the plaintiffs lose, they plan to appeal to the Supreme Court, where some see a spark of hope. In a 2021 case in which the NCAA was denied an exemption from the Sherman Act, Justice Neil Gorsuch signaled a willingness to reconsider baseball's exemption, using such adjectives as “unrealistic,” “inconsistent” and “aberrational” to describe it.

In the world outside of baseball, antitrust is having a moment thanks to public frustration over the dominance of big tech, rising corporate profits and a newly invigorated agenda in the Justice Department and Federal Trade Commission. For baseball's privileged exemption, it may be the bottom of the ninth with two outs and two strikes.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE—ANSWERS

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1972-2021—50 Years. 10 teams have won 1, and only 1 World Series. (So Yankees (7) and Red Sox (4) would be incorrect). Name the teams.

Teams that won 1 World Series since 1972

Pirates beat Orioles 1979

Orioles beat Phillies 1983, also lost to Pirates 1979

Tigers beat Padres 1984, lost to Giants 2012

Mets beat Red Sox 1986, lost to A's 1973, lost to Yankees 2000, lost to Royals 2015

D'backs	beat Yankees 2001
Angels	beat Giants 2002
White Sox	beat Astros 2005
Cubs	beat Indians 2016
Astros	beat Dodgers 2017, lost to White Sox 2005, lost to Nationals 2019
Nationals	beat Astros 2019

Teams that won 2 or more

Yankees	7
Red Sox	4
A's	4
Reds	3
Cards	3
Dodgers	3
Giants	3
Blue Jays	2
Twins	2
Royals	2
Phillies	2
Braves	2
Marlins	2

Teams that won 0

Indians	lost to Braves 1995, to Marlins 1997, to Cubs 2016
Rays	lost to Phillies 2008, to Dodgers 2020
Rangers	lost to Giants 2010, to Cards 2011
Padres	lost to Tigers 1984, Yankees 1998
Brewers	lost to Cards 1982
Rockies	lost to Red Sox 2007
Mariners	no World Series appearances

HOUSEKEEPING

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