

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

1.1.2023

Happy New Year. I hope 2023 brings you good health and much happiness. 88 days 'til opening day.

Many thanks for a fun 2022. Curating my favorites from each week's baseball reading is now in its 4th year and has produced over 5,000 pages. Thank you for reading, thank you for sending ideas (and corrections), thank you for referring new subscribers (a community of 120 friends and friends of friends), thank you to Todd Mogren for creating sundaybaseballtidbits.com to archive it all. The goal each week is to give you 2 cups of coffee worth of interesting stuff and a couple of "wow, that's interesting" moments.

This week Jayson Stark's wonderful 2022 recap of weird plays, Tom Verducci on predicting performance of players pushing 40, **Mark Buehrle**, 2022 highlights and lowlights, RIP to those we lost and trivia. Enjoy your first coffee of 2023 with baseball.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

A triple play of trivia to ring in the new year.

Name the five active pitchers who have won more than one Cy Young award.

I am not in the HOF.

16 year career, 422 saves, 1,196 strikeouts.

Second to **Mariano Rivera** for best all-time career ERA in the live ball era.

Second to **Kenley Jansen** all time in K/9 and K%.

422 saves ranks sixth all-time; 1,196 strikeouts as a reliever ranks fourth all-time and are a record for lefty relievers.

4 of the 5 teams I pitched for were in the NL. My career wrapped in 2010. I led the majors in saves on 2003 and 2005.

Who am I?

Five pitchers hold the single season strikeout record for two teams.

Astros and Yankees

Expos/Nationals and Red Sox

Rangers and Angels

Mariners and Diamondbacks

Orioles/Browns and A's (Hall of Fame, 1907 & 1905)

(answers at the bottom)

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

"I always thought I'd die on the field, but not in the [expletive] bullpen."

— Former Red Sox lefty **Bill Lee**, after he had a cardiac episode and stopped breathing while warming up for the semi-pro Savannah Bananas.

Sandy Koufax's 1.37 career ERA at Dodger Stadium is the best by a pitcher at any ballpark since 1920 (min. 500 IP). **Jacob deGrom** (2.10 ERA at Citi Field) is second.

Anyone remember last May 16 – the Angels were in first place. Their record was 24–14 on May 16, their last day in first; they went 49–75 the rest of the way.

You are a true Yankee fan if you remember the memorials in centerfield were for **Miller Huggins, Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth**. They were located 460 feet from home plate.

The Green Monster at Fenway Park is 37 feet high. The Baker Bowl, home to the Phillies from 1887-1938, had a distance of only 280 feet to right field. Because the Phillies couldn't build out the park any farther with railroads and other businesses in the way, they did the only other thing they could do: They constructed an enormous 60-foot wall. the Phillies routinely led the league in home runs during their time playing there. In 1929, Philadelphia's **Lefty O'Doul** had an incredible 144 hits in 318 at-bats at Baker -- leading the NL with a .398 batting average. Pitching, though, proved difficult for many.

The Polo Grounds is widely known as having the deepest center-field fence in history at an astounding 483 feet. But when Braves Field was originally built in 1915 in Boston, it stretched even farther. The right-center-field corner was 520 feet away from home plate.

Five active second basemen have hit at least 100 home runs in their careers. One of them is **Robinson Canó**, who is technically still active because he hasn't retired. The other four are **Jose Altuve** (192), **Rougned Odor** (174), **Jonathan Schoop** (174) and **DJ LeMahieu** (107)

(For this question, a player must have played at least 50% of his games at second base to qualify, so you will not find **Marcus Semien** or **Javier Báez** on this list.)

Think there may too many position players pitching?

Hits allowed by position players pitching:

1982 0 hits

1992 1 HR

2002 1 single, 1 HR

2012 9 singles, 6 doubles, 2 HR

2022 132 singles, 42 doubles, 2 triples, 48 HR

Good for an over/under bar bet: there were 708,540 pitches thrown in MLB last season.

Minor League pay before pre-union: In the old system, owners paid minor leaguers salaries of \$400 per week in rookie ball, \$500 in Class A, \$600 in Double A and \$700 in Triple A. Bet that's going up as collective bargaining cranks up next month.

Aaron Judge won the AL MVP award, the 23rd win for a Yankees player – a record for most by one club.

Several Yankees have won more than one MVP but Judge is the first one-time Yanks winner since Don Mattingly in 1985.

From Joe Sheehan's newsletter

Signing **Nathan Eovaldi** adds to the team's commitment to building the rotation from my favorite category, "good or unavailable." Eovaldi, **Jacob deGrom**, and **Jon Gray** combined for a 3.74 ERA last year. They did so, however, in a total of 301 innings, about 50-60% of what a team wants from its top three starters. Eovaldi, who was a top-five starter in the AL in 2021, missed 12 starts with separate back and shoulder problems last year. He has qualified for the ERA title once in the last eight seasons, and unlike deGrom -- and more like Gray -- he hasn't always pitched at a high level: a 4.30 FIP last year, 5.90 in 2019, 4.97 in 2016. He's a #3, maybe a #4, and this contract, two years for \$34 million, prices him that way.

There was a whole group of these back-end starters who signed two-year deals for around the same pay this offseason. Eovaldi got the most money of the group, and I think I like signing him at his price more than the field, which includes **Jose Quintana** (2/26), **Sean Manaea** (2/25), **Andrew Heaney** (2/25, also a Ranger), and **Ross Stripling** (2/25). Eovaldi has the best recent season and the highest established volume of that group.

I'm always rooting for old guys. The Pirates agreed to a one-year, \$8 million deal with left-handed starter **Rich Hill**, pending a physical, a source told MLB.com, the latest in what has been a long list of acquisitions for Pittsburgh over the past two months.

Hill, who will turn 43 in March, continued to defy Father Time in 2022, posting a 4.27 ERA and a 3.92 FIP across 124 1/3 innings with the Red Sox.

Even in his 40s, Hill has remained an effective starter. Since the beginning of 2020, Hill owns a 3.92 ERA and a 4.14 FIP with 8.11 strikeouts per nine innings to 3.05 walks per nine innings.

The Pirates will be Rich Hill's 12th team, tying him for third for most franchises played for. First is **Edwin Jackson**, who pitched for 14 teams from 2003-19.

Todd Helton's .372 batting average for the Rockies in 2000 tied for the Major League lead. The American League player also batted .372 that season was **Nomar Garciaparra**.

December 12th, 1980: Brewers acquire Rollie Fingers, Ted Simmons, and Pete Vuckovich from the St. Louis Cardinals in exchange for Dave LaPoint, Sixto Lezcano, David Green, and Larry Sorenson.

Few moments in a franchise's history can you point to as a major turning point. In 1980, the Brewers finished third in the AL East with an 86-76 record. The following offseason, the Brewers got a trio of players that would combine for two Cy Young Awards, an MVP, and two Hall of Fame inductions. This trio of players would help the Brewers make it to the postseason for the first time in 1981 and win the American League pennant in 1982.

Fingers, 34 at the time of the trade, was already a seven-time All-Star. Even though he was at the back end of his career, the right-hander was still dominant. In 1981, Fingers recorded an American League-best 28 saves while posting a 1.07 ERA across 78 innings pitched. The AL MVP and AL Cy Young winner in 1981, he continued to have elite-level stuff into 1982, as he recorded 29 saves in 35 chances. Unfortunately for Fingers and the Brewers, he missed the 1982 World Series due to injury. In four seasons with Milwaukee, the 1992 Hall of Fame inductee recorded a then-team record 97 saves and 196 strikeouts.

Vuckovich would follow the lead Fingers set in 1981 by claiming the 1982 AL Cy Young Award. The right-hander recorded a league-best 14 wins in 1981, and 18 in 1982. He had a 1.50 WHIP and 3.34 ERA during his Cy Young campaign, leading the American League in win percentage at .750. Vuckovich, just like Fingers, was inducted into the Brewers Wall of Fame and was an integral part of arguably the best team in franchise history.

Ted Simmons was a two-time All-Star while playing catcher, first base, and DH with the Brewers. He immediately made an impact, becoming an All-Star in 1981 with 14 home runs and 61 RBI in 100 games. 1982 was another solid season for Simmons, as he slashed .269/.309/.451. Simmons hit two home runs in the 1982 World Series against his former club in the losing effort. The 1983 All-Star played five seasons in Milwaukee and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2020.

By holding on to **J.D. Martinez**, at the trade deadline the Red Sox remained over the first limit of the luxury tax. As a result, they will receive draft picks 133 and 134 as compensation for **Xander Bogaerts** and **Nate Eovaldi** leaving as free agents.

Had the Sox ducked under the cap, it would have been Nos. 70 and 71.

In the history of the draft, eight players with a career bWAR of at least 10.0 were taken at 70 or 71. Only four such players were taken at 133 or 134.

Xander Bogaerts, Nathan Eovaldi, J.D. Martinez, and Christian Vázquez are now with other teams--the Red Sox have lost 28 seasons and 2,695 games of experience with the franchise. Throw in 103 postseason games on top of that. **Rafael Devers** is the only player with 3 or more seasons with the team.

The Dodgers have until Friday to add **Trevor Bauer** to their 40-man roster or release the righthander.

On Dec. 22, an arbitrator reduced Bauer's 324-game suspension for domestic violence to 192 games and made him eligible for the coming season.

Bauer is entering the final year of a three-year, \$102 million contract with the Dodgers. Los Angeles saved \$37.5 million with the suspension — which will help allow it to get below the first luxury-tax threshold — but is responsible for \$22.5 million this season.

That the Dodgers have not yet released Bauer suggests they are considering retaining him and are talking over the situation with their coaches and players.

If Bauer is released, another team could pick him up for the MLB minimum of \$720,000. Bauer has not appeared in a game since June 28, 2021

More looking back at 2022

Blue Jays **Alek Manoah** struck out the side in the All-Star game and over 196 2/3 innings he had a 2.24 ERA. That is the second-lowest ERA in a qualified season in Blue Jays franchise history, trailing only **Roger Clemens'** 2.05 in 1997, when he won his fourth Cy Young Award.

Guardians rookie **Steven Kwan** made a strong first impression by simply not missing on swings. His first miss came on the 117th MLB pitch he saw, and it was a foul tip, which officially counts as a missed swing. The 116 pitches he saw prior was the longest streak of pitches seen without a swing and miss for a batter to start his career, among players to debut since the 2000 season.

Royals rookies **Bobby Witt Jr.** finished the year with 20 home runs, too. Along with his 30 stolen bases, he became one of just five players with at least 20 each of both home runs and stolen

bases in his first MLB season. He joined another player on the list who *also* did it in '22, in **Julio Rodríguez**. Before 2022, the only first-year players to go 20-20 were 1995 **Marty Cordova**, 1987 **Ellis Burks** and 1977 **Mitchell Page**.

Aaron Judge got the milestone love and **Albert Pujols** got the old guy love, but don't forget **Miguel Cabrera** for old guy milestone love. On April 23, Miguel Cabrera became the 33rd member of the 3,000 hit club. It was the second straight milestone year for Cabrera, who became the 28th player to reach 500 home runs in 2021. Cabrera became just the seventh player with 3,000 hits and 500 homers, joining **Alex Rodriguez**, Albert Pujols, **Rafael Palmeiro**, **Eddie Murray**, **Willie Mays** and **Henry Aaron**.

Houston's bullpen was dominant en route to a World Series title. Just a few numbers to prove that: an 0.83 ERA, .126 opponent batting average, .215 opponent on-base percentage, .208 opponent slugging percentage and 0.75 WHIP. Those figures all have one key component in common – they were the best by any team's bullpen in a single postseason, minimum 35 reliever innings.

Obscure? **Michael Harris II** of the Braves became the eighth player to win Rookie of the Year on the team that won the previous Fall Classic, joining 1982 **Steve Sax** (LAD), 1976 **Pat Zachry** (CIN) 1962 **Tom Tresh** (NYY), 1960 **Frank Howard** (LAD), 1957 **Tony Kubek** (NYY), 1954 **Bob Grim** (NYY) and 1951 **Gil McDougald** (NYY).

Sandy Alcantara of the Marlins won NL Cy Young unanimously, and it's not hard to see why, as he combined dominance with sheer volume. Alcantara's six complete games led all of MLB – truly, the whole sport, as he had all of the Marlins' CGs and no other team had six or more. It was the first time in MLB history that an individual led all players *and* teams in complete games.

The Dodgers won 111 games in the '22 regular season, tied for the fourth-most in a season in MLB history with Cleveland in 1954. The only teams to win more games: the 2001 Mariners (116), 1906 Cubs (116) and 1998 Yankees (114). But the Dodgers did something none of those teams, or any team in baseball history, had done – they won 95 games by multiple runs, the most in a season. They've now won 217 games in the last two seasons. Only the 1906-07 Cubs won more games in a two-year span, with 223. But...

The Padres won 22 fewer regular-season games than the Dodgers but knocked them off in the playoffs. You have to go back to 1906 (White Sox over Cubs) to find a bigger post-season differential.

The Reds pitching staff hit 110 batters this season, breaking a record held by the 1899 Cleveland Spiders.

Albert Pujols wrapped it up: 703 HR, ninth all-time in hits, second in total bases and third in extra-base hits.

Adam Wainwright & Yadier Molina passed **Red Faber and Ray Schalk** (306 starts), **Warren Spahn and Del Crandall** (316 starts), and finally **Mickey Lolich and Bill Freehan** (324 starts) on Sept. 14. The two ended '22 with 328 total starts together, most for a battery since 1900.

Clayton Kershaw passed **Don Sutton** (2696) to become the Dodgers all-time strike out leader. He wrapped 2022 with 2,807 K's.

The Mariners **Julio Rodríguez** on July 4 in his 81st game he became the fastest all-time to 15 homers & 20 stolen bases; third rookie ever to reach 25-25 in debut season (**Mike Trout** 2012 and **Chris Young** 2007).

Gerrit Cole struck out 257, passing **Ron Guidry's** team record 248 (1978).

ALL-STAR TEAM OF PLAYERS WHO PLAYED FOR ONE TEAM—PRETTY STRONG

Infielders

Luke Appling

Jeff Bagwell

George Brett

Lou Gehrig

Charlie Gehringer

Chipper Jones

Cal Ripken Jr.

Brooks Robinson

Mike Schmidt

Robin Yount

Outfielders

Roberto Clemente

Joe DiMaggio

Al Kaline

Mickey Mantle

Stan Musial

Mel Ott

Mike Trout

Ted Williams

Carl Yastrzemski

Catcher

Thurman Munson

Pitchers

Whitey Ford

Bob Gibson

Ron Guidry

Walter Johnson

Clayton Kershaw

Sandy Koufax

Jim Palmer

Mariano Rivera

ODD TEAM RECORD HOLDERS

Nate Colbert is the Padres' franchise home run leader (163)

They traded Phil Nevin when he was just seven homers away from tying it and Adrián González when he was just two away. Dave Winfield left in free agency when he was nine away, and the great Tony Gwynn retired only 28 homers shy of the mark.

Freddy Garcia and Jose Contreras share the White Sox single-season wild pitch record (20)

No surprise that these two hold the record, as they both had several seasons with double-digit wild pitch totals and they both walked around three batters per nine innings in their career.

Garcia and Contreras both set the mark in the same season -- 2005. That made the 2005 White Sox the only team in the modern era with two pitchers throwing at least 20 wild pitches apiece. And of course, that's the year the White Sox won the World Series. (Contreras threw two wild pitches in the playoffs that year, Garcia none.)

Darin Erstad is the Angels' single-season hits leader (240 in 2000)

Erstad's hit total from 2000 is first by a longshot. Next is Hall of Famer **Vladimir Guerrero's** 206 hits in 2004. (**Mike Trout's** best is 190 in 2013). Though Erstad had a strong career in Anaheim, this Major League-leading hits total was unusual production for him. He didn't have more than 177 hits in any other year, and his overall offensive production in 11 years with the Angels was just below league average (96 OPS+). His .355 average in 2000 was 73 points higher than his career average.

Rickey Henderson holds the A's single-season caught stealing record (42 in 1982)

This record -- an MLB record, not just an A's record -- might actually be as unbreakable as Henderson's 1,406 career steals. Just to put this in perspective, the entire 2018 A's team only made 56 stolen-base attempts. It is unfathomable in today's game for one player to get the green light enough times to run into 42 outs. Henderson swiped a career-high 130 bags in that '82 season, but his 75.6 percent success rate was among the worst of his career. The next-most times caught stealing belongs to **Ty Cobb**, who was caught 38 times in 1915.

Bert Campaneris holds the Rangers' single-season sacrifice bunts record (40 in 1977)

It's not just that Campaneris went above and beyond his career norm with this bunt bonanza (his next-highest total was 25 sac bunts the following year, a total that ranks second on the Rangers' list). He went above everybody's norm. You have to go all the way back to 1929 to find the previous player with 40 sac bunts in a season (the Philadelphia A's **Mule Haas**), and nobody's done it since Campy.

THE ATHLETIC SUMMARIZED LAST SEASON'S ROUGH MOMENTS

Consider Pirates 1B **Yoshi Tsutsugo**. Tsutsugo finished with -1.7 WAR, according to Baseball Reference, which is impressive considering he had just 193 plate appearances for the Pirates. Tsutsugo packed a whole lot of nothing into those 193 PA, though, with just two home runs, four doubles and 50 strikeouts. Tsutsugo hit .171/.249/.229.

Dallas Keuchel finished with -2.6 WAR. Keuchel managed to pack a lot of unfortunate baseballing into a limited space, making just 14 starts. It wasn't the worst WAR in history for a pitcher with fewer than 15 starts, but it was close. Harry Colliflower was worse for the 1899 Cleveland Spiders,

Keuchel made eight starts with the White Sox and posted a 7.88 ERA, which got him released.

Then he made four starts with the Diamondbacks and posted a 9.64 ERA, which got him released.

Then he made two starts with the Rangers and posted a 12.60 ERA, which got him released.

it's impossible not to appreciate the situational stinkiness of Robert Suarez on April 7. It was Opening Day. It was his major-league debut. He came into the ninth inning to protect a 2-0 lead that was built on top of six no-hit innings by Yu Darvish. It was going to be such a memorable Opening Day for Padres fans.

Then Suarez did this:

- Walk
- Walk
- Wild pitch
- Hit-by-pitch

That's the bases loaded for free and an absolute meltdown from a player who was trying to ingratiate himself to his new team. The next Padres pitcher (**Craig Stammen**) came in and immediately threw a wild pitch and allowed a walk-off grand slam, so it didn't exactly get better, but it started with Suarez.

(Suarez finished the season with a 2.27 ERA and re-signed with the Padres for five years, \$46 million. Go figure.

The Washington Nationals went 55-107. The Nationals were somehow 17-59 against the rest of the National League East. They were 5-14 against the Mets, and they had the same record against the Braves, which was a .263 winning percentage ... and that was their *best* showing

against a divisional rival. They were even worse against the Marlins (4-15), and they almost single-handedly gave the Phillies their pennant (3-16).

The Nationals' best month was June, when they were 11-16. Their longest winning streak was just three games. They had four starters with an ERA over 5.00, two starters with an ERA over 6.00 and one with an ERA over 7.00. They traded their best player and franchise cornerstone in the middle of the season.

Hey, you could be **Luke Voit**. One day you are batting clean-up as DH for the playoff bound San Diego Padres. Then the Padres trade for **Juan Soto**. **Eric Hosmer** was originally included but he invoked his no-trade so San Diego included Voit.

FROM THE "HE WAS BETTER THAN I THOUGHT" FILE

Mark Buehrle pitched in the majors for 16 seasons. Not only was he a dependable left starter, many of us loved him because he worked fast. Buehrle hasn't received much Hall of Fame voter love but he had a pretty good career.

Buehrle was a five-time All-Star and four-time Gold Glove winner. Buehrle topped the 200-inning mark in each of his first 14 full seasons from 2001-14.

The only pitchers in the Modern Era with 14 consecutive seasons of 200 innings are Buehrle, **Christy Mathewson** (1901-14), **Warren Spahn** (1947-63), **Gaylord Perry** (1966-80), **Greg Maddux** (1988-2001), **Phil Niekro** (1967-80) and **Don Sutton** (1966-80).

Six of those seven pitchers are in the Hall of Fame. The other is Buehrle. Buehrle's streak came to an end in his final season in 2015 with the Blue Jays -- when he pitched "only" 198 2/3 innings. With four more outs, he would have joined Spahn, Perry and Sutton -- all of whom pitched decades earlier than Buehrle -- as the only pitchers with 15 straight 200-inning seasons.

Just how rare was it for Buehrle to do *what* he did *when* he did it? His 3,232 innings from 2001-15 were not only the most in the Majors during that span, but he pitched 243 1/3 more innings than any other pitcher (**CC Sabathia** was second with 2,988 2/3).

In other words, Buehrle essentially pitched more than an entire season's worth more innings than any big-league pitcher during his remarkable 14-year run.

Overall, Buehrle finished his career with a 3.81 ERA and 214 wins over 518 games (493 starts) and 3,283 1/3 innings. The only other pitchers with at least 200 wins and 500 appearances since 2000 are Sabathia and **Zack Greinke**.

Buehrle allowed only 59 stolen bases over his 16-year career -- and never more than eight in a single season. He combined with his catchers to throw out 81 attempted base stealers during

that same span, resulting in a caught stealing percentage of 57.9%. That's not only double the league average of 29% during his career, but it's the sixth best by any qualified pitcher since that data was first tracked in 1974.

He picked off 102 baserunners during his career, which ranks fourth since 1974, behind only **Steve Carlton** (118), **Mark Langston** (105) and **Andy Pettitte** (103). Buehrle forced opposing hitters into ground into 362 double plays. That's the fourth most by any pitchers since the stat was tracked in 1974, trailing only Greg Maddux (422), **Tom Glavine** (421) and Pettitte (363).

Buehrle tossed a complete-game victory against the Angels in Game 2 of the 2005 ALCS on his way to helping the White Sox win the World Series. On April 18, 2007 he faced the minimum in a no-hitter against the Rangers. The only blemish was a fifth-inning walk to **Sammy Sosa**, who was promptly -- and unsurprisingly -- picked off by Buehrle. Buehrle became just the 18th pitcher in AL/NL history to throw a perfect game when he retired all 27 Rays batters in a July 23, 2009, game at U.S. Cellular Field.

He is one of only seven to throw both a perfect game and another no-hitter.

The other six are Sandy Koufax, **Cy Young**, **Roy Halladay**, **Randy Johnson**, **Jim Bunning** and **Addie Joss**.

All six are in the Hall of Fame.

LARGEST CONTRACTS BY TEAM

- **Angels:** **Mike Trout** – 10 years, 360MM. Signed 3-21-19.
- **Astros:** **Jose Altuve** – 5 years, \$151MM. Signed 3-20-18.
- **Athletics:** **Eric Chavez** – 6 years, \$66MM. Signed 3-18-04.
- **Blue Jays:** **George Springer** – 6 years, \$150MM. Signed 1-19-21.
- **Braves:** **Austin Riley** – 10 years, \$212MM. Signed 8-1-22.
- **Brewers:** **Christian Yelich** – 7 years, \$188.5MM. Signed 3-6-2020.
- **Cardinals:** **Paul Goldschmidt** – 5 years, \$130MM. Signed 3-24-19.
- **Cubs:** **Jason Heyward** – 8 years, \$184MM. Signed 12-15-15.
- **Diamondbacks:** **Zack Greinke** – 6 years, \$206.5MM. Signed 12-8-15.
- **Dodgers:** **Mookie Betts** – 12 years, \$365MM. Signed 7-22-20.
- **Giants:** **Buster Posey** – 8 years, \$159MM. Signed 3-29-13.
- **Guardians:** **Jose Ramirez** – 7 years, \$129MM. Signed 4-6-22.
- **Mariners:** **Robinson Cano** – 10 years, \$240MM. Signed 12-12-13.
- **Marlins:** **Giancarlo Stanton** – 13 years, \$325MM. Signed 11-18-14.
- **Mets:** **Francisco Lindor** – 10 years, \$341MM. Signed 3-31-21.
- **Nationals:** **Stephen Strasburg** – 7 years, \$245MM. Signed 12-9-19.
- **Orioles:** **Chris Davis** – 7 years, \$161MM. Signed 1-21-16.

- **Padres:** Fernando Tatis Jr. – 14 years, \$340MM. Signed 2-22-21.
- **Phillies:** Bryce Harper – 13 years, \$330MM. Signed 2-28-19.
- **Pirates:** Ke'Bryan Hayes – 8 years, \$70MM. Signed 4-7-22.
- **Rangers:** Corey Seager – 10 years, \$325MM. Signed 12-1-21.
- **Rays:** Wander Franco – 11 years, \$182MM. Signed 11-27-21.
- **Red Sox:** David Price – 7 years, \$217MM. Signed 12-4-15.
- **Reds:** Joey Votto – 10 years, \$225MM. Signed 4-2-12.
- **Rockies:** Nolan Arenado – 7 years, \$234MM. Signed 2-26-19.
- **Royals:** Salvador Perez – 4 years, \$82MM. Signed 3-21-21.
- **Tigers:** Miguel Cabrera – 8 years, \$248MM. Signed 3-31-14.
- **Twins:** Joe Mauer – 8 years, \$184MM. Signed 3-21-10.
- **White Sox:** Andrew Benintendi – 5 years, \$75MM. Signed 12-16-22.
- **Yankees:** Aaron Judge – 9 years, \$360MM. Signed 12-7-22.

R.I.P.

A tip of the cap to some we lost in 2022:

Roger Angell (1920). Perhaps the best baseball writer ever, Angell was a writer and editor for The New Yorker for decades, most notably serving as the magazine's fiction editor. But he became known mostly for his baseball writing -- including his legendary essay, "Gone For Good," about pitcher Steve Blass. He was the winner of the Spink Award, the PEN/ESPN Award for Lifetime Achievement in Sportswriting and an inductee into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the only man to achieve all three honors. His 2014 essay, "This Old Man," remains one of the best pieces of writing this journalist has ever read.

Tommy Davis (1939). A two-time batting champ (he hit .346 in 1962, a year in which he also had 153 RBIs), he won a World Series with the Dodgers in 1963. Davis, who initially signed with the Dodgers rather than the Yankees on the advice of **Jackie Robinson**, was famously well-traveled in his career, once playing on 10 teams in 10 seasons.

Dick Ellsworth (1940) Lefthander who pitched 12 years in the majors, winning 22 games for the Cubs in 1963 and 16 for the Red Sox in 1968.

Jeremy Giambi (1974). The young brother of **Jason Giambi**, Jeremy was a key player for the A's (and famously immortalized in the book "Moneyball") in the mid-2000s. Like many members of those A's teams, he was adept at drawing walks and posted a career .377 OBP, though for some fans he is best known for being the player tagged out by Derek Jeter on the famous "Flip Play" in the 2001 American League Division Series.

Bill Haller (1935). Umpired in four World Series, but may be most famous for a profane Earl Weaver tirade directed at him that was caught on tape.

Joe Horlen (1937). Led all AL pitchers in ERA (2.32) from 1964-68. White Sox righthander who finished second to **Jim Lonborg** in 1967 AL Cy Young voting, going 19-7 with a league-best 2.06 ERA.

Mark Littell (1953) Closer for the Royals and Cardinals who pitched on two Kansas City AL West winners. Gave up famous HR to **Chris Chambliss** in 1976 ALCS that sent Yankees to the World Series. (editor's note—the first post-season game I ever attended).

Bob Locker (1938). Reliever who went 6-1 with 10 saves for the World Series champion Oakland A's in 1972, part of a 10-year MLB career.

Hector Lopez (1929). Among the best Panamanian baseball players, Lopez was the other Yankees outfielder in 1961 and '62, playing alongside **Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle**. He homered and had seven RBIs in the four-game World Series sweep of the Reds in '61. After he retired, he would go on to become the first-ever Black Triple-A manager when he took over the Buffalo Bisons in 1969.

Odalis Perez (1978). The first pitcher ever to win a postseason game before a regular-season game, Perez was also once traded for **Gary Sheffield**.

Gaylord Perry (1938). The first pitcher ever to win the Cy Young Award in both the National League and the American League, Perry was perhaps most famous for his spitball -- a pitch he made sure to note that he threw a lot less than hitters thought he did. (He once tried to secure a sponsorship from Vaseline.) He pitched until he was 45, winning 314 games. He was finally ejected for doctoring the ball for the first time in his career during his second-to-last season in 1982. He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1991.

Vin Scully (1927). The first Dodgers game Vin Scully ever broadcast in 1950 featured future Hall of Famers **Jackie Robinson, Pee Wee Reese, Duke Snider and Richie Ashburn**. The last game he ever broadcast featured **Buster Posey, Corey Seager and Justin Turner**. In between was most of baseball history, with Scully right there in the middle of all of it -- the narrator, soundtrack and soul of the national pastime. "Hi, everybody and a very pleasant good evening to you, wherever you may be."

John Stearns (1951). The "Bad Dude" once got involved in an infamous brawl with **Gary Carter**, but, like Carter, the four-time All-Star will forever be known as a Met -- the team he both played for and coached with for more than a decade.

Bruce Sutter (1953). Sutter did not invent the split-fingered fastball, but he was the one who mastered it -- a pitch he only started using because he had nerve surgery when he was 19 and discovered when he came out of surgery that none of his pitches worked anymore. He was a reliever from the beginning -- in the Minors, then with the Cubs. He was traded to St. Louis along with **Leon Durham and Ken Reitz** prior to the 1981 season, where he would be known as

Engine No. 42. Sutter struck out **Gorman Thomas** to win the 1982 World Series. He was on the Hall of Fame ballot for 13 years before being elected in 2006.

Ralph Terry (1936). A starting pitcher who appeared in five consecutive World Series for the Yankees, Terry actually won the Series MVP in 1962, when he put together a 1.80 ERA in three games against the Giants -- most notably a shutout win in Game 7 in which he outdueled Jack Sanford. He is perhaps still most famous for giving up **Bill Mazeroski's** homer that won the 1960 World Series for the Pirates.

Lee Thomas (1936). An All-Star first baseman for the Angels, Thomas is perhaps better known as the general manager of the Phillies, where he built the 1993 World Series team.

Pete Ward (1937). Third baseman for the White Sox, who was acquired from the Orioles (along with **Hoyt Wilhelm**) for **Luis Aparicio**.

Dave Wickersham (1935). One of four players (along with **Aurelio Monteagudo**, **Moe Drabowsky** and **Ken Sanders**) to appear with both the Kansas City A's and the Kansas City Royals.

Gerald Williams (1966). A 14-year veteran who came up in the Yankees organization with **Bernie Williams** (and who would later befriend **Derek Jeter**, who considered him one of his closest friends), Williams would end up facing the Yankees as a member of the Braves in the 1999 World Series. Jeter once wrote, "Williams speaks softly and thoughtfully and is more like a philosopher than a baseball player. You could sit down next to Gerald on a plane, take a three-hour flight, talk the whole time and never, ever guess that he played baseball. Gerald would talk to you about politics, religion, health care, the judicial system, anything. He is a person who thrives on life. He always finds positives and has told me that he doesn't think he could ever overuse the word positive."

Maury Wills (1932). The man who brought the stolen base back, Wills won the 1962 MVP largely because of his 104 stolen bases, which broke **Ty Cobb's** then-record of 96. This was after an inauspicious start to his career in which he was asked to take over for **Pee Wee Reese** as Dodgers shortstop. He would make seven All-Star teams and win three World Series with the Dodgers. Wills also took the first-ever at-bat for the Montreal Expos.

BASEBALL-ALMANAC.COM

Another topic unearthed while exploring baseball-almanac.com, a fun and free website. Switch hitters homering from both sides of the plate in the same game.

211 times in the American League. 146 times in the National League.

Dylan Carlson of the Cards did it in back-to-back weeks in 2021.

Ketel Marte of the D'backs did it 3 times in a month in 2019.

Carlos Beltran has done it 11 times.

Ken Caminiti did it 10 times double **Chipper Jones** at 5.

Reggie Smith and Bobby Bonilla 6x each.

Of the 146 in the NL, just 11 before 1975.

Jose Ramirez of the Guardians 6 times between 2017 and 2020, none since.

Mark Teixeira 14 times. **Nick Swisher** 13. **Jorge Posada, Bernie Williams and Tony Clark** 8.

Eddie Murray 11, **Chilli Davis** 11.

Between **Mickey Mantle** (10), **Tom Tresh** (3) and **Roy White** (5) Yankees had 18 of the 26 in the AL between 1940 and 1978.

JAYSON STARK IN THE ATHLETIC ALWAYS HAS INTERESTING STUFF TO SAY

(subscribe to The Athletic as a New Year's gift to yourself—you'll be glad you did.)

Let's all fondly remember the Strange But True baseball season of 2022. In which ...

A guy taking his first swing in the big leagues *hit a foul ball to his mother*. ... And another guy got called up and then *debuted before he debuted*. ... And we learned that it really was possible *to single into a triple play!*

And fortunately for us fans of weirdness, there were so many more wacky phenomena just like that this year, we're again splitting up the Strange But True Feats of the Year into *three* columns. Everyone out there cool with that? Thought so. So here we go, with Part 1.0 — our look at the hitters, the pitchers and two men named Judge and Ohtani.

Hitter of the Year: Here came the Judge

What will we remember most about 2022? That every day was Judgement Day, of course! **Aaron Judge**, man. He had One of Those Years we'll remember for about the next 12 centuries. So here's just some of the larger-than-real-life stuff the Judge pulled off:

IF YOU THREW IT, HE WOULD MASH — It didn't matter who you were or where you played. If your path crossed with Judge in 2022, you saw his **Babe Ruth** act with your very own eyeballs.

This dude homered against 56 different pitchers ... in 16 different ballparks ... against 19 different teams ... in every inning, from the first to the 10th. ... and in every possible count except 3-and-0. ... Oh, and also: Nobody hit more home runs against right-handers than he did (48). ... And nobody hit more against left-handers than he did (14).

And one more thing. Please stuff that *just a creature of Yankee Stadium* baloney, OK? This guy launched more home runs *away from* The Stadium (32) than *at* The Stadium (30).

HE WAS THE MOST TERRIFYING LEADOFF MONSTER EVER — Hey, remember when all leadoff men used to look like Juan Pierre? So much for that!

Yep, Judge whomped 13 home runs as the most mammoth leadoff hitter in the history of leadoff hitters. ... And another thing that came out of his part-time gig as 6-foot-7 leadoff hulk: He led off more games with a long ball (four) *than* **Ronald Acuña Jr.** (three). ... Remember to file this away: Before the Judge entered the courtroom, no other 6-foot-7 human had ever led off *any* game with a home run. So much for that, too.

CATCH 22 — Have you checked that American League home run leaderboard lately? It's pretty crazy, because Aaron Judge led his league *by 22 home runs* (Judge 62, **Mike Trout** 40). There were six teams that didn't have anyone hit 22 home runs, in the whole season. But Judge *led his league by 22 home runs*.

And who in the history of baseball has ever led his league by that many? Who else do you think? George H. (Bambino) Ruth. And Aaron Judge. And that's the whole freaking list.

HE ALSO LED HIS LEAGUE IN RUNS ... BY 30! Are we allowed to look at other departments on that leaderboard besides homers? Look, it's our column, so why the heck not. So if you peruse the AL leaders in runs scored, you'll see something mind-blowing.

Aaron Judge — 133

Jose Altuve — 103

Now here comes your complete list of players who have led the National League or American League in runs scored by 30 in any year since the beginning of baseball time.

- **Aaron Judge, 2022 (by 30)**
- **Rickey Henderson, 1985 (by 30)**
- **Babe Ruth, 1921 (by 45)**
- **Ross Barnes*, 1876 (by 54)**

(*-born 11 years before the Civil War)

So what Judge did is a thing that had been done only once, by anybody else, *in the last 100 years*. Holy Richie Ashburn. And you thought that 60-homer thing was kinda rare.

HE WAS PLAYING IN HIS OWN LEAGUE — But it wasn't just homers. And it wasn't just runs scored. Check out where else Judge ranked on that league-leader page:

He led in total bases ... by 82! Did you know that in Judge's lifetime (1992-2022), no other player has even come within 30 of a lead that large?

He led in OPS ... by 92 points! The last man with zero performance-enhancing drug suspicions to blow away the AL competition by that many points? How about **George Brett**, more than four decades ago (in 1980)!

He led in pretty much everything! Now here comes everyone since 1900 who led the AL or NL in on-base percentage, slugging, OPS, homers, extra-base hits, walks, runs and most times on base in the same season: Babe Ruth, **Ted Williams** ... and Aaron Judge!

HE WAS THE PLAYER OF THE MONTH — EVERY MONTH! April was a weird month, thanks to the lockout, so let's ignore that one. But check out Judge's home runs by month in every other month:

May — 12

June — 11

July — 13

August — 9

September — 10

So how many players in baseball outhomered him in *any* of those months? Yep. That answer is ... none!

HE WAS THE REAL TIGER KING — The Tigers are a real major-league team. Feel free to verify that if you'd like, but it's totally true. So how ridiculous is this?

No member of the Tigers hit 18 home runs all season. ... And Judge hit 18 *before we even celebrated Memorial Day!*

HE DOUBLE-TEAMED HIS OWN TEAM — Finally, there are a million different ways to measure how indispensable Judge was last season for the Yankees, who just decided there were 360 million reasons to keep him around until 2031. But I think this one pretty much sums it up.

SECOND-HALF OPS

Judge: 1.286

All other Yankees: .652

Can I help with that math? He came within 18 points of *doubling* the OPS of everyone in pinstripes who was *not* named Aaron Judge. C'mon. Really? Yeah, really. That. Happened. How lucky were we to be alive to see it?

My favorite Ohtani-isms of 2022

Let's raise our glasses for **Shohei Ohtani**. He has become the human Strange But True column. And does that seem like the highest praise this column could bestow on a player? Sure. Let's go with that.

I don't know how to adequately sum up the superhero greatness of Ohtani. But I definitely enjoy trying. So let's aspire somehow to recap the magic of the Shoh Show, 2022 edition:

HE CAN'T BE A REAL PERSON! Is it honestly possible that an actual citizen of our planet could have done all this, without cloning himself:

- He had a better ERA+ as a pitcher (172) than **Max Scherzer or Carlos Rodón**!
- He had a better OPS+ as a hitter (145) than **Mookie Betts or Vladdy Guerrero**!
- Back on the mound, he had a better strikeout rate (33.2 percent) than **Gerrit Cole or Corbin Burnes** (who each led their league in strikeouts)!
- Back in the old batter's box, he had a better rate of home runs per fly ball (21.0 percent) than **Pete Alonso or Bryce Harper**!
- Shohei the pitcher: Third-*fewest* extra-base hits allowed (39) of any starting pitcher in the AL (minimum: 600 opponent at-bats)!
- Shohei the hitter: Third-*most* extra-base hits (70) of anyone in the AL who stepped into a batter's box!
- And Total Shohei was able to pitch so much and hit so much that he became *the first player in history to qualify for the league leaders in pitching and hitting in the same season!* Which doesn't seem possible for actual humans, does it?

I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE OBSESSED WITH THIS GUY! Yeah, it isn't just me. My amigos at Codify Baseball also keep me endlessly entertained by weighing in on him. Here are some of their favorite Ohtani-isms:

- AL hitters with more homers: 3
- AL pitchers with more strikeouts: 2

- AL starters who threw a faster pitch: 1
- AL hitters with a faster time to first base: 0

So now that you get the picture of what his superhuman season looked like in totality, let's contemplate the magnitude of what he made possible every night of the year.

HE BROKE THE HISTORY BOOKS AND THE RULE BOOKS! On April 20 in Houston, Ohtani was scheduled to pitch. But first ... he got to bat twice as a hitter *before he ever threw a pitch*. Who else had ever done that? Nobody else since 1900 had ever done that, *because of course they hadn't*.

But then, after he'd finished spinning six innings of 12-whiff, one-hit magic against a team that would go on to win the World Series, he was able to get *another at-bat* (this time as a DH). And who else had ever done that? Nobody else had ever been permitted by the proper authorities to do that, because this was the year baseball changed the rules of the whole sport *just for him*.

WHO MAKES AN ENTRANCE LIKE THIS GUY MAKES AN ENTRANCE?! Here's another thing in the running for the most Shohei-ish thing ever. ... April 14 in Texas: Threw the Angels' first pitch of the night....Then April 15 in Texas: *Hit a home run on the first pitch the next night*. And who else had ever performed that trick? Nobody else in the modern era, naturally, because pitchers who bat leadoff don't exist in our lifetimes — except for guess who?

HE PITCHED IN THE FIRST INNING, WAS STILL BATTING IN THE 10TH! If they're going to change the freaking rules just for one man, it's always cool when that man then uses those rules to break every barrier in sight. So on May 18 against the Rangers, Ohtani started his evening as a pitcher ... *and then batted in extra innings*.

Do we take this stuff for granted yet? I hope not — because as my friend Ryan (The Ace of) Spaeder so astutely pointed out, no one else had started any game as a pitcher and then came to bat in extra innings since **Pedro Martinez** did it ... *on June 3, 1995*, in the fabled game in which Pedro lost a perfect game in extra innings. ... Ah, but no *American League pitcher* had done that *in 50 years*, since Gaylord Perry on Oct. 1, 1972, in his final start (and at-bat) before the DH era nearly ruined all the notes like this.

HE'S THE KING OF THE HUNDRED-AIRES! According to Statcast, only six starting pitchers in the whole sport threw more pitches at 100 mph or faster than the 40 Ohtani unleashed. Only seven hitters in the whole sport hit more baseballs at 100 mph than the 164 Ohtani pounded. So we know he had this in him. But it was still dazzling to see him do both of those things on the same day at the office.

Which brings us to the quintessential Ohtani performance of June 11. On the way to stopping a 14-game Angels losing streak that was, shall we say, taking its toll ... he threw a pitch in the

third inning *at 101.0 mph* ... and then, in the fifth inning, he squashed a gargantuan home run at 104.4 mph.

Who else does this? Only one human walking this planet can possibly do this. Goosebumps.

HE'S THE BEST IN SHOH! If it's not one thing, it's another thing. Oh, wait. It's actually both things. So how about the highlights of The Shoh from July 13, with the Astros stopping by the Big A.

Pitching Ohtani: Strikes out 12 of the 24 Astros he faces. ... Hitting Ohtani: Fires a triple, off the unhittable Cristian Javier, a man who allowed *no other triples all season*. ... So who was the last AL pitcher to triple in the midst of piling up that many strikeouts? That would be **Denny McLain**, who did that (*while winning his 29th game of the season*) way, way, way back on Sept. 10, 1968.

HE FOUNDED THE 8-13 CLUB! It feels as if only a Marvel creation should be able to spin off the sort of back-to-back nights of sorcery spun by Shohei the Ohtanic on June 21 and June 22.

June 21: Ohtani the bat wizard goes off for two homers and eight RBIs.

June 22: Alternate-universe pitching Ohtani fires eight shutout innings, with 13 strikeouts.

So ... who has ever presented the world with eight RBIs and 13 K's on back-to-back days? Hohohohoho. Nobody else has ever even done that *in a career*. But then again ... want a quick list of some of the hitters who never drove in eight runs in *any* game? It's probably no one you've ever heard of, except maybe Babe Ruth, **Henry Aaron**, **Barry Bonds**, **Stan Musial** and that megastar across the room, Mike Trout.

But it's just another day in the life of Shohei Ohtani. So this is that time when I ask again: Are we positive he's an actual person from our planet? I'm prepared to believe that. But if a spaceship from the planet Ohtanus were to land in my backyard someday and claim otherwise, we sure wouldn't spend much time debating that.

My 10 favorite Strange But True Hitting Feats of 2022

STRANGE BUT TRUE LIVING LEGEND OF THE YEAR — I believe I mentioned earlier that this Aaron Judge guy was basically the 21st-century version of Babe Ruth, right? So it should pretty much fry every brain cell in your head to learn that a 42-year-old legend named **Albert Pujols** somehow *out-Judged the Judge* on his way down the exit ramp.

- **OPS versus left-handed pitchers in 2022:** Pujols (1.146), Judge (1.010).
- **Slugging pct. versus LHP in 2022:** Pujols (.746), Judge (.622).

So think about this. Judge just had a season that felt like a “30 for 30” waiting to happen ... *and Albert obliterated him in OPS by 136 points versus left-handers, and in slugging by 124 points against lefties?* Who writes these scripts!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST CYCLIST OF THE YEAR — What made Nolan Arenado’s July 1 cycle one of the Strangest But Truest ever? Oh, possibly the fact that he hit for a cycle ... *but he was never on first base*. And how’d that happen? You need to check out the single.

Whaddaya mean, it looked like an E-5? Hey, luckily for the Cardinals’ ever-inventive third baseman, the official scorer threw in an infield single, at no extra charge. And that’s how Arenado joined just César Cedeño (*nearly 50 years ago*) as the only cyclists who ever completed a cycle with a single that never involved hanging out at first base. Baseball is so weird.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST “NORMAL” CYCLES OF THE YEAR — Hey, I’m glad we got that out of the way, because it was a year with so much bizarre cycling, even Lance Armstrong was ready to grab a bat.

Austin Hays: Have I written lately that baseball is so weird? Just ask Orioles cyclist Austin Hays. Hays on June 22: Hit for the cycle. ... Hays on June 21: *0 for 4, with four strikeouts!* ... And how many other batsmiths in the modern era have ever hung a cycle and a Golden Sombrero in back-to-back games? C’mon. That would be none. Obviously!

Christian Yelich: I’m not sure why Yelich still takes an airplane when the Brewers visit Cincinnati. They should just let him cycle! Because on May 11, Yelich really did hit for the cycle against the Reds *for the third time*, just since 2018. And why would that make the Strange But True column? Hahahahaha. Possibly because ... Cycles by all other players in baseball against the Reds since 2018: Zero. ... Cycles by all other Brewers against anybody since 2018: Zero. ... Cycles by all Reds combined in the history of Great American Ballpark: Zero. So that’s why!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST MOTHER’S DAY PRESENT OF THE YEAR — Some people give their mothers flowers. Some people give their mothers a lovely necklace. Not Rockies rookie Brian Serven. He gave his mother *a foul ball* — on the first swing he ever took in the big leagues, too, on May 18.

So do we care that she didn’t actually catch it, or that a fan sitting near her did and gave it to her? The official position of the Strange But True column is: No! We definitely do not!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST TRIPLE PLAY OF THE YEAR — Does it seem Strange But True at all to hear that a guy actually singled into a triple play? Trick question! Because if it doesn’t, I have no idea why you’re even reading this column.

The Great Lakes Loons, of the always entertaining Midwest League, were responsible for this wackiness on June 13. And I think it’s safe to say it goes immediately into the Strange But True Hall of Fame (still under construction at a secretly strange location). You should watch!

<https://twitter.com/i/status/1532909233645178881>

If you're thinking that you've never seen that before, that might be related to the fact that *no living human has ever seen that before* — other than maybe at a tee-ball game. That's because, according to the Society of American Baseball Research's brilliant Jacob Pomrenke, there hadn't been a major-league triple play that started with a hit to the outfield since ... *April 29, 1886!* But for some reason, nobody tweeted out the video that day, for reasons that apparently were unrelated to Elon Musk.

MORE STRANGE BUT TRUE HITS-THAT-DIDN'T-END-WELL OF THE YEAR — Just to prove that it's never safe to hit a single anywhere in the outfield, even when the Great Lakes Loons are nowhere to be found, here come two more classics kinda like that one.

The good news for the Angels' **Taylor Ward**, on July 3, was he also lined a "routine" single to the outfield. The bad news? That would be everything that happened to him after that ball landed. Especially the part where he somehow *got tagged out at first by the catcher* (Houston's sneaky **Martín Maldonado**).

https://cdn.theathletic.com/app/uploads/2022/12/22155114/f371f1cf-f9e4-4315-9e06-df2e4755dba3-1.mp4?_=3

But hey, it could have been worse. At least that was only *one* out. On Sept. 9, the Pirates' **Rodolfo Castro** found a way to *single into a double play*. And that wasn't even the Strangest But Truest part — because this was also a double play *started and ended by the right fielder!* Ever seen a 9-2-5-2-9 double play? We can help with that!

https://cdn.theathletic.com/app/uploads/2022/12/22155154/c3287a58-71c6-4fec-a616-3c841d9b2435.mp4?_=4

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST SLAM FEST OF THE YEAR — It was the Yankee Stadium classic in which Aaron Judge hit home run No. 60 ... *and that wasn't even the part of this Sept. 20 Yankees-Pirates game that made it classic* ... or propelled it into the Strange But True column for that matter. Here we go:

- Yankees roll into the ninth, trailing 8-4. Then Judge leads off the ninth with No. 60 — and everyone can go home, right?
- Oops! I hope you didn't jump on that No. 4 train like 20,000 other people — because the next four hitters went: Double ... walk ... single ... **Giancarlo Stanton** *ultimate grand slam (down by three, walk-off slam)* ... and the Yankees win, 9-8. So ...

Strange But True bulletin No. 1: Before that inning, no pitcher had ever given up anybody's 60th homer and anybody's walk-off slam at any point in his career. Then Pirates reliever **Wil Crowe** did it *in the same inning*.

Strange But True tidbit No. 2: Before that inning, no team had ever had any player hit a 60th home run and then had any other player mash a game-ending slam *in the same season*. But then the Yankees did both *in the same inning*.

Strange But True tidbit No. 3: Then what happened in the first inning the next day? The Yankees hit another grand slam. And it was somehow *the second time this season* they'd gone slamming against the Pirates in back-to-back innings. OK, so here it comes, the Strangest But Truest part: Before that, no team in history had ever hit slams in two straight innings against the same team twice *in the history of their franchise*. And then the Yankees did that to the Pirates twice *in two consecutive series*. Because baseball is just amazing.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST SWITCH-HIT MASHER OF THE YEAR — Did you know that before Baltimore's **Anthony Santander** came along, nobody in the grand history of the American League had ever bopped home runs from each side of the plate in four different games in the same season? Not **Mickey Mantle**. Not **Eddie Murray**. Not **Mark Teixeira**. Not anyone. Unbelievable, right? But it's not the Strange But True part of this note.

Nope, the Strange But True part is, while Santander was becoming the first AL hitter ever to do that ... *the Orioles went 0-4 in those four games* ... because Orioles!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST WRIGLEY TOURIST OF THE YEAR — **Ernie Banks** seemed to think Wrigley Field was a sweet place to swing a bat, didn't he? So did **Anthony Rizzo**, **Ron Santo**, **Billy Williams**, **Ryne Sandberg**, **Mark Grace** and many, many other ivy lovers everywhere. But you know what the Cardinals' **Corey Dickerson** did this year that they never did? *Get at least 10 straight hits at Wrigley* — four on Aug. 23, four more on Aug. 24 and three more on Aug. 25.

Now here comes the Strange But True part. How many four-hit games did Corey Dickerson have in St. Louis this year? Yep, none. How many three-hit games? Also none. But he had three games in a row like that at Wrigley ... because baseball!

My 10 favorite Strange But True Pitching Feats of 2022

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST BALK TRIFECTA OF THE YEAR — Anybody mind if I start this item by mentioning that the balk is right up there with the most gimmicky rules in sports? Thank you. Now let's also mention that anybody can hit for the cycle. But on Sept. 27, **Marlins** reliever **Richard Bleier** *balked for the cycle* against the **Mets**.

Does that seem hard? Not when John Tumpane is umping first base, it's not! So how did **Jeff McNeil** manage to score after a two-out single in the eighth? *Balk-a-palooza!* Three balks in five pitches later, McNeil was crossing the plate and Bleier had just become the first pitcher since 1900 to balk three times in one at-bat. So how absurd was that? Thanks for asking.

Richard Bleier balks in his previous seven seasons, 305 games and 1,235 batters faced? Zero!

Richard Bleier balks in that at-bat? Three in five pitches!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST NON-NO-HITTERS OF THE YEAR — How is it possible for two teams to give up no hits in nine innings *but somehow not get any no-hitters out of it*? It's the most baseball thing ever. So let's tell you how.

We had one team (the Rays, on April 23) allow no hits through nine innings — but not get credit for a no-hitter *because the game went too long* (and they allowed a couple of hits in the 10th). ... And then we had a second team (the Reds, on May 14) allow no hits, period, but not get credit for a no-hitter *because their half of the game went too short* (also because they forgot to score in Pittsburgh and gave up a run on three walks and a groundball).

As a longtime friend of this column — the late, great, irreplaceable Doug (Kernels) Kern — was the first to inform us, no one had ever seen both of those things happen in the same season before. But not anymore, because ... Baseball! It. Makes. No. Sense.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST NO-HITTER OF THE YEAR — All right, now that we've got that out of the way, it's worth pointing out that the Strangeness But Trueness doesn't necessarily end when the no-hitters actually count. Did you know there were 20 games this year in which a starting pitcher allowed no hits (and went at least five innings) — but there was only one of those starts in which that pitcher made it to the finish line. And naturally, that pitcher was ...

Reid Detmers!

I'm guessing he wouldn't even have been your first pick *in the Angels rotation* to throw the season's only "he-pitched-nine-whole-innings" no-hitter. But that's why this column exists. And also because he threw a no-hitter even though he allowed ... *25 balls in play* ... which hadn't happened in any no-hitter *in over 40 years* (since **Jerry Reuss** in 1980). Except also because ... in this game, while their pitcher was busy giving up no hits, *everybody in the Angels lineup got a hit* ... which had happened *in no other no-hitter since 1900!* ... Because baseball was clearly invented with these Strange But True columns in mind.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST TIME-TRAVELING DEBUT OF THE YEAR — Here in my house, we lose track of what day it is all the time. But that was a bigger issue for Twins rookie **Yennier Cano** in May, because it caused him to make the Strangest But Truest debut ever. How exactly? Here's how:

He debuted the day before he debuted.

OK, not really. It's all thanks to the miracle of suspended games. So here's what really happened: Cano got waved to the mound on May 11 ... was announced as the Twins' new pitcher ... and even warmed up. But then the Strange But True part occurred ... and 12 billion raindrops later, this game got suspended and resumed the next day ... whereupon Cano still

pitched .. a thing the box scores will always say that he did on May 11 ... even though he never delivered a pitch until May 12. Got all that? Fantastic. God, I love baseball.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST BASE-LOADER OF THE YEAR — It was quite the old Strange But True season in the life of **Aroldis Chapman**. Maybe we should have seen that coming back in April, as signs emerged that even his manager, **Aaron Boone**, would have no idea what to make of him, when ...

In back-to-back appearances, *he walked the bases loaded* (16 pitches, four strikes) and then, the very next day ... his manager *brought him in with the bases already loaded*. And how many times had that happened to any other pitchers on back-to-back days in the half-century of reliable public play-by-play data? That would be none — until Aroldis Chapman entered the building.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST DOUBLE-DIGIT SPECIAL OF THE YEAR — Speaking of back-to-back adventures in Strange But Trueness, I'm guessing **Jerad Eickhoff**'s spectacular career as a Pirate went whooshing past most of you, since it consisted of 4 1/3 messy innings on the same day, on June 22. But the Strange But True column sure didn't miss it. And here's why.

Runs allowed by Eickhoff in that game: 10.

Runs allowed by Eickhoff in his previous appearance in the big leagues — 11 months earlier, for the Mets: *Also 10!*

Which made him ... the first pitcher to spin off back-to-back big-league starts with double-digit runs *since the legendary Chubby Dean — in 1940*. ... But even Stranger But Truer, how about doing it *for two different teams, in two different seasons!* ... You think anyone else ever did that at any point in the modern era? Of course not! Baseball is hard, isn't it?

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST BOX-SCORE FOOTNOTE OF THE YEAR — Does anybody out there still read box scores every day? The Strange But True column does! Which is how we stumbled upon this historic addendum to all the unfortunate numbers in **Dallas Keuchel**'s action-packed start for the White Sox, on April 20 in Cleveland:

Dallas Keuchel faced 11 batters in the second inning!

By that, they mean this guy faced 11 batters in the second inning *and forgot to get any of them out*. And let's just say you could have been reading box scores every day for the last half-century and found that one exceptionally Strange But True, for one simple reason: *In all that time, nobody has ever done that before* — thankfully!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST TICKET TO GETTING DFA'D OF THE YEAR — As long as we're on this box-score-line roll, ready for one more all-timer? The Rangers rolled out **Kohei Arihara** to start against the Blue Jays on Sept. 10. That went smoothly:

3 IP, 12 H, 11 R, 5 ER, 1 BB, 2 K, 2 HR, 99 pitches in 3 IP

That's 12 hits! And five walks! But only nine outs! And how many pitchers in the modern era have ever crammed that many base runners into an outing with that few outs? Exactly one. Kohei Arihara!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST STREAK BUSTERS OF THE YEAR — Here's the thing that all baseball streaks have in common: They all end sometime. But the key is how they end, because that's what gets them a prestigious mention in the Strange But True Feats of the Year column. For instance:

Sept. 17: Zac Gallen's 46-inning homerless streak ends, on a home run by ... *a guy with no career big-league homers (Luis Campusano).*

Aug. 28: The Nationals end their own historic streak — of 43 straight games without a win by any starting pitcher, thanks to a win by ... *the starting pitcher with the most losses in baseball (Patrick Corbin).*

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST deGROMIAN ADVENTURE OF THE YEAR — I can't explain baseball. You can't explain baseball. Because *it makes no sense*. And here was one more day at the old ball yard that made no sense: Sept. 24. The Mets visited Oakland that day. Jacob deGrom was heading for the mound. We all knew what was going to happen.

It wasn't what actually happened.

Jacob deGrom has made 38 starts for the Mets over the last three seasons. In only one of them has he given up as many as five earned runs, or even four if we're being precise here. Guess which one. Yep, it was that start (five runs, four innings) ... *against the A's*, who were about to assume the mantle of ... worst offensive team of the last 100 years ... which we would define as *being the first team to hit .216 or worse, have an OBP of .280 or worse and score fewer than 600 runs in any season since Bruno Block's 1910 Chicago White Stockings!* What the heck!

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST WP/LP TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR — What most Americans will remember about April 28 was that it was NFL Draft Day. But for the Strange But True fans of this sport, you should know it was also one of the most momentous days in the history of the baseball draft. By which we mean ...

The 2004 baseball draft.

What? How? Well, it all had to do with the pitchers of record in the Astros' 3-2 win over the Rangers that day ...

WP — Justin Verlander

LP — Matt Bush

So here comes the Strange But Trueness. Back in 2004, Verlander was the second player picked in the draft ... behind only a guy named ... **Matt Bush**! ... So that means this was, somehow or other, the first game in history in which the winning and losing pitcher were *the first two picks in any draft*. ... But hold on. This gets weirder.

Even stranger, *it took 18 years after that draft for that to happen*. ... And even Stranger But Truer than that, one of those two guys *wasn't even drafted as a pitcher*. That wasn't Verlander, naturally. It was Bush, who was drafted by the Padres as a shortstop ... but then life had other plans ... for which the Strange But True Feats of the Year column is exceptionally grateful!

Brotherhood 1, Phil Maton 0

It was the final day of the regular season, a moment the Maton brothers — Phil (the Astros reliever) and Nick (the Phillies utility wiz) — had been waiting for all their lives. They were going to face each other in a real major-league game. Whereupon Nick would enjoy the thrill of getting a hit *off his brother*. Heartwarming, right?

Oh, wait. What's that? Not so heartwarming? What could possibly foil the brotherly fun at a moment like this? Oh, only *the pitcher who gave up the hit punching his locker ... breaking a bone in his throwing hand ... and missing the entire postseason in which his team won the World Series*. Yep, and also ... now he has to hear about that hit *for the rest of his life*.

The Closer With the Dragon Tattoo

It was such a brutal year for deposed Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman, he couldn't even throw a strike at the tattoo parlor. Or at least that's his story and he's sticking to it. In one of those coincidences that only you tattoo aficionados out there could truly appreciate (or explain), Chapman had to head to the injured list — *for almost a month* — because of an alleged *infected tattoo*. And we wouldn't even think of mentioning that this infection happened to flare up after messy back-to-back August outings in which he threw more balls than strikes.

Special Injury of the Year Postseason Awards

Lance McCullers Jr. — Not everything that happens in those October victory celebrations is as festive as those euphoric champagne-splashed iPhone videos make them look. After the Astros eliminated the Mariners in the American League Division Series, McCullers got bonked on the elbow *by a champagne bottle* and had to have his ALCS start backed up a day. These guys don't just need goggles. They need body armor!

David Robertson — But then, other forms of postseason euphoria can be overrated, too. Just ask David Robertson. The Phillies reliever leaped for joy watching **Bryce Harper**'s mammoth Game 2 homer against the Cardinals in the Wild Card Series ... except that joy only lasted until

he returned to earth ... and forgot to deploy his parachute ... which caused him to strain his right calf muscle ... and miss the whole NLDS. Next time, we recommend pumping those fists in the air and keeping his calf muscles on land where they belong.

Special Broadcaster Injury of the Year Award

It's hard not to have a whole new admiration for the athleticism of Bernie Brewer after seeing the carnage Bernie's slide inflicted on Dodgers reporter David Vassegh of Sportsnet LA. Hey, it seemed like a good idea at the time, when Vassegh attempted to whoosh down Bernie's slide during the Dodgers' August visit to Milwaukee. Six cracked ribs and a fractured wrist later, it didn't seem like the programming idea of the 21st century anymore.

DUSTY! Let's put aside whatever you might feel about the Astros, OK? Can you do that for a moment? Thanks, because their manager, the legendary Johnny B. (Dusty) Baker, just did something amazing. Once upon a time, in 1968, he got a hit in the big leagues *as a teenager*. And in 2022, he won a World Series as a manager *in his 70s*. And you know how many people in the history of his sport have ever done that? *Of course, nobody else has done that*, because ... *Dusty!*

Four-pitcher Astros tag team (Cristian Javier, Bryan Abreu, Rafael Montero and Ryan "Now or Never" Pressly).

We'll have to save the debate over whether this no-hitter was truly the same feat as Larsen's, because let's remember something: This is the Strange But True column. And we have some Strange But Trueness to pass along.

The CBP Strange But Trueness: This was the 1,745th game in postseason history. No-hitters have now been thrown in exactly three of them — **Don Larsen's** 1956 World Series perfect game, this Astros game and **Roy Halladay's** 2010 non-World Series (NLDS) no-hitter. But here's the Strange But True part:

Two of those three games were pitched in Philadelphia's favorite hitting haven, Citizens Bank Park ... *and Dusty Baker was managing the visiting team in both of them* (2022 Astros and 2010 Reds, who lost to Halladay). What the heck were the odds of that?

The CBP Strange But Trueness Addendum: Oh, wait. There's one more thing. The Phillies have been playing baseball at Citizens Bank Park for 19 seasons. And how many regular-season no-hitters have *they* thrown there, while 100 percent of all postseason 21st-century no-hitters have been thrown there? Somehow or other, that answer is ... *none!*

The Cristian Javier Strange But Trueness: Then there's the dude who started this World Series no-hitter, Cristian Javier. On one hand, he went only six innings, so he's no Don Larsen. On the other hand, he easily could have been working on *his sixth no-hitter in a row* (or at least his sixth combined no-hitter in a row).

Check out the number of hits Javier allowed in his last six starts of the year: 0 ... 1 ... 2 ... 1 ... 1 ... 2. In other words, over those six starts, *he gave up a total of seven hits!* Former Astros great Dallas Keuchel had a game this year in which he gave up *nine hits in one inning* ... and Cristian Javier gave up *seven hits over six starts*. Wow.

What happened in the game before this no-hitter? *The Phillies hit five home runs in one game!* And how many other teams in history have ever hit five home runs in one game and gotten no-hit in the next game, even including the regular season? Whaddaya think? It's zero, naturally.

Lance McCullers Jr. in 2022*: 242 batters faced before this game — 4 HR

Lance McCullers Jr., Game 3: 20 batters faced — 5 HR

- But then what happened in the game after this no-hitter? Following a night in which *no* Phillies hitter got a hit, the *first* Phillies hitter the next night (**Kyle Schwarber**) *hit a home run*. But here's the Strangest But Truest part: Nobody had hit one of those in the game after any no-hitter, regular season or postseason, since ... *the day after the only other postseason no-hitter since Larsen's gem* (**Brandon Phillips** for the 2010 Reds, in the game after Halladay's no-no). Because ... *baseball!*

CY WHAT? It was Game 1 of the World Series. The Astros led 5-0. A starting pitcher with a 1.75 ERA was on the mound. His name was Justin Verlander. And it has been pretty firmly established that five-run leads don't disappear when this guy is spinning his Cy Young Award wizardry ... eh, until this game anyhow ... which would somehow end: Phillies 6, Astros 5, on **J.T. Realmuto**'s 10th-inning **Carlton Fisk** imitation. So what the heck just happened?

look into every other game in Verlander's career in which his team handed him a lead of five runs or more. Guess how those games went:

- His personal record? How about *99-and-0!*
- His team's record? How about *101-and-2!*
- And in the two losses, *he's* not the guy who gave back those leads. In both of them — July 10, 2015, and May 14, 2009 (both against the Twins) — late bullpen meltdowns inflicted the damage.

ALWCS Game 2: Guardians 1, Rays 0, in 15 innings of doughnut baking

ALDS Game 3: Astros 1, Mariners 0, in 18 innings of 0000000000000000s

- Did you know that before these two games, only one postseason game had even made it past 12 scoreless innings — and then these two games went wayyy beyond that? So that's one game out of more than 1,700 ... *and then two in a week* (Oct. 8 and Oct. 15). Because that's how baseball rolls!

- But of course, as the Rays and Mariners are so well aware, these were also 1-0 extra-inning *elimination games*. And there had been precisely two of those in more than a century of postseason history (1991: The **Jack Morris** Game; 1997: finale of the ALCS). And then ... yep ... *we had two more in a week!*

- Not to mention both of these games ended on dramatic extremely extra-inning home runs — *by two rookies* (**Oscar Gonzalez** for Cleveland, **Jeremy Peña** for Houston). So here we go again. According to the great Sarah Langs of MLB.com, in the history of postseason baseball, there had been exactly one extra-inning homer hit by any rookie ever (**Chris Burke**, for Houston, in 2005). And then ... you can no doubt sing along with us at this point ... *we had two in a week!*

- But hey, now for something completely different ... strikeouts piled up by the Astros and Mariners in just that one 18-inning game: That would be 42! ... As opposed to ... *Strikeouts in the entire 1913 World Series (all five games of it): 35!* Because ... baseball has apparently changed a little.

Mariners postseason times, they also did something in Game 2 of the Wild Card Series that no team in postseason history had ever done: They found themselves trailing the Blue Jays by seven runs in the sixth inning, on the road ... *and then roared back and won*. And yes, that's absolutely as Strange But True as you'd think.

- Before that game, according to STATS, teams that trailed in a postseason game by seven runs or more in the sixth inning or later had compiled an attractive record of ... 3-239! That's a winning percentage of ... *.012!*

- We should also note that it's not as if miracle comebacks like this were a longtime Mariners specialty, either. Their all-time regular-season record when trailing by seven or more in the sixth or later? How about ... 2-693 ... which computes to a picturesque winning percentage of ... *.003!*

- And if you're guessing the Blue Jays don't make a habit of losing games like this, that's excellent guessing. Their regular-season record over the last 10 seasons in games they've led by seven or more that late? How about ... 149-1! But then they lost that WCS game ... when losing meant going home for the winter ... which is mind-blowing, but also ... *baseball!*

TRENT CITY — And now something else I bet you never saw coming ... **Trent Grisham!**

Maybe you can explain how the same dude can go from hitting .184 for the Padres last season ... to then hitting postseason home runs, on back-to-back nights, *against Max Scherzer and*

Jacob deGrom. But I can't. And since I spent way too much time looking into this, I can report that in baseball history, no player had ever finished a season with 500-plus plate appearances and a batting average that low *and then hit any postseason home runs*. ... But then Trent Grisham not only hit two of them in two days, but also hit them *off the nastiest aces in Queens*.

Regular-season HR for the Yankees by Harrison Bader: 0

Postseason HR for the Yankees by Harrison Bader: 5

Postseason HR for the Yankees by Aaron Judge/Giancarlo Stanton: 4

Baseball! It ... makes ... no ... sense!

Game 1 of that Guardians-Rays Wild Card Series. We're talking about ... *Shane (Bieber) versus Shane (McClanahan)*! Yep, it was the first Shane-versus-Shane game in postseason history. But was that the Strange But True part? No, it was not, because we can sum up all the scoring in this game with this bulletin from the sixth inning ...

Jose (Siri) HR off Shane (Bieber) ...

After which ...

José (Ramírez) HR off Shane (McClanahan)

All right, I know you're wondering, so here you go. ... According to Baseball Reference MVP Kenny Jackelen, *of course* this was the first game in postseason history that two hitters with the same first name homered off two pitchers with the same first name in the same inning.

Padre Austin Nola in the NLCS:

1 for 2 against his brother Aaron of the Phillies

0 for 17 against pitchers he's not related to

The post season added more stuff:

JT Realmuto hit the first inside the park HR by a catcher in WS history. Bryce Harper hit a go-ahead home run on the *last* pitch he saw at home in the LCS, and then bombed another go-ahead home run on the *first* pitch he saw at home in the World Series.

The weirdness from last season just keeps on coming.

The Mets' Jeff McNeil just won the National League batting title even though ... *he never led the league for even one day from April through September ...* and also ... as late as Sept. 21, *he was still trailing Freddie Freeman by 16 points (.330-.314).* McNeil the first batting champ not to lead his league at any point in April through September since ... **Harry Heilmann** in 1925! (Heilmann didn't pass Tris Speaker until the last day of the season, Oct. 4.)

Only one batting champ in the last 111 years ever came from farther back than McNeil's 16-point hole after games of Sept. 21. In 1911, **Honus Wagner** stormed from 17 points behind to beat out **Chief Meyers**, for his seventh (and final) batting title.

The Astros) throwing two immaculate innings in the same game (June 15) ... *against the same three Rangers hitters* ... was as Strange But True as it gets, huh? Correct! So let's tell you how strange.

- The Rangers hadn't been the victims of even one immaculate inning since April 29, 1990. And I'm guessing the three hitters involved in this immaculate daily double don't recall that one too well ... since **Nathaniel Lowe** and **Ezequiel Duran** *hadn't made their debut on Planet Earth yet* — and **Brad Miller** *was 6 months old.*

- Since that game, the Rangers had played 5,060 games — with no immaculate innings. And then they had two of them *in the same game.*

- In between those games, many assorted Rangers hitters had accumulated 174,338 at-bats ... 35,492 strikeouts ... in *over 45,000 innings* ... and had still avoided any immaculate innings. But then in this game, they had two of them in a span of 21 at-bats ... and 15 strikeouts ... and six innings. *Because of course they did.*

Who was the first pick in the 2007 MLB Draft? That would be **David Price**. Who just announced he doesn't plan to pitch next year, after a great 14-year career.

And who was the 186th player picked in that 2007 draft? That would be Reds reliever **Fernando Cruz**, *who finally made his major-league debut this year ... 15 years after the Royals took him in the sixth round.*

Guardians pitcher **Cal Quantrill**'s October? Here's what:

Cal Quantrill at Progressive Field, regular-season career: 34 starts, 0 losses

Cal Quantrill at Progressive Field, in this postseason: 1 start, 1 loss

Now let's explain. Regular-season Cal Quantrill: 14-0 lifetime in his home park in Cleveland, which ties him with **Vic Raschi** (14-0 at old Comiskey Park) for the most wins without a loss in

any ballpark since 1901. Postseason Cal Quantrill: Lost to the Yankees in ALDS Game 4 at this same park.

ZOMBIE PICKOFF ALERT — Just when I thought we'd run out of ways for those pesky Zombie Runners to wreak extra-inning havoc:

So how about this goofy thing that happened in a July 30 Phillies-Pirates game.

Top of the 10th inning: Pirates get the last out by picking Rhys Hoskins off first base.

Bottom of the 10th inning: Phillies get the first out by picking the Zombie Runner, Oneil Cruz, off second base.

OK, do you have this figured out yet? That's adjoining pickoffs ... *of each team* ... with no plate appearances ... *or even anyone else actually reaching base* ... in between. Once, there was a time when this would have been 100 percent not possible. That time definitely isn't this time.

HALL OF FAMERS BRIEF STOPS WITH ODD TEAMS

Boston Red Sox: Tom Seaver

The Sox actually had three other Hall of Fame pitchers -- **Jack Chesbro, Juan Marichal and John Smoltz** -- make fewer appearances for them than Seaver's 16. Seaver, who made his name with the Mets, finished his career with Boston after a June 1986 trade from the White Sox. At age 41, he still managed a 111 ERA+ in 104 1/3 innings but didn't appear in the team's postseason run to the World Series due to a knee injury.

Chicago White Sox: Ken Griffey Jr.

Two years before his retirement, the Reds sent Griffey to the White Sox at the 2008 Trade Deadline. Over 41 regular-season games, he hit just three of his 630 career homers, but the Sox took a tiebreaker game from the Twins to claim the AL Central title. In his third and final trip to the playoffs, Junior went 2-for-10 with five strikeouts in an AL Division Series loss to the Rays.

Los Angeles Angels: Rickey Henderson

MLB's all-time stolen-base king played for nine teams, tied for the most among Hall of Famers -- and that doesn't count the repeat stints he had with multiple clubs. In August 1997, the Padres traded the 38-year-old to the Halos, and he hit a mere .183 over 32 games, though he still posted a .343 OBP and swiped 16 bags. That was hardly the end for Henderson, who suited up in six more seasons.

Seattle Mariners: Goose Gossage

Like Henderson, Gossage played for nine teams, and he also had a 28-game stint with the

Fukuoka Hawks of Japan's Pacific League in 1990. He returned to the Majors the next year, bouncing from Texas to Oakland to Seattle, where he made 36 appearances before the strike arrived and his career ended. In the very last of those, the 43-year-old tossed three perfect innings for his 310th save.

Arizona Diamondbacks: Roberto Alomar

The 12-time All-Star second baseman signed with Arizona in 2004, at age 36, and played only 38 games, thanks in large part to an errant pitch that broke his right hand in April. On Aug. 4, Alomar went 4-for-5, lifting his D-backs line to .309/.382/.473 before he was traded back to the White Sox for his final 18 contests.

San Diego Padres: Greg Maddux

Maddux signed with the club as a free agent heading into his age-41 season in 2007 and made 60 starts in a Padres uniform over the next two years, reaching the 350-win mark along the way. He was traded to the Dodgers in August 2008, for the final few months of his career, retiring at age 42.

San Francisco Giants: Steve Carlton

"Lefty" was a four-time Cy Young Award winner when the Phillies released him in June 1986. He soon signed with the Giants, and in his sixth outing for them, whiffed the Reds' Eric Davis to become the second pitcher, after Nolan Ryan, to record 4,000 strikeouts. Afterward, Carlton announced his retirement, but he returned with the White Sox a week later and then pitched parts of two more seasons with the Indians and Twins.

TEAMS GIVING OLDER PLAYERS MORE MONEY AS THE GAME GETS YOUNGER

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

More players are being paid to leave rather than complete their contracts, and yet teams continue to ink long-term deals that take players well into their 30s.

To much fanfare, MLB teams tossed aside their actuarial tables to spend huge sums on free-agent players who will age far out of their prime. **Carlos Correa**, pending his \$315 million for 12 years with the Mets, will become the 16th free agent this winter to sign a contract that pays through at least age 36. Teams spent \$896 million on 41 player seasons age 36 or older—on average, betting \$22 million per player per year into their late 30s.

To less fanfare, around these same two months, the Cubs released **Jason Heyward**, the Reds released **Mike Moustakas** and the Red Sox released **Eric Hosmer** with a combined \$83 million left on their contracts. (The Padres owe the bulk of Hosmer's guaranteed salary.) They were three of seven players this year with contracts of four or more years that were paid to go away

rather than complete their contracts. Total money to these seven players *not* to play: \$181 million.

Dead Money, 2022 Released Players

	Owed	Original Contract (\$/Years)
Robinson Canó , Mariners/Mets	\$45M	\$240M/10
Eric Hosmer, Padres/Red Sox	\$39M	\$144M/8
Justin Upton , Angels	\$28M	\$106M/8
Mike Moustakas, Reds	\$22M	\$64M/4
Jason Heyward, Cubs	\$22M	\$184M/8
Chris Davis , Orioles*	\$21M	\$161M/7
Elvis Andrus , Rangers/A's	\$4M	\$106M/6

*Retired, but receives money as part of restructured contract

Part of the strategy behind the megadeals this winter is an accounting trick. By amortizing the cost of the player over more years, the club reduces its potential competitive balance tax hit. The average annual value of the contract counts toward the CBT number. **Trea Turner**, for instance, is a \$30-million-a-year player, but the Phillies cut his AAV to \$27.2 million by giving him an 11-year contract that will pay him through age 40.

Another strategic factor is the NL's adopting the DH in 2022, which allows all teams in baseball (not just the 15 in the AL) to rationalize megadeals with the escape hatch of the DH as the player ages out of a defensive position.

Another factor: star power. The deep free-agent field included 11 players named to the All-Star team this year.

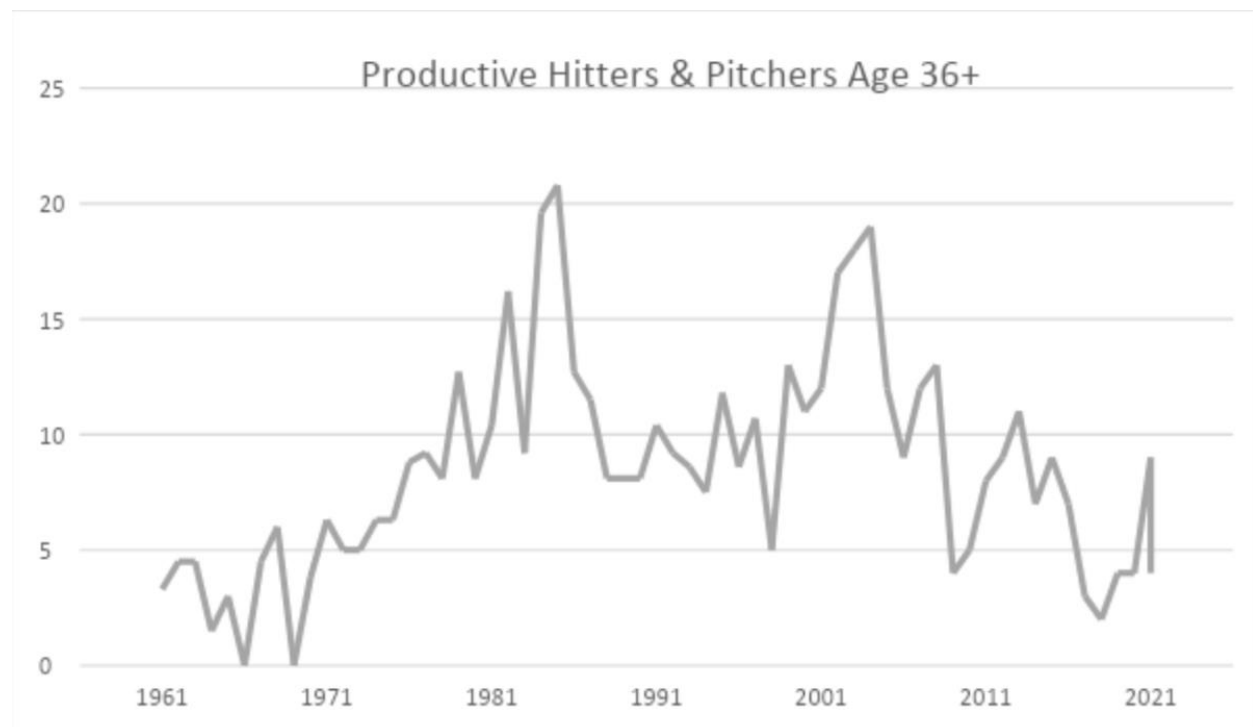
But the factor I find most fascinating is the new theory among clubs that sport science can keep a player producing at an advanced age better than in the past. Every club has boosted its investment in sport science in recent years by hiring experts in nutrition, kinesiology, recovery, sleep, biomechanics and other nonplaying areas. It is not unusual for a manager to give a day off to a healthy player strictly on the advice of the team's sport performance coaches, based on energy expenditure and schedule. The general term for such proactive workload management is "prehabilitation." It is designed to prevent injuries rather than respond to them.

But here's the catch: Clubs are working with only *a theory* that such advances will produce a generation of players who remain productive through their late 30s. There is no evidence that is happening. In fact, the opposite is happening.

Productive players in their late 30s are the rarest they have been in 50 years. To put together a quick actuarial chart on this subject, I looked at each of the 62 seasons of the expansion era (since 1961). I started with a question: How many players 36 and older were productive in each season? I defined “productive” as satisfying two basic requirements: enough plate appearances or innings to be considered qualified and either an OPS+ or ERA+ at 100 or better. “Productive” loosely means being at least an average regular.

To account for differences in the number of teams, I prorated each season’s number of productive older players by 30 teams. For instance, seven such players among 24 teams in 1976 is equivalent to 8.8 today.

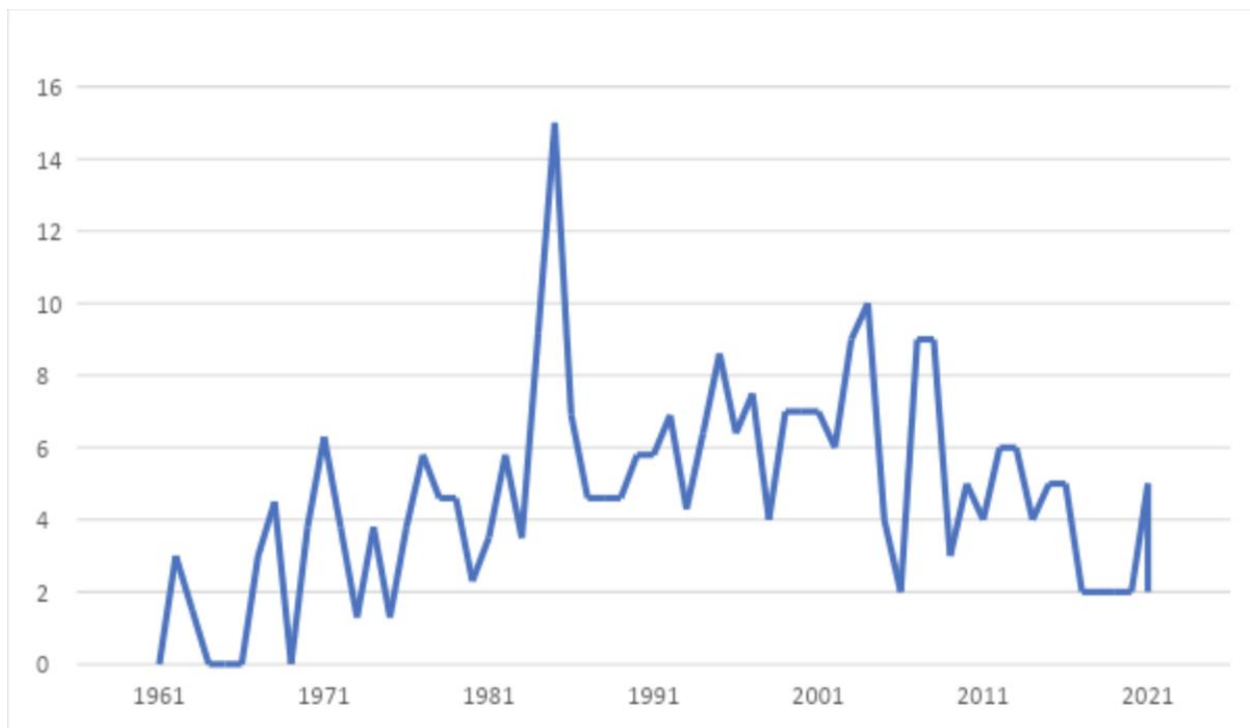
What did the numbers yield? A 62-season trendline that loosely resembles an uppercase M—and ever since baseball began testing for PEDs the game has been writing the last downstroke of the M.



- Baseball was a young man’s game in the 1960s and ’70s, through three expansions. In those times many players still took offseason jobs and used spring training to “get in shape.”
- The early 1980s saw such a huge growth in extended careers that it looks like an outlier. The years ’82 to ’87 averaged 13 productive players per season, compared to 6.5 in the 11 years before and 7.9 in the 11 years after.
- The steroid era extended careers. From 1999 through 2008, which reflects the last group who accrued the benefits before testing began in ’04, the game averaged 13.6 productive older players each year—an extended peak compared to the early-’80s spike.

- In 14 years after the steroid era's peak, the number of productive older players has been cut by more than half, to an average of 6.1 per season. Last season saw only four productive older players: **Justin Turner, Carlos Santana, Justin Verlander and Adam Wainwright**. In 2004 there were 19.

Maybe the numbers are going down because fewer pitchers overall throw enough innings to qualify. So, let's remove pitchers and examine the aging patterns for hitters:



Again, there's been a decline since 2009, and the numbers do not support the massive investments in aging hitters. The past six seasons have seen only 15 older productive hitters, an average of just 2.5 per year—or half as many as the previous six-year average and down from seven per year in the steroid era.

Two snapshots of productive age-36-plus hitters:

- **2004 (10):** Moises Alou, Jeff Bagwell, Craig Biggio, Barry Bonds, Vinny Castilla, Jeff Conine, Steve Finley, Jeff Kent, Tino Martinez, Rafael Palmeiro.
- **2022 (2):** Carlos Santana, Justin Turner

Older players are getting more money as the game is getting younger. The average age of a hitter last season was 28.3. In 2004, it was 29.3, the oldest mark in baseball history (with the exception of the years 1944 and '45, when many players served in the military).

The average age of a hitter exceeded 29 every year from 2000 to '07, thanks largely to steroids. Except for 1944 to '45, it never happened *once* before or since. It has been no higher than 28.4 for the past eight seasons—the first such extended emphasis on youth since the 1970s.

This is not to say sport science isn't working. Remember that it benefits younger players, too. As velocity and spin rise, the game tilts more to youth.

Fast forward to 2031, when at least eight players will be 36 or older on current contracts:

2031 Salaries, Age 36+

	Age	AAV
Aaron Judge	39	\$40M
Francisco Lindor	37	\$34.1M
Corey Seager	37	\$32.5M
Mookie Betts	38	\$30.4M
Trea Turner	38	\$27.2M
Carlos Correa	36	\$26.5M
Xander Bogaerts	38	\$25.45M
Bryce Harper	38	\$25.4M

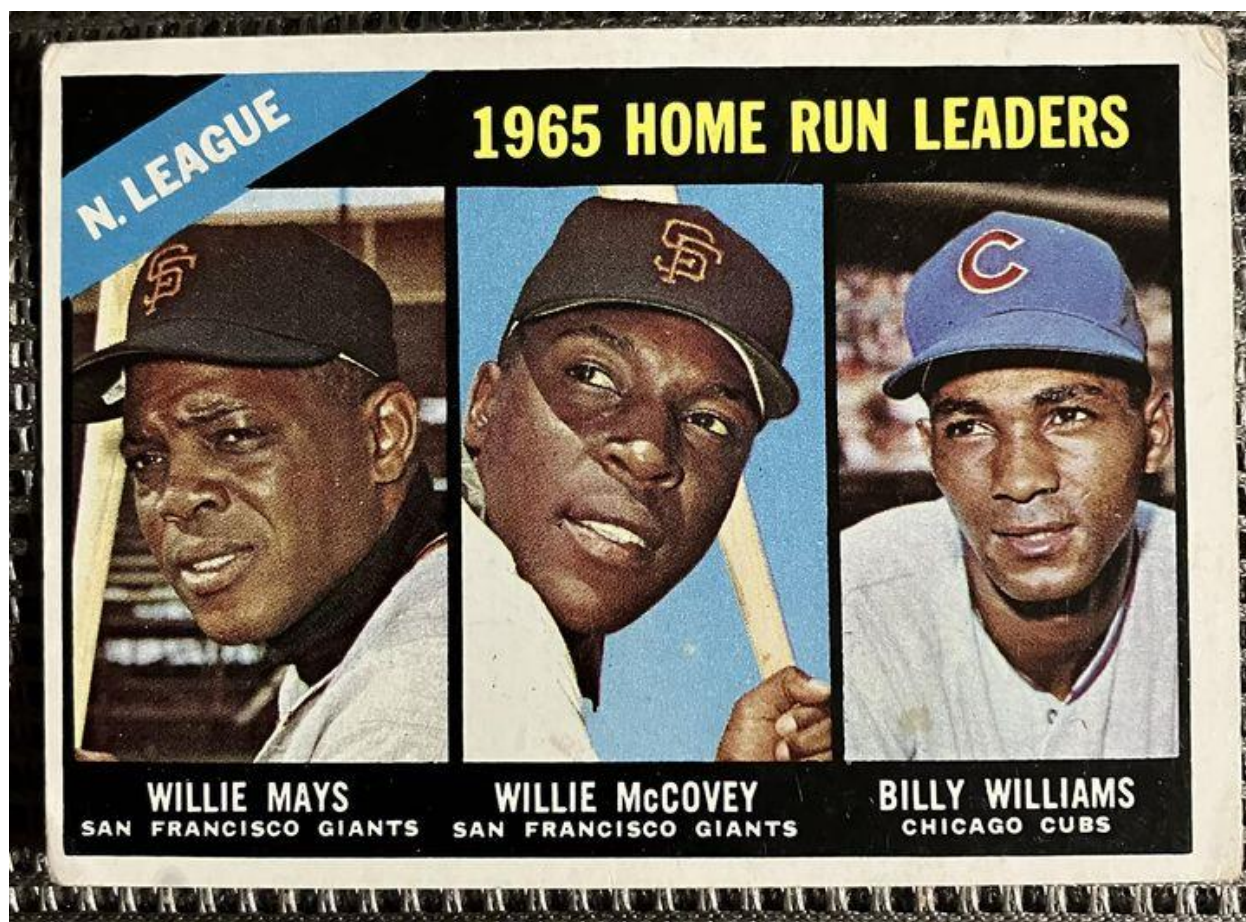
Two more issues are worth mentioning in these investments in aging players:

1. Inflation. **Albert Pujols's** \$24 million AAV ranked him as the third-highest-paid player when he started his 10-year contract with the Angels. At the end of the contract, it placed him 24th. The \$24 million in 2012 was the equivalent of \$28.3 million in '21.

2. Market resources. Bad contracts don't alter the way the biggest clubs do business. After the Yankees signed free agent **Jacoby Ellsbury** to a seven-year, \$153 million deal through age 36, Ellsbury returned *one* productive season (his first). He did not play at all in the final three seasons of that deal. Yet the \$21.85 million in dead money each year did not deter New York: It made the postseason each of those years and finished seventh, third and first in payroll.

In 2022 and '23, 11 contracts worth at least \$100 million over five or more years will have ended. In most cases, the final year would not qualify as productive: Canó, 40; **Joey Votto**, 40; **David Price**, 36; Davis, 36; **Evan Longoria**, 36; **Yu Darvish**, 36; **Charlie Blackmon**, 36; **J.D. Martinez**, 34; Justin Upton, 34; Andrus, 33; and Heyward, 33.

The newest class of players with megacontracts includes more money at more advanced ages. Until the trendline changes, the incentive for clubs is less about sport science than it is accounting and the cost of acquiring the player.



THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Name the five active pitchers who have won more than one Cy Yong award.

Jacob deGrom	2019 Mets, 2018 Mets
Clayton Kershaw	2013 Dodgers, 2014 Dodgers, 2011 Dodgers
Corey Kluber	2014 Guardians, 2017 Guardians
Max Scherzer	2017 Nationals, 2016 Nationals, 2013 Tigers
Justin Verlander	2011 Astros, 2019 Astros, 2022 Tigers

I am not in the HOF.

16 year career, 422 saves, 1,196 strikeouts.

Second to **Mariano Rivera** for best all-time career ERA in the live ball era.

Second to **Kenley Jansen** all time in K/9 and K%.

422 saves ranks sixth all-time; 1,196 strikeouts as a reliever ranks fourth all-time and are a record for lefty relievers.

4 of the 5 teams I pitched for were in the NL. My career wrapped in 2010. I led the majors in saves on 2003 and 2005.

Who am I?

Billy Wagner

Five pitchers hold the single season strikeout record for two teams.

Astros and Yankees **Gerrit Cole**

Expos/Nationals and Red Sox **Pedro Martinez**

Rangers and Angels **Nolan Ryan**

Mariners and Diamondbacks **Randy Johnson**

Orioles/Browns and A's (Hall of Fame, 1907 & 1905) **Rube Waddell**

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The Athletic

Baseball-almanac.com

Baseballroundtable.com

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