

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

1.9.2022

Good morning baseball fans. A trivia quiz from Society of American Baseball Research, lots of Hall of Fame voting discussion and a fun piece on Ash and Maple bats. Enjoy.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

1927. Babe Ruth hits 60 HRs, more than the team total for 12 of 15 other MLB teams.

Clayton Kershaw. 3 x Cy Young, 3 x led NL in wins, 8x All-Star, 5x NL ERA leader.

You will read this below in the Hall of Fame ballots section but this surprised me: Andruw Jones. From 1998 through 2007 (age 21-30), Jones averaged 34 homers (67 extra-base hits) and 103 RBIs, while winning 10 consecutive Gold Gloves, posting an .847 OPS and playing an average of 158 games per season, including 161 of 162 in three consecutive seasons and never fewer than 154.

The Orioles' club ERA was the worst in franchise history in 2021. 5.84 for the team that went 52-110. Not pretty.

Can you name the 7 franchises whose all-time hits leader has less than 2,000 hits with the team? Answer below.

Brooks Robinson hit into [four triple plays](#) — in 1958, 1964, 1965, and 1967 — and also participated in three others as a fielder.

King Felix Hernandez, [Seattle Mariners right-hander](#) recorded an immaculate inning on June 17, 2008; a four-strikeout inning on June 3, 2010; and a perfect game on August 15, 2012. Only pitcher in MLB history with all three.

Rusty Torres was a here today/gone tomorrow outfielder for the Yankees. I didn't know he was directly involved in three of the four American League forfeits in the 1970s.

1 — The Washington Senators' [final home game](#) at RFK Stadium in 1971. (Torres started in RF for the Yankees.)

2 — [Ten-Cent Beer Night](#) in Cleveland in 1974. (Torres pinch-hit for Cleveland.)

3 — [Disco Demolition Night](#) in Chicago in 1979. Torres started in RF for the White Sox in the first game of the ill-fated doubleheader. The rioting between games prompted Chicago to forfeit the nightcap to Detroit.

The only defunct major-league franchise to win 1,000 games--the National League's Baltimore Orioles

Led by future Hall of Famers John McGraw, Hughie Jennings, and Wee Willie Keeler, the [original Orioles](#) went 1,133-1,049 (.519 winning percentage), capturing three National League pennants between 1882 and 1899.

McGraw went on to be HOF manager – 33 years with 10 pennants, 3 World Series titles and 2763 wins, mostly with the New York Giants. But I knew nothing of his playing career with the Orioles. He played 9 of his 17 MLB seasons with the Baltimore, hit over .320 in 9 straight seasons including .391 in 1899.

You could probably win a bet knowing the only two World Series MVPs who were not on the teams they represented at the beginning of the season--Donn Clendenon and Steve Pearce. [Clendenon](#) won a World Series MVP award with the 1969 New York Mets and [Pearce](#) won with the 2018 Boston Red Sox.

Miller Huggins, Branch Rickey, Tony La Russa. All managed the Cardinals. All are in the Hall of Fame. All earned law degrees.

Yankees pitcher Bobby Shantz won the 1960 Gold Glove with just 17 fielding chances.

Warren Spahn [amassed 363 victories](#) and 363 base hits in his 21-year career, split proportionately among the three teams he played for: Braves (356 wins and 356 hits); Mets (4 and 4) and Giants (3 and 3). He also matched wins and hits in his postseason appearances (4 and 4).

Tom Seaver (198), Doc Gooden (157), Jerry Koosman (140) are the only three Mets pitchers to win 100+ games with the team. Ron Darling (99), Sid Fernandez (98) and Al Leiter (95) came close.

On July 20, 1973, Wilbur Wood started both ends of a doubleheader ([Game 1](#) / [Game 2](#)) - the last pitcher in baseball history to do so. Wood lost both games and finished the season with twenty-four wins, and twenty-losses, the last pitcher in American League history to reach both plateaus (20-wins / 20-losses) during the season.

Whitey Ford holds an interesting title all on his own--he threw 283.0 innings in 1960 without allowing a single steal. Only three runners even tried to steal on the lefty that year.

Catcher Russ Nixon had 0 stolen bases in 2504 at bats over his 12 year career. He was caught stealing 7 times.

FROM THE SABR – SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN BASEBALL RESEARCH WEBSITE.
GREAT SET OF TRIVIA QUESTIONS. ANSWERS BELOW. HOW MANY DID YOU GET?

Who are the only two players to win: a.) League MVP b.) World Series MVP and c.) All-Star Game MVP?

Which pitcher started the All-Star Game then played only one MLB game the rest of his career?

Who is the only player to play for all four original expansion franchises and ONLY those franchises?

What pitcher threw 14 consecutive scoreless innings in All-Star competition?

Who is the only player who has appeared in a World Series game at both Wrigley Field and Comiskey Park in Chicago?

What 7 men in uniform for the 1993 World Series were, during their career, named World Series MVP?

Who was the first African American player inducted into the Hall of Fame who had not played in the Negro Leagues?

Which five Hall of Famers each played for only one manager who was also a Hall of Famer during their entire major league careers?

Of the sluggers with more than 600 career home runs, who is the only one to never win an MVP award?

Who were the batting leaders in the only year when both leagues' champions each had batting averages of .325 or lower?

Which country produces more major-leaguers per capita than any other country in the world?

Of the 16 franchises of the modern two-league era, which one has never won more than 100 games during a regular season?

Which player, over the course of his career, played with five different teammates who either had already, or would in the future, win two consecutive MVP awards in four different decades?

What four men played in the postseason in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s?

Name the pitcher who holds the major league record for most career regular season wins without ever having a single regular season at-bat.

Who led his league in ERA more times than any other pitcher?

Name 3 baseball commissioners who served for fewer than 4 years.

What four players have hit a home run as a teenager and after turning forty?

Who was the first batter to homer off a pitcher whose Cy Young Award came before the hitter was born?

Name the only modern-era Hall of Fame pitcher who, over a 3-year span, led his league in wins the first year, losses the second year, and wins again in the third?

Who is the only pitcher to surrender home runs to all three Alou brothers?

Although he never played for a New York team, this man hit 86 career home runs in New York. Name him.

Who was the only Rookie of the Year Award winner to be a Seattle Pilot?

What three pitchers have won a game as a teenager and after turning forty?

Name the only three pitchers in the modern era to win 20 games in a season for three different teams.

Who is the only major-leaguer to hit a grand slam right-handed and left-handed in the same game?

Who broke up at least 81 no-hitters with a home run?

Who was the only American League batting champ without a homer that season?

7 Franchises all-time hit leaders have less than 2,000 hits:

Yankees	Derek Jeter	3465
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Red Sox	Carl Yastrzemski	3419
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Orioles	Cal Ripken Jr.	3184
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Blue Jays	Tony Fernandez	1583
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Rays	Carl Crawford	1480
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Tigers	Ty Cobb	3900
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Royals	George Brett	3154
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Twins/Senators	Sam Rice	2889	(Kirby Puckett 2304)
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White Sox	Luke Appling	2749
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Rangers	Michael Young	2230
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Guardians	Nap Lajoie	2047
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Astros	Craig Biggio	3060
Mariners	Ichiro Suzuki	2542
Angels	Garret Anderson	2368
A's	Bert Campaneris	1882

Braves	Henry Aaron	3600
Phillies	Jimmy Rollins	2306
Nationals	Ryan Zimmerman	1876
Mets	David Wright	1777
Marlins	Luis Castillo	1273

Cards	Stan Musial	3630
Reds	Pete Rose	3358
Cubs	Cap Anson	3012
Brewers	Robin Yount	3142
Pirates	Roberto Clemente	3000

Giants	Willie Mays	3187
Padres	Tony Gwynn	3141
Dodgers	Zack Wheat	2804
Rockies	Todd Helton	2519
D'backs	Luis Gonzalez	1337

I watched a bio of Ernie Banks recently. I wasn't so sure when they said he was the best power hitter of the second half of the 1950's. So I went to baseballreference.com for HRs by year:

	Banks	Aaron	Mantle	Mays	Matthews	F.Robinson	Kaline	Snider
1955	44	27	37	51	41	-	27	42
1956	28	26	52	36	37	38	27	43
1957	43	44	34	35	32	29	23	40
1958	47	30	42	29	31	31	16	15
1959	45	39	31	34	46	36	27	23
1960	41	40	40	29	39	31	15	14
	258	206	236	214	226	165	135	177

HRS BY DECADE

1920-29	Ruth	467
1930-39	Foxx	415
1940-49	Williams	234
1950-59	Snider	236
1960-69	Killebrew	393
1970-79	Stargell	296
1980-89	Schmidt	313
1990-99	McGuire	404

SUBSCRIBER CONTRIBUTION OF THE WEEK—HIT BY PITCH STATS—THANKS WALLY

All-time Walter Johnson hit 205 batters.

Joe McGinnty pitching for the 1932 Brooklyn Dodgers hit a record 41 batters.

Sandy Koufax went 323 innings without hitting a batter.

Don Drysdale led the NL 5 times.

Most hit batters by both teams in a game is 7, which has happened 5 times, most recently 2008 Red Sox and Indians.

Twice one team has had 6 batters hit, most recent June 6, 2018 when the Astros hit 6 Rangers batters.

According to baseballalmanac.com over 30 pitchers have hit 3 batters in the same inning including some names you'd recognize—David Price, Tom Morgan, Bud Black, Bert Blyleven.

But the magic number—6 pitchers since 1922 have hit 3 consecutive batters.

Javier Vazquez of the Yankees plunked 3 consecutive Tampa Bay Rays in 2010.

Jeff Weaver, 2004 Dodgers hit three in a row. It was the second time in his career he had hit 3 batters in a game.

Steve Sparks of the Angels in 1999 had quite an outing. Over 5 innings he hit 4 batters including 3 in a row.

C.J. Nitkowski of the 1988 Houston Astros faced 7 Marlins batters. In the 8th inning hit three in a row.

September 1977 Wilbur Wood hit 3 straight Angels.

Dock Ellis of the Pirates on May 1, 1974 in the first inning against the Reds faced 4 batters—he hit 3 straight and walked the 4th.

FROM THE SABR – SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN BASEBALL RESEARCH WEBSITE--ANSWERS

Who are the only two players to win: a.) League MVP b.) World Series MVP and c.) All-Star Game MVP?

Brooks Robinson and Frank Robinson.

Brooks: 1964 AL MVP, 1970 WS MVP & 1966 ASG MVP

Frank: 1966 AL MVP, 1966 WS MVP & 1971 ASG MVP

Which pitcher started the All-Star Game then played only one MLB game the rest of his career? **J.R. Richard.**

The Astros fireballer started the 1980 All-Star Game for the National League before suffering a career-ending stroke soon afterward.

Who is the only player to play for all four original expansion franchises and ONLY those franchises? **Nolan Ryan.**

Ryan pitched for the Angels and Rangers (who entered the AL in 1961 as expansion franchises) and Mets and Astros (who began play in 1962 in the NL).

What pitcher threw 14 consecutive scoreless innings in All-Star competition? **Juan Marichal.** Marichal's scoreless streak began with the 1964 All-Star Game and continued to 1971. He allowed just 2 runs in 18 innings pitched over eight All-Star appearances.

Who is the only player who has appeared in a World Series game at both Wrigley Field and Comiskey Park in Chicago? **Babe Ruth.**

Ruth's Red Sox defeated the Cubs in 1918, when World Series home games were held at the larger Comiskey Park. More famously, Ruth and the Yankees played the Cubs at Wrigley Field in the 1932 World Series.

What 7 men in uniform for the 1993 World Series were, during their career, named World Series MVP? **Johnny Podres (1955), Gene Tenace (1972), Dave Stewart (1989), Jack Morris (1991), Pat Borders (1992), Paul Molitor (1993), Curt Schilling (2001).**

Podres was the Phillies' pitching coach and Tenace was the Blue Jays' bench coach in 1993. The rest were active players.

Who was the first African American player inducted into the Hall of Fame who had not played in the Negro Leagues? **Bob Gibson.**

[Bob Gibson](#) was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1981. Unlike Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Ernie Banks, and other Black Hall of Famers who made their MLB debuts in the 1940s or 1950s, the Cardinals' pitching legend did not get his start in professional baseball with a Negro League club.

Which five Hall of Famers each played for only one manager who was also a Hall of Famer during their entire major league careers? **Don Drysdale, Sandy Koufax, Ross Youngs, Harry Wright & Walter Alston.**

Drysdale's and Koufax's manager was [Walter Alston](#).

Alston's manager was [Frankie Frisch](#). Youngs's manager was [John McGraw](#). Wright's manager was [himself](#).

Of the sluggers with more than 600 career home runs, who is the only one to never win an MVP award? **Jim Thome.**

Thome's [highest MVP finish](#) was a 4th place for the 2003 Phillies.

Who were the batting leaders in the only year when both leagues' champions each had batting averages of .325 or lower? **Pete Runnels and Dick Groat.**

In 1960, [Runnels](#) of the Boston Red Sox led the AL at .320 and [Groat](#) of the Pittsburgh Pirates topped the NL at .325. (I remembered that Yaz won the 1968 AL batting title at .301 but that same year Pete Rose hit .335 for the Reds to lead the NL>)

Which country produces more major-leaguers per capita than any other country in the world? **Curaçao**

Curaçao has [36.56 MLB players](#) per 1,000,000 population — including Andruw Jones, Andrelton Simmons, and Ozzie Albies.

Of the 16 franchises of the modern two-league era, which one has never won more than 100 games during a regular season? **Chicago White Sox**

The White Sox won [exactly 100 games](#) in 1917 and have never recorded more than 99.

Which player, over the course of his career, played with five different teammates who either had already, or would in the future, win two consecutive MVP awards in four different decades? **Jim Bouton.**

[Bouton](#) was teammates with **Yogi Berra (1954-55 MVPs), Mickey Mantle (1956-57), Roger Maris (1960-61), Joe Morgan (1975-76), and Dale Murphy (1982-83).**

What four men played in the postseason in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s? **Willie Mays, Norm Cash, Stan Williams and Don McMahon.**

[Mays](#): 1951, '54, '62 and '73 WS + 1971 NLCS

[Cash](#): 1959 and '68 WS + 1972 ALCS

[Williams](#): 1959 and '63 WS + 1970 ALCS

[McMahon](#): 1957, '58 and '68 WS + 1971 NLCS

Name the pitcher who holds the major league record for most career regular season wins without ever having a single regular season at-bat. **Ron Guidry.**

Guidry [won 170 games](#) for the New York Yankees from 1975 to 1988. He did have nine plate appearances in World Series play for the Yankees, but never recorded a hit.

Who led his league in ERA more times than any other pitcher? **Lefty Grove.**

Grove [led the American League](#) in ERA nine times, including four seasons in a row from 1929-32 with the Philadelphia A's.

Name 3 baseball commissioners who served for fewer than 4 years. **Bart Giamatti, Fay Vincent, William Eckert.**

[Eckert](#) served as commissioner from 1965 to 1968. [Giamatti](#) was hired as commissioner in 1989 before his untimely death at the age of 51. [Vincent](#) served from 1989 to 1992. ([Peter Ueberroth](#) served exactly 4 years.)

What four players have hit a home run as a teenager and after turning forty? **Ty Cobb, Rusty Staub, Gary Sheffield and Alex Rodriguez.**

Who was the first batter to homer off a pitcher whose Cy Young Award came before the hitter was born? **Cameron Maybin / Roger Clemens.**

On August 18, 2007, [Maybin](#) — born April 4, 1987 — hit a home run off Clemens, who had won his first Cy Young Award in 1986.

Name the only modern-era Hall of Fame pitcher who, over a 3-year span, led his league in wins the first year, losses the second year, and wins again in the third? **Hal Newhouser, 1946-48.**
The [Tigers lefty](#) went 26-9 in 1946, 17-17 in 1947, and 21-12 in 1948. (Eddie Cicotte also did this from 1917-19 for the Chicago White Sox.)

Who is the only pitcher to surrender home runs to all three Alou brothers? **Ferguson Jenkins.**
Jesus Alou homered off the [Cubs ace](#) in 1967 and 1973, Felipe Alou in 1968, and Matty Alou in 1971.

Although he never played for a New York team, this man hit 86 career home runs in New York. Name him. **Stan Musial.**
Among his [475 career home runs](#), Musial hit 49 of them at the Polo Grounds and 37 at Ebbets Field.

Who was the only Rookie of the Year Award winner to be a Seattle Pilot? **Lou Piniella.**
[Piniella](#) was with the Seattle Pilots in spring training 1969, but traded to the Kansas City Royals before the season began. He won the AL Rookie of the Year Award with the Royals after hitting .282 with 11 home runs.

What three pitchers have won a game as a teenager and after turning forty? **Herb Pennock, Bert Blyleven and Mike Morgan.**

Name the only three pitchers in the modern era to win 20 games in a season for three different teams.

Pete Alexander, Carl Mays, Gaylord Perry

[Alexander](#): Phillies, Cubs, Cardinals

[Mays](#): Red Sox, Yankees, Reds

[Perry](#): Giants, Indians, Padres

Who is the only major-leaguer to hit a grand slam right-handed and left-handed in the same game? **Bill Mueller.**

On July 29, 2003, the [Red Sox third baseman](#) had a solo home run in the third inning, and grand slams in the seventh and eighth innings.

Who broke up at least 81 no-hitters with a home run? Rickey Henderson.

By virtue of his [81 leadoff home runs](#), which occurred when the opposing pitcher had clearly not yet allowed a hit.

Who was the only American League batting champ without a homer that season? **Rod Carew**
The [Twins star](#) hit .318 in 1972. (Three National Leaguers also turned this trick: Wee Willie Keeler of the 1897 Baltimore Orioles with a .424 average, Ginger Beaumont of the 1902 Pittsburgh Pirates at .357, and Zack Wheat of the 1918 Brooklyn Robins at .335.)

FROM JOE POSNANSKI'S BLOG

Jan. 8, 1986: Willie McCovey voted into the Hall of Fame.

When the great Willie McCovey — 521 home runs, retired with the record for intentional walks, true force of nature, one of the greatest sluggers in the history of baseball — was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame, he was asked how he'd like to be remembered.

He said this: "I'd like to be remembered as the guy who hit the line drive over Bobby Richardson's head."

It's one of my all-time favorite answers — because, of course, his line drive DID NOT go over Richardson's head. It was Game 7 of the 1962 World Series, the Yankees led 1-0, and the Giants had runners on second and third with two outs when McCovey stepped to the plate. He ripped a line drive off the Yankees' Ralph Terry. But he hit it too low and Richardson snared it for the third out, ending the Series.

HALL OF FAME BALLOTS 2022: THE ATHLETIC VOTERS REVEAL THEIR SELECTIONS

Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Curt Schilling and Sammy Sosa are on the ballot for their 10th and final time, with their candidacies highlighting the questions many voters faced as they filled out their ballots. For just the ninth time in history and the first time since 2013, no players were voted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2021. Could the same happen in 2022?

We asked those of our writers who vote for the Hall to share their ballots and to write a few words about one particular candidate they find particularly interesting or compelling. Here's how their votes stacked up.

The Baseball Writers' Association of America's results will be announced on Jan. 25.

Rob Biertempfel's ballot

Todd Helton

[Joe Nathan](#)

Scott Rolen

Curt Schilling

Billy Wagner

Being a National League beat writer, I didn't see Nathan pitch very often. His numbers are impressive — 377 saves (eighth most in history), 89.3 save percentage (tops among relievers with 250-plus saves) and a six-year run over which his 14.2 fWAR was second only to [Mariano Rivera](#). And yet, Nathan didn't really break out as a dominant closer until age 29 and his 787 career games rank just 57th. I need more time to evaluate his case and to gather intel from writers, players and coaches who know him best. I voted for him not so much because I think he's a slam-dunk Hall of Famer, but because I want him to reach that 5 percent threshold and stay on the ballot for another year.

Steve Buckley's ballot

Barry Bonds

Roger Clemens

Todd Helton

Andruw Jones

Jeff Kent

Andy Pettitte

David Ortiz

Scott Rolen

Curt Schilling

Billy Wagner

There was a time, back in the day, when I thought I'd be conflicted about the looming Hall of Fame candidacy of Ortiz. He did, after all, test positive for ... for *something* when MLB and the Players Association conducted a confidential testing survey in 2003. I now believe the survey was flawed, its results murky and, if that's all you have on Ortiz, it means you have nothing. No hands were wrung in the making of this selection: Ortiz was an easy choice.

Dan Connolly's ballot

Barry Bonds
Roger Clemens
Todd Helton
[Torii Hunter](#)
Andruw Jones
David Ortiz
Scott Rolen
[Jimmy Rollins](#)
Gary Sheffield
Billy Wagner

I'm probably on an island here, similar to the one for Torii Hunter last year, but I think Rollins, a first-timer on the ballot, [deserves to be a candidate](#) for the next few years so we can properly dissect his career. So in a sense, he gets my checkmark to make sure he has a better chance of appearing on 5 percent of submitted ballots. But I'd select him anyway because I'm all about well-rounded candidates, and he was the whole package. Rollins could hit, could run, had pop, played great defense, had off-the-charts character (he was the 2014 Roberto Clemente Award co-winner) and absolutely hated to lose. He's one of those players, especially paired with double-play partner [Chase Utley](#), who seemingly willed his team to win. His overall numbers are a little light for a Hall of Famer but add in the extras to give him my vote.

Rustin Dodd's ballot

Barry Bonds
Roger Clemens
Todd Helton
Andruw Jones
David Ortiz
[Manny Ramirez](#)
[Alex Rodriguez](#)
Scott Rolen
Curt Schilling
Gary Sheffield

When I revealed my ballot on Twitter, the most common question surrounded the absence of Sosa, which is fair. If you look at who I voted for, I'm not particularly worried about links to

performance-enhancing drug use or, in the case of Ramirez and Rodriguez, violations of MLB's policy. I thought long and hard about my votes for Ramirez and Rodriguez, but we do not have an official accounting of which players used which drugs, how many drugs they took, how the drugs affected their performance, etc. Both players were such obvious Hall of Famers, and if I'm going to vote for Bonds and Sosa, I ultimately landed on "yes" for Manny and A-Rod.

But back to Sosa. I think there is an argument to vote yes for him. He hit 600 homers and made an indelible impact on the game's history. Ultimately, though, his overall statistical case didn't quite measure up to the players I voted for. (Even just looking at offense, for instance, he finished with a career 128 OPS+.) The simple reason I didn't vote for Sosa: There were 10 players who I wanted to vote for before him.

Matt Gelb's ballot

Barry Bonds
Roger Clemens
David Ortiz
Manny Ramirez
Alex Rodriguez
Scott Rolen
Curt Schilling
Gary Sheffield
Sammy Sosa
Billy Wagner

The more logic I attempted to apply to my ballot, the more twisted it became. This forced me to evolve how I think about the process. I have been steadfast in voting for Bonds and Clemens, but I had excluded Ramirez because I drew the line where [Major League Baseball](#) did; Ramirez tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs after the league instituted a substance policy. Now comes Rodriguez, and I could not reconcile supporting Bonds while omitting Rodriguez. Maybe that's twisted, too. But I am appreciative of Jeff Fletcher, [who articulated what I could not](#): "The Hall of Fame is perfectly capable of making its own character judgments before giving me a ballot." He's right. The proliferation of legalized sports betting and MLB's profiteering from it probably forces some to reconsider Pete Rose's place. As Fletcher wrote, "If the Hall wants to decide that other offenses – besides betting on baseball – are so egregious that it should exclude players from the Hall, they can take those players off the ballot." So, that is where I stand.

I suspect as time passes, there will be a shifting evaluation regarding the Steroid Era. And if someone who tested positive from that era is inducted, it should be noted on his plaque. Lastly, the Hall's Era Committees have moved on the spectrum toward "Big Hall" voting practices ([while still curiously excluding Dick Allen](#)), and this prompted me to reconsider "bubble" candidates. Wagner, a dominant reliever whose career spanned much of the Steroid Era, makes my ballot for the first time.

Chad Jennings' ballot

Bobby Abreu
Barry Bonds
Roger Clemens
Todd Helton
Andruw Jones
David Ortiz
Scott Rolen
Gary Sheffield
Sammy Sosa
Billy Wagner

It's been three weeks since I put my ballot in the mail and already I'm wondering if I should have marked it differently.

What I submitted, I think, was my most honest opinion. I voted for 10 players last year, and all 10 were back on the ballot this year. I needed to make room for Ortiz — who, after careful consideration, was an easy checkmark for me — and my solution was to eliminate Schilling. I still think Schilling is a Hall of Famer, but if I have to drop someone, I'd rather drop [the guy who said he doesn't want my vote](#). I'll continue my support for Helton and Abreu as admittedly borderline candidates.

I kind of wish I'd found a way to vote for Nathan, which I didn't at all expect when I began the process. Nathan has a case, though. By the numbers, he looks at least as good as Hall of Famers Lee Smith and Bruce Sutter, maybe as impactful as Rollie Fingers, and he isn't totally out of place alongside Trevor Hoffman. He's actually pretty similar to Billy Wagner (close in JAWS, WAR, WPA and IP), but I think Wagner was more dominant, so I kept Wagner on my ballot despite not finding room for Nathan. Really, I think Hall of Fame voters are still figuring out what to do with modern relievers and their relatively limited innings, and I was relieved to find [noted Hall of Fame thinker Jay Jaffe](#) was similarly moved by Nathan's case. At the very least, I think Nathan has a surprising but compelling argument for Cooperstown. I'm not absolutely sure he belongs in the Hall of Fame, but I kind of wish I'd helped him stay on the ballot for at least one more look.

Keith Law's ballot

Barry Bonds
Todd Helton
Andrew Jones
David Ortiz
Manny Ramirez
Alex Rodriguez

Scott Rolen
Gary Sheffield

The all-time home run king, fourth all time in WAR among all players (behind only Babe Ruth, Walter Johnson and Cy Young — all of whom played before baseball was integrated), recipient of seven MVP awards and deserving of two more, seventh all time in on-base percentage, eighth all time in slugging percentage, still the only member of the 500 HR/500 stolen base club ... this isn't about Bonds' statistical case, though. His Hall of Fame candidacy has become a referendum on the "steroid era," which is a misleading moniker, at best. We don't know who did or did not use performance-enhancing drugs in most cases. Bonds himself never tested positive for anything, and the vast majority of players who tested positive were decidedly less than superstars. The only argument whatsoever to omit Bonds from a ballot is based on a broad reading of the character clause, and in his case, I don't think that argument suffices to keep out of Cooperstown one of the best players in MLB history and someone who was on a Hall of Fame track even before his physical appearance seemed to rapidly change.

David O'Brien's ballot

Todd Helton
Andruw Jones
Jeff Kent
David Ortiz
Scott Rolen
Curt Schilling
Billy Wagner

Voting for Jones is not a difficult decision for me and hasn't been since he appeared on the ballot, but I do find it interesting that so many others view him as a borderline-at-best HOF candidate. The common criticism is that Jones' performance declined precipitously after age 30. While that's true, it neglects to note that he debuted at 19, and at age 21 he hit 31 homers and won the first of 10 consecutive Gold Gloves. If he'd instead debuted at 22 and excelled through his age 33 season, would that criticism be negated? Considered by many to be the greatest defensive center fielder of all time — Willie Mays himself told Jones as much — the longtime Brave had a decade that few other outfielders can rival. From 1998 through 2007, Jones averaged 34 homers (67 extra-base hits) and 103 RBIs, while winning 10 consecutive Gold Gloves, posting an .847 OPS and playing an average of 158 games per season, including 161 of 162 in three consecutive seasons and never fewer than 154.

C. Trent Rosecrans' ballot

Barry Bonds
Roger Clemens
Todd Helton
Andruw Jones

David Ortiz
Manny Ramirez
Alex Rodriguez
Scott Rolen
Gary Sheffield
Sammy Sosa

I never voted for Sosa before this, his 10th and final year. I've been persuaded over the last few years, especially as my thinking has evolved with those who reached their peak during the steroid era. I have Bonds, Clemens, Sheffield, Ramirez and Rodriguez on my rogues ballot, so it's not the steroids issue. To me, it had mainly been peak production vs. career production with Sosa falling short on career production. But I've gotten to where I feel the peak was so high that it can't be ignored. Sosa had always been behind other players on my ballot, although I didn't vote for 10 last year and regretted that. I honored Schilling's request to not vote for him and that allowed me to check Sosa's name.

Daniel Barbarisi's ballot

Barry Bonds
Roger Clemens
Todd Helton
Andruw Jones
David Ortiz
Scott Rolen
Curt Schilling
Billy Wagner

Back when I was a baseball beat writer, the players I spent the most time talking to were the ones on the fringes of the roster — the middle relievers, backup catchers, utility infielders. For the most part, they were the most relatable guys in the clubhouse, and they had figured out how to squeeze the most out of their oft-limited talent in order to reach this level. Conflicted on how I should vote when the time came, I would at times raise the issue, and ask those guys what they thought. Many seemed angry at what Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens represented.

As a Hall voter, until now I've opted against including those biggest names, partly because I think — based on these and other conversations — that stars of their reputation and status using pushed a lot of borderline players into a difficult choice. Many of those Four-A guys straddling that line between the minors and majors were compelled to partake just to keep up and maintain their livelihood.

I still think that's true. But looking at and discussing the case of Ortiz forced me to re-examine my stance, how I vote and who really bears more of the blame here.

Ultimately, I've come to believe the system and rewards structure in place at the time forced unenviable choices on everyone. At the time when Bonds and Clemens put up outsized numbers, there was no real enforcement mechanism, no consequences, no material disincentive for using; and there were significant benefits to doing so, especially when MLB itself was celebrating their supercharged achievements.

Ortiz's case — by the regular and postseason numbers, and the impact, I think he's a Hall of Famer, but he has that 2003 test, despite its issues — is on many levels similar to those of Bonds and Clemens. The hypocrisy implicit in voting for him and keeping Bonds and Clemens out (all three of them players who operated before baseball explicitly said "no") instantly struck me as too great, and would require tying myself in one too many logical knots. So I thought and talked a lot about it, and came away more acutely conscious of the distinction between players who might have taken performance-enhancing drugs before there were established rules with real consequences, and those who came after testing and punishment programs were codified. Until that point, baseball not only looked the other way, but lauded and cashed in on the record-breaking feats of the era. And the players shouldn't be unduly vilified for that.

So, Bonds, Clemens, Ortiz in; A-Rod and Ramirez out (and Gary Sheffield jussst on the other side of my arbitrary line based on performance relative to era and unremarkable postseason production).

Do I feel "right" about it? Not really. But I feel a little less wrong.

Joe Smith's ballot

Barry Bonds
Roger Clemens
Todd Helton
Andruw Jones
David Ortiz
Manny Ramirez
Alex Rodriguez
Scott Rolen
Gary Sheffield
Billy Wagner

This seems like it gets harder every year. I took Schilling off because he asked last year to be removed from the ballot. I think he's a HOFer by his numbers but chose to add someone else worthy instead (Todd Helton). The toughest call for me has been Sosa. I've voted for Bonds and Clemens, and have since added Ortiz and Rodriguez. They were all dominant at their positions for a long time (Ortiz being the rare DH to be considered). For me, I'm not keeping Sosa out strictly because of performance-enhancing drug suspicions or corked bats. To borrow wisdom from my colleague (and Hall of Famer) Jayson Stark, Sosa's biggest comparable is Mark McGwire, who was a bigger offensive force and didn't come close to election. I only had 10

choices and wasn't ready to remove one of them for Sosa, who I will continue to consider and hear arguments for.

PETER GAMMONS: TODD HELTON'S HALL OF FAME CASE IS COMPLICATED—FOR REASONS UNLIKE HIS PEERS.

What many of the participants in the 1994 Cape Cod League All-Star Game remember about that day was that it was unusually windy.

"The wind was blowing hard in from center and right field, which was unusual for Orleans," recalls [Yankees](#) scout Matt Hyde, who then was an assistant coach for Brewster.

"It wasn't a great baseball day," says Todd Helton, who played for Orleans and had narrowly beaten out Brewster's Sean Casey as the East team's starting first baseman.

Some, though, look back and think about things beyond the weather — especially those of us who were asked to throw out the first pitch. What does stand out for most of us, however, is that because of the wind, the home run derby couldn't be what they had hoped. Northeastern University first baseman Mike Glavine — who finished the season with 13 homers and at the time was tied with Lamar outfielder Morgan Walker for the regular-season lead — interested scouts, especially with his being Tom Glavine's brother. Nebraska's Darin Erstad was the best player in the league, already on the path to being the first pick in the 1995 draft. He was, of course, also a noted football player at Nebraska, and had won the 1994 national championship. And he wasn't the only two-sport star at the game that day.

"We have a punter and special teams dynamo from Nebraska and the starting quarterback at Tennessee in this derby," one scout said. "But why is Todd Helton in a home run derby? He hasn't hit a home run in this league."

And he wouldn't. When he left prior to the playoffs, Helton played 35 games, good for 120 at-bats, hitting .308 with nine doubles — but no homers. Several scouts pushed for Casey. Some pushed for Erstad, who was also Bradley's department store Employee of the Month for June, while Mark Kotsay was everyone's favorite grocery bagger at the Bourne A&P. The next summer Erstad went first overall to the [Angels](#), while Kotsay was MVP of the College World Series.

"Mike (Glavine) was a hitter who pulled a lot of balls in the air to the pull side," remembers Hyde, who now sees a lot of Glavine because Glavine coaches Northeastern, a major national sleeper in college baseball. "He'd hit balls that on a normal day would be home runs, but the wind killed."

The same thing happened to Erstad, who, if you remember Game 6 of the 2002 World Series, could hit bombs to right field. Not that day.

But Helton?

“What was strange,” says Helton, now back home in Knoxville, “is that I normally didn’t hit balls out to center and right.”

Bill Mosiello, Helton’s coach at Tennessee who that summer coached Brewster, says “he just hit bullets out there that day, and they cut through the wind.” Mosiello, who later managed [Mike Trout](#) in the Angels system, says one of his jobs that summer “was to make sure no baseball team stole Helton away and get him back to the football coaches at Tennessee.”

Helton was in Knoxville for fall practice. Peyton Manning wasn’t ready to take over, not yet.

On the Cape, they essentially made the derby a shootout, first homer wins. Helton won.

“That was the first home run derby I ever won. I never won one in the minors, either,” he says.

That seems all right. He hit 369 homers in the National League. Glavine was a 22nd-round pick by Cleveland in ’95, played seven games with the [Mets](#) with his brother, got one hit, and when he was replaced for defensive purposes at first base, his substitute was Tony Clark.

By the time the 1995 college season began, Erstad was a sure thing as the first pick. José Cruz Jr. of Rice was the third pick followed by Kerry Wood. All along, scouting directors projected Helton to be the fifth pick, going to the Oakland A’s, but when Cuban refugee Ariel Prieto became eligible for the draft, the A’s took him, so Helton dropped to eighth. Those things happen. With the 15th pick, Boston took a Texas high school pitcher named Andy Yount instead of Roy Halladay, who went 17th to Toronto. Yount hurt his hand and started 12 games in the Red Sox organization. Halladay is in the Hall of Fame.

When I mailed my Hall of Fame ballot on Dec. 27, Todd Helton was one of the names on it. I voted for Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens and David Ortiz, although I don’t believe my selection of Ortiz should be explained like the other two. I voted for six others, as well.

There are always names that stand out when they first appear on the ballot — and, for me, if one plays 10 years in the big leagues, that itself is a remarkable achievement — and there are also many whose candidacies become more distinctive after two or three years examination over multiple ballots. Apologies to Brian Kenny, because when Abreu came on the ballot last year, I passed him by; a year later, I realize he is, at worst, a fringe candidate, and a year from now the same might be true of [Tim Hudson](#), Andy Pettitte, [Jimmy Rollins](#) and [Joe Nathan](#).

In the past, I saw Helton as a fringe candidate. Now, I feel very strongly about him. That Home Run Derby was on July 23, 1994. The next Hall of Fame induction ceremony will be July 24,

2022. At the forum of the inductees on July 25, maybe we can recreate Glavine vs. Helton with Wiffle Balls and bats, as happened after Chipper Jones and Alan Trammell were inducted and finished the day-after forum, when they were joined by Trammell's guest, Lou Whitaker, in their HOF version of a home run hitting contest.

In reality, Helton's election process may be a long one, as it is with Curt Schilling in his final time on the writer's ballot, and for Jeff Kent the next year. Remember, Larry Walker polled 34.1% in 2018, his eighth year on the ballot, then jumped to 54.1% in 2019 and made it in 2020, then had to wait for his induction until September of 2021.

A career playing in Coors Field is hard to quantify, a fact which made Dan O'Dowd's job as general manager exceedingly difficult over his many years with the [Rockies](#). There is the light air and the associated recovery issue; remember, pitcher Mike Hampton, among others, slept in a hyperbaric chamber. In his 10 years at Coors Field after his 1995 trade from Montreal, Walker played more than 142 games once, 153 in 1997, his best season. In Helton's first 10 full major-league seasons, 1998-2007, he averaged 154 games.

"He hated to sit, which is why his last six years were spent in pain, between back problems and three elbow operations," says O'Dowd.

Facts: Helton's 1.048 home OPS is the eighth-best ever among players appearing in more than 1,000 games, trailing names like Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Walker and Barry Bonds (incredible when one knows how hard it was to hit balls out to right field in what was then Pac Bell Park).

There is the ball movement factor, the way the ball moves differently in Colorado, and how that impacts players when they go on the road. "You play a dozen games at home and balls don't move that much, then you go on the road for the next dozen games against the same teams and the pitches move completely differently," says O'Dowd. "That makes hitting really difficult."

Helton's career road OPS was .855, among the greatest ever home-road split, although hitters who played in Boston may wonder if the splits for a strong left-handed hitter wouldn't be similar to those in Denver (Williams and Wade Boggs are among the all-time home average leaders). Taking his seasons as a whole, home and road, one appreciates the comps offered on Helton — [Don Mattingly](#), George Brett, Boggs, [Freddie Freeman](#) — and remembers the fact that he had 10 consecutive seasons with 35 doubles (Bobby Abreu did the same, and his Hall of Fame vote percentage may start creeping up next year). Baseball-Reference's version of WAR lists him as 12th among first basemen, and two above him — Mark McGwire, Rafael Palmeiro — did not make the Hall because of PED issues.

He was one of the best defensive first basemen among modern players, with great hands and a rocket arm (Tennessee coach Rod Delmonico called him "the best pitcher I ever coached"). In 2000, when he led the National League in OBP, slugging, doubles and runs created, and was

second in walks while hitting 42 home runs, the New York Times referred to him as “the greatest player nobody knows.”

I’ve found that those who played with and know him revere his fire and competitiveness. We who live where East Coast bias blossoms from Memorial Day until Labor Day — when with an 8 a.m. tee time, a 6 a.m. run time for stripers or a 7 a.m. 10-miler, one sometimes can watch the last two innings of the Giants-Dodgers — seldom appreciate outstanding Rockies players; ask [Ryan McMahon](#).

Hopefully, Helton continues his upward momentum after his 45 percent showing in 2021, climbing towards election like his former teammate Walker did. Remember, Walker’s first five full seasons were played in Montreal, his final one-and-a-half in St. Louis, and 41 percent of his home games were played where the *home* in home/road splits didn’t mean residing in the land of a humidor. For Helton, 1,141 games were played with “Coors Lite” still-life pitches, and then, 1,106 spent adjusting to real-life movement elsewhere in the nation.

So, that’s one name on my ballot. These are the rest.

2. Barry Bonds

Of course I read “Game of Shadows,” and I remain staggered by it, as well as the astounding reporting that made it the “Peril” of baseball history books. But when the 2022 Hall of Fame Induction Ceremonies take place on July 24, it will be the 17th such July celebration since [Major League Baseball](#) had a definitive PED policy.

I see where so many of the Hall of Fame players object to PED-accused players being admitted, but in the last decade there have been several inducted who many are convinced used them. The “proof” was word of mouth, not tests. In some cases, teammates were adamant one way or another. The book made it difficult to ignore, but what Bonds and Clemens had which Sammy Sosa did not was a Hall of Fame resume long before the late 1990s. In his final three years with the [Pirates](#) and his first season with the [Giants](#), Bonds should have won four straight MVP awards, but for perceptions of his personality.

Terry Pendleton edged Bonds for the award in 1991, and he was one of John Schuerholz’s best signings and a leader on a team that went last to first, but Bonds was in the midst of winning four consecutive Gold Gloves and in ’91 led Pendleton in on-base, OPS, WAR and homers. I remember asking questions about a productive player in the 1990s and whether his bulked body and offensive numbers were related. Some players thought they were. Others shrugged. In the early 21st century, one slugger said, “I’d bet 75 percent of players used something. If you didn’t, you probably didn’t give a (—).”

Then, remember, the first time a star player was suspended after the drug agreement went into effect in 2005 was Palmeiro, a near-certain future Hall of Famer whose test results and suspension came out at the end of the Cooperstown Hall of Fame induction in July 2005. There

is so much we don't know about the period from 1980 to 2005, so little we understand about the complexities that resulted in the use of PEDs, including how much money was made from players and across a sport whose revenues boomed for so many reasons each decade beyond the Andy Messersmith-Dave McNally free agency decision

Unless the baseball industry has greatly benefitted from offshore accounts, we know that when the players went on strike in August 1994, they got 52% of the revenues, and today that number is somewhere below 50 percent. In that 31-year period, Bonds leads the majors in homers, intentional walks, MVP awards, Wins Above Replacement, Runs Created and putouts in left field, but never was he the highest-paid player in the business.

What will be interesting is that this is the final year Bonds, Clemens and Sammy Sosa are all on the ballot, which will lift some of the clouds off the votes until [Alex Rodriguez](#) and [Manny Ramirez](#) are off and clear space for more candidates and performance-based debates.

3. Roger Clemens

Clemens' major-league spring training debut was 1984, in Winter Haven, Fla., against the [Tigers](#), managed by Sparky Anderson, a team that went on to win 104 games and the World Series. Before the game, Anderson talked about the short bus ride from Lakeland, and how some Tigers rookie who'd faced Clemens in the Florida State League the previous summer was talking about an incident when one of his Lakeland teammates — who went to Oklahoma State, which in Clemens' mind was a bitter enemy — took out Clemens' Texas and Winter Haven teammate Mike Brumley and knocked him out of the game. When that player got up to bat again, Clemens beamed him.

"I shouted, 'no more talking about this guy,'" said Anderson. Which made me think about the fourth game of the 2000 ALCS between the Yankees and [Mariners](#), when Clemens threw a fastball behind Alex Rodriguez's head, and went on to post a complete game shutout with one hit allowed and 15 strikeouts, perhaps the best post-season pitching performance I've watched in person.

Clemens pitched for the Red Sox through the 1996 season, won 192 games, including 242 2/3 innings for a bad Red Sox team in 1996 before his bitter departure to Toronto. Twice he pitched games in which he struck out 20 and walked none. He won three Cy Youngs in Boston; it was reportedly there that his alleged/rumored PED use began. When he retired after his age-42 season, he had seven Cy Youngs — three in Boston, two in Toronto, one in New York, one in Houston — and won 354 games, a number topped only by Warren Spahn (363) and Greg Maddux (355) among pitchers born after World War I. He won an MVP. He threw 211 1/3 innings at age 42. He never tested positive.

There are many baseball fans and scholars who do not believe Bonds or Clemens deserve induction. Alex Rodriguez is unquestionably a Hall of Fame talent, but he was suspended after

the owners and players agreed on PED testing; the difference is that voters have years to debate the A-Rod case.

In the bargaining on a labor agreement in 2002, Bud Selig, who had taken his share of criticism for how the 1998 McGwire-Sosa chase became a scandal, wanted drug testing. The MLBPA, with strong leadership, balked, and the two sides reached an agreement where there would be anonymous testing in 2003 — and if more than 5% of players tested positive, real testing would begin in 2005. Around 7% of players did test positive, but they were to be anonymous, and off all records. The union was ready to destroy all test results, “then,” as one of the player reps remembers, “there was a case stemming from BALCO, they delayed destroying the tests ...” And the New York Times revealed some of the names, including that of David Ortiz. The results were not legitimized, hence he is not considered to have failed in the same way that A-Rod and Manny Ramirez later did.

In Clemens’ final 1996 season in Boston, he made \$5.5 million. In Bonds’ 1998 season, when he’d already won three MVP awards, he made \$8.9 million. When Rodriguez admitted his PED use — and, [as one who experienced his emotions](#), his shame and contrition sweated through his sweater because he understood what the game meant to him — he made \$33 million. Ramirez made \$18.9 million in 2008, the year he shoved his way out of Boston. There were many complications that went along with the growth that more than quadrupled MLB’s revenues from the end of the strike in 1995 to the Palmeiro suspension, revenues that had nearly doubled again when the pandemic so ravaged the business in 2020-21.

4. David Ortiz

The David Ortiz Bridge starts across the street from where the plot to throw the 1919 World Series was hatched, and a couple of hundred yards west begin the Fenway Park offices. Like Ethan Allen at Ticonderoga and Samuel Adams at the Boston Tea Party, the honor of the bridge puts Ortiz in the pantheon of New England heroes.

In April 2013, after the Boston Marathon bombing, there was a ceremony at Fenway Park honoring the heroes and the wounded, the first responders and the police. Ortiz was at one end at the dugout, waiting to follow his teammates as they were introduced and walked on the field. All of a sudden he charged down the dugout and stopped to where I was standing for NESN, at the other end of the dugout.

“That kid they killed was eight years old, same age as my son,” he yelled. “Those (—) killed that kid.”

Ortiz was not scheduled to speak when he was on the field, but he seized the microphone and when he proclaimed “this is our (—) city and nobody is going to dictate our freedom, stay strong,” a deafening roar erupted through the park. Boston Strong began in earnest. The Red Sox, a last-place club in 2012, won the World Series. In Game 2 of the ALCS against [Max Scherzer](#) with the Red Sox down a game, Ortiz hit an eighth-inning grand slam to tie the

contest, just as he had homered in Game 4 of the 2004 ALCS in the 12th inning to bring the Red Sox back to a 1-3 series deficit against the Yankees. Or homered off Kevin Brown in Game 7. And on and on.

Ortiz was at the top of the marquee as the Red Sox won World Series in 2004, 2007 and 2013. He hit 541 home runs in his career. Yes, he was a DH in 88% of his major-league at-bats. No less than commissioner Rob Manfred has worked to exonerate him from that 2003 test by joining the many voices who have questioned the 2003 results, which are flawed on numerous levels. Ortiz never failed another test and was never subject to league discipline, unlike Rodriguez, Ramirez and Sosa. Unless impact is not an allowable voting factor, Big Papi is going into the Hall of Fame.

5. Curt Schilling

[Pedro Martinez](#) and Randy Johnson won World Series titles alongside Curt Schilling, in their cases three years apart. With Arizona and Boston, the former a franchise's one-and-only, the latter the organization's first in 86 years. At a Hall of Fame forum with Johnson, I raised the Schilling issue, thinking much of the audience detested Schilling. "Curt may be part of the reason I'm here," responded Johnson. "We pushed one another. We competed *with* each other and made each other better. He belongs here."

Pedro Martinez, never one to mince words, said, "he taught me a lot about preparation. He may have added a couple of years to my career because of it. I agree. He belongs here."

One of the most honest and fair people ever worked with is John Kruk, and he often said, "away from the field I often couldn't stand him. But if I needed to win a game, the one person I wanted on the mound was Curt Schilling."

Kruk was Schilling's teammate in 1993 when Schilling beat the [Braves](#) — who'd won pennants the previous two years — and got the [Phillies](#) to the World Series. Toronto beat Philadelphia, 15-14, in Game 4, which seemingly had broken Philadelphia's heart and soul. Game 5? Schill, 2-0. Back to Toronto, and then Joe Carter happened.

Schilling won games in all three postseason series in 2001 throwing 98 MPH, in 2004 throwing 95 MPH, and in 2007 throwing, at times, 85 MPH; the Red Sox would sometimes post higher velocities on their scoreboard to keep his spirits up.

Schilling had no problem criticizing an ink-stained wretch like me, as is his given right. He could beat a drum of politics that strained the imagination, yet then if there were a charitable opportunity to help inner-city kids, a signed, game-worn [Diamondbacks](#) uniform would arrive via FedEx, or he would participate in fundraising forums.

Whatever, this isn't about politics; he never tested positive (and rang up astounding numbers in the Steroid Era). I believe his induction speech will/would be about respect and passion for the

game, his admiration for Sandy Koufax, Greg Maddux and others behind him on the Cooperstown stage, and what union leaders like Jim Bunning, Robin Roberts and Tom Glavine did for all players. If he gets to see his plaque up on the wall of the hall, he will be as emotional as Ted Simmons.

6. Andruw Jones

We get some of the issues with Andruw Jones' candidacy: His .254 average would make him only the fourth player in the Hall with a career average under .260. He had some troublesome on-field patches, such as with the [Dodgers](#), and a 2012 arrest on domestic assault charges. He finished second in the 2005 MVP balloting, the only time he ever finished higher than eighth. He hit 434 home runs, but only approximately 60% of players with that career total are in Cooperstown.

But for all the years he played for the Braves, when their goal was to win, he won 10 Gold Gloves. His first step was mind-boggling, his presence vital as part of the foundation supporting their three Hall of Fame starters. It's been said only Willie Mays was better, but we may not be including enough looks at Devon White, or even Jim Edmonds. Regardless, Jones was among the all-time great defenders during his years in Atlanta. His 345 home runs and 10 Gold Gloves in a decade (1998-2007) in which the Braves finished first every year from 1998 through 2005 is a piece of history. His career Defensive WAR ranks 22nd all-time; none of those who rank higher are outfielders. And for those of us who love center fielders who could play shallow, he was a favorite, and for most of us in that group, he's a Hall of Famer.

7. Scott Rolen

Jeff Bagwell once described hitting with 6-foot-4, 245 pound Scott Rolen playing third base as "trying to hit realizing there's a condominium down there, a condominium that can move like a shortstop." A condominium that won eight Gold Gloves, and ranks sixth among all third basemen in Defensive WAR (behind Brooks Robinson, Adrián Beltré, Buddy Bell, Clete Boyer and Graig Nettles).

Then add to that 517 doubles, fourth among third basemen (behind George Brett, Beltré and Chipper Jones), WAR (10th among third basemen and adjusted OPS+ (again tenth). Rolen had conflicts with some managers, and in the second half of his career he sometimes did not seem happy. He is, admittedly, a borderline Hall of Famer, but when a Hall of Famer compares him to a condominium and his 317 home runs and 2,077 hits are inches over the Hall of Fame qualifying numbers, Scott Rolen is one step over the line and onto Route 20 from Albany to Cooperstown.

8. Jeff Kent

No player has hit more home runs while playing second base than his 351, and he notched 377 total while playing other spots. Bowing, as I so often do, to Fangraphs' Jay Jaffe, if we take

players with 7,000 plate appearances — at least half of which came as a second baseman — Kent is second to Rogers Hornsby in slugging, third behind Hornsby and Charlie Gehringer in OPS, 10th among all second basemen in OPS+.

He won an MVP in San Francisco. Few will ever fully understand the motorcycle incident, but when as a young player he refused to dress in women's clothing for a road trip, he should have been applauded for intelligence, respect for women and his Berkeley-honed freedom of thought. Speaking of Berkeley, he didn't get enough credit for what he did in saving the baseball program at Cal in 2010 and 2011, and thus helping hand [Marcus Semien](#) and Mark Canha over to our baseball pleasure.

Kent wasn't a Roberto Alomar-type second baseman; he'd benefit from the game today. But he turned tough double plays, and he just didn't dwell on the first-person pronoun. Several [Astros](#) players have said he was a guy who got to the clubhouse, didn't say much, then went out and played his behind off. I may be wrong, but the more I spent time with him, the more I believed he loved the game much more than was portrayed. One Astros teammate says, "he would back any teammate at any cost." OK, maybe not Barry Bonds in San Francisco. I've got my pen put aside to check the box for [Chase Utley](#) next winter.

9. Billy Wagner

No position is more difficult to judge in the proper historical perspective than relief pitching. Rollie Fingers, Goose Gossage and Hoyt Wilhelm gave their managers whatever was needed, anytime it was needed. I saw Billy Wagner pitch for the Brewster Whitecaps in the summer of 1992 and still believe he's the best I've ever seen in the Cape Cod League.

When he pitched in that summer's All-Star Game in Harwich, he threw 10 pitches, none were even fouled off, yet scouts voted Wayne Gomes and Brian Anderson as the two best pro prospects in the game. "You can't be that small and be in the big leagues," one told me, disappointed because before the game I did a feature for ESPN on him. FYI, when Jim Kaat makes his induction speech, he's going to mention 5-6 Bobby Shantz, who was 24-7, 2.47 ERA for the Philadelphia A's in 1952 and won the AL MVP four years before the Cy Young Award was created.

Relievers' lifespans are usually short; if [Jonathan Papelbon](#) had pitched more than a dozen seasons, would he be a Hall of Famer? Wagner could blaze, and he struck out 33.2% of the batters he faced, best in the modern game. The .187 opposing average is way beyond the pale. He was a teacher to Papelbon, and other young reliever teammates.

He's not going to be inducted this summer. But he deserves more consideration. I do not want to hear that a middle reliever that throws 80 innings is more valuable than someone who closes out 30-something ninth innings on a team that is in a pennant race, and I do want to hear more on the case of Billy Wagner v. History.

10. Gary Sheffield

In March 1986, I was working on a piece on Wade Boggs for Sports Illustrated, and we went to a game to see a pitcher named Chris Myers at Boggs' alma mater, Plant High School in Tampa. Boggs mentored Myers, and wanted to see the game.

Also at the game was Dwight Gooden. His nephew, Gary Sheffield, was pitching for Hillsborough High School. Myers did not pitch that day; he played first base. Sheffield threw in the low 90's. Myers got a hit off him. Sheffield hit 509 homers, walked 1,475 times and struck out 1,171 times in the majors. Myers was a first-round pick by the [Orioles](#) in 1987, his career stalled in the minors.

A couple of years later I was doing a story on Sheffield and the neighborhood where he and his uncle grew up in Tampa; he insisted on driving and wouldn't let me stray far from him, then did most of the interviewing in St. Petersburg, where much of Gooden's family lived.

Many years after that, I was walking out of Legends Field with Sheffield when a man yelled, "Gary you never come back to your old neighborhood, you've forgotten where you came from."

Seconds passed, and Sheffield muttered, "no, I remember where I came from."

Sheff had his moments, great and not-so-great. He was drafted by the [Brewers](#), but got into a feud with Harry Dalton and had to be traded. He demanded trades from other teams, but over his career he matured. He went to the West Coast for a winter training with Barry Bonds, which led to charges he used The Clear. Sheffield claimed he didn't know what he was using, and before he had a press conference, he talked by phone with Harold Reynolds and me and said, "you know what really bothers me, Barry stole my chef."

BALCO was swirling, and Sheff was still seething about losing his chef.

Remember how hard he swung the bat, then think about that 1,475/1,175 walk/strikeout ratio. He finished his career with 509 homers, 37th in Offensive WAR (ahead of Frank Thomas, [Miguel Cabrera](#), Carl Yastrzemski, Jim Thome, Reggie Jackson, Dave Winfield and Willie McCovey), 39th in extra base hits, and when he retired he went into the agent business.

It's been more than a quarter-century since I first saw Gary Sheffield; I watched him mature and I always remember one thing — his respect for his mother, Betty Jones, Doc's sister. Mother and son loved Doc, but the ghosts that haunted the pitcher were not going to get Sheff. I once commented about her toughness, and he said, "you don't know how tough." Sheff is his mother's son, tough enough never to be her beast of burden.

JOE POSNANSKI

OK, let me start with something that's been bugging me — I've been working for a few days on a post called "Should Bad Guys Be in the Hall of Fame?" The post has really turned me inside out. It is built around the fact that, as you undoubtedly know, Hall of Fame support for Omar Vizquel has entirely cratered.

I don't think I'll ever finish that essay, it just got too dark.

So I'll write this one instead.

Let's clarify, for a moment, what "cratered" really means. Two years ago, Vizquel got more than 50 percent of the vote, truly rarified air. I did not vote for him and, being blunt, did not come particularly close to voting for him: In my mind, Vizquel was a wonderful defensive player and a below-average hitter, and he played forever, and added all together I have him behind other shortstops such as Bert Campaneris and Dave Concepcion and Jimmy Rollins and probably others.

But lots of other people loved Vizquel's case — more than 2,800 hits, 11 Gold Gloves, all those great barehanded plays, the distinctive joy he brought to the game.

In the last year, several nasty charges have been made against him — domestic abuse, sexual harassment. He vigorously denies all charges, and from a legal standpoint, all of that has and will be worked out in the courts.

But in the Hall of Fame court, he has been unequivocally found unworthy. At this moment, Ryan Thibodaux and his folks have released 116 Hall of Fame ballots of people who voted last year; 59 of those people voted for Vizquel, more than half.

This year, the number is 12 — yes, 47 of the 59 have dropped him off their ballots.

And of the 11 new people voting this year, exactly zero have Vizquel on their ballots.

He's done. He will likely get the 5% necessary to stay on the ballot for one more year, but I imagine next year he won't even get that. His Hall of Fame dream is over, barring something ... well, I can't imagine what.

And in working on my original post, I started wondering: Where does this line end? Because ... Andruw Jones was arrested for an ugly incident of domestic abuse (he pled no contest and paid a fine). Barry Bonds' ex-wife said he beat her repeatedly and his ex-girlfriend said he threatened to kill her. The New York *Daily News* reported that Roger Clemens' illicit relationship with Mindy McCready began when she was 15.

And, for that matter, Joe DiMaggio reportedly "smacked around" Marilyn Monroe, Ty Cobb was charged with "cruel treatment," when his wife sued him for divorce, Kirby Puckett allegedly threatened to kill his wife, Bobby Cox was arrested on domestic assault charges and his wife told police he had assaulted her many times before (she later retracted the statement), and this is all just the easy stuff to find. The deeper you dig, alas, the more nastiness you will find. That's not because people in baseball are worse than the rest of society. It's because people in baseball are just like the rest of society.

I honestly don't know what we're supposed to do with any of that. It's fair to say, I think, that it's the Baseball Hall of Fame, and they have sportswriters vote on it for crying out loud, and as such it is obviously baseball that should be considered. It's also fair to say, I think, that the Hall of Fame is an honor — baseball's ultimate honor, as it's often called — and that honor obviously should not be given to people who do really terrible things.

There are also, like, 100 bible verses and a million philosopher quotes warning about the terrible dangers of judging others.

Truth is, I fully see both sides. People who vote for Omar Vizquel are not approving the way he's lived his life; they're registering their belief that he was a great baseball player. And people who have withdrawn their vote for Omar Vizquel are not saying that he's any less of a baseball player; they're registering their belief that he is unworthy of the Hall of Fame.

And it's the round-and-round nature of the thing that leaves me at a loss. As you might remember, I once came up with the Willie Mays Hall of Fame. The conceit was to come up with a Hall of Fame that only included baseball players who were as good in every way as Willie Mays. And, not to give away any spoilers, but in the end, I found that nobody was good enough to be in the Willie Mays Hall of Fame — not even Willie Mays himself.

It goes without saying that if a person had to be perfect to get into the Hall of Fame, nobody would get in. But it also goes without saying that it's a long, long distance between perfection and people who do really bad things. Where do you draw the line? I suppose the idea is that everybody draws their own lines, and then you put it up for a vote, and if 75% find agreement then the person gets into the Hall of Fame.

That's a messy way to do things, and it will lead to all sorts of illogical and discordant things. But, so far, I guess, it's the best idea we've come up with.

So, here's the Hall of Fame question of the day: Who is the better Hall of Fame candidate, David Ortiz or Gary Sheffield?

Notice the question: I didn't ask who was the better *player*. We will get into that, but that's not the big question. No, I'm asking: Who is the better Hall of Fame candidate?

And, even more, I'm asking: Is there a difference between those two questions?

Let's start with some basics — David Ortiz will probably get elected this year. Gary Sheffield definitely will not. With 13\30 public ballots in, Ortiz is getting 83% of the vote. That doesn't make him a lock to get in by any stretch — he still has to get 71% of the "private" votes, and in general the people who do not publicly reveal their ballots tend to be significantly harder on suspected steroid users.

We don't need to delve very far into Ortiz's specific story — his connection to steroid use is an illegally leaked drug test — to note that pretty much anyone even tangentially connected to steroid use has gotten 10-20% less support among the private votes. I think he gets there. But I think it will be painfully close, at least this year.

Sheffield, meanwhile, is getting 50% of the vote right now. It's the best he's done — he drew less than 15% in each of his first four years on the ballot — but it will not be close to good enough to get him elected. With only two years left on the ballot after this one, it's going to take a real wind shift for Sheffield to get elected to the Hall of Fame.

OK, so we know that the voters have Ortiz way ahead.

And that leads to the first question: Was Ortiz the better player?

I'm not sure we can give a conclusive answer to that, but I do think we can get pretty close to one. Let's begin with their hitting numbers — Sheffield did get about 900 more plate appearances than Ortiz, so please keep that in mind:

Ortiz: .286/.380/.552, 141 OPS+, 632 doubles, 19 triples, 541 homers, 1,768 RBIs, 1,419 runs.

Sheffield: .292/.393/.514, 140 OPS+, 467 doubles, 27 triples, 509 homers, 1,676 RBIs, 1,636 runs.

Boy, that looks close, isn't it? Ortiz, having had so many games at Fenway Park (he played the Green Monster the way Yo-Yo Ma plays the cello) is way ahead in doubles. Sheffield, though, got on base more and, because of that, scored many more runs.

So, who was better? Well by Baseball-Reference Batting Runs (RBat), Sheffield was demonstrably better, 561 batting runs above average to 455 for Ortiz. That difference does surprise me, I must admit — their OPS+ numbers are SO CLOSE. I asked our pal Tom Tango to explain why there is such a big gap, and he explained it this way:

1. The fact they have such close OPS+ misses the true value of those extra walks that Sheffield got.
2. RE24 is probably the most complete way to evaluate offense because it looks at the 24 different states of baseball* and it shows Sheffield being 60 runs more valuable on offense than Ortiz.
3. Sheffield's career is longer so there is more value there.

**The 24 states of baseball? It's actually easier that you think: There are 24 possibilities every time a batter steps to the point. There could be: No runners on with 0, 1, 2 outs (3 states); runner on first with 0, 1, 2 outs; runner on second with 0, 1, 2 outs; runner on third with 0, 1, 2 outs; runners on first and second with 0, 1, 2 outs; runners on first and third with 0, 1, 2 outs; runners on second and third with 0, 1, 2 outs; and bases loaded with 0, 1, 2 outs — that's 24 different states.*

Tango also points out something else which I find fascinating — Sheffield's Win Probability Added, which looks at every individual at-bat, is higher than Ortiz's. I did not expect that at all, considering Ortiz's clutch-hitting reputation.

Look, they were both absolutely incredible hitters, way above Hall of Fame level, but if we're comparing them, the advanced numbers offer a pretty powerful argument that Sheffield was better.

In fact, let's look at it them more way, by ranking at each player's best offensive season.

For Sheffield, that would probably be 1996 for the Marlins, when he hit .314/.465/.624 with 33 doubles, 42 homers, 120 RBIs and 118 runs scored.

For Ortiz, that would probably be 2007, when he hit .332/.445/.621 with 52 doubles, 35 homers, 117 RBIs and 116 runs scored.

Those are two extraordinary seasons, no question about it. There doesn't seem much to choose between them. Sheffield did get on base more and hit more homers, but Ortiz had many more doubles and hit for a higher average.

But if you look closer, Sheffield's season was better. He played in a somewhat lower-scoring environment. He played half his games in a tough hitting ballpark in Florida while Ortiz was tilting Fenway Park. And the most compelling stat is still on-base percentage — the game is very much about making the fewest outs — and Sheffield's 20-point lead there carries the day.

By RBat, Sheffield was 76 runs above average in his best year and Ortiz was 58 runs above average. FanGraphs, calculating things a bit differently, also gives Sheffield a pretty commanding lead, 70 runs above average to 62.

I think Sheffield was the better hitter.

Now, you don't have to buy any of this. You absolutely could argue, "Hey, come on with your RE24 and Rbat talk, it's obvious, Ortiz hit more doubles and more homers, he drove in more runs, what are we even talking about here?" All's fair in love and baseball arguments. But, honestly, taking all things into consideration, even if you don't buy my premise that Sheffield

was a better hitter, I don't see a compelling argument that ORTIZ was the better hitter. I think it is, at best, a push.

OK, moving on, who was the better baserunner? Well, that's obviously Sheffield — Ortiz was a very smart baserunner, but he was legendarily slow. Sheffield was the much faster athlete (he stole more than 250 bases in his career), and all in all he was clearly better on the bases.

What about defense? Well, that's tricky stuff. Ortiz was a designated hitter almost 90% of the time — after age 28 he never played more than 10 games in the field. So his defensive value is easy enough to figure: It's basically zero. Yes, it is true that when pressed into action, as he was in the playoffs at times, he proved surprisingly spry out there. But, no, we can't give him any points for defense.

And Sheffield? Well, by Baseball-Reference numbers, Gary Sheffield was the worst defensive outfielder in baseball history. Here are the five worst defenders by Baseball-Reference's Fielding Runs Above Average (Rfield):

1. Derek Jeter, minus-253 runs
2. Gary Sheffield, minus-195 runs
3. Adam Dunn, minus-168 runs
4. Michael Young, minus-152 runs
5. Matt Kemp, minus-141 runs

Now, it's not apples to apples because Jeter and Young played elite defensive positions. So if you would like to take positional adjustments into account, you can look at Defensive WAR, but that does Sheffield no favors at all:

Lowest dWAR:

1. Adam Dunn, minus-28.4 wins
2. Gary Sheffield, minus-27.7 wins
3. Frank Howard, minus-22.7 wins
4. Dave Winfield, minus-22.4 wins
5. Frank Thomas, minus-22.5 wins

Yes, I can see your face: You might want to throw out the whole thing when you see Dave Winfield, a seven-time Gold Glove winner with a glorious arm, on such a list. Bill James, among others, is deeply skeptical that Sheffield was THAT terrible a fielder. I can see Bill's counter-argument: Sheffield was a fantastic athlete, he played five different positions in his career (he began as a shortstop), he made enough good plays that he didn't stand out as an eyesore out there, and his teams usually won.

But you can't miss the obvious math here — Sheffield's range numbers are putrid, no matter what position he played. He just didn't make as many plays as other defensive players.

So, in considering the two players, what do you do? Ortiz didn't play the field. Sheffield played the field but was a liability. Which one gets dinged more?

By Baseball Reference's calculations, Sheffield gets hurt quite a lot more — they subtract 272 runs from his total (-195 for fielding, -77 more for playing less valuable defensive positions).

Ortiz, meanwhile, only gets dinged 220 runs (-204 for being a DH, but only -16 for his actual fielding). That's a 50-run difference below average, or seven or so wins in WAR. I must say I don't agree with that. I do not believe that Sheffield, who started 2,203 games in the field, was worth *less* defensively than David Ortiz, who started just 278 games in the field. I just don't see that at all.

But, OK, this is where we are. You add it all up for WAR purposes and here's what you get:

Baseball-Reference WAR: Gary Sheffield, 60.5; David Ortiz, 55.3

FanGraphs WAR: Gary Sheffield, 62.1; David Ortiz, 51.0.

So both say that Sheffield was better. And, as I have mentioned, I tend to agree. They were both incredible hitters. But I think when you take everything into consideration, Sheffield was the better player.

And now we ask the real question: Who is the better Hall of Fame candidate?

I think a lot about Sandy Koufax. A lot. He turned 86 last week — Happy Birthday, Sandy — and it occurred to me then, not for the first time, that he is actually the perfect Hall of Fame

candidate. What do I mean by that? I mean that pound for pound, he had more Hall of Fame moments than anyone in baseball history, between the perfect game, the no-hitters, the Yom Kippur stand, the World Series dominance, the Game 7 performances, etc., etc., etc.

To squeeze all of that into a 12-year career — and really he did just about all of it in six years — is beyond remarkable, and it is why Koufax's name still stands out among the legends.

Sometimes, for effect, it's fun to compare the career stats of other superb pitchers like Johan Santana or Ron Guidry to Koufax, but it feels a little bit like comparing another artist to Vincent Van Gogh by counting the paintings. Koufax's brilliance is not in the numbers. It is in the memories he burned into baseball history.

Gary Sheffield had an impactful career, no question about it. I can still see him now with that bat waving dangerously behind him. Was he the scariest hitter in baseball to face? Certainly, he was right there. He seemed to throw all his fury and soul into each and every swing, and yet he rarely struck out. He would have stretches where he was simply impossible to get out. He was outspoken, he was controversial, he was brilliant, he was arrested, and he was caught up in the steroid mess.

But ... by the Sandy Koufax measure, his Hall of Fame case might be less than awe-inspiring. How important is he to the story of baseball? I'm not sure. I tend to remember the aura of Sheffield more than individual moments. I remember he was on that crazy 1997 Marlins team, but I don't recall anything in particular he did. And then that team was cast out to the four corners of America. I remember him on some great but inevitably disappointing Yankees teams in the mid-2000s, and again I don't recall anything in particular he did. His time with the Braves is completely gone from my memory. He did hit 500 home runs, but I don't really remember the big one — No. 500 happened when he played for the Mets (he played for the Mets?) and came in as a pinch-hitter, and he hit it off someone named Mitch Stetter.

How much should it matter that Sheffield's greatness is, at least for me, vague and easily forgettable?

Maybe it shouldn't matter at all.

But now: Ortiz. I remember everything. Don't you? It's so strange, if you look at his career numbers, he wasn't any better in high-leverage situation (.292/.388/.556) than he was in

medium-leverage situations (.299/.388/.572). He wasn't dramatically better with runners in scoring position (.296/.411/.531) than he was overall (.283/.380/.552).

And yet ... he was the most dangerous hitter I ever remember seeing when the game mattered. Well, him or George Brett. Maybe it doesn't add up over a career, but how many incredible Ortiz moments spring to mind? Dozens, right? There's his walk-off home run in Game 4 of the 2004 ALCS, his walk-off single in Game 5 of that series, his curse-shattering home run in Game 7, his first-inning home run in Game 1 of that World Series, the one that told all of Boston that this time everything would be all right, his "This is our F— city" speech after the Boston Marathon bombing, the grand slam he hit against the Tigers in the 2013 ALCS, the 11-for-16 performance in that year's World Series, and we could just keep going and going.

All of which takes us back around to the question, and for the sake of argument, let's say these two premises are true (you might disagree with one or both, but this is only to bring home the point):

A. Gary Sheffield was a slightly but measurably better player than David Ortiz.

B. David Ortiz was much more famous and accomplished many more memorable and significant things in the game.

You get only one vote — which one do you put in the Hall of Fame?

Only one vote, I choose David Ortiz. I just think that, in the end, the Hall of Fame is about celebrating moments, achievements, memories. I've started to think about the Hall of Fame this way: Imagine a huge book* that tells the story of baseball. Do you have it in your mind?

**Did someone say huge book?*

OK, now turn to the back of the book and look at the index.

And ask yourself — how many times is the player listed in that index?

Gary Sheffield? I'm sure he'd get a couple of mentions.

But David Ortiz would have a whole column of mentions.

I'm not saying that this is where the Hall of Fame argument begins and ends. Roger Maris undoubtedly has a bunch of mentions in such a book and he's not in the Hall of Fame. Joe Carter would be in that index, while Craig Biggio might not. Dwight Gooden would be in that index, while Bert Blyleven might not. Fernando Valenzuela would be in that index while Mike Mussina might not. The Hall of Fame, despite the name and the occasional arguments people make, is certainly not *just* about fame.

But fame, surely, is a part of it. Altering the course of baseball history is certainly a part of it. As it turns out, I didn't have to choose just one — so I voted for both Sheffield and Ortiz. But as I see the stark voting difference between the two, I can't help but think two conflicting thoughts. One, I really do believe that Sheffield was better. And two, I really do believe that Ortiz is the better Hall of Fame candidate.

FANATICS TO ACQUIRE TOPPS SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

In an increasingly-rare piece of transactional news, online retailer Fanatics has reached an agreement to acquire renowned trading card company Topps Sports & Entertainment, [per](#) Scott Soshnick and Eben Novy-Williams of Sportico. Topps Sports & Entertainment represents the trading card and digital collectible portion of the greater The Topps Co. enterprise. The deal is worth \$500MM, according to [Jared Diamond and Andrew Beaton of the Wall Street Journal](#).

News of tonight's reported deal comes in the wake of [last year's revelation](#) that Major League Baseball and the MLBPA would not be renewing their longstanding agreement with Topps. Instead, both the league and players union pivoted and partnered with Fanatics on a long-term licensing deal, granting the online sports retailer with exclusive trading card licenses.

Though the Fanatics Trading Cards brand has yet to launch a single product, recent valuations for this portion of the Fanatics enterprise have skyrocketed. Thanks in part to renewed trading card interest by hobbyists during the past two years, a recent valuation of Fanatics Trading Cards now stands at \$10.4 billion. Both the MLB and MLBA are equity holders in Fanatics' new trading card venture, creating an ongoing revenue source for both parties.

In a [piece](#) by The Wall Street Journal, Jared Diamond and Andrew Beaton note that Fanatics' original August deal with MLB wasn't set to begin until after the 2025 season. Likewise, licensing deals with the NFL and NBA were also a few years from kicking in, slowing Fanatics' push into the trading card space. Acquiring the Topps Sports & Entertainment division now, however, will allow Fanatics to accelerate its foray into this portion of the hobby market years

ahead of schedule. In addition to immediate distribution rights of baseball cards, Fanatics also picks up Major League Soccer, UEFA, and Formula One licenses in the deal.

Implications of this acquisition will be far-reaching, though it most directly increases Fanatics hold on a growing industry. The Topps Company will now see business operations span only its candy and gift card divisions, barring further activity from the company's ownership group. Sports leagues across the world are now primed to see increased revenue streams thanks to their newly cut licensing deals and equity stakes with Fanatics.

For baseball and its players union, this news looms against a still-stagnant lockout backdrop. The financial ramifications of this deal are unlikely to have any immediate impact on the state of the lockout, though it appears another party, Fanatics, now has its interests more wholly aligned with the 2022 baseball season being conducted as scheduled.

ASH, MAPLE AND THE FUTURE OF BASEBALL BATS

By Stephen Nesbitt and C. Trent Rosecrans

Stashed inside a pitch-black storage room in Joey Votto's home in Cincinnati are rows and rows of ash baseball bats. The bats are vacuum-sealed and stored upright on carpet to prevent warping. The room is temperature- and humidity-controlled, with no daylight seeping in. These are preservation measures Votto took after buying the bats in a blind panic last winter and consulting wood experts on how to make this stockpile last the rest of his career.

"It's as safe as I can keep it," Votto says.

A year ago, before this space became a storehouse for ash's last stand, Votto was preparing for a pivotal season at first base for the Reds. After seeing his production wane since an MVP runner-up season in 2017, Votto had revamped his swing and approach in the second half of 2020 and gotten to a point where he thought it would work, where he could once again, even at 37, be in the MVP discussion.

But everything needed to be perfect, and his bats weren't. Votto asked a Louisville Slugger rep why the wood on the barrel of his bats — an ash M356 model double-dipped in black finish — was fraying. They were "falling apart," Votto says, with cracks cutting through the grain right in the center of the bat.

"Good bats, in my experience, haven't done that," Votto says. "So I made the request (for more bats). That's when I was informed that ash was not going to be available going forward. And that caused a bit of a panic in me because it's something I'm very, very used to."

Ash, the preferred wood for most of baseball history, is on its way out. Blame beetles or Barry Bonds or both. (More on them later.) Louisville Slugger, a brand built on ash baseball bats, was born in 1884 when Bud Hillerich made a bat for Pete “The Louisville Slugger” Browning. For generations, white ash from forests along the Pennsylvania-New York border was chopped, milled and shipped to Kentucky, then turned into bats for major league hitters.

Today, according to fourth-generation bat-maker Bobby Hillerich, not one major leaguer is swinging an ash Louisville Slugger in games.

Hillerich & Bradsby, maker of Louisville Slugger bats, still has a sawmill in Pennsylvania that produces ash bats, but they no longer are in the hands of Joey Votto or Evan Longoria, two of the last players to exclusively use ash bats. Longoria has, like most hitters in the game, moved on to maple.

Votto, though, refused to switch. He’d tried maple and birch and liked neither. So, after talking to the Louisville Slugger rep last offseason, he started contacting other bat companies. Some had a few ash bats; others had none. Marucci had the mother lode. Votto bought out the rest of Marucci’s pro-quality ash inventory, somewhere between 50 and 70 bats, and carefully stowed them in his storage room. He’s hoping he won’t run out before he retires.

In June 2002, the month the Reds drafted Votto, a team of entomologists from Michigan State University drove to Westland, Mich., just outside Detroit, to inspect a stand of ash trees. Something was killing ash trees in the area. They had thinning canopies, yellowed leaves and bark riddled with small holes.

Peeling back the outer bark of one tree, the entomologists found bright green beetles beneath, each about a half-inch long, and a maze of tunnels left by larvae feeding on the tree. The experts took photos and collected some beetles.

Back on campus, they set to work identifying the insects decimating ash trees. A Michigan State coleopterist (beetle expert) whittled the suspects down to a specific genus — *Agrilus* — but couldn’t pin the exact species. So, beetles were shipped around the world: to a systematist (taxonomy specialist) at Oregon State University; to a forest health group in Ontario; to the London Natural History Museum; and to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, which has 35 million specimens in its insect collection in Washington, D.C.

“We got an email back from the Smithsonian that said there’s no comparable specimen,” says Deborah McCullough, a Michigan State entomologist, “which means they’d never seen it before.”

Then beetles were sent to Eduard Jendek, a Slovakian entomologist and expert on Asian wood-boring beetles. There, in a lab in Bratislava, Jendek identified the species as *Agrilus planipennis* — the emerald ash borer.

Jendek helped color in the ash borer's backstory. The invasive species likely came from China, where ash trees have evolved to resist it, and was carried to the United States in wooden pallets or other packaging materials. The prevailing theory is that infested pallets wound up outside warehouses in the Westland area, making it the epicenter of the ash borer's destruction.

Almost no literature existed about the borer. Employees at the U.S. Forest Service's insect unit at Michigan State translated a page and a half of 1960s research from a Chinese forest entomology textbook about a beetle that turned out to be the ash borer — describing its basic biology, life cycle and behavior. They tracked down the researcher, Chengming Yu, hoping he knew more about the borer and how to stop its spread. But he didn't. During China's Cultural Revolution, Yu was made to do labor instead of research, [according to the Lansing State Journal](#), and his work on the beetles infesting ash trees was lost.

"It's an epic saga," McCullough says. "And that leads us to baseball bats."

Six years earlier, a scout and a stagehand sat side by side in their usual seats at Mayflower Pub in downtown Ottawa. Colorado Rockies scout Bill MacKenzie was a drink or two deep and lamenting how often he saw ash bats breaking. He turned to his friend Sam Holman, who worked at the National Arts Centre, and challenged him to use his woodworking savvy to make a better baseball bat.

"Well," Holman would later say, "I knew I wasn't going to make a better ash tree."

At the time, Holman was rebuilding a staircase in his home. He picked up a cut of maple he'd planned to use for the banister and decided to make it a bat instead. He researched maple characteristics — it's harder than ash, doesn't dent or flake — and studied bat patents. Then Holman carried the maple block out to the garage, switched on the lathe and turned his first bat.

Holman needed two more strokes of fortune before the bar challenge began baseball's maple revolution. The first was lax SkyDome security. After testing and tweaking the maple bats in Ottawa, Holman drove to Toronto and talked his way onto the turf during Blue Jays batting practice. Joe Carter tried one of the bats and, as the story goes, his first swing was a home run.

"You're on to something there," Carter told Holman.

The second was Carter being traded to the Giants in July 1998. He would spend the final 41 games of his career playing alongside Barry Bonds. In that time, Carter introduced Bonds to Holman's maple bat — the Sam Bat. Bonds liked it. He didn't just want to try maple; he wanted a weekly shipment of 12 bats. (He would use Holman's maple bats for the rest of his career, often emailing the bat-maker his thoughts about the weight and feel of his current batch.)

“From there, (Holman) started producing his bats in his garage,” says Arlene Anderson, president and co-owner of Holman’s company, the Original Maple Bat Corporation. “His home here in Ottawa — which Bonds has actually visited — turned into the production facility. He had bats in his living room and dining room. Guys were lined up to use their bathroom in the morning.”

In 2001, Bonds broke the single-season home-run record, smashing 73 home runs with Sam Bats. Well before Bonds would blast past Hank Aaron and become baseball’s all-time home run leader beneath a cloud of steroid suspicion, big leaguers were focused on his bats. Almost overnight, there was an explosion of interest in this small Canadian maple bat company. Hitters turned from ash to maple in droves. Sporting goods stores wanted to stock maple bats. Holman needed more space, more staff, more bats. He hired the bar manager at the Mayflower Pub to be his production manager. He bought an empty bar in Ottawa and converted it into a bat-making laboratory. It still wasn’t enough to keep up with demand.

Maple was suddenly king, and just in time.

The following year, the first ash borers were discovered in Michigan.

The little green beetles had actually been infesting trees in Michigan for far longer than anyone knew at the time. Michigan State researchers conducted a tree ring study — creating a 5,800-square-mile grid of southeast Michigan and coring more than 1,000 dead and dying ash trees — and concluded that the emerald ash borer had arrived in the state in the late 1980s or early 1990s. It went undetected for more than a decade, feasting beneath the bark, multiplying and moving from tree to tree and town to town long before being discovered.

The scale of the ash borer’s spread stunned experts. Says McCullough, “It’s like a pot that’s sort of simmering, and you don’t realize how hot it is.”

In early 2003, the ash borer was discovered across the border in Ohio.

Officials in Michigan and Ohio quarantined ash in affected counties, attempting to stop its spread as soon as evidence of the borers was found there. This angered the owners of massive tree nurseries, who now had to sit on millions of dollars’ worth of ash trees, and it only slowed the ash borer’s advance. Nursery ash sales were traced forward; infected ash already had been sent to Maryland and Virginia, unintentionally introducing the larvae to East Coast ash trees. On smaller farms, dead ash trees had been cut down and sent to mills, or chopped for firewood and carried across county lines.

The ash borer could fly, or hide beneath the bark. It couldn’t be contained.

The beetles were found in West Virginia in 2007, then western Pennsylvania later that year, marching toward the white ash forests in central Pennsylvania and upstate New York that have

produced baseball bats for much of baseball history. In 2013, the borer was detected in Warren County, Pennsylvania, where Hillerich & Bradsby has its Akeley, Pa., mill.

“There are pests that can stunt the growth, and there are pests that can kill the trees, but I’ve never seen anything like the emerald ash borer. There was no stopping it,” says the man who still runs that mill, Brian Boltz, head of timber operations at Hillerich & Bradsby. “I went to Michigan in 2005 to see how devastating it was, and they said they thought within 12 years the ash would be dead in Pennsylvania.”

Today, [the ash borer has spread](#) to 35 states, six Canadian provinces and Washington, D.C. Five of the six most prominent ash tree species in North America are now included on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s red list of threatened species.

There still are pockets of ash in Pennsylvania — a state forest inventory showed an 18 percent decline in white ash trees between 2014 and 2019 — but much of it is lower-quality wood, Boltz says, not something he’d put in the hands of a major league hitter.

At the same time, the dwindling ash supply aligned well with dwindling demand over the past two decades. One could argue Bonds saved baseball from running into an ash bat shortage much sooner than it did.

“Thank God maple came on when it did,” says Pete Tucci, a former first-round pick who now has his own bat company, Tucci Lumber, “because the ash trees that are left wouldn’t be able to support the demand of baseball as a whole right now.”

Votto wasn’t always an ash apostle. As a high schooler in Toronto, he swung whatever wood bat was available. In the minors, he tried a variety of bats without settling on any. It was Jay Bruce who got him hooked on ash when they were at Triple A together. Votto came to love the sound of a baseball smacking the sweet spot, the way an ash bat hardens and grain grooves deepen over time, and the feedback delivered to his hands when making solid contact. An ash bat, he says, just feels like the best possible tool a hitter can have.

And so when Votto has an ace ash bat, he wants to protect it.

“This might sound crazy,” Votto says, “but there were times I was even a touch more particular about what I was going to swing at because I didn’t want to break the bat.”

It’s not that Votto never gave maple a chance. He uses it every day in batting practice — he’d rather break maple in that setting and save ash for competition. Last year, he took an ash bat for a test run in the batting cage and broke it. That really bothered him. “It’s like that scene from ‘Seinfeld’ where Elaine goes out and gets the sponges, then she’s like, ‘Are you sponge-worthy?’” Votto says, with a laugh. “I was hitting, and I was like, ‘Are you cage-worthy?’ I don’t want to burn them on batting practice.”

Before Bonds turned most major leaguers on to maple, Hillerich & Bradsby dominated the bat market with its Louisville Slugger brand. Mark McGwire had just broken the single-season home-run record with an ash bat in 1998, so even as Bonds and Sam Bat broke it again Hillerich & Bradsby decision-makers had a mantra about maple: If it wasn't used for ladders and tools, it wasn't fit for baseball bats, either. They stuck with ash, which *was* trusted for furniture, tools, water skis, hockey sticks and cricket bats (until Bonds' maple wave made its way to cricket).

"We really, really fell behind," says Hillerich, adding that Hillerich & Bradsby waited five more years before making its first maple bat. "If Bonds hadn't done what he did, I think a lot of companies would have been struggling. But it made for a way for other bat companies to get into the market, and — I'll just flat-out say it — they helped make us a better company, and the players have one hell of a product to swing today because of it."

The allure of maple is in its firmness. While ash is aided by a hardening process — using bone rubbing or steel burnishing to compress the grains — the cell structure of maple is naturally compressed, with tiny cells crammed together. Maple is heavier than ash, and the sound of a baseball off the barrel brings a louder crack.

Initially, maple bats had a habit of shattering dangerously, breaking into multiple pieces and presenting an injury hazard. MLB enlisted TECO, a third-party wood inspection service, to study the broken bats, then adopted several changes to the making of maple bats — including using an ink-dot test to measure the slope of grain in each maple bat before it's sent out.

Birch offers the compressed grain structure of a maple bat and the flexibility and trampoline effect of an ash bat. Like ash, birch has a break-in period in which the bat will get harder the more you make contact in certain spots. "It kind of provides a best-of-both-worlds feeling," says Joe Cmelik, a Louisville Slugger product line manager. Blue Jays superstar Vladimir Guerrero Jr. now swings a birch bat; perhaps he'll be to birch what Bonds was to maple.

By now, most major leaguers have grown up swinging maple bats. Unlike the veteran Votto, they're neither nostalgic about ash nor married to it. Ash simply isn't as consistent. An order of 12 ash bats might produce just a few "gamers" — bats good enough for game use. The ratio is better with birch and maple. Both of those are in abundant supply, compared to ash, and they benefit from the fact that there's little difference between top-quality wood and slightly lower-grade wood.

"If you take the best ash — perfectly straight grains, seven grains per square inch, which has been scientifically proven to make the strongest ash bat as far as performance and durability — and then deviate off that," Tucci says, "the drop-off in performance is dramatic."

He adds, "There's a definite lifespan in an ash bat. You could never mis-hit an ash bat and it might last you two (batting practice) rounds, two weeks or two years. With birch or maple, if you never mis-hit it and you take care of it, theoretically it will last forever."

As soon as the emerald ash borer was identified in Michigan two decades ago, McCullough, the Michigan State entomologist, thought about baseball bats. She'd been studying at the University of Minnesota when the Twins won the World Series in 1987 and 1991; she didn't need graduate degrees in forestry and entomology (which she had) to notice they all were swinging ash bats back then. So, as the beetles spread across America, she saw the end of ash bats coming.

From time to time, McCullough will be driving along Interstate 275, and she'll pass the Westland warehouses where she believes the emerald ash borer arrived in the United States.

"Every time I drive over there I kind of give them the side-eye," McCullough says. "Like, what did you people do?"

The ash isn't entirely gone. Not yet, anyway.

In 2001, 95 percent of Hillerich & Bradsby bats were ash.

In 2021, Hillerich says, it's 87 percent maple and 12 percent birch and "whatever's left is ash." Tucci's inventory is 96 percent maple, 2 percent birch and 2 percent ash. In Ottawa, 95 percent of the Original Maple Bat Corporation's bats are maple, plus some birch for minor leaguers. (The company that popularized maple bats does have, however, a private stash of ash bats. "If Mr. Votto needs any more, we can provide them," Anderson says, laughing. "It's not a problem.")

Boltz, who runs the Hillerich & Bradsby mill in Pennsylvania, heard from a friend of his, a logger in the Allegheny National Forest, that he has four months' worth of ash logs Boltz could use. But Boltz is wary of buying any. "What you can find is not the same quality that was here for many, many years." Anyone who has standing ash is trying to get rid of it, Hillerich adds, and seldom does he get a log that doesn't have some sort of evidence of the borer.

"Once the borer is in it, it starts to really affect the wood," Hillerich says. "Even though it'll make a great piece of furniture, I don't think that once the emerald ash borer is in there it can take the impact (of an at-bat) anymore."

Still, Hillerich & Bradsby will mill the logs and make bats. While the quantity of pro-quality ash bats is too small to offer them to major league hitters, Hillerich says the company still sells 200,000 to 300,000 low-end ash bats each year. Sporting goods stores like to stock \$50-\$60 wood bats, and they're used anywhere from T-ball to high-school wooden bat tournaments. Hillerich also suspects that some of the bats are only being used for children's Halloween costumes. "They sell a lot of them around Halloween," he says.

When Boltz learned that Votto had managed to acquire more than 50 bats from Marucci, he replied, "I'm a little stunned that they found that much wood." Each bat needs to be made to

exact specifications — consistent in height, weight, density and more — and [no two trees are alike](#). A perfect ash tree can produce about 30 ash bats, Boltz says.

It's hard to find one well-grown ash tree these days, much less two.

"If I had known there was an end, I probably would have done a better job saving my bats over the years," Votto says. "If I'd been sent a good ash bat, I probably would have tucked it away and tried to take care of it. Because there's only so much left."

This season, Votto broke about 10 bats and earned four down-ballot MVP votes. His inventory of ash bats shrank slightly, but not a concerning amount. His contract with the Reds runs through at least 2023. He'll be 40 then. Votto's done the math a few times. He thinks he can make the ash last even longer.

NEW YORK TIMES CO. TO BUY THE ATHLETIC FOR \$550 MILLION CASH

The deal could help the media company reach its goal of 10 million subscriptions ahead of schedule.

The New York Times Company has reached an agreement to buy The Athletic, the online sports news outlet with 1.2 million subscriptions, in an all-cash deal valued at \$550 million, The [Times said on Thursday](#).

The deal brings The Times, which has more than eight million total subscriptions, quickly closer to its goal of having 10 million subscriptions by 2025, while also offering its audience more in-depth coverage of the more than 200 professional teams in North America, Britain and Europe that are closely followed by The Athletic's journalists.

Meredith Kopit Levien, the chief executive of the Times Company, called The Athletic "a great complement to The Times."

"We are now in pursuit of a goal meaningfully larger than 10 million subscriptions and believe The Athletic will enable us to expand our addressable market of potential subscribers," she said. Ms. Levien told analysts Thursday evening there was "relatively modest" overlap in subscribers of the two companies.

Under Times ownership, The Athletic will be operated separately from The Times's newsroom and its sports section, the company said. The publisher will be David Perpick, a longtime senior executive at The Times who has been a leader of its Cooking and Games apps, as well as the product recommendation site Wirecutter.

Alex Mather and Adam Hansmann, who started The Athletic in 2016, will stay on after the acquisition. Mr. Mather, currently the site's chief executive, will become general manager and co-president; Mr. Hansmann, now The Athletic's president, will be its chief operating officer and co-president.

"We started The Athletic to bring fans closer to the teams, players and leagues they love through deep, immersive journalism and storytelling," Mr. Mather and Mr. Hansmann said in a statement on Thursday. "Today marks a thrilling milestone for that dream, one realized because of the hard work of every single one of our employees. We are proud to have The Athletic become part of the Times Company's family of subscription products."

Mr. Mather and Mr. Hansmann, formerly colleagues at the fitness tracking app Strava, started The Athletic in the belief that die-hard fans were not finding the coverage they craved at a time when newspapers were in decline, Sports Illustrated was undergoing an ownership change and [ESPN began laying off journalists](#).

They hired prominent sports journalists from across the country and expanded quickly, bringing coverage of games and the latest sports developments to readers who had grown accustomed to getting news online. The Athletic had a reporter covering nearly every major professional sports team in North America, as well as several top European soccer clubs, while also serving up magazine-length feature articles and podcasts.

The site has about 600 employees — roughly 400 in its newsroom, making it the second-largest employer of sports journalists in the country, behind the Disney-owned ESPN. Like a number of digital media companies that have found success in recent years, The Athletic relies on subscribers, rather than advertisers, as its main source of revenue.

Recently, as its rapid subscription growth began to slow, The Athletic explored various options, including selling a minority or majority stake in the company, with private equity firms and corporations as potential buyers.

The Athletic brought in about \$65 million in revenue last year, with operating losses of roughly \$55 million, Ms. Levien told analysts Thursday. Ms. Levien said The Athletic would eat into The Times's profitability over the next three years, before adding to the bottom line, as it adds new subscribers and more advertising revenue. The New York Times will offer The Athletic as an independent subscription — and will ultimately make it a part of a New York Times package.

"The future growth of The Athletic and of the combined New York Times and The Athletic — and the broader bundle and portfolio of products — depends on things that we have literally spent the last half decade, maybe longer, learning how to do," Ms. Levien said in an interview, citing The Times's experience with marketing and advertising, among other things.

When asked about potential layoffs at The Athletic, she said, "at this point, that's not our plan."

Last summer, there was speculation that gambling platforms like FanDuel and DraftKings might acquire The Athletic. Ms. Levien said gambling could be a business opportunity for the company.

“We did not buy The Athletic to build a giant betting platform, but I don’t rule out that there will be ways that we work with gambling companies over time,” she said.

The Times’s acquisition of The Athletic is expected to close by April 1. For The Times, the addition will bring an infusion of paying readers. Ms. Levien has consistently emphasized the importance of adding digital subscribers since taking charge of the business in 2020. At the end of the third quarter of 2021, the Times Company had reached 8.4 million total subscriptions.

The Times’s growth in recent years has included other big-ticket acquisitions. In 2016, the Times Company bought [The Wirecutter](#) and its sibling site, The Sweethome, for more than \$30 million. In 2020, The Times bought [Serial Productions](#), the company behind the “Serial” podcast, for more than \$25 million. The same year, it acquired Audm, an app that offers listeners articles read aloud. The Times had about [\\$1 billion in cash](#) on its books as of the third quarter of last year, according to company filings.

“If we were to have tried to build something, it would have been The Athletic,” Mr. Perpich said. “And so when we saw it, we just said, ‘We should acquire it as opposed to trying to replicate what they’re doing.’”

When Mr. Mather and Mr. Hansmann started The Athletic, they said much of the nation’s sports coverage was “empty calories” produced by slowly dying newspapers, adding that a media company focused on journalism for sports fans would be better for readers.

Early on, Mr. Mather boasted in [an interview with The Times](#) that The Athletic’s goal was to let local newspapers “continuously bleed until we are the last ones standing.”

And more:

The rationale: The deal would expand The Times’s reach within an important niche audience. The Athletic has 1.2 million subscribers, which when combined with The Times’s 8.4 million would quickly bring it closer to its goal of 10 million subscriptions by 2025. (There is a “relatively modest” overlap in subscribers, the company said.) The Times said it would offer The Athletic as a separate subscription, and will ultimately make it a part of a broader package. “The Athletic would add a large, and growing subscriber base to NYT’s expanding digital tentacles and could provide significant upside,” Douglas Arthur of Huber Research wrote to clients.

The numbers: The Athletic, which employs 450 journalists, generated about \$65 million in revenue last year, but lost roughly \$55 million. The Times expects The Athletic to eat into its

own profitability over the next three years. “An alternative for the Times could have been to spend a fraction of this money to build a similar operation organically,” Kannan Venkateshwar of Barclays wrote. But David Perpich, a longtime Times executive who is set to become publisher of The Athletic, said, “If we were to have tried to build something, it would have been The Athletic.”

What about gambling? Last summer, there was speculation that betting platforms like FanDuel or DraftKings might acquire The Athletic. “We did not buy The Athletic to build a giant betting platform, but I don’t rule out that there will be ways that we work with gambling companies over time,” Meredith Kopit Levien, the C.E.O. of The Times, said.