

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

11.6.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Five HRs off one pitcher. Phillies up 2 games to 1. Maybe emotions would win over talent? Nope. Four pitchers combine for a no-hitter, some Verlander history, a 450 foot **Yordan Alvarez** blast, more great pitching and that was that. I was rooting for the Phillies but the better team won.

Probably a couple of cups of coffee this morning. World Series facts and anecdotes, the lady who helped bring the Dodgers to L.A., 2023 free agent class, automating balls & strikes, “state of the game”, history of World Series home runs, robot umpires and trivia.

The state of the game section brings together pieces by Joe Posnanski (former Kansas City Star columnists/now great newsletter publisher), Dan Shaughnessy (Boston Globe) and Tom Verducci (Sports Illustrated and author partner Joe Maddon’s autobiography).

Enjoy.

THIS WEEK’S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Since 2000, besides this year’s Houston Astros, 5 teams have played in back-to-back World Series. How many can you name?

2000 won, 2001 lost

2008 won, 2009 lost

2010 lost, 2011 lost

2014 lost, 2015 won

2017 lost, 2018 lost

WORLD SERIES BITS & PIECES

Game 6

Astros 4 Phillies 1

Saturday in Houston

Astros win series 4 games to 2

Leading up to his decisive game 6 blast, Alvarez hit a three-run, walk-off homer in the Astros playoff opener. But after that he was hitting .125 with zero homers over his past 10 postseason games. The homer off Phillies lefty **José Alvarado** won the Astros a championship.

The team went 11-2 en-route to the title, but it was not as easy as that record would indicate. Nine of those wins were by three runs or fewer. Five were come-from-behind.

José Altuve started the postseason by going 0-for-25. Justin Verlander had two awful starts. Production from the DH spot was non-existent — **Trey Mancini** and Díaz combined for two playoff hits.

Say what you want about sign stealing, the Astros built a strong roster and then executed. We've seen a period of six years when the Astros have never missed the ALCS, been to the World Series four times and have won it twice.

Including the postseason, the Phillies were 76-52 after **Rob Thomson** became manager on June 3. That's a .593 clip over 128 games. Philadelphia was 22-29 when **Joe Girardi** was fired in early June and replaced by bench coach Thomson.

Houston won 106 games in the regular season, 16 more than their closest competitor in the American League West. The team went undefeated in the seven games against American League competitors in the postseason.

Andy McCullough in The Athletic-- The easiest way to analyze the disconnect between regular-season success and playoff triumph is to view the two contests as disparate events. The 162-game slog rewards the deepest and most versatile rosters — you can't luck your way into 100 wins. The scramble of the postseason benefits the team that enters the bracket at its apex and maintains that level for the final sprint, as the Braves did in 2021 and the Phillies almost did this year. There is truth in both sentiments. The fear among some, myself included, was that by diluting the postseason to include 12 teams in 2022, Major League Baseball ran the risk of disincentivizing teams from attempting to build juggernauts: Why try to be great when being good was enough to win it all?

The early rounds of this postseason resurrected all these arguments. A succession of upsets prompted hearty discussion about the merits of the expanded format. In the wild-card round, the 101-win Mets fell to the 89-win Padres. San Diego further upset the apple cart by trouncing the 111-win Dodgers. Across the country, the Phillies marauded past the 101-win Braves.

There were chances for Houston to lament the format, or whine about having so many days off, or ponder existential questions about the game's cruelty. Instead, at every turn this October, the team just played better than its opponent. When Verlander faltered, **Framber Valdez and Cristian Javier** starred. When Alvarez went cold, rookie **Jeremy Peña** stepped up.

That is what it takes. But that is also all it takes.

Jeremy Pena is special. Hits in all 6 games—a rookie record. Hits in 12 of 13 post season games including a streak of 7. ALCS MVP. Then on Thursday, he became the first rookie shortstop in history to hit a World Series home run. But don't let that go whooshing by without stopping to appreciate it.

It isn't as if Pena accomplished this feat because no rookie had ever played shortstop in a World Series before. In fact, according to Baseball Reference, he's the 29th. The list of guys who didn't do that includes: **Derek Jeter, Troy Tulowitzki, Xander Bogaerts, Dave Concepcion.**

But none of them did what Jeremy Peña did. Pretty cool.

The 25-year-old star from the Dominican Republic, who grew up in Providence and played at the University of Maine, also won a Gold Glove and AL Championship Series MVP. Peña is the first hitter to win those three awards in a career, and he did it all in his first season. Peña was the first rookie position player to win MVP and only the third rookie overall, the first since Marlins righthander **Livan Hernandez** in 1997.

Astros starter **Framber Valdez** became the only lefthander other than **Sandy Koufax** in 1963 to strike out five consecutive batters in a World Series game. He fanned the side in the third, then **Bryce Harper** swung and missed a 97 miles-per-hour sinker to start the fourth before **Nick Castellanos'** 10-pitch at-bat that ended with him taking a 96 m.p.h. pitch on the inside corner.

The Astros had a 2.29 earned run average in 13 postseason games with 160 strikeouts over 126 innings. The bullpen allowed only five earned runs over 54 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings.

Former Red Sox catcher **Christian Vázquez** also played a role. He was in the lineup as the designated hitter and cracked an RBI single later in the sixth inning. In 2018, Vázquez caught the final pitch of the World Series for the Sox, the team that drafted him in 2008. He hoped to spend his entire career with Boston but was traded to Houston on Aug. 1. That Vázquez was in the lineup was made possible by a pre-game roster move.

The Astros received permission from Major League Baseball to drop first baseman **Yuli Gurriel** because of a knee injury and add catcher **Korey Lee**. That allowed Baker to play a hunch and use Vázquez as the designated hitter.

Astros' record over these last six seasons.

W-L: 541-329

Win percentage: .622

Games over .500: 215

Run differential: +1,167

World Series won: 2

World series appearances: 4

ALCS appearances: 6

Dusty Baker. two All-Star teams, won two Silver Sluggers and a Gold Glove, received MVP votes in three different seasons, won three National League pennants (1977, '78 and '81), one NLCS MVP award ('77) and one World Series ('81). In his 25 years as a big-league manager, he has won 2,093 regular-season games (ninth most all time), three pennants and three Manager of the Year awards. 1800+ wins as a player/1800+ wins as a manager. The 73-year-old Baker, who had been to the World Series twice before as a skipper, is the oldest championship manager, breaking **Jack McKeon's** mark (72) which was set in 2003. Baker also joined **Cito Gaston** and **Dave Roberts** as the only African American managers to win the top prize. He isn't just the oldest World Series-winning manager, he's the oldest manager or head coach in MLB, NBA, NFL or NHL history to win a championship

Baker, who made his MLB debut as a 19-year-old in 1968, and played until he was 37 (1986).

Baker was the youngest manager in the sport when he was hired in December 1992 to helm the Giants in '93. He was 43

In 1981, Baker and the Dodgers won the franchise's first title since 1965. He'd been with the club for two prior postseason runs, when the Dodgers lost to the Yankees in the 1977 and '78 Fall Classics.

With this '22 title, Baker went 40 years in between World Series wins. That's the most years between any two consecutive World Series won as a player (at least one postseason game played) or manager, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The prior longest such stretch was 29 years, by **Bob Lemon** between a 1948 title with Cleveland as a player and a '78 one with the Yankees as a manager.

Baker now has two titles spanning 41 years from 1981 to 2022. No individual in baseball history had ever had his title-winning ways reach across that many trips around the sun. The prior longest stretch between first and last World Series win, regardless of how many were won in the middle, belonged to **Casey Stengel**, per Elias. Stengel won in 1922 as a player, then in 1949-53, '56 and '58

Baker is the seventh individual to win the World Series as both a player and a manager in the divisional era (since 1969). He joins **Alex Cora, Joe Girardi, Davey Johnson, Lou Piniella, Dave Roberts and Mike Scioscia**.

When he made his managerial debut on April 6, 1993 with the Giants, the opposing team's leadoff hitter was **Geronimo Peña**, the father of **Jeremy Peña**, who won ALCS and World Series MVP for the Astros this postseason.

Baker won the World Series in his 97th postseason game managed, which is the most at the time of first World Series-clinching win, per Elias. The prior mark had belonged to Roberts, who won the 2020 World Series in his 65th postseason game at the helm. Baker's 97 postseason games managed are fourth all-time, behind only **Joe Torre** (142), **Bobby Cox** (136) and **Tony La Russa** (132).

Baker has managed 3,884 regular-season games, 10th-most all-time, which is also the most at the time of a manager's first title. That distinction was previously held by **Bruce Bochy**, who had managed 2,574 regular-season games as of the 2010 postseason, when the Giants won it all.

308 players played at least one game with him and 558 have played at least one game with him as their manager. Baker was in the on-deck circle with the Braves when **Hank Aaron** broke **Babe Ruth's** all-time home run record in 1974. As a manager, he was with the Giants when **Barry Bonds** broke **Roger Maris's** single-season home run record in 2001.

Game 5

Astros 3 Phillies 2

Astros lead 3 games to 2

Thursday in Philadelphia

No hit the night before, **Kyle Schwarber** homers leading off the game to snap the Phillies hitless string.

Justin Verlander finally gets a World series win.

516 starts. 2 (and likely a third) Cy Youngs. MVP. Rookie of the Year. World Champion. 3,000 strikeouts. But until Thursday night no World series pitching wins. Verlander needed 17 seasons, trips to five World Series, and nine total World Series starts to collect Win No. 1.

10 other pitchers in history have made at least as many World Series starts as he has. And you could argue that his career ranks with any of them. Except for one thing. ...

Those 10 have combined for *62 World Series wins*. And Justin Verlander had zero

When he becomes the 11th pitcher to win 3 Cy Youngs—well, the other 10 never combined for 24 World Series wins. Verlander zip.

Thursday marked his 16th career postseason win. That's the second-most of all time, behind only **Andy Pettitte** (19). You know how hard it is to win that many postseason baseball games but have none of them come in a World Series?

Well, just six pitchers in history have won at least a dozen postseason games: Pettitte, Verlander, **John Smoltz** (15), **Tom Glavine** (14), **Clayton Kershaw** (13) and **Roger Clemens** (12). They combined to win 17 of them. But Justin Verlander had *none* until Thursday night

The Phillies had every chance to take a decisive Game 5 victory and instead left 12 runners on base and went 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position

Game 4

Astros 5 Phillies 0

Series tied 2 games each

Wednesday in Philadelphia

On Wednesday night **Cristian Javier**, **Bryan Abreu**, **Rafael Montero** and **Pressly** didn't just shift the momentum of a best-of-seven set. They authored the first combined no-hitter in the World

Series -- an achievement that joins **Don Larsen's** 1956 perfect game as the only no-hitters in 118 editions of the Fall Classic.

Cristian Javier is a 25-year-old pitcher with a blood-curdling slider and a magical fastball that batters somehow cannot hit even when he throws it over the middle of the plate. The league hit .170 against him this year. In the playoffs, before this game even started, they had hit .100. Earlier this season, he combined with two other pitchers to no-hit the New York Yankees.

Then on Wednesday night, Javier utterly shut down a Phillies team that had bludgeoned the Astros one night earlier, the same night his parents had told him that he would throw a no-hitter. He threw six no-hit innings. It was remarkable and wonderful stuff.

In 12 1/3 innings in these playoffs, Javier has allowed just one run on two hits, and he's struck out 36% of the batters he's faced. In his three-year career, he now has a 2.20 postseason ERA, with 48 strikeouts against just 14 hits allowed.

Then Bryan Abreu didn't allow a hit in the seventh. Rafael Montero didn't allow a hit in the eighth. Ryan Pressly didn't allow a hit in the ninth.

It wasn't just that the Phillies didn't get a hit — they didn't really come CLOSE to getting a hit. The only ball they hit all night that had better than a 33% hit probability was a line drive to right that **Jean Segura** hit in the eighth off Rafael Montero. He hit it well. But it hung up and really wasn't that hard a play for rightfielder **Kyle Tucker**.

The only other postseason no-hitter was Hall of Famer Roy **Halladay's** 2010 National League Division Series gem for the Phillies against the Reds in this very building. Astros manager **Dusty Baker** was the Reds manager. Halladay missed a perfect game with a 5th inning walk to **Jay Bruce** (on a 3-2 count).

It was the second time this year the Phillies have been no-hit. On April 29 against the Mets in New York, 5 pitchers combined to shut down the Phillies. **Aaron Nola** started that game as well.

Nola became the third pitcher to start multiple games where his team was no-hit in a single season (including postseason), joining the Guardians' **Zach Plesac** in 2021, with three such games, and the Tigers' **Jim Perry** in 1973, with two.

Phils became the first team in AL/NL history to hit at least five homers in one game and then be no-hit the next, in the regular season or postseason.

Starting with the last two innings of Game 3, the Astros have now thrown 11 consecutive no-hit frames, tied with the 1939 Yankees for the longest such streak in a World Series **CHECK THIS**

This was the 19th combined no-hitter in Major League history, with four of those by Houston. The only other postseason attempt at a combined no-no that made it through the seventh came in Game 3 of last year's World Series by the Braves (**Ian Anderson, A.J. Minter and Luke Jackson**), against these Astros. Six of the last seven MLB no-hitters have been combined efforts.

This was the 318th no-hitter in MLB history.

Javier's brilliant effort, in which he mounted the first individual no-hit bid of at least six innings in the World Series since the Mets' **Jerry Koosman** went six against the Orioles in Game 2 in 1969.

Astros became the first team with two combined no-hitters in a season (including the postseason), they no-hit the Yankees on June 25.

This was the 19th combined no-hitter in AL/NL history. Before Wednesday, the 18 combined no-hitters had involved 62 different pitchers. Javier and Pressly are the first pitchers to be part of two combined no-nos in a career, let alone a season -- and they did it by starting and finishing the same two no-hitters.

Javier's outing was one of 10 individual no-hit bids in World Series history of at least six innings, the only one of those pitchers to be removed from the game before either losing the bid or completing it.

Javier has been almost untouchable this postseason, allowing just one run on a Eugenio Suárez homer in ALDS Game 1 in relief. That home run is one of two hits he's allowed across 12 2/3 innings. He's faced 44 batters, and opponents are 2-for-39. That's an .051 opponents' batting average, which would be the second-lowest in a single postseason behind only Larsen's .031 in 1956 (minimum 10 innings).

Javier also is one of only six starters ever to pitch at least six scoreless innings while allowing no more than one hit in a World Series game. The other five? **David Cone** (1999 Game 2), **Tom Glavine** ('95 Game 6), **Jim Lonborg** ('67 Game 2), **Claude Passeau** ('45 Game 3) and Larsen.

And another perspective (similar to several I read)

We talk a lot here about how the motivations of teams and the motivations of general baseball fans are not always aligned. The Astros had one goal on Wednesday night and that was to win the game and even the Series and guarantee that they will go back to Houston for Game 6.

That was their sole purpose, and so there was absolutely no way that they were going to have Javier stretch his start in search of baseball immortality. For him to actually throw a World

Series no-hitter, he would have had to throw, probably, 135 or 140 pitches. No team in baseball would ever allow that, not in today's game. Javier has never thrown more than 115 pitches in a game, and he hasn't thrown even 100 pitches since August.

Right. The winning strategy is to get him out after 97 pitches, have him ready to go out of the bullpen in Game 6 or possibly even start on short rest in Game 7. From the team perspective — and from an Astros fan perspective — that's 100 percent what Dusty Baker and the Astros should have done.

But for other fans? For baseball itself?

We're still talking about **Don Larsen** 75 years later. The buzz from the combo no-hitter barely lasted 75 minutes.

"Like, OK, you won the game," my friend wrote. "And in the process made baseball a little less magical, a little less special, a little more mechanized."

"Pulling this pitcher is just so wrong," he texted me. "So deeply wrong. God. No love for the romance of baseball. It's just gone. It didn't feel like history, at least not in the type of history that will go down in World Series lore."

It lacked the rising anticipation that completely overtakes all five of our senses as the game progresses. It lacked the euphoric outcry that explodes from the depths of the baseball fan's soul upon the final out in a hitless game. It lacked the blissful comedown from the ultimate high of witnessing a monumental triumph.

And that's a shame.

Through game 4, the Astros' five-run fifth was the latest crooked number in a World Series defined by them. There have been 30 runs scored in the Series, 15 by each team. Of those 30, 27 have come in innings of two runs or more. There have been just three single-run innings in four games. Of the 72 "ups" in the World Series, runs have been scored in just 13 of them. It's big-inning baseball, and both teams have been up for it.

Game 3

Phillies 7 Astros 0

Phillies lead series 2-1

Tuesday in Philadelphia

Game 3 -- Phillies 3B **Alex Bohm** hit the 1,000th HR in World Series off **Lance McCullers Jr.** **Babe Ruth** gave up the 23rd in history but then hit the 32nd, 42nd, 43rd, 47th, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 85th, 86th, 89th, 111th and 114th.

The Yankees are responsible for more than 35 percent of those 1,000 homers! They've hit 216 and allowed 148.

It took 27 years to hit the first 100 homers.

It's taken only *five* years to hit the last 100 because, well, let's hear it for the wild-card era!

No team had ever hit three home runs in the first two innings of a World Series game before Tuesday. But how about this: Only two previous teams had ever homered even once in both the first *and* second innings of a World Series game.

The first was the 1977 Dodgers, with **Ron Cey** and **Steve Yeager** both homering off **Catfish Hunter**.

The other was the 1980 Royals, who did it *against* the Phillies, with **Willie Mays Aikens** hitting both of them.

Game 1 – Astros take 5-0 lead

Game 2 – Astros take a 5-0 lead

Game 3 – Phillies take 6-0 lead

According to STATS, this is the first World Series ever played that featured three games in a row in which any team charged out to a lead of 5-0 or larger. But that's not just the first three games. And it's not just the home teams.

It had never happened *in any three-game stretch* of any World Series ever played. But then it happened here in Games 1, 2 and 3 in 2022.

Phillies starter **Aaron Nola**. Since 2018, Nola leads all pitchers in starts and innings pitched, and is one of three pitchers to have struck out 1000 batters in that span (**Gerrit Cole**, **Max Scherzer**). He's also become an incredible command pitcher, walking just 3% of the batters he faced this year, with an astounding 235/28 K/BB that ranks among the 15 best control seasons since 1893.

The Dodgers (1114) and Astros (1121) allowed the second- and third-fewest hits of any team since 1968, and two of the bottom-15 totals of all time.

Game 3 Phillies become first team ever to homer in first 5 innings of a WS game—**Bryce Harper**, **Kyle Schwarber**, **Rhys Hoskins**, **Alec Bohm**, **Brandon Marsh**. **McCullers** became the first pitcher in World Series history to give up 5 HRs in a game (why didn't **Dusty Baker** pull him?).

Never in the history of the World Series had five of the first 20 hitters homered for *any* team. Let alone off the same pitcher (Lance McCullers Jr.). Let alone on a night when their team hit more than twice as many homers (five) as singles (two).

Through game 3 the Phillies are 6-0 at home, and they're averaging seven runs a game. They have hit seventeen home runs in those six games.

Game 3 Phillies win 7-0. The most lopsided shutout win in a World Series happened more than 60 years ago, when the Yankees beat the Pirates 12-0 in Game Six. Winning 7-0 isn't all that notable. Over the long sweep of baseball history, 17 teams had posted a World Series shutout win of 7-0 or better, most recently the Braves just a year ago today. Before that, the Royals beat the Giants 10-0 in Game Six in 2014, and the Giants took out the Rangers 9-0 in 2010. It doesn't mean much; even with a rout under their belt, those 17 teams won just 11 of the 17 Series in which they posted a rout (the Yankees did it twice in 1960 and still lost).

No pitcher had allowed even four home runs in a Series game since **Dick Hughes** of the 1967 Cardinals against the Red Sox in Game 6 at Fenway Park.

Rico Petrocelli had two and **Reggie Smith** and **Carl Yastrzemski** one each in an 8-4 victory for the Sox that day (yes, it was a day game). But they were beaten in Game 7 by the great **Bob Gibson**.

Eleven pitchers had allowed four homers in a postseason game, three of them all-time greats — current Hall of Famer **Catfish Hunter** (1971 against Baltimore in ALCS), future Hall of Famer

Clayton Kershaw (2017 against Arizona) and future Hall of Famer **Max Scherzer** (this year's wild-card game against the Padres).

Three different pitchers had allowed four homers in a World Series game. Besides Dick Hughes mentioned above:

— **Gene Thompson**, pitching the Reds in Game 3 of the 1939 World Series, allowed two home runs to **King Kong Keller** and one each to **Joe DiMaggio** and **Bill Dickey**. The Yankees won that game 7-3 and ended up sweeping the series; that 1939 Yankees team is one of the best in baseball history.

— **Charlie Root**, pitching for the Chicago Cubs in Game 3 of the 1932 World Series, is the most famous of the pitchers to give up four homers in the World Series, because two of them were to **Lou Gehrig** and two of them were to **Babe Ruth** ... and one of those Ruth homers is his famous called shot (which you will be able to read a whole lot about in this book I keep hearing about called *Why We Love Baseball*, coming to bookstores in September, assuming the author finishes writing it).

But McCullers now stands alone with five homers. McCullers in the regular season faced 242 batters and gave up 4 HRs. Against the Astros he gave up 5 HRs in the first 20 batters.

There was the three-homers-in-two-innings portion. No pitcher in postseason history had ever done that, either — by which we mean allow three home runs before he'd gotten six outs.

There was the five-homers-but-only-one-single portion. Does it make any sense that McCullers gave up five home runs *but just one single*? It makes so little sense that you can look at it this way:

The Astros have played baseball for 61 seasons. They've never even had a starting pitcher do that in any *regular-season* game. And the Phillies have played baseball for 140 seasons. They've also never done that against any starting pitcher in any regular-season game. But then it happened ... in a World Series game.

Schwarber was part of the 5 HR barrage. He also was NL HR leader. It was only the third by an NL HR leader in that year's World Series in ... the last 38 years. The others were hit by **Ryan Howard** in 2008 and **Kevin Mitchell**, back in 1989.

The last NL HR leader to play in the World Series but not homer was **Gorman Thomas** for the 1982 Brewers. Since then, eight home run leaders had played in a World Series, and all eight had homered. Schwarber makes it 9.

The Phillies were the first team in regular-season history to hit five home runs off the same starting pitcher? They did that in 1921, off the Giants' **Phil Douglas** (in a game in which Douglas gave up 19 hits — and was still left in for eight innings).

But then the Phillies didn't do that again for 101 years — until they did it a month ago in Washington, in the final weekend of the season. Whereupon they then did that a third time *in a World Series game*

McCullers just became the third pitcher in history to start multiple World Series games in November. He started Game 7 in 2017. He started Game 3 five years later. The only other pitchers in history with two November starts: **Cliff Lee** (2010 Rangers, 2009 Phillies) and **Andy Pettitte** (2001 and 2009 Yankees).

In a related note, McCullers also just became the second pitcher in history with both a win and a loss in November. The other: Cliff Lee (won in 2009, lost in 2010).

When you add in Sunday's off day and Monday's rain day, here's how the Astros' not-so-rigorous schedule had broken down between the end of the regular season — four weeks ago Wednesday — and Monday night:

Days they played a game — 9

Days they didn't play a game — 17

So how did that happen? Here's how:

Oct. 6-10 — 5 days off (first-round bye)

Oct. 16-18 — 3 days off (swept ALDS, waiting for ALCS)

Oct. 24-27 — 4 days off (swept ALCS, waiting for World Series)

Oct. 30-31 — 2 days off (between Games 2 and 3 of World Series)

There were also two scheduled travel days in there. And that comes to 16 days of *not* playing. How rare is it for any team to play only nine times in 26 days, especially considering *they're in the middle of a World Series*.

Reviewing *every* team in history, starting from the date of their first game of the season and ending with their last game of the season (or postseason). They found only one other time in

the modern era in which any teams played this few games over any 26-day span. And that other time was slightly different ...

Since there was an earthquake involved!

That was the 1989 San Francisco quake, which caused the Giants and A's to play zero games between Oct. 15 and 27. So those two teams played only seven games in 26 days. But at least they could blame it on the San Andreas Fault.

And what was the last team to do this before the Giants, A's and Astros? You'd have to go back a while — to Farmer Weaver's 1893 Louisville Colonels, who also played just nine games in 26 days, in May, for reasons that aren't 100 percent clear but appear to come down to "the worst weather in the history of Louisville."

So those Colonels and the 1989 A's/Giants are the only three teams we know of that had to deal with anything remotely close to the Astros' sporadic schedule.

Bryce Harper homered in his last at bat at Citizen's Park in the final game of the NLCS. He then homered in his first at bat at Citizens Park in the World Series. More than half a century of League Championship Series have led up to the World Series. And according to STATS, only one other player before Harper had ever homered in his last home plate appearance of an LCS and his first home plate appearance of a World Series. The crazy thing is, it happened *in this same ballpark*. But besides that, these two things were not the same.

That other guy was **Jayson Werth**, for the Phillies, in 2009. Werth by the way is the all-time post-season HR leader at Citizen's Park with 6.

Astros won 19 more games this season than the Phillies. That is the largest difference between World Series teams since Cubs-White Sox in 1906.

Yuli Gurriel of the Astros set a record in game 3. His 24th career post-season hits are the most by a Cuban-born player. He passed **Tony Perez** (23) and **Bert Campaneris** (20). Gurriel won the 2021 AL batting title. Through game 3 he is 14-40 this post-season and has not struck out.

The Phillies' 6-5, 10-inning win over the Astros in the Series opener drew 11.68 million viewers on Fox, Fox Deportes, and the Fox Sports streaming app, the highest for Game 1 since 2019.

The game was seen by 11,475,000 viewers on Fox and 207,000 viewers on Fox Deportes last Friday night, Fox said.

This year's total was up 5 percent who watched last year's opener, a 6-2 Atlanta win over the Astros, and up 23 percent from the Game 1 record low set in 2020 when 9,353,000 watched the Dodgers' 8-3 win over the Rays. Washington's Game 1 win over Houston in 2019 was seen by 12,283,000.

The 2020 World Series, played at a neutral site in Arlington, Texas, because of the pandemic, was the first in the televised era in which games were viewed by fewer than 10 million. The low of 8,339,000 was set for the Dodgers' 6-2 win in Game 3, on a Friday.

Viewers peaked at 51,560,000 for Game 7 of the 1975 World Series between the Red Sox and Reds. Totals declined with the rise of cable television and then of streaming services, giving viewers more choices.

This year's opener, which began at 8:04 p.m. EDT and ended at 12:38 a.m. Saturday, drew a 23.6 rating and 57 share in Houston, and a 23.0 rating and 54 share in Philadelphia

The rating is the percentage of television households tuned in to a broadcast. The share is the percentage viewing a telecast among those households with TVs on at the time.

4,747 days since Philadelphia last played host to a World Series. On that night—Nov. 2, 2009—the Phillies staved off elimination with an 8–6 win in Game 5 over the Yankees thanks to a pair of home runs by **Chase Utley**.

The Phillies wore their classic retro powder blue uniforms Thursday. So when **Kyle Schwarber** went deep, it was the first World Series home run by a Phillie stuck in a '70s fashion statement since **Joe Morgan** and **Garry Maddox** homered in Baltimore in Game 1 of the 1983 World Series.

WORLD SERIES ROOKIES

The World Series has been going on since 1903. It's all sorts of amazing when, 119 years later, we're still getting firsts in the Fall Classic.

We had one last week when **Jeremy Peña and Bryson Stott** became the first pair of rookie shortstops to start a World Series game opposite one another. Peña and Stott (and to lesser extents, **Hunter Brown and Matt Vierling**) will ensure that first-year players will have an impact on this year's fight for a title.

With that in mind, here are five of the most impactful World Series from rookie players in chronological order:

Larry Sherry, Dodgers, 1959: Sherry is the only rookie to win World Series MVP honors and did so 63 years ago when he either earned a win or a save (two apiece) in all four of his appearances for the Dodgers in their six-game series win over the White Sox. He allowed just one earned run in 12 2/3 innings, leading an LA staff with **Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale** in frames along the way.

Mike Boddicker, Orioles, 1983: The 1983 ALCS MVP followed that up with another gem in Game 2 of the 1983 World Series against the Phillies. He struck out six and allowed just one unearned run on three hits and no walks in a nine-inning complete-game victory over the Phillies. His 0.33 WHIP is the lowest among rookie pitchers with at least nine frames in a World Series.

Andruw Jones, Braves, 1996: Jones was only 19 and had only 31 Major League games under his belt entering the '96 Series against the Yankees. No matter. He went 8-for-20 (.400) with two homers, one double, six RBIs and eight runs in the six-game loss. His 1.250 OPS remains highest among rookies with at least 20 plate appearances in a World Series.

Randy Arozarena, Rays, 2020: Arozarena still had prospect eligibility remaining when he stormed through the pandemic postseason two years ago, and he was as good as ever in the Fall Classic, going 8-for-22 (.364) in the six-game loss to the Dodgers. His three homers set a rookie record for the World Series, while his 17 total bases tied **Jim Gilliam's** mark for Brooklyn from 1953.

Ian Anderson, Braves, 2021: Call it recency bias if you must, but this still sticks out. Anderson threw five no-hit innings as a rookie starter in Game 3 last year, a 2-0 Atlanta win at home. Manager **Brian Snitker** chose to pull the right-handed starter after 72 pitches. While the no-no bid ended in the eighth, the shutout remained, and the Braves grabbed a 2-1 series lead. Anderson's flirtation with history came in Atlanta's first home World Series game since 1999 when he was 17 months old.

From the Boston Globe: We all remember 2017 when **Alex Cora's** trash-can dream came true. The Cheatin' Stros beat the Red Sox, Yankees, and Dodgers in succession, only to live forever in disgrace when it was learned they enjoyed the benefit of an illegal sign-stealing system

designed in part by the man who would become manager of your Red Sox. The Astros instantly became America's most hated team since the Spygate/Deflategate, Belichick/Brady Patriots pantsed the NFL for the better part of two decades.

Houston's transgressions were worse than anything the Patriots ever did, but New England fans haven't had much high ground in this area, given the hiring of Cora, two celebrated football scandals, and the 2017 Red Sox Apple Watch malfeasance.



Joe Sheehan: My memory of World Series games when I was younger -- and I don't mean as a kid, I mean earlier in my career -- is that they weren't quite so chaotic. This is largely because of the way we handle starting pitchers now. From the first pitch, we're thinking about how long they will go and who will come out of the pen first, whether the manager will choose the right

relievers from the group. The days of **Andy Pettitte to Mariano Rivera to John Wetteland** -- or for that matter, from **Whitey Ford** to the postgame handshake -- are long gone.

Framber Valdez's start last night, in which he went 6 1/3 innings, was the longest World Series start since **Zack Greinke** went 6 1/3 in 2019's Game Seven. The day before Greinke did that, **Stephen Strasburg** went eight innings in Game Six. No starter has thrown a World Series complete game since **Johnny Cueto** did in 2015.

Last team to clinch the World Series in its home ballpark--Red Sox (2013) defeated Cards 4-2.

Nine players have won MVP of both LCS and World Series in the same season:

Jeremy Peña, SS, 2022 Astros
Corey Seager, SS, 2020 Dodgers
Madison Bumgarner, LHP, 2014 Giants
David Freese, 3B, 2011 Cardinals
Cole Hamels, LHP, 2008 Phillies
Livan Hernandez, RHP, 1997 Marlins
Orel Hershiser, RHP, 1988 Dodgers
Darrell Porter, C, 1982 Cardinals
Willie Stargell, 1B, 1979 Pirates

Jayson Stark from The Athletic on Astros place in history

Astros win back-to-back titles with a .622 winning pct. How many teams in history did what these Astros have now done — win multiple World Series and have a winning percentage that good over six seasons?

Before we get to them, it might be more impressive to mention some of the teams that *aren't* on the list.

- The Yankees of 1996-2003? Not on it.
- The Big Red Machine? Nope. Not on it.
- The Orioles of the late 1960s/early '70s, the A's of the '70s, the Red Sox of the 2000s, the Giants of the 2010s? Sorry. Not there, either.

Sooo ... do we have your attention yet? To find the last team to do what the 2017-22 Astros have done, you have to go back *more than six decades*.

The last team with multiple titles and a .622 win percentage or better over any six-year span? How about the **Mantle/Berra/Ford** Yankees ... of 1953-58. Unreal.

After that, you run into all sorts of Yankees behemoths of the 1920s, '30s and '40s. So let's not bother even listing them. But here come all the non-Yankees teams in history to do that — *all four of them!*

Stan Musial's 1941-46 Cardinals — 3 titles, .655*

Jimmie Foxx's 1927-32 A's — 2 titles, .650*

Home Run Baker's 1909-14 A's — 3 titles, .640

The Tinker/Evers/Chance 1905-10 Cubs — 3 titles, .678*

(-overlapping spans from other years not included)*

So that ... is ... it. For the entire World Series era. *No* other teams from the division-play era (1969-present). *No* other teams from the expansion era (1961-present). Only *two* other non-Yankees from the live-ball era (1920-present). Plus two more from the dead-ball era.

And the 2022 Astros. Wow.

Short list of teams that made it to four World Series in six years *and* won multiple titles.

Once again, there are way too many Yankees juggernauts to list — this time including the late-'90s Yankees and the Yankees of 1976-81. But here come the non-Yankees teams. There aren't many, but some of them will look familiar.

Brooks Robinson's 1966-71 Orioles — 4 World Series, 2 titles

Walker Cooper's 1942-46 Cardinals — 4 World Series, 3 titles

Frankie Frisch's 1921-24 Giants — 4 World Series (in a row), 2 titles

Stuffy McInnis' 1910-15 A's — 4 World Series, 3 titles

Wildfire Schulte's 1906-10 Cubs — 4 World Series, 2 titles

So once again, that's *one* other non-Yankees team from the expansion era, a total of *three* other teams from the live-ball era, and the usual two suspects from the dead-ball era. This is rarefied company.

Lost World Series and then came back to win it-- here's every team in the expansion era that lost a World Series one year but returned and won the next one. Yet again, it won't take long to recite this roll call:

Eric Hosmer's 2014-15 Royals

Dave Stewart's 1988-89 A's

Reggie Jackson's 1976-77 Yankees

Jim Palmer's 1969-70 Orioles

Roger Maris' 1960-61 Yankees

So that's one other team from the last three decades, then basically one each from the 1980s, '70s and '60s, plus that 1960-61 Yankees team that spanned the expansion and pre-expansion era.

Astros' six consecutive trips to the League Championship Series was *not* a record, because the Braves of the '90s got there eight times in a row. Yeah, that's true, technically. But ...

The Braves got to three of those NLCS in the pre-Wild Card era, when the playoffs still *started* with the LCS. But for the past 28 seasons, the playoffs have had at least three rounds — the Division Series for the first 17, then a Wild Card Game or Wild Card Series for the last 11.

So in this era, you had to earn your way there. OK, how many other teams in *that* era kept on barging into the LCS every October for at least six years in succession? You know the answer. It's none.

BOB COSTAS: *"You know, there obviously are still people who get off on calling them cheaters and diminishing their achievements. But to me, at this point, it's like saying that (Tom) Brady, Bill Belichick and the Patriots are all because of Deflategate or taping a Rams practice before the first Super Bowl.*

"I think you can disapprove of those things without attributing too much to them. There's too much excellence there. There's too much evidence there. And the same thing is true of the Astros — maybe not to the same level as the Patriots, but it's the same idea. There's a stain there, and we're not washing it away. But it doesn't explain all of it. In fact, it doesn't even explain most of it."

So no, the Astros don't get to erase 2017. They don't get excused for 2017. What happened then is part of their story. But when it's five years later and you've won again, then that second World Series — *this* World Series — dramatically changes the way we should be framing their story.

COSTAS: *"They needed to win outside the shadow of 2017."*

This, he said, "legitimizes" the Astros, because "it's very hard to deny just how good they were, period. Trash cans doesn't account for getting to the LCS six seasons in a row."

No, but even in a world where trash cans never enter the baseball conversation, winning a second title is an important threshold to cross. Now, Costas said, we can separate these Astros from the Braves of the '90s, who "only" won the World Series once, and the Dodgers of the last decade, who have "only" won once. There's a term for teams like that — and it isn't "greatness."

COSTAS: *"I would say excellence. Sustained excellence — whereas greatness we associate with something else. The Dodgers and Braves have achieved excellence but perhaps not greatness."*

So by winning a second World Series, do the Astros now have a claim to greatness?

MORE MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Name the three former big leaguers with 17-game postseason hitting streaks (over the course of multiple Octobers). Two Yankees, one Red Sox: **Hank Bauer, Derek Jeter Manny Ramirez.**

MLB revenue this year will be just shy of \$11 billion, up from \$10 billion before the pandemic.

The 30 teams combined to draw 64.6 million fans, up from 45.3 million in the pandemic-restricted 2021 season and down from 68.5 million in 2019. The 26,843 average was down 5.3 percent from the 2019 average of 28,339.

There have been 23 perfect games—**Felix Hernandez** (2012 Mariners), **Matt Cain** (2012 Giants), **Phillip Humber** (2012 White Sox), **Roy Halladay** (2010 Phillies), **Dallas Braden** (2010 A's), **Mark Buehrle** (2009 White Sox), **Randy Johnson** (2004 D'backs), **David Cone** (1999 Yankees), **David Wells** (1998 Yankees), **Kenny Rogers** (1994 Rangers), **Dennis Martinez** (1991 Expos), **Tom Browning** (1988 Reds), **Mike Witt** (1984 Angels), **Len Barker** (1981 Indians), **Catfish Hunter** (1968 A's), **Sandy Koufax** (1965 Dodgers), **Jim Bunning** (1964 Phillies), **Don Larsen** (1956

Yankees World Series), **Charlie Robertson** (1922 White Sox), **Addie Joss** (1908 Naps), **Cy Young** (1904 Americans), **Monte Ward** (1880 Grays), **Lee Richmond** (1880 Ruby Legs)

Justin Turner won the Roberto Clemente Award for character, community involvement, and philanthropy. The Dodgers third baseman was presented the award shortly before Game 3 of the World Series was rained out, two years after he was criticized by the commissioner's office for violating coronavirus protocols by celebrating with teammates following the title-winning Game 6.

Turner, 37, was nominated for the award for the fifth time this year. The Justin Turner Foundation, funded by Turner and wife Kourtney in 2016, supports homeless veterans, children, and families battling diseases and illnesses, also helps youth baseball organizations and holds an annual golf tournament that raised \$650,000 this year for The Dream Center and Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

Turner and his wife donated \$100,000 to The Dream Center, which supports the homeless and hungry, to fund its foster care intervention program. The center last year renamed its food bank after Turner and his wife.

Turner and his wife donated more than \$100,000 for Children's Hospital Los Angeles, where he serves on the board of directors, and they provided more than 70,000 toys and 14,000 bicycles to children in Los Angeles.

A two-time All-Star, Turner would become eligible for free agency after the World Series if the Dodgers decline a \$16 million option in favor of a \$2 million buyout.

Highest combined pitcher WAR this century:

1. **Justin Verlander**, 78.2
2. **Clayton Kershaw**, 73.3
3. **Max Scherzer**, 70.5
4. **Zack Greinke**, 68.5
5. **CC Sabathia**, 64.2
6. **Roy Halladay**, 63.5
7. **Mark Buehrle**, 56.2
8. **Cole Hamels**, 54.8
9. **Randy Johnson**, 52.1

10. King Felix Hernandez, 52.0

The Dodgers won 111 games this year. They clinched the NL west with 21 games to go. The seventh team in MLB history to eclipse 110 wins and the first since the 2001 Seattle Mariners to score the most and yield the fewest runs in the same season. decline over the final couple of weeks, when they batted just .215 and averaged less than 3 ½ runs per game over their final 15 contests, carried into the postseason.

When the Dodgers were knocked out by the Washington Nationals in the 2019 NLDS, they imploded on the mound in Game 5, but also batted just .135 during the series with runners in scoring position.

When the team was eliminated in the NLCS last year by the Atlanta Braves, a worn-out pitching staff contributed to the six-game defeat, but so too did missed opportunities at the plate, especially in their elimination game.

And of all the things that doomed the Dodgers to another October faceplant this year, situational hitting — specifically, a five for 34 mark (.147 average) with runners in scoring position — tripped them up most once again.

At one point, they went hitless in 20 straight at-bats with a runner at second or third base, their longest such drought of the season.

The Dodgers didn't get length from their rotation, with none of their pitchers lasting longer than five innings (in this year's playoffs, only the Braves averaged fewer innings per game from their starters).

Chris Sale has the right to opt out of the last two years and \$55 million of the five-year, \$145 million extension he signed with the Red Sox in 2019. 33-year-old Sale (he turns 34 next March) has pitched just 48⅓ innings over 11 starts in the first three years of the extension.

Sale missed all of the pandemic-shortened 2020 season after undergoing Tommy John surgery in March that kept him out until mid-August of 2021. He went 5-1 with a 3.16 ERA down the stretch that year, helping the Sox reach the playoffs.

In parts of 12 big league seasons, Sale owns a 114-75 record, 3.03 ERA, and the highest strikeout rate (30.6 percent) for any pitcher who has thrown 1,500 innings. He finished in the top six in Cy Young voting in each of seven straight years with the White Sox and Red Sox from 2012-18, and was named to the All-Star team in each of those seasons.

Nov. 1, 1960: Legendary Dodgers left-hander **Fernando Valenzuela** was born 62 years ago in Navojoa, Mexico. The southpaw signed with Los Angeles for \$120,000 as an 18-year-old out of the Mexican League in 1979 and was assigned that summer to High-A Lodi, where he posted a 1.12 ERA in three starts. Valenzuela jumped to Double-A San Antonio the following year and showed why he'd soon be a future ace with a 3.10 ERA and 162 strikeouts in 174 innings before earning his first call-up that September. Fernandomania followed in 1981 when the 20-year-old won a Cy Young, Rookie of the Year and World Series title.

How many of you knew that Lindsay Clubine Buchholz, wife of former Red Sox pitcher **Clay Buchholz**, was "Briefcase Girl No. 26" on "Deal or No Deal" in 2006? The then-single Clubine was stationed in the top row, just a few feet from Meghan Markle, who held placard No. 24.

Clay and Lindsay were introduced by Donald Trump at a UFC after-party and held their wedding at the Trump National Golf Club in 2009.

Most 4-hit games in postseason history--**Albert Pujols** (3 games of 4 or more hits)

The Giants, despite having the mother of all outlier seasons when they won 107 games and the NL West in 2021, were back to playing roster footsie last season and needed a flourishing final two weeks just to end the year at .500.

Giants are shedding season ticket holders, their full-season attendance was their lowest in 23 years at their waterfront ballpark

J.T. Realmuto is about as close to a five-tool player as you'll find at his position. This year he became just the second catcher in MLB history with 20 home runs and 20 stolen bases in the same season. **Ivan Rodriguez** had 35 HRs and 25 stolen bases for the 1999 Rangers.

Pudge batted .332/.356/.558 with 35 home runs, 25 stolen bases and 6.4 WAR. He won the American League MVP, a Gold Glove and a Silver Slugger, and was the starting catcher in the All-Star Game.

In the first 55 years or so of the expansion era, true position players rarely pitched, and they pretty much never did so outside of losses and extremely long games. In 1968, **Rocky Colavito** was called into a game in the fourth inning near the end of his career by **Ralph Houk** on a day when Houk's bullpen had been drained. A month later, the Twins' **Cesar Tovar** started a game as part of a stunt in which he would play all nine innings in one game. **Shane Halter** would repeat Tovar's stunt in 2000, as did **Andrew Romine** in 2017.

From 1961 through 2018, those were the only four instances in which a position player pitched in a nine-inning game his team won.

My how things have changed.

From 1961 through 2018, those were the only four instances in which a position player pitched in a nine-inning game his team won.

On March 30, 2019, with the Dodgers up 18-5 over the Diamondbacks, **Dave Roberts** sent catcher **Russell Martin** to the mound to eat the ninth inning. Martin's shutout inning encouraged Roberts, who would use Martin to close out a pair of blowout wins in August. After avoiding the tactic for a couple of seasons, Roberts has now used Alberto five times to close out Dodger wins this year. He's gotten four shutout innings (and a total of one run allowed) for his troubles.

It's catching on. Something that was never done for nearly 60 years has now happened 12 times in the first five months of 2022. (position players pitching topped 100 games this season).

I was surprised to read that Mets righthander **Chris Bassitt** has posted a 3.45 ERA in 737 1/3 innings over eight seasons. This year, he went 15-9 with a 3.42 ERA in 30 starts. Last year, he went 12-4 with a 3.15 ERA in 27 starts and finished top 10 in the AL Cy Young voting for the second consecutive season.

GHOST RUNNERS

Starting extra innings with a runner on second base, the rule adopted by Major League Baseball as a way to shorten games during the pandemic, might be sticking around.

"Both fans and players like it. The clubs like it. Seems like it has legs to me," commissioner Rob Manfred said Monday night after announcing Game 3 of the World Series between Houston and Philadelphia had been postponed by rain. "I have a few people who e-mail me that don't like it."

Home teams went 113-103 in extra-inning games this year and are 262-263 in extras since the runner on second rule started in 2020, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Home teams were 312-294 in extra-inning games from 2017-19, Elias said.

Baseball has not used the rule during the postseason. Cleveland beat Tampa Bay, 1-0, in 15 innings in the clinching Game 2 of their best-of-three American League wild-card series this year, and Houston defeated Seattle, 1-0, in 18 innings to sweep their best-of-five AL Division Series.

There were 216 extra-inning games in the third season of the pandemic rule of placing an automatic runner on second base in each extra frame, down from 233 last year and 78 during the shortened 2020 season. The longest game this year was Cleveland's 7-6, 15-inning win over Minnesota in the second game of a doubleheader Sept. 17. That was one inning shy of the longest in the three seasons of the rule, the Dodgers' 16-inning win at San Diego on Aug. 25, 2021.

Extending the rule change requires an agreement with the players' association.

NOTES FROM THE GOLD GLOVE AWARDS

Guardians had 4 gold glovers—pitcher **Shane Bieber**, CF **Myles Straw**, LF **Steven Kwan**, 2B **Andres Gimenez** most in franchise history. Previous was three in 2000—**Roberto Alomar** 2b, **Omar Vizquel** SS, **Travis Fryman** 3b.

Steven Kwan won gold glove as a rookie—other rookie outfielders to win **Tommy Agee** 1966 White Sox, **Ichiro Suzuki** 2001 Mariners, **Fred Lynn** 1975 Red Sox, **Luis Robert** 2020 White Sox.

Phillies catcher **J.T. Realmuto** is the first Philadelphia gold glover in 10 years—Jimmy Rollins SS.

Trent Grisham CF is the first Padre gold glover in 10 years—**Chase Headley** 3b

Four Dodgers outfielders have won multiple gold gloves—**Willie Davis** 3, **Raul Mondesi** 2, **Matt Kemp** 2, **Mookie Betts** 6

Braves pitcher **Max Fried** won his third straight gold glove, joining **Greg Maddux** 10 and **Phil Neikro** 5.

Yankee catcher **Jose Trevino** joined **Elston Howard** 63-64 and **Thurman Munson** 73-74-75 as Yankees catcher winners.

AL Championship Series MVP **Jeremy Peña** won his first Gold Glove Award and Houston right fielder **Kyle Tucker** joined his teammate

Cards 3b **Nolan Arenado** won his 10th, tying **Mike Schmidt** for second most for a 3b. **Brooks Robinson** won 16.

STATE OF THE GAME

Editor note—Three pieces caught some important themes—the game is changing, but is it fast enough to survive and thrive? The speed and action of the NFL, video games and Formula 1 racing threaten our game. I don't understand why the union gets to approve rules changes—the NFL constantly adjusts its product for maximum entertainment value.

No one respects and enjoys the history of the game more than me. But I hope commissioner Manfred and his advisor Theo Epstein move fast enough to tweak things to maximize entertainment (there's that word again) and attract a next generation of players and fans.

JOE POSNANSKI

You might have seen this interesting story that Derek Thompson wrote for *The Atlantic*, called "[What Moneyball-for-Everything Has Done to American Culture.](#)" I've probably had 10 different people send it to me, and I'm grateful to all of them because it's really thought-provoking and, I think, illuminating.

You should read the whole thing, but Derek writes about an issue I've thought about a lot, not only in baseball: Can you basically figure out a sport or a game? And if you can, do you in the process ruin it?

I've thought about it as the Superman Conundrum. Many years ago, I fulfilled a dream and bought an actual arcade game. But I couldn't afford a popular game like Ms. Pacman or Donkey Kong or whatever. So I bought a video game called "Superman." If you've never heard of it, join the club, it was not one of the big ones. It looked like this:

It was actually a fun game; you were a flying Superman dealing with a bunch of bad guys and there were challenges and all the rest. Here's the thing, though: I got really, really good at Superman. Like REALLY good. Like I made it to the end.

And once I made it to the end, I never played it again. It's like: What's the point?

Derek makes the argument that analytics people have essentially solved baseball. And once that has happened, what's the point?

Here's the key paragraph:

The religion scholar James P. Carse wrote that there are two kinds of games in life: finite and infinite. A finite game is played to win; there are clear victors and losers. An infinite game is played to keep playing; the goal is to maximize winning across all participants. Debate is a finite game. Marriage is an infinite game. The midterm elections are finite games. American democracy is an infinite game. A great deal of unnecessary suffering in the world comes from not knowing the difference. A bad fight can destroy a marriage. A challenged election can destabilize a democracy. In baseball, winning the World Series is a finite game, while growing the popularity of Major League Baseball is an infinite game. What happened, I think, is that baseball's finite game was solved so completely in such a way that the infinite game was lost.

You intuitively know what he's saying here, because so many of you (and, yes, me too) have been saying it for a long time. Teams have figured out, for example, how to optimize pitching staffs. By pitching so many pitchers in short bursts, managers make sure that batters are in a constant battle against high-90s fastballs and violently spinning breaking balls and perfectly tunneled change-ups. Batters never face tired pitchers anymore. They never face struggling pitchers for very long. They only occasionally see the same pitcher three times in a game.

And as a direct result, strikeouts are at all-time highs, singles are at all-time lows, triples are at all-time lows, stolen bases are at all-time lows, etc. And, as Derek rightfully says: "The sport that I fell in love with doesn't really exist anymore."

Derek, by explaining the concept of finite and infinite, really gets into something that I've had a hard time putting in words. I don't want to bring up the intentional walks again, but of course, I will: I realize now that the real argument I have with people about the intentional walk is the argument itself.

They want to argue STRATEGY. And I want to argue ESSENCE. Sure, I think a huge percentage of the time the intentional walk is a terrible strategy, but I don't care about that. What I care about is that the intentional walk is a fundamentally corrupting force in the game. It takes an exciting situation and makes it boring. It takes away key at-bats from the best and most thrilling players in the game. It robs us of joy.

And yet, people constantly defend it, constantly make spurious comparisons to annoying strategies in other sports, and I've lost my mind over this countless times, but Derek has opened my eyes to what the real disagreement is here.

The real disagreement is that they think baseball is about winning and losing.

And I don't. I think baseball is about entertaining millions of people.

That's finite and infinite.

For many years, you did not necessarily have to choose between finite and infinite in baseball. The two seemed to have a positive relationship. Players and teams tried to do things to win — steal more bases, play better defense, hit more homers, develop new pitches — and these things often did make the game more fun and popular.

But — and this is important — that was never the motivation. Teams were not built around the idea of making the game more fun. No, they were built around winning and losing. Managers and general managers did not get fired if their teams were boring; they got fired if their teams lost.

And as more and more data has become available — and more and more analytical minds have been brought in to study that data — the efforts to find winning formulas has gone up exponentially, and these winning formulas simply do not make the game more fun and popular.

You can't blame teams for shifting a lot more now that they can pinpoint with amazing accuracy where a batter is likely to hit the ball. But it doesn't make the game better for you and me.

You can't blame teams for carrying 13 or 14 pitchers with great arms and sending them out there one after another in a barrage of flammable sliders and fastballs and curves. But it doesn't make the game better for you and me.

You can't blame batters for putting an uppercut in their swings and trying to hit the ball out when the pitching and defenses have simply cut off the chances of putting together longer rallies. But it doesn't make the game better for you and me.

You can't blame teams for understanding that outs are their most precious commodity and that throwing them away on frivolous stolen base attempts or rash efforts to take an extra base is counterproductive. But it doesn't make the game better for you and me.

No, this doesn't come down to the teams or the players. This comes down to

the commissioner and the people who run the game. As Joe Sheehan rightfully points out, it's silly to blame analysts for what's happening because analysts are also the ones who rang the bell about the way the game was going years and years ago. Everything that has happened was not only predictable ... it was predicted. The rise in strikeouts began in earnest right around 2012-2013. Sinking batting averages began at the same time. Stolen bases began declining then, triples began declining then. The games also started getting longer. All of this was pretty easily foreseen.*

**In retrospect, it's quite striking how much changed in the years 2012 and 2013.*

In 2012, for the first time, games averaged three hours.

In 2012, for the first time, teams averaged 7 1/2 strikeouts per nine innings.

In 2013, triples dropped to their lowest level ever.

In 2013, overall batting average dropped to .253, the lowest it had been in 40 years.

But the people who run baseball did nothing. Well, they apparently did juice the baseballs, which was a terrible idea that only exacerbated the problem.

Again, none of this would be a problem if the end game was simply finding a winner and loser. But that's not the end game; if it ever got to the point that pitching and defense "won," then baseball would be as useless as my Superman arcade game after I got to the final screen. We'll probably spend much of the offseason here talking about wild, silly, provocative and terrible ideas for making the game better, because that's what we do. But I think the first step is to admit that winning isn't everything, and it's certainly not the only thing.

DAN SHAUGHNESSY

We all know the old saw about how baseball no longer grips the nation as it once did. We know the games are too long, played too late at night, with not enough balls in play. We know that America's true pastime is almighty football. Baseball fans are an older crowd — folks who grew up when everybody knew who was heavyweight champ, and people still read newspapers, went to the track, and maybe attended daily Mass.

That's all gone now. Along with typewriters, rolodexes, dress shoes, and penmanship.

The World Series is a huge deal here in Houston. Likewise, Games 3 and 4 in Philadelphia are going to be epic. Two cities care about this event madly. Just like in the old days.

But the rest of our country? Not so much. Go to any middle school outside of greater Houston and Philadelphia and I guarantee 98 percent of the kids have no idea who is playing in the Fall Classic. A quick scan of the press box in Houston reveals nobody's here reporting for outlets in old baseball towns such as Chicago, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. Same with Atlanta. Reporters from Philadelphia and Houston are covering wall-to-wall, but this is not a big event for municipalities that once cared deeply about baseball. They're all watching college and NFL football.

There will be no World Series game on Sunday this year — a scheduling first that feels like a total admission that baseball's once-coveted, ultimate TV program can no longer compete with Any Given Sunday.

The World Series is great, but it is a 45 rpm phonograph record in an iPhone world. It is "The Ed Sullivan Show," starring Mitzi Gaynor and Topo Gigio. This pains those of us who grew up riding our bikes home fast to catch **Whitey Ford** pitching against the Pirates, Giants or Dodgers in early-afternoon telecasts of World Series games.

MLB's showcase event has become a regional — no longer national — American sports TV program.

Nobody's fault. It's evolution.

But it still hurts.

TOM VERDUCCI

Excerpted from THE BOOK OF JOE: Trying Not to Suck at Baseball & Life by Joe Maddon and Tom Verducci.

Angels GM Perry Minasian arrived at **Joe Maddon's** front door and rang the bell. Maddon answered and invited him in. Minasian did not immediately notice the mohawk. If he did, he said nothing about it. He appeared uncomfortable.

Maddon thought he had a good idea of why Minasian was there. Over the previous few days Minasian had told Maddon he was considering firing some coaches. "You can't do that," Maddon had told him. "They're very good at what they do. No, that's not the answer."

Maddon took Minasian's appearance on his doorstep as a bad sign for his coaches. They sat down in the living room. Minasian made a quick comment about Maddon getting "a haircut." The words lacked the lilt of humor. Quickly it was apparent why. Minasian said he was "making a change" and removing him as manager. "I've got to do something, Joe," Minasian told him.

The firing was not about Maddon losing the clubhouse; Minasian later said he did not consult with any players or coaches about the change. It was not about effort; Minasian said at his news conference later that day "the effort has been great." He did not give Maddon any specific reasons for why he was firing him. He kept telling him, "I've got to do something." Nor did Minasian provide specificity at his news conference.

Why, then, was Maddon fired? Before the (12 game) losing streak, only the Yankees and Astros had won more games than the Angels in the American League. The team was improving under Maddon in his third year, just as it had in his second year, just as his teams did in his previous managing jobs with the Rays and Cubs. How could a World Series-winning manager with 19 years and 2,599 games of experience lose his job over a 12-game sample?

The answer is that the firing had been in the works long before those dozen games, even if both men could not or did not want to see it that way. The losing streak simply provided an exit ramp for a relationship that was going nowhere—not because of any personal animosity but because of philosophical differences.

What happened between Minasian and Maddon tells a familiar story of what has happened to the role of the manager—and baseball itself. The power shift from the dugout to the front office over more than a quarter of a century has changed how the game is played, and its value system. Knowledge over wisdom. Technology over teaching. Data over art. Efficiency over entertainment.

As front offices seized control, games grew longer, with less action, and there were more pitching changes, more fungibility of personnel and fewer fans. (Attendance has declined slowly but steadily since the all-time per-game high in 2007.) Meanwhile, baseball managers ceased being celebrities. It happened in part because the replay challenge system reduced colorful arguments with umpires, but mostly because managers operated with less power and job security than general managers. To survive, they adopted the bland corporate-speak of their bosses.

The shift happened over the arc of Maddon's career in the major leagues. He was trying to hold on to the soul of baseball as he knew it, relying on trust, relationships and his coaches. Minasian was part of a generation of power brokers who dove even deeper into data and process. Depending on how you were raised in the game, a 68-year-old man in a mohawk was either a colorful master motivator or an unfunny gimmick that had no bearing on the win probability of the game that night.

If there was a physical space where this dynamic played out it was the coaches' room at Angel Stadium. Minasian and his top assistant, Alex Tamin, maintained lockers in the same room as the coaches, using the room as they changed between front-office attire and workout or game-day attire.

In the game in which Maddon was raised, GMs stayed out of the clubhouse unless they had specific business to attend there. The clubhouse and its immediate environs belonged to uniformed personnel. But Minasian and Tamin found it perfectly normal to share space with coaches on an everyday basis because it had become perfectly normal for executives to dictate game strategy as much as coaches. What Maddon regarded as interference Minasian regarded as standard operating procedure.

Maddon was also put off by some of the copycat processes implemented by Minasian. A certain intramural competition exists among baseball front offices, a kind of Silicon Valley cutting-edge war as to who can hire the smartest experts and install the latest technology, whether it's \$15,000 whole-body-vibration "power plates" for training or \$24,000 air and surface purifiers that convert ambient oxygen and humidity into dry hydrogen peroxide to reduce the presence of microbes. Last season the Giants plowed new ground by employing 13 coaches—one for every two players—including three hitting coaches and three pitching coaches. That number does not include their "breathing coach."

The Giants, Dodgers and Braves especially served as references for Minasian and his front office staff. In 2022 the GM instituted daily meetings with players, primarily the hitters, rather than just the traditional first-game-of-a-series meeting. “I just think it’s way too over the top,” Maddon says. “[Minasian] kept reminding me, ‘The Braves did it. The Braves did it.’ Fine. A lot of things were related to ‘We did it this way with the Braves,’ or ‘This is how the Giants did it.’ We were all over trying to do things like somebody else.”

After last season, Minasian replaced Maddon’s bench coach, **Mike Gallego**, with **Ray Montgomery**, a 52-year-old former player making the rare jump from the front office to the field. Montgomery, who had been the director of player personnel, was working in uniform for the first time after spending most of his career in scouting. Montgomery helped run those daily meetings.

Moreover, what Maddon calls a pregame “choreography” took root, spearheaded by Minasian and Tamin. Those two, not Maddon and his coaches, would decide which relief pitchers were not available for the game that night. It was based on a proprietary algorithm developed by Tamin that kept track of a pitcher’s work in rolling 30-day increments. In recent years it had become common for front offices to usurp control of the bullpen from managers. So-and-so “is down tonight” entered baseball parlance, and it came from upstairs. “In that losing stretch that led to my demise, a lot of relievers were made unavailable,” Maddon says. “I couldn’t use them.

“Tam had the 30-day matrix built on how to use relief pitchers, how often and how much rest they needed. Honestly, that’s insulting.”

Maddon read body language, mechanics, clues in how his players answered his questions . . . all the insights gleaned from 42 seasons in professional baseball. The modern front office, however, has too much access to data to rely on the instincts of a veteran manager. Minasian and Tamin were not revolutionaries. They were deploying methodologies that had become mainstream. Says Maddon, “If you’ve grown up in an era of understanding the game and how important it is beyond the numbers to connect with people and establish patience and relationships with your players in order to have success, it’s hard to get on the same page with front offices today.

“Other managers that I’ve spoken with, guys with experience, feel the same way, and they are encouraging me to speak up. This is not an attempt by me to ‘get even’ or anything like that. I’m not trying to protect myself. It’s exposure. If you’re a baseball fan, if you love the game and care about the game, you should know what is behind how the game is being played today.”

The divide between old and new, manager and front office, data and art, Maddon and Minasian, reached a boiling point on May 9. The Angels had just scored five runs in the seventh inning against the Rays to turn a 6–3 lead into an 11–3 blowout. **Ohtani** hit a grand slam. The dugout was lively. Suddenly, head athletic trainer Mike Frostad walked up to Maddon at his

usual perch on the top step of the dugout and said, “Perry just called down. He said get **Mike Trout** out of the game.”

Earlier in the day Trout had complained about a bit of soreness in his groin. But later he told Maddon that the soreness dissipated, and he was fine.

To Maddon, Minasian broke a sacred code. The GM had called the dugout during a game to dictate strategy to the manager—a proven, veteran manager at that. To Minasian, he simply was deploying the power given to this generation of executives. Nothing was sacred. Nothing was out of bounds.

The next day Maddon blew up at Minasian in Maddon’s office. “Listen, don’t you ever f----- call down to the dugout again!” Maddon said.

Twenty-six days later, he was gone. When Minasian fired him, Maddon offered him advice. He suggested that Minasian not bring Tamin on road trips. He did not tell Minasian to leave the coaches’ room to the coaches. “I was going to text him the next day to bring it up, but I chose not to,” Maddon says. “It was over.”

Coaches and coaching are at the heart of Maddon’s baseball belief system. To him they are to baseball what teachers are to education. Underpaid and underappreciated but indispensable. Keepers of the flame. “Who is teaching the next generation of coaches, and what are they teaching?” Maddon asks. “Is the game being taught or is it more reliant on studying feedback from technology? The players want to hear more and more about exit velocity and spin rates from coaches, as opposed to mechanical information that only a well-trained pitching coach or hitting coach could pass along.

“Who is mentoring these groups? How is the game being passed on with the eradication of minor league teams? There is a lot of tearing of the fabric right now.”

At the top of today’s major league organizational chart is a triangle. The owner, lead baseball operations person (traditionally the GM, though title inflation has wrought fancier designations) and manager form the corners. But the triangle is inverted. The manager is at the bottom. The owner and general manager hold power over the manager, even as it relates to game strategy and coaching. The triangle works best only when all three positions buy in completely to the structure and philosophy.

General managers increasingly prefer to hire managerial blank slates: candidates with little or no experience and thus no established philosophies or norms to clash with how they want the job done. In 32 managerial changes from the 2017–18 offseason through Maddon’s firing by the Angels, general managers picked a first-time manager on 19 occasions—almost 60% of the time.

The Angels' inverted triangle lacked seamless philosophy and stability. Deep down, Minasian and Maddon knew this. Twelve straight losses forced Minasian to confront that reality. He replaced Maddon with Angels third-base coach **Phil Nevin**, another first-time MLB manager.

"The only reason you fire the manager," Maddon says, "is there is a total disconnect between the manager and players, or there is a philosophical disconnect between the manager and either the GM or the owner. I plead guilty to having philosophical differences with Perry. You don't take it personally. It's business."

Maddon wants to manage again. But baseball has changed since he was a rookie manager with the 2006 Devil Rays. If Maddon has a place in the game again, it will be for someone else who also honors the soul of the game, who believes data enhances and complements art and instinct, not depreciates them.

"Right now as a manager, you need to understand you are going to be controlled," Maddon says. "You're really going to be required or asked to do exactly what the front office wants you to do. The trick then would be to somehow be able to build relationships—but even then, your ability to freely think, work and suggest with these players can be constricted. It's just the way of the world right now."

THE LADY THEY HATE IN BROOKLYN IS DEAD

(from NYT obit)

Roz Wyman, who helped lead Los Angeles' successful campaign to persuade Walter O'Malley, the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, to move west after the 1957 season, died Wednesday at her home in the Bel Air neighborhood of Los Angeles. She was 92.

Her son Robert confirmed the death.

Major League Baseball had 16 teams until 1961, and until 1958, none was farther west than Kansas City, Mo., although California had minor league teams, most prominently in the Pacific Coast League. When Roz Wyman, at 22, ran for a seat on the Los Angeles City Council in 1953, she vowed to import a major league team. She focused on the Dodgers and, to a lesser extent, the New York Giants.

In O'Malley, Ms. Wyman and her allies, including Norris Poulson, the city's mayor, and Kenneth Hahn, a county supervisor, had a cagey target. He pledged publicly to stay in Brooklyn and engaged in long-drawn-out talks with New York City officials about building a new ballpark. In

1955, he rebuffed Ms. Wyman's request for a meeting; she responded that she would talk to the Giants instead.

But when it appeared that O'Malley would not get what he wanted in Brooklyn, Los Angeles became a more viable option. In October 1957, the City Council prepared to vote on the terms that would bring the Dodgers to Los Angeles and let O'Malley build a stadium in Chavez Ravine, an area once populated by residents, mostly Latino, who had been evicted to make room for a public housing project. (That plan was canceled in a referendum in 1952.)

Ms. Wyman and Poulson worked diligently to secure the votes needed to approve the plan — some members of the council thought the deal was a giveaway to the Dodgers — but they wanted O'Malley's guarantee, before the council voted, that he would accept the terms. They called him, and Poulson placed the phone in Ms. Wyman's hands.

"I am going to the floor," she recalled telling O'Malley in an interview for Michael D'Antonio's "Forever Blue" (2009), a biography of O'Malley. "I would like to say you are coming." But O'Malley did not give her a straight answer.

He told her that "if I could get my deal in New York, I'd rather stay in New York," but he then quickly reversed himself, saying, "I think everything is right for me there in LA."

She decided not to tell the council about O'Malley's indecision. And, she said, when no one asked if O'Malley had made a commitment to moving, the council voted 10-4 to approve the deal.

To celebrate the moment, she posed for pictures with Poulson. He held a bat, and she placed a cap on his head that said, "L.A. Bums," a nod to the Brooklyn Dodgers' nickname, "Dem Bums."

O'Malley quickly accepted the terms — and the deal passed by the council survived a referendum held in June 1958, two months into the Dodgers' inaugural season in Los Angeles.

Before the Dodgers' first game in Los Angeles — against the Giants, who, following the Dodgers' lead, had moved to San Francisco — Ms. Wyman rode in a ticker-tape parade that ferried players from City Hall through downtown streets and to the team's temporary home at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Ms. Wyman, who had given birth to her daughter, Betty, a few days before, sat in an open convertible with Dodger pitchers Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale.

"What this lady did for baseball in this city," Tommy Lasorda, the team's longtime manager, told The Los Angeles Times in 2000, "they should erect a monument to her."

“MY EYE OVER YOURS”: BALL AND STRIKE CHALLENGES, POSSIBLY COMING TO AN MLB GAME NEAR YOU.

By Zach Buchanan

Earlier this month in the Arizona Fall League, Red Sox prospect **Stephen Scott** struck out looking on a fastball at the bottom of the zone. For most of baseball’s long and storied history, that has been the end of it. Disbelieving stares and snide comments were but symbolic protests in a world governed solely by the umpire’s say-so. But instead of trudging back to the dugout, Scott exercised a right that few baseball players have ever enjoyed.

He challenged the call.

In seconds, the big screen was overtaken by an animated graphic of a pitch flying toward the plate, its trajectory brightly colored like the tail of a comet. As it passed through a rectangular representation of the strike zone, clipping its bottom edge, the verdict was delivered: strike. The umpire had been correct. A dugout-bound trudge ensued after all, but at least Scott had been able to ask the ump to prove it.

The whole episode, which lasted no more than 10-15 seconds, was a byproduct of an experimental rule being tested this fall by Major League Baseball. This year, for the first time ever in the sport’s history — first in the Low-A Florida State League, then in select Triple-A parks and now in the AFL — ball-and-strike calls have been subject to in-game review. Now, several times over the course of fall games at Salt River Fields, the only park with the review system in place, the action comes to a brief pause so that everyone in the stadium can immediately see if the umpire got it right.

And players seem to like it.

“So far, I think it’s pretty good,” said Rockies prospect **Grant Lavigne**.

“It’s honestly pretty cool,” added Cardinals shortstop **Masyn Winn**.

“It’s going to make the game a little more interesting,” said Braves prospect **Justyn-Henry Malloy**.

The automated balls and strikes (ABS) challenge system being tested works as follows: Each team enters the game with three challenges, keeping the ones it wins for repeated use. Challenges must be issued immediately, and only by the catcher, pitcher or hitter. Unlike in the replay review system currently in use for non-ball-and-strike calls in the majors, a manager

cannot challenge a pitch. Umpires do not huddle or retreat to a headset, but instead watch along with the rest of the stadium as the correct call is displayed on the scoreboard.

It's a system similar to the one used for boundary calls in tennis, powered by the same Hawk-Eye technology, but that seeks to find a middle ground between human and robot umpires. For several years, MLB has had the tech to transition to full ABS, and indeed has tested such a system at various levels of the minors in recent seasons. With the challenge system, though, the league hopes to preserve the human element while providing something of a technological safety net.

The disruption caused by any challenge is brief, lasting mere seconds, and a speedy turnaround was an absolute necessity for any such system. "It was really important for us to have a solution that was quick," said **Joe Martinez**, a former pitcher who now serves as MLB's vice president of on-field strategy. But even if challenges elongate a game by just one minute, the wrinkles they add to the sport are numerous. By challenging calls themselves, players exercise potentially game-changing authority previously reserved for managers. With real-time feedback on pitch location, the zone may become more consistent as a game progresses. And by giving players recourse to dispute borderline calls, ejections may go down dramatically.

The first issue teams and players must figure out is who can challenge and when. One team in the fall league — the Salt River Rafters, who play every home game with the ability to challenge — has prohibited pitchers from challenging. "Because of emotion," said Salt River pitching coach **Shane Loux**, a Diamondbacks staffer. "We don't need them getting pissed and challenging 2-0 pitches in the second inning." The three-challenge limit is designed to prevent frivolous uses, incentivizing teams to save them for the most consequential calls. Thus, situational awareness is key.

With so much power in their hands, players must weigh the stakes against their confidence in their own perception. "You get a borderline pitch early in the first inning. Is it really worth it to challenge?" asked Red Sox infielder **Nick Yorke**. Others have taken stock of their strike-zone awareness. Malloy knows he sees the high and outside pitch better than anything in, so don't expect him to challenge many inside strikes. Braves right-hander **William Woods** chooses to trust his catcher instead of his own eyes, attached as they are to a head in constant movement at the end of his delivery. Others reserve challenges for obvious missed calls. "One of those easy spits," Yorke said.

That hasn't stopped players from exercising the privilege, though. Scott wasn't the only one to issue a challenge during that mid-October game, although his was the only one memorialized in the play-by-play on the league's Gameday tracker. Many times throughout the game, a pitch would be delivered only for a player to immediately tap his hat or helmet, signaling the call for a review.

Then a brief moment of suspense. Here again, the league is trying to split the difference between speed and entertainment. Inspired once more by tennis, the pitch is animated in the same style as the Gameday tracker, leaving everyone on pins and needles. The players appear to like the anticipation. "It's like a weird excitement that you get," said Braves shortstop **Cal Conley**. Yorke describes it in a way that evokes being called to the principal's office in middle school. "Everyone's like, 'Ooooooh!'" he said. If you've watched a 55-foot putt approach the pin, you know the feeling.

"It fires everyone up," Malloy said. "It creates that little anticipation of 'aaaaaaaahhhh OH!'"

So far, the umpire has been right more often than not. Through Oct. 24, challenges in the fall league had been successful only 33 percent of the time, according to statistics kept by MLB. That's a worse rate than in Low A and Triple A, which saw success rates of 44 and 48 percent, respectively. Perhaps relatedly, there have been only 4.4 challenges per game in the AFL, compared to 5.8 and 5.7 per game in Low A and Triple A. Batters have been more successful than pitchers and catchers in the AFL, which may be why they challenge more often than their defensive counterparts. The opposite is true in the other two leagues, where pitchers and catchers challenge more often than hitters, and are more often successful.

What MLB has not tracked at its testing sites is the effect on ejections, although several in the fall league predict a decrease. There were 176 ejections in the majors last year, according to tracking from CloseCallSports.com, and 51 percent of them were for arguing balls and strikes. Without a challenge system, griping to the umpire was a player or manager's only recourse. Scottsdale Scorpions manager **Matt Tuiasosopo**, who coaches in the minors with the Braves, isn't fond of chirping at the umpires, but would do it occasionally to support his players. But now, if players "feel they've been wronged," he said, "they can challenge it." Added Malloy: "It's almost as if you're able to say, 'My eye over yours. Let's see what it looks like.'"

That may reduce ejections, but it remains to be seen what broader effect the system has on the umpire player-relationship. (A spokesperson for the Association of Minor League Umpires did not respond to an interview request.) Umpires certainly have gotten used to the replay system in the big leagues, and many players figure they'll adapt to this one, too. "I hope they don't get offended," said Lavigne. A challenge doesn't have to be taken antagonistically. "Players have a lot of respect for umpires, even though they can suck," said Conley. "Just like us," he quickly and diplomatically added.

Others have their doubts. "I almost think there could be a negative repercussion" for hitters, said Diamondbacks catcher **Cooper Hummel**. Similarly, Loux worries that umpires will hold a subconscious grudge against players who challenge. "Oh, this guy," the pitching coach said, imagining what goes on in an umpire's head. "He challenges every close pitch." A gripe or a stare might be forgotten, especially since almost every hitter complains. But what about a literal challenge to one's authority played for the whole stadium?

Questions like that, of course, are why the league tests these systems before implementing them. And players and coaches do have suggestions.

Some would like more challenges to use, or to divide them between defense and offense. With the system in use in only one fall league park, visiting hitters say they sometimes forget they can object to certain pitches. Tuiasosopo wouldn't mind seeing pitch locations on the big board, regardless of if they're challenged. At least once, Loux said, an umpire mistook a pitcher's hat adjustment for a challenge signal, causing confusion. "We had to have a meeting," he said. "It took two minutes!" The three-challenge limit also hasn't fully eliminated all frivolous reviews. Winn admits to challenging one on a goof in a lopsided game. "It was a slider directly down the middle," he said with a laugh. "In those nine boxes, it hit the middle box."

Loux counts himself among what appears to be the minority that is against adopting MLB's experiment. He'd rather see full-time robo umps. "An average game has like 240 pitches," he said, "and we're worried about six of them." Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that he's a catcher who derives some value by stealing strikes, Hummel prefers human umpires and no challenges at all. "I like it," he said of the challenge system, "but at the same time, I don't know if I want it." Blue Jays infielder **Addison Barger** hates it and also prefers only human umps. "It just gives you another thing to worry about in a sport where there's already way too much to think about," he said. Ironically, he's won every single challenge he's initiated.

But most players and coaches in the fall league who spoke to *The Athletic* feel differently. They see a system that provides for real-time umpire accountability, and one that adds a fun strategic element to the game. It's quick, painless and even exciting. It would make for an interesting adjustment to the rules, although there's no clear timetable for when it could be adopted in the majors. MLB's competition committee is stacked in favor of the league, allowing commissioner Rob Manfred to adopt rule changes over objections from the players union, but nothing so far suggests that strike zone challenges are coming to the majors in 2023.

If the league does adopt it, though, it will represent a fundamental change to how the game answers its most fundamental question. Was that strike, or was it a ball? Just tap your head and you'll find out.

THE 21 YEAR OLD BEHIND THE TWITTER BOT

Boston Globe

Catch the "perfect game" during this year's World Series between the Astros and Phillies?

I'm not referring to Wednesday night's no-hitter.

This perfect game had nothing to do with how well the pitchers threw the ball and all to do with the umpire behind the plate during Game 2: Pat Hoberg. According to the website and Twitter bot Umpire Scorecards, Hoberg called all strikes and balls correctly, an impressive feat.

Based on Umpire Scorecards' data, which dates back to 2015, it's the first time this has happened in Major League Baseball.

The Umpire Scorecards website has nearly 1.2 million page views this year, and the @UmpScorecard Twitter account reached 300,000 followers Tuesday. Few people know the popular software — which scrapes MLB data and uses algorithms to determine the accuracy, consistency, and biases of umpire calls at the plate — was built by a 21-year-old Boston University junior.

“Not that it's really a secret, but I just don't talk about it that much,” Ethan Singer said from his dorm room in Boston, which he shares with seven others.

What began as a personal project in 2020 after Singer graduated from high school in Bethesda, Md., has become a widely cited source on baseball stats. A couple dozen professional baseball players follow the Twitter account, and its insights sometimes make the news.

“It sort of snowballed,” said Singer, who majors in statistics and computer science and minors in public policy.

All the data that feeds into the algorithms come from MLB. The program Singer wrote captures just five of the 89 attributes the league publishes on every pitch: its horizontal

and vertical position when it crosses the plate, the top and bottom of the strike zone (adjusted for a batter's stance), and the umpire's call.

When an umpire calls a pitch wrong, that brings down their accuracy score. Umpire Scorecards also generates more sophisticated stats, such as "impactful missed calls," which identifies bad calls that had an impact on the game.

All of this information appears in Singer's graphic templates that auto-post to Twitter.

To account for errors in MLB stadium camera tracking systems, Umpire Scorecards uses a mathematical technique to simulate all possible locations a ball could be when it crosses the plate — there are around 500 — and only determines calls are wrong when it's 90 percent sure.

Other programs generate stats on umpires. But Singer said the MLB's Baseball Savant, as well as stats produced by ESPN, do not account for how the strike zone moves up and down for the height and stance of the batters.

While some Twitter bots post daily videos of missed calls, Singer said people follow Umpire Scorecards because it publishes the same data on every game played. The website also allows people to filter through games, umpires, and teams, so it's become a research tool, he said.

These days, Umpire Scorecards is a fully automated program running on a Google Cloud sever. (Singer used to keep a laptop on top of the microwave in his dorm and run a Python program every morning before heading out to class.)

Singer said he's in the process of setting up Umpire Scorecards as an official business

entity. He runs ads on the website and collects Venmo donations. "It's not an income, but it's not nothing," he said.

As for the future, Singer has no plans to turn his idea into something bigger. Ultimately, he wants to pursue a career in public policy.

"Baseball analytics is not my life," he said.

2023 TOP FREE AGENTS

Reminder of the rules:

Day 1 after the World Series: Players with six-plus years of big-league service time who are not under contract beyond 2022 become free agents.

Days 1-3 after the World Series: Players with opt-out clauses in multiyear contracts have the right to become free agents.

Day 3 after the World Series: Deadline for team and mutual options.

Day 5 after the World Series: Player option and qualifying offer decisions due.

Teams can make a one-year, \$19.65 million qualifying offer to their free agents. If the player accepts, he would remain with the team for 2023 (unless they negotiate a multiyear deal). If he rejects, the team receives a draft pick if he signs elsewhere.

OK GM. You've convinced your team owner to open his checkbook. Here are the top 50 free agents. Who do you sign?

Josh Bell, 1B, age 30

2022 (Washington Nationals, San Diego Padres): .266/.362/.422, 3.0 rWAR/2.0 fWAR

Anthony Rizzo, 1B, age 33

2022 (New York Yankees): .224/.338/.480, 2.4 fWAR

José Abreu, 1B/DH, age 36

2022 (Chicago White Sox): .304/.378/.446, 4.2 rWAR/3.9 fWAR

Jean Segura, 2B, age 33

2022 (Philadelphia Phillies): .277/.336/.387, 1.8 rWAR/1.7 fWAR

Kolten Wong, 2B, age 32

2022 (Milwaukee Brewers): .251/.339/.430, 3.2 rWAR/2.5 fWAR

Jace Peterson, UT, age 33

2022 (Milwaukee Brewers): .236/.316/.382, 2.3 rWAR/2.2 fWAR

Carlos Correa, SS, age 28

2022 (Minnesota Twins): .291/.366/.467, 5.4 rWAR/4.4 fWAR

Trea Turner, SS, age 30

2022 (Los Angeles Dodgers): .298/.343/.466, 4.9 rWAR/6.3 fWAR

Dansby Swanson, SS, age 29

2022 (Atlanta): .277/.329/.447, 5.7 rWAR/6.4 fWAR

Xander Bogaerts, SS, age 30

2022 (Red Sox): .307/.377/.456, 5.7 rWAR/6.1 fWAR

Elvis Andrus, SS, age 34

2022 (Oakland A's/Chicago White Sox): .249/.303/.404, 3.0 rWAR/3.5 fWAR

Justin Turner, 3B, age 38

2022 (Los Angeles Dodgers): .278/.350/.438, 1.9 rWAR/2.4 fWAR

Joey Wendle, 3B/2B, age 33

2022 (Miami Marlins): .259/.297/.360, 2.5 rWAR/1.0 fWAR

Brandon Drury, 3B/1B, age 30

2022 (Cincinnati Reds/San Diego Padres): .263/.320/.492, 2.6 rWAR/2.9 fWAR

Aaron Judge, OF, age 31

2022 (New York Yankees): .311/.425/.686/holy/s-t, 10.6 rWAR/11.5 fWAR

Brandon Nimmo, OF, age 30

2022 (New York Mets): .274/.367/.463, 5.0 rWAR/5.4 fWAR

Gurickson Profar, OF, age 30

2022 (San Diego Padres): .243/.331/.391, 3.1 rWAR/2.5 fWAR

Andrew Benintendi, OF, age 28

2022 (Kansas City Royals, New York Yankees): .304/.373/.399, 3.2 rWAR/2.8 fWAR

Mitch Haniger, OF, age 32

2022 (Seattle Mariners): .246/.308/.429, 1.4 rWAR/0.8 fWAR

Kevin Kiermaier, OF, age 32

2022 (Tampa Bay Rays): .228/.281/.369, 1.1 rWAR/1.1 fWAR

Joey Gallo, OF, age 29

2022 (New York Yankees/Los Angeles Dodgers): .160/.280/.357, 0.2 rWAR/0.6 fWAR

David Peralta, OF, age 35

2022 (Arizona Diamondbacks/Tampa Bay Rays): .251/.316/.415, 0.7 rWAR/1.7 fWAR

Michael Conforto, OF, age 30

2022: did not play (injury/unsigned)

Willson Contreras, C, age 31

2022 (Chicago Cubs): .243/.349/.466, 3.9 rWAR/3.3 fWAR

Gary Sánchez, C, age 30

2022 (Minnesota Twins): .205/.282/.377, 0.9 rWAR/1.3 fWAR

Christian Vázquez, C, age 32

2022 (Boston Red Sox/Houston Astros): .274/.315/.399, 2.1 rWAR/1.6 fWAR

Michael Brantley, DH, age 36

2022 (Houston Astros): .288/.370/.416, 1.3 rWAR/1.2 fWAR

Jacob deGrom, RHP, age 35

2022 (New York Mets): 3.08 ERA, 64.1 IP, 8 BB, 102 K, 9 HR, 1.4 rWAR/2.2 fWAR

Carlos Rodón, LHP, age 30

2022 (San Francisco Giants): 2.88 ERA, 178 IP, 52 BB, 237 K, 12 HR, 5.4 rWAR/6.2 fWAR

Jameson Taillon, RHP, age 30

2022 (New York Yankees): 3.91 ERA, 177.1 IP, 32 BB, 151 K, 26 HR, 1.2 rWAR/2.3 fWAR

Taijuan Walker, RHP, age 30

2022 (New York Mets): 3.49 ERA, 157.1 IP, 45 BB, 132 K, 15 HR, 2.6 rWAR/2.5 fWAR

Justin Verlander, RHP, age: Nothin' but a number

2022 (Houston Astros): 1.75 ERA, 175 IP, 29 BB, 185 K, 12 HR, 5.9 rWAR/6.1 fWAR

Martín Pérez, LHP, age 32

2022 (Texas Rangers): 2.89 ERA, 196 1/3 IP, 69 BB, 169 K, 11 HR, 5.0 rWAR/3.8 fWAR

Tyler Anderson, LHP, age 33

2022 (Los Angeles Dodgers): 2.57 ERA, 178 2/3 IP, 34 BB, 138 K, 14 HR, 4.3 rWAR/4 fWAR

Kodai Senga, RHP, age 30

2022 (Fukuoka Softbank Hawks, NPB): 1.94 ERA, 144 IP, 49 BB, 156 K, 7 HR

Zach Eflin, RHP, age 29

2022 (Philadelphia Phillies): 4.04 ERA, 75.2 IP, 15 BB, 65 K, 8 HR, 0.9 rWAR/1.4 fWAR

Edwin Díaz, RHP, age 29

2022 (New York Mets): 1.31 ERA, 62 IP, 118 K, 3.2 rWAR/3.0 fWAR

Clayton Kershaw, LHP, age 35

2022 (Los Angeles Dodgers): 2.28 ERA, 126 1/3 IP, 23 BB, 137 K, 10 HR, 3.8 rWAR/3.8 fWAR

Noah Syndergaard, RHP, Age 30

2022 (Los Angeles Angels/Philadelphia Phillies): 3.94 ERA, 134.2 IP, 31 BB, 95 K, 14 HR, 1.8 rWAR/

José Quintana, LHP, age 34

2022 (Pittsburgh Pirates, St. Louis Cardinals): 2.93 ERA, 165 2/3 IP, 47 BB, 137 K, 8 HR, 3.5 rWAR/4 fWAR

Chris Bassitt, RHP, age 34

2022 (New York Mets): 3.42 ERA, 181.2 IP, 49 BB, 167 K, 19 HR, 3.2 rWAR/2.7 fWAR

Ross Stripling, RHP, age 33

2022 (Toronto Blue Jays): 3.01 ERA, 134.1 IP, 20 BB, 111 K, 10 HR, 2.7 rWAR/3.1 fWAR

Nathan Eovaldi, RHP, age 33

2022 (Boston Red Sox): 3.87 ERA, 109.1 IP, 20 BB, 103 K, 21 HR, 1.5 rWAR/1.0 fWAR

Kyle Gibson, RHP, age 35

2022 (Philadelphia Phillies): 5.05 ERA, 167.2 IP, 48 BB, 144 K, 24 HR, 0.6 rWAR/1.8 fWAR

Drew Rucinski, RHP, age 34

2022 (NC Dinos, KBO): 2.97 ERA, 193.2 IP, 34 BB, 194 K, 14 HR

Michael Wacha, RHP, age 31

2022 (Boston Red Sox): 3.32 ERA, 127.1 IP, 31 BB, 104 K, 18 HR, 3.3 rWAR/1.5 fWAR

Rafael Montero, RHP, age 32

2022 (Houston Astros): 2.37 ERA, 68.1 IP, 23 BB, 73 K, 3 HR, 1.3 rWAR/1.5 fWAR

Corey Kluber, RHP, age 37

2022 (Tampa Bay Rays): 4.34 ERA, 164 IP, 21 BB, 139 K, 20 HR, 0.6 rWAR/3.0 fWAR

Jake Odorizzi, RHP, age 33

2022 (Houston Astros/Atlanta): 4.40 ERA, 106.1 IP, 35 BB, 86 K, 14 HR, -0.1 rWAR/1.3 fWAR

Andrew Heaney, LHP, age 32

2022 (Los Angeles Dodgers): 3.10 ERA, 72.2 IP, 19 BB, 110 K, 14 HR, 0.7 rWAR/1.1 fWAR

FROM SEBRING TO BOHM, A HISTORY OF 1,000 WORLD SERIES HOMERS

Tyler Kepner, NYT

Jimmy Sebring hit the first World Series homer back in 1903 and in the third game of the 118th Fall Classic, **Alec Bohm** of the Phillies hit the 1,000th.

Alec Bohm hit the 1,000th home run in World Series history in Game 3 on Tuesday at Citizens Bank Park. For a while, it seemed as if his Philadelphia Phillies teammates might slam a thousand more.

They settled for five in their 7-0 wipeout of the Houston Astros, good enough to tie the single-game record for one team in a World Series game. It was fitting for a lineup built to bludgeon the opposition, whether or not they admit it.

“Guys aren’t trying to go up there and just hit homers,” Bohm said after the game. “We’re hitters. Guys were working at-bats. Guys are taking singles the other way. And sometimes they make a mistake and we get ‘em.”

By the end of the night — the end of the fifth inning, actually — the home run count had ticked up to 1,003, from Jimmy Sebring’s inside-the-park homer off Boston’s **Cy Young** on Oct. 1, 1903, to Rhys Hoskins’s liner into the left-field seats off **Lance McCullers Jr.** on Tuesday.

Sebring, the right fielder for the Pittsburgh Pirates, did not earn much acclaim from The Boston Globe, which called it a “weak fly” over second base “that rolled nearly to the ropes, the Boston outfielders taking their time in fielding it and permitting a home run.” The Pittsburgh Press, meanwhile, reported that Sebring “sent the ball to deep center” for his homer.

It’s fun to imagine all the homers listed, in order, on some sort of royal scroll in Cooperstown, N.Y. Light-hitting infielders like **Al Weis** (No. 437) and **Walt Weiss** (No. 621) make the list, but not celebrated sluggers like **Ken Griffey Jr.** or **Ted Williams**. **Willie Mays Aikens** shows up four times, **Willie Mays** not at all.

The most famous home runs — by guys named **Babe Ruth** and **Mickey Mantle**, **Bill Mazerowski** and **Joe Carter**, **Carlton Fisk** and **Kirk Gibson** — have been chronicled in depth for generations. Here are a few other milestones on the 119-year, one-month journey to 1,000.

No. 10: First by a guy nicknamed “Home Run”

Home Run Baker, 1911

John McGraw’s Giants tried to intimidate **Home Run Baker**, a third baseman, by spiking him repeatedly in the field. He responded with this crucial homer in Game 2, and another the next day to help beat the great **Christy Mathewson**. This was the first of Baker’s four seasons leading the American League in homers — with as few as nine and as many as 12.

No. 29: Only home run in the Black Sox World Series

Shoeless Joe Jackson, 1919

Two of the infamous “Eight Men Out” hit World Series homers: **Happy Felsch** in 1917 and **Shoeless Joe Jackson** in 1919. They were, of course, two of eight White Sox players barred for life for accepting bribes in 1919, when the Reds prevailed, five games to three. The record shows that Jackson’s .375 average led all Chicago regulars, and his Game 8 homer was the only one hit by either team.

No. 30: First grand slam

Elmer Smith, 1920

It takes a lot to overshadow the first grand slam in World Series history, by Cleveland’s **Elmer Smith** in the first inning of Game 5 off Burleigh Grimes. But second baseman **Bill Wambsganss** did it, snaring a line drive, stepping on second and tagging the runner for the first — and still only — unassisted triple play in World Series history.

No. 39: First at Yankee Stadium

Casey Stengel, 1923 (inside the park)

In the ninth inning of the opener, **Casey Stengel**, then with the visiting Giants, lined a ball to deep left center as the outfielders gave chase. “It was very apparent he intended to make those old legs carry him home,” The Daily News reported, “if it should be the last time they ever functioned.” Stengel, who was then 33, retained the use of his legs and went on to manage the Yankees to seven titles.

Sign up for On Baseball. Our analysis of the biggest M.L.B. games, story lines and athletes, delivered daily during the postseason. Get it sent to your inbox.

No. 115: The forgotten follow-up

Lou Gehrig, 1932

Everyone with a passing interest in American sports has heard of **Babe Ruth**’s “called shot” at Wrigley Field in 1932. It was mostly a myth — had Ruth pointed theatrically to the bleachers, pitcher **Charlie Root** would have drilled him — but Ruth was trying to silence the hecklers on the Cubs’ bench and did it in grand style. Lesser known is what happened next: a home run by **Lou Gehrig**, who actually hit for a higher average than Ruth in World Series play (.361 to .326) with, incredibly, the exact same on-base plus slugging percentage: 1.214.

No. 209: First walk-off

Tommy Henrich, 1949

It took until the 209th homer for one to end a game, when Henrich — nicknamed Old Reliable — drove a **Don Newcombe** pitch into the right-field seats to beat Brooklyn in the opener at Yankee Stadium. Fifteen other players have ended World Series games with home runs, though nobody has ever hit a walk-off grand slam.

No. 345: Most significant Game 7 homer

Hal Smith, 1960

The Yankees were four outs from victory when **Hal Smith**, a backup catcher, connected for a three-run blast off Jim Coates in Game 7. Just like that, the Pirates stood three outs from winning the title — and though they lost the lead in the top of the ninth, **Bill Mazerowski's** leadoff shot against **Ralph Terry** won the championship. “The people in Pittsburgh realize — now, this is what they tell me — that my home run was more important than Mazerowski’s,” Smith told me in November 2019, two months before he died at age 89. “Because we could have got a double and single and won that game, but we had to have some runs when I hit mine.”

No. 401: Most improbable

Jose Santiago, 1967

The “Impossible Dream” Red Sox lived up to their nickname early in Game 1. Facing the dominant **Bob Gibson**, the Red Sox scored their first run on a homer by pitcher **Jose Santiago**, who hit just one in his career in the regular season. Gibson, naturally, had the last word: He hit a homer of his own in Game 7, when he won his second World Series M.V.P. Award.

No. 500: Halfway there

Jim Mason, 1976

The halfway point on the path to 1,000 came from an unlikely source: **Jim Mason**, a backup shortstop for the Yankees who hit only 12 home runs in more than 1,500 major league at-bats. Mason’s homer — in Game 3 of a sweep by the Reds — was the Yankees’ first in the World Series at the remodeled Yankee Stadium. Mason is one of four players to homer in their only career World Series at-bat, with **Geoff Blum** (2005), **Bobby Kielty** (2007) and **Michael A. Taylor** (2019).

No. 528: Best answer

Reggie Jackson, 1978

Reggie Jackson, quite famously, finished the 1977 World Series with three homers off three first pitches from three different Dodgers pitchers. But did you know that he also produced the final runs of the next season, too? Jackson was humbled in Game 2 at Dodger Stadium, when the hard-throwing rookie **Bob Welch** pumped fastballs past him for a game-ending strikeout. But Jackson asserted himself in the end, homering off Welch late in Game 6 to punctuate a 7-2 clinching victory.

No. 609: Best bat flip

Tom Lawless, 1987

With third baseman **Terry Pendleton** sidelined by injury, the Cardinals turned to **Tom Lawless**, who hit .080 during the regular season and had just one homer to that point in his five-year career. Facing the eventual World Series M.V.P. **Frank Viola** in Game 4 with runners at the corners, Lawless lifted a high fly to left — and started *walking* to first base, carrying his bat with him as he watched the ball barely clear the wall. When it did, Lawless casually flipped his bat — *over his head*. “I just must have blanked out there for a second,” Lawless said later. “This never happened to me before.”

No. 689: Best fulfillment of a prophecy

David Justice, 1995

On the afternoon of Game 6 of the World Series, Cleveland pitcher **Jim Poole** dropped by his alma mater, Georgia Tech, to watch a football game for a while. When Poole left, one of his buddies told him, “Whatever you do, don’t let Justice beat you!” And wouldn’t you know: That night, in the sixth inning, Atlanta’s **David Justice** homered off Poole for the only run of a 1-0 clinching victory.

No. 710: Best tip from a fan

Bobby Bonilla, 1997

The Marlins reached the seventh-inning stretch of Game 7 trailing, 2-0, to Cleveland’s **Jaret Wright**, with just one hit. As he waited to lead off the inning, **Bobby Bonilla** got a helpful tip from a man in the front row: “Take a step back from the plate; he’s not going to pick up that you adjusted your stance.” This was not just any fan — it was **Joe Black**, a former Brooklyn Dodger, who had fallen for that trick in Game 7 of the 1952 World Series. The Yankees’ **Mickey Mantle** had subtly moved back in the box, hoping for an inside pitch, and beaten Black with a

go-ahead home run. Bonilla made the adjustment, smoked a leadoff homer, and the Marlins won in 11 innings.

No. 811: The last by a pitcher

Joe Blanton, 2008

In 216 career regular-season at-bats, Joe Blanton never got an extra-base hit. But for the Phillies in Game 4, he drove a pitch from the Rays' **Edwin Jackson** into the same left-field seats where Bohm would rip No. 1,000. "It was a fastball, just trying to groove it in there," Jackson said, many years later. "It ran back across, middle in, right into his bat path."

No. 982: The first to start a World Series

Jorge Soler, 2021

Last October, in Houston, Atlanta's **Jorge Soler** led off the top of the first inning of Game 1 and did something no player had ever done: start the World Series with a home run. "It's pretty amazing we can come up with all these things," a teammate, **Adam Duvall**, said in wonder that night. "Even more amazing is that the game has been played this long and there are still the first players to do something. That's pretty cool. I guess there will be a day when there are no firsts anymore."

The first 1,000 homers are now complete. Here's to thousands more.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Since 2000, besides this year's Houston Astros, 5 teams have played in back-to-back World Series. How many can you name?

2000 won, 2001 lost

2008 won, 2009 lost

2010 lost, 2011 lost

2014 lost, 2015 won

2017 lost, 2018 lost

2000 Yankees defeated Mets, 2001 lost to Diamondbacks

2008 Phillies defeated Rays, 2009 lost to Yankees

2010 Rangers lost to Giants, 2011 lost to Cardinals

2014 Royals lost to Giants, 2015 defeated Mets

2017 Dodgers lost to Astros, 2018 lost to Red Sox

HOUSEKEEPING

Sunday Baseball Tidbits is distributed every Sunday morning. The goal is to provide “2 Cups of Coffee worth of baseball news, analysis, history and trivia” from a range of sources. All content belongs to its respective copyright holders. This newsletter is provided for the non-commercial enjoyment of our subscribers. Please email nhsuperseven@yahoo.com for a free subscription. We will never share your email address. Questions, comments, ideas, corrections and pointers to content you think subscribers would enjoy are encouraged and appreciated.