

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

1.15.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

This week lots of Hall of Fame stuff (including your ballot opportunity) as we approach vote results, expansion thoughts, unbreakable records, more about **Nap Lajoie** than you ever wanted to know, and trivia.

It's a long issue. Read what you like, skip what you don't. Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

3 questions, increasing difficulty. Answers at the bottom.

I am the only pitcher to debut after 1920 (Live Ball era) to win 300 games with an ERA under 3.00.

I pitched from 1967 to 1986. I played in 2 World Series.

I spent 17 seasons of my 20-year career in the National League.

I was Rookie of the Year and won 3 Cy Young Awards. I was a 12 time All Star and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1992 with the highest percentage of votes up 'til then.

Who am I?

Five players hit 500 HRs, Hall of Fame, played entire career with one team. Name the 5 sluggers.

NL infielder retired 1971.

AL outfielder retired 1968

NL outfielder retired 1947.

NL infielder retired 1989.

AL outfielder retired 1960.

Four organizations have claimed four Rookie of the Year winners apiece since 2000. **Julio Rodríguez and Michael Harris II** helped Seattle and Atlanta, respectively, join that group in 2022. What two other clubs from the same state have also won four Rookie of the Year Awards in that time frame?

- A. Mets, Yankees
- B. Athletics, Dodgers
- C. Astros, Rangers
- D. Marlins, Rays

NOTE ON LAST WEEK'S QUESTION ABOUT MULTIPLE BATTING CHAMPS

You will recall the answers to batting champs with 5 or more batting titles besides **Dan Brouthers** were **Ty Cobb** (12), **Honus Wagner** (8), **Tony Gwynn** (8), **Rogers Hornsby** (7), **Rod Carew** (8), **Stan Musial** (8), **Ted Williams** (6), **Wade Boggs** (5). A subscriber asked why no **Nap Lajoie**?

My source for the question and answer was baseballreference.com. Its list of multiple batting titles had Lajoie listed with 3, but if you went to his individual page, it shows he won 5:

.426 in 1901 Philadelphia A's (led the majors)

.378 in 1902 Philadelphia and Cleveland (led the majors)

.344 in 1903 Cleveland

.376 in 1904 Cleveland (led the majors)

.383 in 1910 Cleveland (led the majors)

Lajoie was a 2B and 1B from Woonsocket, RI. Hall of Famer, triple crown winner, 3243 career hits and batting average of .338. He was so popular Cleveland renamed its team the Naps.

So I reached out to baseballreference.com and asked "what's up?"

Hi Pete,

*The batting titles we are showing are what were awarded officially by the league at the time. In 1902, **Ed Delahanty** was recognized as having a higher batting average, but research done by independent researchers from their game logs in later years confirmed that Lajoie just beat out Delahanty. Our compromise in that situation is to bold Lajoie since he does lead that season based on the stats we know today, but we keep Delahanty's title since that was a league-issued award that was never retroactively changed on their part. There's a similar handling of 1910's Cobb over Lajoie.*

So now you know. Last week's answer should have included Lajoie and his 5 batting titles. And a tip of the cap to the subscriber who flagged it. Nap Lajoie was a great player early in the 20th century. Later in this edition I've included his career highlights plus insight into one of those mysterious batting titles from Joe Posnanski's excellent book The Baseball 100.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Interesting off season in Los Angeles. The Dodgers won 106 or more games last there regular seasons. This off season they had nine major-league free agents sign elsewhere for guarantees of \$10 million or more, including **Trea Turner** to the Phillies, **Justin Turner** to the Red Sox, **Tyler Anderson** to the Angels, **Cody Bellinger** non-tendered-signed with the Cubs. Payroll for luxury tax purposes drops from 1 to 7 (and that includes \$22.5 million in dead money for released Trevor Bauer.

They enjoyed the use of three shortstops -**Manny Machado, Trea Turner and Corey Seager** who all wound up with \$300 million contracts. None of the huge deals with L.A.

Time for a payroll/tax re-set and expect a bunch of young faces getting a lot of innings and at bats. (it's all is relative-the Dodgers payroll is about \$232 million.)

How the Game Has Changed--In 1915, 24 major-league teams (American, National and Federal Leagues) laid down a record 4,441 sacrifice bunts. In 2022, 30 major-league teams (playing a longer schedule) recorded only 390 sacrifice hits (bunts). Looked at in another way, in 1915 fans could expect to see 2.4 sacrifice bunts per game, while in in 2022 those in the ballpark could anticipate seeing one sacrifice bunt ever 6.2 games.

Andruw Jones won 10 consecutive Gold Glove Awards from '98 to '07. The only outfielders who have more than 10 Gold Gloves are **Roberto Clemente and Willie Mays**. **Ken Griffey Jr.** won 10 but not consecutively.

Jones has the most career Defensive Wins Above Replacement (24.4) among outfielders, according to Baseball Reference. He ranks second among all players, and first among outfielders, in Total Zone Runs, which measure "the number of runs above or below average the player was worth based on the number of plays made."

Jones hit 434 home runs in his career, including 26 or more homers for 10 straight years ('98 to '07). He stole 152 bases. He made five All-Star teams, won a Silver Slugger Award and finished in the top 16 in the NL MVP voting five times.

From 1998 to 2007, he ranked third in WAR behind **Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez**, and just ahead of his former teammate **Chipper Jones**, a Hall of Famer. And his team won its division 10 times from 1996 through 2005, and he was a major reason for that run.

The top dozen single-season RBI records (modern era) all came in the 1920s and 1930s. Which player has the highest single-season RBI total since 1940? That would be **Manny Ramirez**, who had 165 RBIs with Cleveland in 1999. **Sammy Sosa** ranks second, having driven in 160 runs for the Cubs in 2001.

Interesting side-by-side:

Bobby Abreu batted .291, had a .395 OBP, and drew 1,476 walks.

Gary Sheffield batted .292, had a .393 OBP, and drew 1,475 walks.

1980 was the year **George Brett** chased for a .400 batting average. He wound up .390/.454/.664 leading the majors in all three. Just 22 strikeouts in 515 PA. 24 HRs, 118 RBI.

Chipper Jones (.529) has the highest slugging pct. of 3B in the Hall of Fame, just ahead of **Mike Schmidt** (.527).

The race in the NL east should be close and exciting. Braves-Mets-Phillies all are strong and all invested this off season. But challenges remain. The average age in the Mets starting rotation is 35 1/2 years old. The Phillies lost 445 innings pitched through free agency. The Braves lost SS and vocal leader **Dansby Swanson** to free agency and plan to start 22-year old **Vaughn Grissom**.

Carlos Correa's 22 home runs last year were the second-most by a shortstop in Twins history. **Roy Smalley** holds the record (24 HR in 1979).

In the Dominican Republic, kids play a game called La Plaquita. It translates as “little plate” because they use a crimped license plate (or the like) standing on an edge behind the batter. If the pitcher can knock over la plaquita, then the batter is out. Pitches routinely bounce off the street, kinda like cricket. **Vladimir Guerrero Sr.** learned his aggressive approach as a hitter playing the game as a kid. Cards leftfielder **Corey Dickerson** has hit three doubles on bounced pitches in his career.

You might win a bar bet with this tidbit--last rookie to lead the AL or NL in stolen bases--**Mike Trout** (49 SB in 2012).

Andrew McCutchen who signed with the Pirates this week could reach 2,000 hits, 300 home runs, 400 doubles and 1,000 walks this season. Two active players have already passed those thresholds--**Miguel Cabrera and Joey Votto**.

Alvin Davis, Dave Niehaus, Jay Buhner, Edgar Martinez, Randy Johnson, Dan Wilson, Ken Griffey Jr., Lou Piniella, Jamie Moyer, and Ichiro Suzuki. Members of the Seattle Mariners Hall of Fame.

King Felix Hernandez will be inducted this summer. Hernández spent his entire 15-year career in Seattle, where he blossomed into one of his generation’s greatest pitchers. He was a six-time All-Star and the 2010 AL Cy Young Award winner, finishing runner-up in ’09 and ’14.

Hernández made 211 starts at T-Mobile Park, more than any other pitcher at any other single ballpark since his debut in 2005. In those outings, Hernández went 91-65 with a 3.25 ERA, while striking out 1,348 and walking only 388 over 1,422 2/3 innings.

Overall, he was 169-136 with a 3.42 ERA and 2,524 strikeouts in 2,729 2/3 innings over 419 games, including MLB’s most recent perfect game on Aug. 15, 2012.

The Red Sox have spent past the tax threshold in 11 of the last 20 years. In that time, they have exceeded it two years in a row but not three, given the escalating penalties. They were one of six teams to spend past it in 2022, carrying a payroll of about \$234.5 million, with the threshold at \$230 million. According to Fangraphs, six teams — the Mets, Yankees, Padres, Phillies, Blue Jays, and Braves — project to exceed the threshold in 2023.)

An example of what it takes to avoid the tax thresholds—**Justin Turner** is guaranteed \$15 million for the 2023 season, while **Rafael Devers** is going to be paid \$331 million over the next 11 years. In theory, the Sox could have reached a one-year, \$15 million accord with Turner while doing a straightforward 11-year deal with Devers, which would have resulted in the two counting for roughly \$45.1 million for luxury-tax purposes this year.

Had the Sox done that, their commitments (as calculated for luxury-tax purposes) would be at roughly \$220 million-\$225 million for 2023. That would leave little room left to maneuver while staying under the \$233 million tax threshold set for 2023 in the collective bargaining agreement between Major League Baseball and the MLB Players Association.

The Sox worked out the Turner and Devers deals so that they will represent a combined tax payroll hit of \$28.35 million — keeping roughly \$15 million-\$20 million available to spend on additional players.

Turner is guaranteed \$15 million for 2023, but the Sox structured his deal so that it will count for only \$10.85 million for tax purposes. He will make an \$8.3 million salary, with a \$13.4 million player option. However, if he declines the option, the Sox will be on the hook for a \$6.7 million buyout — half of his 2024 salary.

That figure is no accident. If a player has a buyout of no more than 50 percent of his salary, then his player option year is treated as guaranteed, which changes how it's calculated for luxury-tax purposes. Even though he is assured of earning at least \$15 million, Turner's contract is treated by MLB as a two-year, \$21.7 million deal, with an average annual value of \$10.85 million.

If he exercises his player option, Turner again will count for an AAV of \$10.85 million in 2024. If the designated hitter/corner infielder declines, then the \$4.15 million difference between what he earns (\$15 million between his 2023 salary and the buyout of his 2024 season) and his 2023 luxury-tax figure (\$10.85 million) will get tacked onto the Sox' 2024 payroll.

As for Devers, the fact that the Sox announced a one-year agreement for the 2023 season at \$17.5 million last Monday (a day before news broke of his long-term agreement) was not coincidental.

The Sox then signed the third baseman to a 10-year, \$313.5 million deal that takes effect in 2024, allowing them to keep his luxury-tax figure at \$17.5 million in 2023 before it jumps from 2024-33. (Because the 10-year deal includes deferrals, its AAV is calculated at just over \$29 million per season.) Had the Sox simply signed Devers for 11 years, his salary would have been calculated at \$30.1 million each year starting in 2023 — wiping out most of the team's spending flexibility.

Rafael Devers ranks second in the majors with 1,078 total bases over the last four seasons. Number one is **Freddie Freeman**—1,080 total bases

All 30 Triple A ballparks plan to use an electric strike zone this season, per ESPN. However, the teams will use the Automatic Balls and Strikes (ABS) system differently. One half of Triple A teams will use an electronic strike zone for all calls, while the rest of the league will use an ABS challenge system that allots three challenges per game.

MLB has reportedly not decided whether or not it will implement the ABS system in the future, but they will likely use this season's experiences in Triple A to help make that determination. If anything, the major leagues will look to use the challenge system first before using the full electronic strike zone system, per ESPN.

The ABS system has been used across the last several years at various minor league levels. Last season, it was introduced to Triple A action for the first time. Now the system has expanded to encompass the entirety of the highest level of the minor leagues, giving MLB a great look at the potential future of umpiring.

Nice tribute in the Boston Globe -- **Bill Campbell**, a reliever for the Sox from 1977-81, who died of cancer at age 74 on Jan. 6.

In 1976 for the Twins, Campbell became the only pitcher before or since to win 17 games and save 20 in a season. That led to a big-money free agent contract with the Sox — an unfathomable \$1 million over five years — and the screwball artist was excellent in his first season (13 wins, 31 saves, 140 innings) before pitcher-loathing manager **Don Zimmer** ground his shoulder into a fine paste with further overuse. It's a tribute to Campbell's resilience that he lasted in the majors through 1987.

Speaking on next season's pitch clock, Theo Epstein, a consultant to the commissioner and a key voice during the rule-making process, said the rules are designed to prevent games from turning on technicalities.

"There are a lot of safeguards built into the rules to make sure that games aren't decided in a late-and-close situation by a pitch-timer violation," Epstein said. "Every hitter has a timeout each and every plate appearance, where if the game is going too fast, you need a little bit more time, you can simply call timeout, and gather your thoughts and reset the timer that way.

"When there are runners on base, every pitcher can step off twice per plate appearance with impunity, and reset the clock and gather your thoughts and move forward. And then you get two more if a runner advances.

"There are five mound visits throughout the course of the game. You're guaranteed to have one in the ninth inning and one in each extra inning that can be used to stop the clock — come together, gather thoughts and move forward. And then there are also, thanks to player input, there's now some discretion with umpires under certain special circumstances, where umpires can afford the players more time to avoid a situation where it's inappropriate to have the clock dictate a ball or strike or decide a game.

"So those are safeguards that were important, because we want players to be able to perform at a really high level without incurring violations, and the rule was designed that way for that reason."

Interesting idea in The Athletic-- Here's an idea borrowed from hockey: A roster would be made up of more players than are eligible on game day — a few of them would be scratched and out of uniform. During the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, MLB adopted a similar idea, a so-called taxi squad. More players traveled with their teams than could play in a given game.

Right now, a game roster includes 26 players, then increases to 28 in September. If a team wants to make a roster change, they usually need to fly in a player from the minor leagues. A healthy scratch system would allow them to have more players on hand — let's say 30 with four healthy scratches. Those players could take batting practice and go to meetings and throw bullpens, but when the game starts, only 26 would be available. The next day, though, a healthy scratch could play and somebody else would sit instead.

This would solve some bullpen burnout issues and allow for more dexterity in manager lineup decisions. It would also require that owners pay 30 big leaguers instead of 26. And then there's the whole issue of service time...

Trevor Bauer is one of 17 players suspended for domestic violence in MLB history. His suspension, even with the reduction from 324 to 194 games, is the longest by 32 games. The Dodgers are on the hook for \$22 million this season, the final year of his contract. Bauer lost \$37.6 million to the suspension.

One of the reasons Red Sox fans are unhappy: **Xander Bogaerts** started at shortstop in 90 percent of the games the Red Sox played from 2015-22 and was on the injured list once, in 2014.

Counting the nine times he was the DH, Bogaerts started all but 110 games during those eight seasons.

Trevor Story already has missed 68 games and will be on the injured list for at least another 85-100 games this season, if not all 162. The start of the season will mark Story's third time on the injured list in a span of 10 months.

Boston free agent signee **Justin Turner** won the **Roberto Clemente** Award last season for his community service. Justin and his wife, Kourtney, began the Justin Turner Foundation in 2016. The Los Angeles City Council declared Jan. 22 as Justin Turner Day in the city to recognize the former Dodger for his many charitable works over the last nine years.

Major League Baseball hired longtime sports television executive Billy Chambers to the newly created position of executive vice president of local media. With cable subscribers steadily dropping, MLB's reliance on revenues from regional sports networks (such as NESN) are endangered. Over time, the league could create a national product featuring a menu of games along with streaming services of local games that would be safe from blackouts.

The Tigers changed the dimensions of cavernous Comerica Park. The wall in center field is being moved 10 feet closer, to 412 feet, and reduced in height from 8½ feet to 7 feet. The 13-foot wall in right-center also is dropping to 7 feet, as is the wall in right field. The Tigers hit 52 home runs at home last season. Only the Guardians, with 50, had fewer. How mad must **Miguel Cabrera** be? He played 15 years in a home run graveyard and now they're moving the fences in before his final season.

Fangraphs.com

Another excellent website worth checking out.

Along with **Johnny Evers and Joe Tinker** — they of Tinker-to-Evers-to-Chance fame — **Alan Trammell and Lou Whitaker** are the most-storied double-play combination in baseball history. As well they should be. The Detroit Tigers duo played more games together (1,918) than any middle-infield duo in history. Moreover, they combined for 11 All-Star appearances, seven Gold Gloves, seven Silver Sluggers, and they won a World Series together. Both are icons for a franchise that has played in the American League since 1901.

Tinker and Evans, who played together with the Chicago Cubs from 1902-1912, are both in the Hall of Fame. So is Trammell. Meanwhile — this for reasons best explained as inexplicable — Whitaker is not. His exclusion stands as one of Cooperstown's most glaring omissions.

Whitaker has more WAR and a higher JAWS score than a number of Hall of Fame second basemen, but that can be a debate for another day. For now, let's focus on how he compares to Evers.

Whitaker: 2,369 hits, 244 home runs, 118 wRC+, 68.1 WAR.

Evers: 1,659 hits, 12 home runs, 109 wRC+, 49.0 WAR.

While Evers's numbers are anything but great, it should be noted that he won an MVP award and played for three World Series-winning teams (the Cubs twice and the Boston Braves once). That said, it's highly unlikely that he would be in the Hall of Fame were he not part of a legendary double-play combination (he and Tinker were Old-Timers-Committee selections in the same year). How they became legendary is, of course, a big part of the story. The poem penned in 1910 by sportswriter Franklin Pierce Adams reads:

These are the saddest of possible words

"Tinkers to Evers to Chance."

Trio of bear cubs, and fleeter than birds,

"Tinkers to Evers to Chance."

Ruthlessly pricking our gonfalon bubble

Making a Giant hit into a double

Words that are heavy with nothing but trouble--

"Tinkers to Evers to Chance."

Should that eight-line poem have anything to do with Lou Whitaker's Hall-of-Fame-worthiness? No, at least not by any reasonable standard. That said, the Trammell-Whitaker double-play combination is every bit as famous as Tinker-Evers, and they were markedly-better players. Whitaker has even better numbers than Trammell.

"Sweet Lou" Whitaker isn't in the Hall of Fame are themselves the saddest of words.

Brothers Who Pitched Against Each Other

Joe Neikro (Cubs, Astros)	Phil Neikro (Braves) 9x 1967-1982
Jess Barnes (Braves, Robins)	Virgil Barnes (Giants) 5x 1924-1926
Gregg Maddux (Cubs, Astros)	Mike Maddux (Phillies) 2 x 1986-1988
Gaylord Perry (Indians)	Jim Perry (Tigers) 1978
Pat Underwood (Tigers)	Tom Underwood (Blue Jays) 1979
Pedro Martinez (Expos)	Ramon Martinez (Dodgers) 1996
Allan Benes (Cubs)	Andy Benes (Cards) 2002
Jered Weaver (Angels)	Jeff Weaver (Dodgers) 2009

Very interesting piece in the Boston Globe by Alex Speier on why Rafael Devers got a long-term deal from the Red Sox while Mookie Betts and Xander Bogaerts did not.

Why did **Rafael Devers** become the first player to whom the Red Sox made a decade-long commitment? Why were they willing to get him under contract for the next 11 seasons while going nowhere near the 11-year deal to which the Padres signed **Xander Bogaerts**?

The answer relates largely to how the team approaches risk — specifically, the risk associated with how players age.

Throughout the last quarter-century, the Sox have taken big contractual swings. They've seen the immense rewards of such deals, titles won with **Pedro Martinez, Manny Ramirez, J.D. Martinez, and David Price**. But they've also seen long-term megadeals curdle — usually because of injury, sometimes because of performance declines by aging players.

The longer a deal and the older a player is over the life of it, the greater the likelihood that a team eventually will pay a player who contributes little to nothing. The Sox have always been mindful of that.

Over the 21-year tenure of the current ownership group, nearly every deal of four or more guaranteed years has expired no later than a player's age-36 season. The only exception was the eight-year, \$110 million deal for **Dustin Pedroia** that ran from 2014-21, spanning his age 30-37 seasons. (Pedroia played just nine games beyond his age-33 season, and none over the final two years of his contract — the exception who magnified the rule.)

It's not terribly hard to see why the Red Sox have been reluctant to spend on players beyond their age-36 seasons. The funnel of productive players narrows quickly based on age.

Over the last 10 seasons, the number of players who remain healthy (with enough plate appearances to qualify for a batting title) and productive (a league-average OPS+ of 100 or better) into their mid-30s is few. The list of players who do so into their late 30s is almost nonexistent.

Just four players have hit at league-average levels and qualified for the batting title at ages 38 and 39 over the last decade. Two (**David Ortiz** in 2016, **Nelson Cruz** in 2021) have done so at age 40. None have done so at age 41 or older.

The number of players who remain healthy and productive into their late 30's and beyond is very small.

Age Number of players with 502+ plate appearances (qualify for batting title) since 2013.

41+ 0

40 2

39 4

38	4
37	14
36	12
35	20
34	35
33	46
32	52
31	71
30	98

Against that backdrop, Devers's age represented a considerable part of his appeal to the Red Sox in their commitment to extend him for 10 years and \$313.5 million. The third baseman will play all of next year — under a one-year, \$17.5 million deal — at age 26. The extension will cover his age 27-36 seasons.

It's not unreasonable to expect some level of positive contribution from Devers though age 36. By contrast, the landmark deals for Bogaerts, **Trea Turner**, and **Aaron Judge** that will pay them through their age-39 (Judge) and age-40 (Turner and Bogaerts) seasons represent commitments where teams almost have to expect player production to zero out.

Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said of Devers, "We think he's one of the great players in baseball. We think his best years are even ahead of him because he's in his mid-20s.

"You know that free agency for players that you have to extend deals until they're 39 or 40 or 41 is a perilous slope. One of the reasons that we signed Raffy is even at the end of this deal, he's 36."

The teams who are signing players to those deals are under no illusions about the risks associated with players in their late 30s. But they put enough value on the short-term payoff — and their desire to limit the luxury-tax hits of the deals — to assume an immense amount of risk a decade or more down the road.

The Sox declined to follow suit. Their last offer to Bogaerts was for six years, running through his age-35 season. While there might have been room to stretch further, his departure became an inevitability once the Padres nearly doubled that term.

It's not the first time that term length played a sizable role in a star player's departure. In the spring of 2019, the Sox made a 10-year, \$300 million proposal to 26-year-old **Mookie Betts**. They sought to keep him in Boston with a deal that ran through his mid-30s rather than beyond. Betts countered with a 12-year, \$420 million proposal.

The sides couldn't get to common ground. One year later, the Sox traded Betts to the Dodgers, with whom he signed a 12-year extension that spans his age-28 through age-39 seasons.

The Dodgers are thrilled with the return, with Betts helping to deliver a World Series title and serving as the face of the franchise, even if the later years of his deal end up as roster-building obstacles (minimized to some degree by deferrals).

And certainly the Phillies have been elated with the contributions of **Bryce Harper** in the first four seasons of his 13-year, \$330 million deal that runs from his age-26 through his age-38 season.

Given that, it is fair to ask: Should a team — particularly one with the resources of the Red Sox — care so much about how a player might perform seven or nine or 12 years down the road that it loses players in the short term? For that matter, why should members of the front office care about the back end of a deal that very likely will take place long after any reasonable forecast of their tenures?

"The organization is bigger than me," chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom said last month. "If I'm making a decision to say by the time this decision doesn't look good, it may not even be my problem, it would be incredibly selfish, and I wouldn't be doing my job."

"There are certain players that you're willing to stretch for and others that you're not able to come to an agreement on," said Red Sox CEO/president Sam Kennedy. "You don't want to create a situation where the team has too many constraints, whether that's next year or eight years from now. It's a recipe for success to be able to have the financial firepower and flexibility as you go forward."

"Even if I'm going to be long gone, you do feel an obligation to make sure that you're making the right decisions for the short term and the long term."

In Devers, the Sox believe they managed to do that — and found a willing partner in the enterprise.

“Raffy was very keen on that timeline,” said assistant general manager Eddie Romero. “He’s always made comments about how he really respected how David Ortiz played his last year and he was still productive. I think that’s very important to him.”

That stance, in turn, helped the Sox commit to a player who can be a cornerstone contributor not just for the 2023 season — when a still-incomplete roster faces a dauntingly deep AL East — but for what they hope is a return to consistent championship aspirations in the years to come.

Baseballroutable.com had some oddities this week:

Roy Gleason

Gleason played in just eight MLB games, had a double in his only MLB at bat – but also earned a World Series ring (1963) and a Purple Heart. Ultimately, he was the only ballplayer with MLB experience to serve on the front lines in Vietnam.

John Allen Miller

Miller played just 32 MLB games (during the 1966 and 1969 seasons), taking the field (at 1B/LF/3B/2B) for the Yankees and Dodgers. Miller collected ten hits in 61 MLB at bats (.164 average) and hit just two home runs – but he made those long balls count – becoming one of just two players in MLB history to homer in their first and final official appearances in a major-league batter’s box.

Chris Seanz

RHP Chris Seanz’ big day came on April 24, 2004 – when he was called up from Double-A Huntsville (where he was 1-1, 3.86) to make a spot start against the Saint Louis Cardinals, whose powerful lineup included the likes of **Albert Pujols, Scott Rolen, Jim Edmonds and Reggie Sanders**. The rookie went six innings, giving up just two hits, three walks and no runs, while fanning seven. Two days after this debut, he was on his way back to Huntsville, where he suffered an elbow injury and never returned to the majors. Statistics before 1900 can be sketchy, but baseball-reference.com shows that Saenz is the only pitcher to complete a one-game MLB career of at least five innings pitched, without giving up a single run (earned or unearned).

Keith McDonald

McDonald’s MLB career (Cardinals 2000-2001) covered just eight games and 11 plate appearances (nine at bats) and three hits – but he made them count. All of McDonald’s safeties

were home runs – making him the only MLB player with more than one career hit who can look back on major league career in which his every hit was a home run.

Harley Hisner

Hisner's MLB tenure encompassed the day of September 30, 1951. That's when the 24-year-old righty faced the New York Yankees – and a lineup that included five future Hall of Famers: **Mickey Mantle** in RF; **Joe DiMaggio** in CF; **Phil Rizzuto** at SS; **Johnny Mize** at 1B; and **Yogi Berra** behind the plate. In his very first MLB inning, Hisner faced five batters, four of them future Hall of Famers, and gave up two singles and no runs. His place in history? One of those singles was Joe DiMaggio's last MLB hit.

Karl Spooner

Southpaw Spooner holds a share of the record for strikeouts in an MLB debut (15) and also threw complete-game shutouts in each of his first two starts. After earning a late September (1954) call-up (to the Dodgers), the 23-year-old rookie was thrown right into the fire – starting on September 26 against the league-leading and Dodger chief rival Giants. In the first frame, it looked like it might be a short game for Spooner. It took him 32 pitches to get out of the inning (17 strikes – 15 balls). He gave up a single and two walks, but escaped unscored upon. Settling down, Spooner went on to pitch a complete-game, three-hit, three-walk, fifteen strikeout shutout, as the Dodgers won 3-0. Four days later (September 26), Spooner made second MLB appearance – a start against the Pirates (in Brooklyn). In this one, he threw another complete-game shutout – giving up four hits and fanning 12 in a 1-0 win. His 27 strikeouts in his first two appearances also remain an MLB record.

WHAT RECORDS MAY NEVER BE BROKEN

Mlb.com played with it, excluding **Cy Young's** off the charts totals.

The saying "Records are made to be broken" is about as old as the existence of sports records themselves. But in baseball, some achievements truly stretch the limits of that adage.

Johnny Vander Meer's back-to-back no-hitters in 1938 is one of those achievements. Only a handful of the 200-plus pitchers with a no-hitter have managed even a few perfect innings during their next trip to the mound. Vander Meer's pair might indeed turn out to be "unbreakable," or as close to that term as possible, and it calls to mind a handful of other records that are collecting dust as years go by.

Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hit streak is one of the most famous "unbreakable" records, but his .357 average in 1941 suggests that -- with all the right circumstances in play -- a high-average,

low-walk hitter could someday approach "Joltin' Joe." How that player would handle the media scrutiny as he approaches the mythical "56" is another story, of course.

With Vander Meer and DiMaggio in mind, here are a handful of other modern records that seem "unbreakable." Some of them you'll know right away; others may surprise you.

(For the purposes of this exercise, we are sticking to records that could feasibly be broken, so Cy Young's record of 749 complete games, for example, is not part of this conversation. A few other Cy Young records that look insurmountable—511 wins, 315 losses, 815 pitching starts, 7356 innings pitched.)

The records you likely know

Cal Ripken Jr.'s 2,632 straight games played

Plenty has been written about the streak of the "Iron Man," who not only matched Lou Gehrig's once-unbreakable mark, but kept on playing for another three straight seasons. Ripken survived several close calls, including a severely twisted right knee in 1993, ankle injuries in '85 and '92 and the '96 All-Star Game, when reliever **Roberto Hernandez** slipped and broke Ripken's nose during a photo shoot for the AL squad (and that didn't even stop Ripken from playing in the Midsummer Classic). The longest streak recorded by any player since is Miguel Tejada's 1,152 games from 2000-07 -- not even half of Ripken's total. Ripken's streak is also more than double the NL record of 1,207 games by **Steve Garvey** from 1975-83.

Ichiro's 262 hits in 2004

Few players have thrilled fans in as many different ways as Ichiro, and that included his impeccable bat control and timing at the plate. Breaking Ichiro's single-season hit mark would require an uncommon combination of consistency, opportunities and the ability to make contact -- an increasing rarity in the modern game. Plus, Ichiro logged 704 at-bats in that magical 2004 season, one of only four players to cross the 700 at-bat plateau in a single campaign. So to break this record, you'd have to hit .373 and log more than 700 ABs. Good luck.

Nolan Ryan's 5,714 strikeouts and 2,795 walks

Even with today's ever-escalating strikeout climate, it's hard to imagine anyone pitching with both the ferocity and dizzying longevity needed to catch Ryan. The Ryan Express' desire to strike out every hitter had its trade-off, producing a walk record also unlikely to be equaled. But we'll likely never see another pitcher quite like him, in either regard.

Rickey Henderson's 1,406 career steals and 130 steals in 1982

Baseball is a cyclical game, but right now, it's hard to imagine the stolen base being featured again like it was in Henderson's heyday. The last player to attempt 130 steals in a season was **Vince Coleman** in 1985, and 34-year-old **Dee Strange-Gordon** was the active steals leader through the 2022 season with just 336.

Hack Wilson's 191 RBIs in 1930

Driving in runs is one of the more context-dependent statistics in baseball. While there's no doubt Wilson went on an absolute tear in 1930 (.356/.454/.723 with 56 home runs), he also played in an extreme offensive environment (a record six players topped 150 RBIs that year) and had a pair of superb table-setters in front of him in **Kiki Cuyler** (.428 OBP) and **Woody English** (.430). **Manny Ramirez's** 165 RBIs in 1999 stand as the closest recent attempt, but it still fell about a month's worth short of Wilson's mark.

Chief Wilson's 36 triples in 1912

Wilson never again hit half as many triples as he did in this historic year, pointing to how difficult this kind of campaign would be. No one hit more than nine triples in 2022.

Barry Bonds' 232 walks in 2004

With the kind of power that could persuade managers to intentionally walk him in the first inning or with the bases loaded, no one in baseball history tested the limits of statistics quite like Bonds. For context, only one player other than Bonds has walked at least 170 times in a season (**Babe Ruth**, 1923), and Bonds alone piled up more than half the walks that the entire Pirates squad drew in 2004. He was also issued 120 intentional passes that year, and only one player other than Bonds -- who had 68 IBBs in 2002 and 61 in '03 -- has ever drawn more than 45 in one year (**Willie McCovey**, 1969).

Babe Ruth's 177 runs scored in 1921

Like Wilson's RBI mark, Ruth got a good bit of help from a lineup that collectively hit .300 and averaged 6.2 runs. But don't shortchange the 353 times that "The Bambino" reached base, which still stands as the fifth-highest single-year total in modern history. Hitting 59 homers will go a long way, too, of course. Even at his peak, Bonds never scored 150 times in a season; **Jeff Bagwell** (152 runs in 2000) is the most recent player to crack 150, and he was the first since **Ted Williams** in 1949.

Pete Rose's 15,890 plate appearances and 4,256 hits

It is conceivable that Ichiro could have been within shouting distance of Rose's hit mark had he debuted in America well before his age-27 season. It's much harder to imagine any player not only equaling Rose's 24 big league seasons, but also maintaining the excellence required to average 662 plate appearances per season as the Hit King did. For as long and as well as **Albert Pujols** played, for example, he just finished his career more than 2,800 plate appearances and nearly 900 hits behind Rose.

Hank Aaron's 6,856 career total bases

Bonds may have eclipsed Aaron as the Home Run King, but no one comes close to "Hammerin' Hank" in this measure of metronomic power. **Stan Musial** still stands closest to Aaron with 6,134 total bases, while **Miguel Cabrera** -- the new active leader with Pujols retired -- is more than 1,600 behind.

Off the beaten path

Ron Hunt's 50 hit by pitches in 1971

Eclipsed only by **Hughie Jennings'** 51 body blows recorded before the founding of the American League, Hunt's rather painful '71 campaign hasn't been seriously challenged in nearly half a century. Hall of Famer **Craig Biggio**, second all-time with 285 hit by pitches in his career, could only peak at 34 plunkings in 1997.

Jody Davis' 89 baserunners caught stealing in 1986

Davis' total ties for 166th all time, but everyone ahead of him played before the end of World War II and integration. Davis raced past **Gary Carter's** 75 caught-stealing throws in 1983, and no other backstop has reached 70 since **Tom Pagnozzi** in '91. As we referenced with Henderson above, there simply aren't enough steal attempts now to create an environment where one could throw out baserunners like Davis did for the Cubs more than 30 years ago.

Joe Sewell's three-strikeout season in 1932

An easy candidate for the toughest hitter to strike out in the history of the game, Sewell's career punchout percentage (.014 percent) is best described as "microscopic." The Hall of Famer's three strikeouts over 576 plate appearances in 1932 -- the fewest of any qualified season with at least 502 trips to the plate -- is now matched by numerous hitters on every day of the Major League schedule.

Hall of Famer **Eddie Collins** 512 sacrifice hits (bunts). No one is even within 100 of that total and the current leaders among active players are **Clayton Kershaw** with 110 and **Elvis Andrus** with 103.

A few others from your editor for your consideration

Mike Marshall pitched in 106 games for the 1974 Dodgers. (**Alex Claudio** of the Mets is the active leader 83 in 2019 with Milwaukee).

Nolan Ryan's 7 career no-hitters will be tough to catch (active leader with 3 is **Justin Verlander**).

Will White threw 79 complete games for the 1889 Cincinnati Reds. The last time a pitcher reached 20 was **Fernando Valenzuela's** 20 in 1986).

Walter Johnson threw 110 shutouts for the Washington Senators. (active leader is **Adam Wainwright** with 11—only 99 behind).

BASEBALL ALMANAC.com

More fun stuff from a useful free website.

Oldest AL pitcher to throw a no-hitter--**Nolan Ryan**, age 44 for the 1991 Rangers.

Oldest NL pitcher to throw a no hitter **Warren Spahn**, age 40 for the 1961 Milwaukee Braves.

Youngest AL pitcher to throw a no-hitter—**Vida Blue** age 21 for the 1970 A's.

Youngest NL pitcher to throw a no-hitter—**Amos Rusie** age 20 for the 1891 New York Giants.

Most AL Wild Pitches career —**Jack Morris** 206 (**Tony Mullane** holds the MLB record with 304, he pitched for 8 teams from 1881-1894). Morris is also tied for the AL record for wild pitches in a game with 5.

Walter Johnson and **R.A. Dickey** are amongst the 6 pitchers who threw 4 wild pitches in an inning.

Ty Cobb is career leader in steals of home—54 career, 8 in a season (1912).

SO CLOSE—THESE 11 JUST MISSED MILESTONES

Mlb.com

Humans love their round numbers, and baseball players are no exception.

Five hundred home runs and 3,000 hits remain sacred for hitters, as do 300 wins and 3,000 strikeouts for pitchers. More advanced forms of analysis have decreased the emphasis on traditional counting stats, but these hallowed milestones still have plenty of cache within the game.

As players move into the late stages of their careers, these round numbers provide a target -- something to shoot for before the time comes to hang 'em up. Of course, that doesn't mean every player in such a situation is able to get there in time.

Here are 11 stars who came up just short of reaching a major milestone.

Lou Gehrig: 493 home runs, 1,994 RBIs

This is a story as tragic as it is well known. Had The Iron Horse's body not so cruelly betrayed him, there is no doubt he would have blown well past 500 homers and 2,000 RBIs, and quite possibly 3,000 hits as well. (He finished with 2,721). But Gehrig began feeling weak and listless, his production dropped, and eventually he was diagnosed with ALS, the debilitating disease

with which he would come to be so closely associated. He would never play another game and died just shy of his 38th birthday in 1941, though not before giving his famous speech at Yankee Stadium in which he proclaimed himself “the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” Despite the premature end to his career, Gehrig still ranks fifth all-time in RBIs, per the official accounting of the Elias Sports Bureau.

Al Kaline: 399 home runs, 498 doubles

Kaline might be one of the Hall of Fame’s most underrated players, and coming up just short of a couple of milestones certainly could be part of that. Mr. Tiger did manage to squeeze across the 3,000-hit barrier late in his final season in 1974, finishing with 3,007. But while his longevity certainly bolstered his career totals, Kaline’s power numbers also suffered from spending his prime in a pitcher-friendly environment. He also battled various injuries that limited him to an average of 125 games over his last 13 seasons, not that they stopped him from becoming a first-ballot Hall of Fame inductee in 1980.

Fred McGriff: 493 home runs

Only Gehrig got as close as McGriff to the 500 mark without reaching it. It seemed as if the Crime Dog would get there when he went deep 30 times at age 38 for the 2002 Cubs. But after a decade and a half of enviable durability, he fought injuries and added just 13 to his total in 86 games for the ’03 Dodgers. McGriff got one more chance the next year with Tampa Bay, but he struggled mightily and was released in July. However, it’s worth noting that the 1994 strike may well have been the difference, as McGriff had 34 homers when that season ended in August. After falling short of the Hall of Fame via the writers’ ballot, McGriff was elected by the Contemporary Baseball Era Players Committee in December 2022.

Andrés Galarraga: 399 home runs

The Big Cat was better than you remember, a talented hitter whose career was a bit of a roller-coaster ride. Galarraga had all of 116 homers through age 31, before things took off upon a move to Colorado. Galarraga then remained an effective hitter until he was 43, despite missing all of 1999 and much of 2004 while twice overcoming cancer. Galarraga hit his 399th homer on Oct. 1, 2004, and signed with the Mets that December, but with his roster spot in doubt amidst a tough Spring Training in ’05, he stepped away. “I just wasn’t playing up to the expectations that I have set for myself throughout my entire career, and I wanted to walk away on my own terms,” Galarraga said.

Dale Murphy: 398 home runs

Few have been as good in their primes as Murphy, a two-time National League MVP Award winner whose 310 homers through age 31 in 1987 put him right in line with Hall of Fame sluggers such as **Mike Schmidt, Reggie Jackson, Willie McCovey, Eddie Murray and Frank Thomas**. But Murphy wasn’t able to maintain that pace. He added 86 homers in the next four seasons despite playing nearly every day, then two more in 1992, while a knee injury limited him to 18 games. Murphy latched on with the expansion ’93 Rockies to give it one more go, but he went homerless in 26 games, preempting his likely release by retiring.

Luis Gonzalez: 596 doubles

Only 18 players have hit 600 doubles, and nobody has gotten closer to that mark without reaching it than Gonzalez. Known more for his 57-homer eruption in 2001 or his World Series-winning bloop single that same year, Gonzalez is one of 13 players to hit 45 two-baggers in four different seasons, including a career-high 52 in 2006. Even at age 40 with the 2008 Marlins, he notched 26 doubles in 387 plate appearances, but that wasn't quite enough to get to 600. Gonzalez wanted to keep playing in '09, but he never found a deal and retired to join the D-backs' front office, where he remains.

Ian Kinsler: 1,999 hits

Dead Ball Era third baseman **Jimmy Collins** also finished with 1,999 hits, and he's in the Hall of Fame, so perhaps that's a good sign for the underrated Kinsler. The four-time All-Star second baseman looked like a good bet to reach 2,000 hits when he signed a two-year deal with the Padres prior to the 2019 season, needing only 57 more knocks. But Kinsler batted .217, and a back injury took him out of action for the last several weeks of '19, then helped push him to retire and join San Diego's front office after the season. "My pride wouldn't let me go halfway at something that I've been doing at 100 percent for my whole baseball life," he told The Athletic.

Tommy John: 288 wins

With the exception of **Roger Clemens** -- for reasons having nothing to do with his pitching record -- each of the 24 pitchers with 300 victories is in the Hall of Fame. And no pitcher since the turn of the 20th century has gotten closer to that mark without reaching it than John. It was hardly for lack of effort. The left-hander toiled in the big leagues for 26 seasons, the final 14 of which came after Dr. Frank Jobe reconstructed his ulnar collateral ligament in a procedure that would come to bear John's name. But he had a 5.80 ERA in 10 starts for the Yankees in 1989 before getting released at the end of May, soon after his 46th birthday. He hoped to hook on with another team, but not because of the milestone. "I play because I love the game and I love to pitch," John told The New York Times. But he never got another chance.

Bert Blyleven: 287 wins

After 14 years on the Hall of Fame ballot, and with the staunch support and spirited campaigning of baseball's burgeoning sabermetric community, Blyleven finally made it to Cooperstown in 2011, having worked his way up from a low of 14.1% of the vote. But the fight might not have been quite so tough had Blyleven squeezed out just 13 more victories over his 22 MLB seasons -- only a few of which were spent with playoff teams. Unfortunately for Blyleven, after a resurgent 1989 season at age 38, shoulder problems plagued him the next year and kept him out for all of '91. Blyleven made one more comeback in '92 that yielded his final eight wins and signed with the Twins heading into '93. But spring struggles derailed his bid for a roster spot. "Sure, I wanted 300 wins, but it's not really that big of a deal," Blyleven told the Los Angeles Times. "The thing that's important is that I gave everything I had to try to achieve that goal."

Billy Pierce: 1,999 strikeouts

A 5-foot-10, 160-pound lefty, Pierce didn't necessarily have the look of a strikeout pitcher, but he threw hard and led the American League in K's for the 1953 White Sox. That was one of Pierce's seven All-Star seasons, the last coming in '61, when hip and shoulder injuries really began to eat into his innings and his strikeout ability. Pierce worked mostly as a reliever for his final two seasons, and his two K's in three innings on Oct. 3, 1964, left him just one shy of 2,000. The 37-year-old was very well aware of that status but nonetheless announced his retirement at the end of the season, saying he no longer wanted to be away from his family.

Johan Santana: 1,988 strikeouts

Santana's strikeout total is a sign of two things: his incredible talent, and the injuries that wiped out most of his 30s. The lefty had more strikeouts through age 31 (1,877) than **Justin Verlander**, who went on to become the 18th member of the 3,000-K club in 2019. And no pitcher to finish his career with less than 2,300 innings racked up more K's than Santana. Unfortunately, the two-time AL Cy Young Award winner dealt with multiple shoulder surgeries and a torn Achilles tendon and pitched just 21 games after that age-31 season. Comeback attempts with the Orioles and Blue Jays faltered, and despite his elite peak, Santana fell off the Hall of Fame ballot after getting only 2.4% of the vote in his first year.

HALL OF FAME STUFF

As we zoom up on January 24 Hall of Fame vote reveal, the Boston Globe offered this:

The Baseball Writers' Association of America elected 13 players to the Hall of Fame from 2017-20, seven on the first ballot, including the first unanimous choice in history, **Mariano Rivera**.

Now the spigot is being turned off.

The 2021 election did not produce any Hall of Famers. In 2022, **David Ortiz** was the lone choice and the only candidate to receive more than 66 percent of the vote.

Do not expect that stingy trend to change for 2023.

With **Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, and Curt Schilling** off the ballot after 10 years of eligibility, **Todd Helton, Scott Rolen, and Billy Wagner** are the top remaining candidates.

Helton and Rolen have progressed beyond 60 percent, a sign they will eventually gain admission. But vote tracking shows that is unlikely to be this year when the results are announced Jan. 24, although there is a chance.

The same is true for Wagner, who reached 51 percent last year in his fourth season on the ballot.

Carlos Beltrán is the top newcomer, but his role as one of the ringleaders of Houston's sign-stealing scheme in 2017 is holding down his numbers.

If no player emerges via the BBWAA vote, **Fred McGriff** would be the lone inductee on July 23. The well-traveled slugger was a unanimous selection by the Contemporary Baseball Era Committee last month.

Let's make you a voter—you can vote for up to ten. Who meets your criteria? (2022 vote % indicated). Please email me your votes and I will tally them in a future issue.

Scott Rolen	62.2%	Carlos Beltran
Todd Helton	52%	R.A. Dickey
Billy Wagner	51%	Bronson Arroyo
Andruw Jones	41.4%	Jacoby Ellsbury
Gary Sheffield	40.6%	Andre Ethier
Jeff Kent	32.7%	Matt Cain
Manny Ramirez	28.9%	J.J. Hardy
ARod	34.3%	John Lackey
Omar Vizquel	23.9%	Mike Napoli
Andy Pettitte	10.7%	Jhonny Peralta
Jimmy Rollins	9.4%	Francisco Rodriguez
Bobby Abreu	8.6%	Huston Street
Mark Buehrle	5.8%	Jered Weaver
Torii Hunter	5.3%	Jason Werth

Andy McCullogh in The Athletic responding to a question in his weekly roundtable

*Which of these players who've recently received \$300M+ contracts (**Aaron Judge, Bryce Harper, Corey Seager, Carlos Correa, Manny Machado, Trea Turner, Fernando Tatis Jr., Francisco Lindor, Rafael Devers, Mike Trout**) do not make Hall of Fame? Can we confidently say all of them will get in? — Mark K.*

With the caveat that I don't vote for the Hall of Fame, and won't vote for the Hall of Fame, I'll take a shot at this, while adding **Mookie Betts** to the list. The short answer to your second question is: I cannot confidently say that all of them will get in. It is very hard to make the Hall of Fame.

Here are how these 11 players stack up in FanGraphs's version of wins above replacement:

1. Mike Trout, 82.1 WAR
2. Mookie Betts, 50.1
3. Manny Machado, 46.6
4. Bryce Harper, 44.2
5. Francisco Lindor, 42.0
6. Aaron Judge, 36.1
7. Trea Turner, 31.6
8. Carlos Correa, 31.3
9. Corey Seager, 26.2
10. Rafael Devers, 18.1
11. Fernando Tatis Jr., 13.6

For cross-reference, here are the rankings for Baseball Reference's version of WAR:

1. Trout, 82.4
2. Betts, 56.4
3. Machado, 52.0
4. Harper, 42.5
5. Correa, 39.5
6. Judge, 37.0
7. Lindor, 36.6
8. Turner, 29.7
9. Seager, 25.3
10. Devers, 15.2
11. Tatis, 13.6

If Trout's career ended today, he should be a slam-dunk, first-ballot unanimous Hall of Famer. Betts and Machado are pretty good bets to join him in Cooperstown. Betts ranks just below fellow corner outfielder **Tony Gwynn**, according to Jay Jaffe's essential JAWS system. Machado just put together his best season — .298/.366/.531, 32 HR, 100 RBI, 7.4 fWAR — and tends to stay healthy. There are questions about Harper's health, especially as he returns from Tommy John surgery, but I will bet on his ability to remain an elite hitter deep into his 30s. (Neither

Nolan Arenado nor **José Ramírez** makes enough money to make this list, but I'll put them in, too. Same for **Paul Goldschmidt** and **Freddie Freeman**.)

After that, it starts to get interesting. The two WAR metrics disagree somewhat about Correa; there is also some newfound worry about the stability of his right ankle. Judge lives within the physical frame that is least conducive to long-term success. Lindor may be a better bet than both. He does not miss many games. He should be able to stick at shortstop. His 125 OPS+ in 2022 was the second-best mark of his career. All three are on track, but good health will be crucial.

After that, I think the players fall off. Turner's game is based on speed, which tends to age poorly. Seager lost too much of his 20s to injury, which makes him tougher to project. And Devers, while an excellent hitter, just hasn't played long enough to merit a serious discussion. His top two comparable players on Baseball Reference, through his age-25 season, are **Eric Chavez** and **Ryan Zimmerman**, a pair of wonderful players who are not in the Hall.

As for Tatis: Obviously, the talent is immense. But I would wait until he plays 135 games in a season without getting injured or suspended before fitting him for his plaque.

On the ballot—some guys who will likely be one and done (under 5%) but had good careers:

Bronson Arroyo

One-time All-Star, won 148 games in big league career and pitched in the 2004 World Series. Won a Gold Glove in 2010.

Made 30-plus starts every year from 2005 to 2013. He got Cy Young votes in 2010 for Cincinnati when he went 17-10 with a 3.88 ERA. The next year, he gave up 46 home runs, which is the second-most allowed by a pitcher this century (**Jose Lima** gave up 48 in 2000).

J.J. Hardy

A three-time Gold Glove winner at shortstop and a two-time All-Star. Hit a career-high 30 home runs for Baltimore in 2011.

Hardy played 1,561 games, every one of them as a shortstop. By weird coincidence, that's where **Brandon Crawford** currently stands; he has played 1,561 games, all at short. The only exclusive shortstops who played more games are **Luis Aparicio** (2,599) and **Ozzie Smith** (2,573).

Jayson Werth

One-time All-Star hit 229 home runs in his career and was a key player on the 2008 Phillies World Series-winning team.

From 2008 to 2010, when the Phillies ruled the National League, Werth hit .279/.376/.513, averaged 29 home runs per year, stole 53 bases while being caught only seven times, played all three outfield positions and played them well, led the league in doubles one year, etc.

Jhonny Peralta

Three-time All-Star hit 376 doubles and 202 home runs in an impressive 15-year career.

Matt Cain

Through age 27, Cain seemed on a plausible Hall of Fame track — he had thrown 200-plus innings six years in a row and he had a career 124 ERA+ — but he was rarely healthy after that. He pitched 13 seasons for the Giants, wrapped with 104 career wins. But he can always say he is tied with **Sandy Koufax** for the most strikeouts in a perfect game with 14 and he won his only World Series decision, beating Texas in 2010.

Jacoby Ellsbury

In 2011, while playing for the Boston Red Sox, Jacoby Ellsbury hit .321/.376/.552 with 119 runs, 46 doubles, 32 homers, 105 RBIs and 49 stolen bases. He led the league with 364 total bases. He also won a Gold Glove. Few have had such a complete year.

At that point in his career — and he'd only just turned 28 — he was a lifetime .300 hitter, he'd twice led the league in stolen bases, once led in triples, he was good for 100 runs a year, his power was obviously coming into play.

He got hurt the next year, but the following season, 2013, he put up another terrific year. He led the league in stolen bases for the third time, scored 92 runs, he led the Red Sox to the playoffs, and was terrific in those playoffs. Then it went off the rails after signing a seven-year, \$153 million deal with the Yankees before the '14 season. He played just 520 games for New York in perhaps the most regrettable deal of Brian Cashman's tenure.

Ellsbury wrapped his career with 1376 hits and 343 stolen bases. He hit .284 with 104 HRs and 512 RBI. He also had a knack for reaching base on catcher's interference — in 2016, he reached base that way 12 times, a big-league record.

Jared Weaver

It's not easy to follow in an older sibling's footsteps, particularly when that older sibling is a first-round draft pick, a top prospect, and a bona fide major league starting pitcher. Yet given a leg up by the benefit of 6 years older **Jeff Weaver's** experience — not that the 6-foot-7, 210-pound righty needed it — Jered Weaver advanced beyond big brother's accomplishments. In a 13-year career (2005–17), he made three All-Star teams and finished among the top five in the Cy Young voting three times, serving as a rotation stalwart on four Angels teams that made the playoffs. In 2012, he pitched a no-hitter, the 10th in franchise history.

Jered put together a stellar collegiate career at Long Beach State, going 37–9 with a 2.43 ERA overall and 15–1 with a 1.62 ERA and 13.3 strikeouts per nine in 144 innings as a junior in 2004 and throwing 46 consecutive scoreless innings for Team USA's college national team the summer before. His junior year performance earned him the Golden Spikes Award as the country's top amateur baseball player; the **Dick Howser** Trophy as the national collegiate baseball player of the year; the **Roger Clemens** Award (now the National Pitcher of the Year Award in the wake of Clemens' scandals); and the *Baseball America* College Player of the Year Award. He was the starting pitcher on *Baseball America's* first-team All-American squad and the publication's top draft prospect for 2004.

Weaver earned the All-Star Game start for the AL in 2011 on the strength of an 11–4, 1.96 ERA first half, throwing a scoreless inning highlighted by a strikeout of **Carlos Beltrán**. He placed second in the Cy Young voting (a distant second, as **Justin Verlander** won unanimously) after finishing 18–8 with a 2.41 ERA and 6.9 WAR. In 2014 he led the AL in wins going 18-9 but his HRs allowed and ERA were going up and his career was winding down. He retired in 2016 with a record of 150-98, 1621 strikeouts and 3.63 ERA. The timing was such that he's one of five former Angels on this Hall of Fame ballot, along with **John Lackey, Mike Napoli, Francisco Rodríguez, and Huston Street**.

Third Basemen = tough to make the HOF

That's part of what **Scott Rolen** is up against. (mlb.com)

Just 17 third basemen, the fewest of any non-DH position group. It's the only position without at least 19 members inducted.

if you look past catcher, a unique position with its own demands, third base is short by a *lot*, at just under 29,000 games played. It's not even three-quarters of the way to first base, which is at nearly 40,000 games played – in part because first base is viewed as an easier position, one that players can move to as they age. But third base, comparatively, is underrepresented.

Let's go back to the 17 listed third basemen on the Hall of Fame site, and look at how they break down:

- 6 of them were born in the 19th century
- 12 of them were born before World War II
- 16 of them were born before 1960
- 3 of them never played in the AL or NL (Negro Leagues stars Ray Dandridge, Judy Johnson, and Jud Wilson)
- More than half – 9 – were elected by various secondary committees, not the regular annual BBWAA ballot

Only **Chipper Jones** (born 1972) was born in the last six decades. Only **Pie Traynor**, who was born in 1898, was elected via the regular BBWAA ballot (in 1948) in the first four decades of the Hall's existence, until **Eddie Mathews** joined him in 1978.

Not only are relatively few third basemen in the Hall of Fame, many of the ones who are were never seen by anyone still alive today, having been born well over 100 years ago – or were elected by committees long after their deaths. This has long been a known issue, of course. Here's the New York Times in 2018; here's The Hardball Times in 2013; here's Bill James himself way back in 1995 calling the position "dramatically underrepresented."

Why? There are certainly examples of great hitters who were moved off third to less demanding positions as they aged – **Paul Molitor, Jim Thome, Tony Pérez, and Harmon Killebrew** among them – and that's likely part of the problem, that early-career third basemen didn't remain late-career third basemen. (Which is a feather in Rolen's cap: Every single one of his 2,023 career defensive appearances came at third.) Maybe the voters of decades ago didn't quite appreciate that third basemen had to hit better than middle infielders *and* field better than first basemen.

For example, FanGraphs author and Hall of Fame voter Jay Jaffe has long published his JAWS metric, which is a version of WAR specifically focused on Hall of Fame comparison. Eleven of the 13 best third basemen by this metric *are* in fact Hall of Famers; one is not eligible yet but should be a slam dunk when he's on the ballot in 2024 (**Adrián Beltré**); the final one is Rolen. By this measure, the best non-HOF third basemen are **Graig Nettles, Ken Boyer, and Buddy Bell** -- good players all, yet none who seem like obvious snubs. Rolen aside, it's difficult to argue that there are many deserving third basemen who have been left out.

To further illustrate this, we took the eight non-pitcher defensive positions, looked up Wins Above Replacement at FanGraphs over the decades, and ranked them. For many, many years, third base was a middle-of-the-pack position, almost never deviating from "the middle." It wasn't great. It wasn't poor. It was just there.

Third base WAR rankings through 2009

1920-69: 5th of 8

1970-79: 3rd of 8

1980-89: 4th of 8

1990-99: 5th of 8

2000-09: 4th of 8

Consistent, right? Now look what's happened since, split both into the decade of the 2010s and over the last six seasons. Third base is dominant.

Third base WAR rankings since 2010

2010-present: 2nd of 8

2016-present: 1st of 8

If it feels like third base is full of superstars, then that's absolutely true. Five of the top six WAR seasons for the position have come since 2015, and while that's a little about the fact that there are more players and teams now than there have been historically, it's mostly about the caliber of player who mans the spot now.

That 2016 date is convenient, because in May of that year, Jayson Stark (then of ESPN) presciently argued that the golden age of third basemen was then, and little has changed. ("It used to be a bunch of big hairy men who were the power hitters in our game," then-Baltimore manager **Buck Showalter** told Stark. "Now I've never seen so many guys with power who are also great defenders.")

When we recently looked at the current players who might end up in the Hall of Fame, we found three third basemen who seem like they'll have extremely good cases (**Manny Machado, Nolan Arenado, and José Ramírez**) and a trio of others (**Rafael Devers, Alex Bregman, Evan Longoria**) who will likely at least be in the conversation. If even four get in, and we assume that Rolen and Beltré precede them, then the number of Hall of Fame third basemen will have swelled by 35% compared to today.

All of which comes back to Rolen, an eight-time Gold Glove winner who had an eight-year run from 1997-2004 where he had posted the third-most WAR in the Majors – or, if you prefer, the most WAR in the Majors among players who don't have PED connection issues. Rolen is trending towards Cooperstown immortality because he had a great career, and because leaving him out would be a mistake. But his induction would also go a long way towards correcting another transgression: the lack of third basemen in the Hall.

NAPOLÉON "NAP" LAJOIE



Napoléon "Nap" Lajoie (/ˈləʒəweɪ/; September 5, 1874 – February 7, 1959)

Played for the Philadelphia Phillies, Philadelphia Athletics (twice), and Cleveland Naps between 1896 and 1916.

Managed the Naps from 1905 through 1909.

Lajoie was 6'1", 195 lbs., threw and batted righthanded.

Lajoie was signed to the National League's (NL) Phillies in 1896. By the beginning of the 20th century, however, the upstart American League (AL) was looking to rival the supremacy of the NL and in 1901, Lajoie and dozens of former National League players joined the American League. National League clubs contested the legality of contracts signed by players who jumped to the other league, but eventually Lajoie was allowed to play for **Connie Mack's** Athletics. During the season, Lajoie set the all-time American League single-season mark for the highest batting average (.426).

One year later, Lajoie went to the Cleveland Broncos, where he would play until the 1915 season, when he returned to play for Mack and the Athletics. While with Cleveland, Lajoie's popularity led to locals electing to change the club's team name from Broncos to Napoleons ("Naps" for short), which remained until after Lajoie departed Cleveland and the name was changed to Indians.

Lajoie led the AL in batting average five times in his career and four times recorded the highest number of hits. During several of those years with the Naps he and **Ty Cobb** dominated AL hitting categories and traded batting titles with each other, most notably coming in 1910, when the league's batting champion was not decided until well after the last game of the season and after an investigation by American League President Ban Johnson.

In 1914 Lajoie joined **Cap Anson and Honus Wagner** as the only major league players to record 3,000 career hits. He led the NL or AL in putouts five times in his career and in assists three times.

He was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1937.

1901 Philadelphia A's, first \$4,000 a year player.

1901 season, Lajoie led the majors in doubles (48), and led the majors in hits (232), batting average (.426), runs (145), on-base (.463) and slugging percentage (.643), and total bases (350). His 125 RBIs led the AL and his 14 home runs were a career-best and his 48 doubles are a Philadelphia Athletics' record.

In April 1902, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania overruled an earlier decision by the Court of Common Pleas and upheld the reserve clause in contracts between players and NL clubs. President of the Chicago National League Club Jim Hart said the state Supreme Court's decision had dealt "a fatal blow to the rival league" and NL clubs "have won a great victory." The Phillies' Rogers obtained an injunction barring Lajoie from playing baseball for any team other than his team. However, a lawyer discovered that the injunction was enforceable only in the state of Pennsylvania. The courts ruled that the reserve clause was not valid for players who signed with an AL team. Mack responded by trading Lajoie and **Bill Bernhard** to the then-moribund Cleveland Bronchos, whose owner, Charles Somers, had provided considerable financial assistance to the A's in the early years. Lajoie was also pursued by Charles Comiskey, owner of the Chicago White Sox.

Cleveland Bronchos/Naps

Lajoie, nicknamed "The Frenchman" and considered baseball's most famous player at the time, arrived in Cleveland on June 4. The Bronchos drew 10,000 fans to League Park in Lajoie's first game. The Bronchos' record at the time Lajoie and fellow Athletics teammate, Bill Bernhard, joined was 11–24. The team went on to finish 69–67, fifth in the AL, for the franchise's first winning record since the AL began as a league. After his first season with the Bronchos, Lajoie's .378 average led all AL players.

For the remainder of 1902 and most of 1903, Lajoie and Flick traveled separately from the rest of the team, needing to avoid entering Pennsylvania so as to avoid a subpoena (the only team they could legally play with inside state limits was the Phillies). When the Naps went to play in Philadelphia, Lajoie and Bernhard would go to nearby Atlantic City to help pass the time. The issue was finally resolved when the leagues made peace through the National Agreement in

September 1903 (which also brought the formation of the World Series). To begin the 1903 season, the club changed its name from the Bronchos to the Naps in honor of Lajoie after a readers' poll result was released by the *Cleveland Press*. (The team was officially the Blues in their inaugural AL season but changed to the Bronchos for the 1902 season.) The Bronchos finished the season 77–63 and Lajoie finished his first full season with the club again the AL's batting champion with a .344 average. He also led the league in slugging percentage (.518), finished second in doubles (41), third in RBIs (93) and tied for fifth in home runs (7)

In 1904 he became player-manager. He still managed to lead the majors with a .376 batting average as he recorded his second consecutive league batting title. He also led the majors in hits (208), doubles (49), RBIs (102) and slugging percentage (.546)

He developed sepsis from a spike injury and missed much of the 1905 season.

Lajoie led the majors in 1906 in hits (214) and doubles (48) and the Naps finished third in the AL again with a winning record, 89–64.

In 1910 he led the majors in hits (227), doubles (51), batting average (.383) and total bases (304).

For the first part of the 20th century, Lajoie's and Cobb's statistics rivaled each other like few other players in the American League. In 1908, Honus Wagner and Lajoie recorded their 2,000th career hits.

Lajoie ended his career with a lifetime .338 batting average. His career total of 3,252 hits was the second-most in MLB history at the time of his retirement, behind only Honus Wagner's total (3,420). Lajoie's 2,522 hits in the American League was that league's record until Cobb surpassed his mark.

No matter how you look at stats across eras, it is instructive to look at how Lajoie compared to his peers:

5 batting titles (13x top 10)

5 times led league in 2B (14 x top 10)

4 times slugging pct. (14 x top 10)

4 times extra base hits (12x top 10)

4 times total bases (11x top 10)

3 times RBI (11x top 10).

He was among the second group of players elected to the Hall of Fame in 1937 and was later inducted on June 12, 1939, when the Hall opened that same year. Lajoie obtained the greatest

number of votes as he led induction mates **Tris Speaker** (165 votes) and **Cy Young** (153) with 168 votes (83.6 percent of ballots) from the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Lajoie led all second basemen in the NL in putouts (1898) and the AL four times in his career (1901, 1903, 1906, and 1908). From 1906–1908 he led the AL in assists (amongst second basemen). He also led the league in double plays six times in his career.

Over his 21-year career Lajoie stole 380 bases. He struck out just 347 times in 9590 at bats. He led the majors in hits four times.

It is worth looking at Lajoie's 1901 season one more time.

131 games for Philadelphia A's.

.426 average – led the majors

145 runs scored-led the majors

232 hits – led the majors

48 doubles – led the majors

14 HRs and 125 RBI – led the AL to complete Triple Crown

350 total bases – led the majors

JOE POSNANSKI ON NAP LAJOIE

So much of life is style. **Napoleon “Larry” Lajoie** was, in so many ways, every bit the hard-bitten character that his great nemesis **Ty Cobb** was. As a rookie with Philadelphia, Lajoie would repeatedly come to the ballpark inebriated. Once, after a particularly rowdy night, he got into a fight with a heckler on the way to the park and was arrested. Another time, he showed up so drunk that his manager, George Stallings, put him in the game just to humiliate him. Lajoie promptly made a two-run error, screamed at fans, got pulled from the game and was suspended for four days.

Lajoie was suspended a lot, actually. He got suspended for throwing a wad of chewing tobacco into the face of an umpire (and then chasing down the umpire after the game, threatening him all the way). He was suspended another time for viciously arguing balls and strikes and calling the umpire “crooked” (but this time, at least, sans tobacco). He once grew so mad that an umpire would not replace a baseball that had gone black from dirt and spit and grime, he simply picked up the ball and threw it over the grandstand the way a petulant child might. The game was ruled a forfeit.

Lajoie broke his thumb while battering a future Hall of Fame teammate, **Elmer Flick**, who said Lajoie had been bullying him for more than a year. Lajoie got into a lot of fights.

And you know how Cobb was infamous for spiking players? Well, nobody spiked more players than Larry Lajoie (as he was generally called). He once spiked three fielders in the same inning, a record that is unlikely to be broken.

And yet, through it all, unlike the fierce and solitary Cobb, everybody absolutely adored Lajoie. People adored him so much that they tried to get him one more batting title, a story we'll tell in just a moment. They adored him so much that they followed him into a new league, something called the American League, after he left Philadelphia in a nasty contract dispute. They adored him so much in Cleveland that they literally named the team after him, the Cleveland Naps, and kept that name until he was too old to keep hitting.

Lajoie was just so friendly and fun-loving, he was irresistible. "He was a pleasure to play against, too, always laughing and joking," Pittsburgh's **Tommy Leach** said. "Even when the son of a gun was blocking you off the base, he was smiling and kidding with you. You just had to like the guy."

Lajoie was, you might say, the sixth person elected into the Baseball Hall of Fame. You have that famous first class — Cobb, **Babe Ruth**, **Honus Wagner**, **Christy Mathewson**, **Walter Johnson** — and Lajoie finished sixth in the voting. The next year, three more players were elected, and he received the highest vote total of the three, more than Tris Speaker or Cy Young. He was revered, not only for his achievements — lifetime .338 average, 3,000 hits, the first person in the 20th century to win the triple crown, four batting titles, an unmatched reputation as a defender — but also for the graceful way he played the game.

"He plays so naturally and so easily," **Connie Mack** said of him, "it looks like a lack of effort."

Or as Ogden Nash put it in his poem "Lineup for Yesterday":

*L is for Lajoie
Whom Clevelanders love
Napoleon himself
With glue in his glove*

Batting races used to matter. A lot. During Deadball in particular — but even well into the 1940s and '50s — there would be almost as much newspaper coverage around the country of batting races as pennant races. There would be weekly updates, sometimes even daily updates, about Rogers Hornsby taking the batting lead from **Zack Wheat** or **Harry Heilmann**'s efforts to hold off Tris Speaker. Batting races were like reality TV shows long before television; fans knew the characters involved and rooted for their favorites and against the others.

In 1910, there was a particularly exciting twist to the batting race. Hugh Chalmers, a flamboyant promoter who had made his name selling cash registers, had just founded his own automobile company, Chalmers Detroit. And he was particularly proud of its new car, the Chalmers Model 30 Roadster, a 30-horsepower behemoth that he called the envy of the world (with a \$2,000

sticker price, more than \$50,000 today). These were the early days of automobiles, when nothing seemed more exotic than a beautiful car.

So it was a big deal when Chalmers announced that the company would give a Model 30 to the batting champion of baseball.*

**You will see it written sometimes that Chalmers planned to give a car to batting champions in both leagues, but that was not the plan. It was always going to be one car. In 1910, Sherry Magee won the National League batting title. He did not get a car. He was actually pretty bitter about it.*

Cobb was the heavy favorite to take the batting crown and the car. He'd won the 1909 title by 30 points over **Eddie Collins**, and he had the highest batting average in baseball in 1907, too. He was still just 23 years old and at the height of his game; he had blazing speed and a ferocious will, and nobody seemed likely to even challenge him. "I hope to be lucky enough to own a new Chalmers next fall," Cobb said before the season began.

And Lajoie? To be honest, he was one of the least likely contenders. Yes, he had won four batting titles in his career, but those had been years earlier — by 1910, Lajoie was 35 years old and had slowed considerably. In 1908, he didn't even hit .300.

But it was Lajoie who got off to the incredible start. In late May, the papers reported that he was hitting .433 (or so — the newspaper numbers, as you will see, were notoriously inaccurate). He was way ahead of Cobb and everybody else. On June 16, he was still over .400 while Cobb was hitting .388 (or so). This was exciting — a two-man race between the grand old legend of baseball and the hard-charging upstart who would dare take his place. It was a nationwide phenomenon*, not least because people were betting like crazy on their favorite to win.

**According to Jon Wertheim's story "The Amazing Race," one Cobb fan reportedly died of a heart attack while arguing with a Lajoie fan.*

And there were twists! Turns! At some point in August, Cobb started seeing something blurry cross his vision through his right eye. He took some time off. "Ty Cobb Going Blind" was the headline that appeared in papers across America. "Specialist Says He Is in Danger of Losing Sight."

Then, just as suddenly, the blurriness faded and Cobb was back in the lineup, ripping singles and doubles and triples like a man possessed.

He took a substantial lead, as the Lowell Sun reported on Sept. 1.

"Recently," the paper reported, "Cobb overtook (Lajoie). The chances are that Cobb will beat Lajoie out for the batting honors."

But did he? On Sept. 2, the Lethbridge Herald broke the news that the batting leader was not Cobb, and it was not Lajoie either. It was, instead, **Fred Snodgrass**.

“Fred Snodgrass of the Giants is probably the most talked about player in the country today,” the Herald wrote under the headline “SNODGRASS LEADING THE WAY FOR THE PRIZE AUTOMOBILE.” “Snodgrass’ present average is about .405* while Cobb’s is around .380.”

**Snodgrass was really hitting about .345.*

On Sept. 4, the Washington Post had Cobb hitting .362 and Lajoie hitting .359, and leading the league was ... Philadelphia’s **Amos Strunk** at .438 (though he was just 14-for-32).

On Sept. 5, Sporting Life had Lajoie leading Cobb .372 to .365.

Nobody really knew what was going on. It now seems strange that even though batting races were just about the biggest thing in American sports, nobody actually *kept track* of the numbers. It shouldn’t have been that hard. I mean you take hits, you take at-bats, you do some long division, *voila*, done. But the official numbers were kept secret by the leagues. Ban Johnson, the president of the American League, wanted to be able to announce the batting champion on his own time and in his own way.

This didn’t prevent daily speculation. America was enraptured by a horse race in the dark.

Cobb’s eye issues popped up again — and just when the Tigers were playing Lajoie’s Naps. What an unlucky break. The Cleveland papers were dubious and ripped Cobb repeatedly, but Cobb seemed unbothered by it all. While Cleveland and Detroit played, Cobb sat in the stands wearing frosted eyeglasses.

When Cobb came back, he got at least one hit in each of his final 14 games. He hit .532 in those 14 games and seemed to have put the batting title away. After cracking a single and a double in Chicago against the White Sox on Oct. 7, Cobb decided to call it a season. He said that his eyes were bothering him again.*

**Strangely, Cobb’s eyes were good enough that he immediately left to play for an all-star team that was put together to help the Philadelphia Athletics prepare for their World Series against the Chicago Cubs. This was a real thing in those days. The leagues were in such competition that players from other American League teams — in this case, Cobb, Speaker, Walter Johnson and other stars — really did get together to help the pennant winner prepare to play the National League team. Could you even imagine something like that today?*

The batting race came down to the last day, even though the papers had more or less declared it over. “Ty Cobb Cinched Auto” was the newspaper headline in The Ottawa Citizen and most other places. The numbers were different*, but most agreed that Cobb had a sizable lead — even the Cleveland papers called Lajoie’s chances “mightily slim.”

**Not everybody thought Cobb was winning. The Philadelphia Inquirer's George L. Moreland did a detailed study and had Lajoie up by two points.*

Lajoie thought the whole thing was ridiculous. He complained about how inaccurate the tabulations were. Even more, he complained about official scoring.

"They ought to have traveling scorers just like umpires," he said. "The official figures kept now are jokes. Just for instance, the last time I was in Boston I hit a ball to deep short. The shortstop, Wagner, went for it and fell down. He was charged with an error. The same thing occurred in New York, and I got a hit.

"I'm not kicking, understand, over the loss of that one hit. But it just goes to show how unfair the methods of scoring are under the present system."

Looking back now, with the help of countless baseball fans who have intensely researched the race, the truth is that Cobb was leading going into that last day by seven points.

He had 194 hits in 507 at-bats for a .383 average.

Lajoie had 219 hits in 583 at-bats for a .376 average.

So the race really was all but over. Cobb was off playing with an all-star team. Lajoie did have a doubleheader against the hapless St. Louis Browns, but he would need a miraculous two games to make up seven points of batting average.

Well, miraculous or corrupt — nobody could have predicted the madness that would follow.

Rowdy Jack O'Connor — who was also known as Peach Pie O'Connor — was a longtime catcher in the wild early days of baseball. He was **Branch Rickey's** teammate for a while, and what Rickey remembered most about him was that he had this trick where he would spit tobacco juice into a hitter's eye while the pitcher was winding up. This, apparently, was quite effective.

Rowdy Jack once threatened the umpire Hank O'Day with such ferocity — he promised not only to attack O'Day personally but also to bring a mob of Cleveland fans with him — that O'Day refused to take the field in Cleveland until his safety was guaranteed.

That year, in 1910, Rowdy Jack became manager for the St. Louis Browns. "While he has retained the belligerence," the Pittsburgh Press assured baseball fans, "he has passed up the rowdyism."

Maybe. But his team was a fiasco. They came into the final doubleheader 22 games behind the next-worst team in the American League.

Nobody knows for sure what motivated O'Connor to do what he did on that day, Oct. 9, 1910. Many assumed he did it because he loathed Cobb, which is never a bad guess. Others thought he did it out of admiration for Lajoie, which is also not a bad guess.

Others suggested O'Connor did it because, like so many others, he had big money on the batting race, which is probably the best guess of all.

Whatever his reasons, O'Connor decided that he was going to get Larry Lajoie a batting title and a new Chalmers automobile. He did not even try to hide his intentions. In the first game of the doubleheader against Lajoie and the Naps, Rowdy Jack inserted himself as the catcher. He was 44 years old and had not played in a game in more than three years. So that was not a great sign.

Then, he put a 22-year-old rookie named Red Corriden at third base and gave him specific instructions to play Lajoie deep because otherwise "he'll take your head off."

And so was set up one of the greatest scams in the history of baseball.

The first time Lajoie came up, he lifted a fly ball to center field. He hit it pretty well — Lajoie would later say he crushed it, which was almost certainly an exaggeration — but most newspaper accounts thought it was definitely playable for rookie centerfielder **Hub Northern**. Northern did not get to the ball; it went over his head for a triple.

"It was a clean and hard hit, but there were many in the stands who were of the opinion that a more experienced outfielder would have captured the ball" was the nuanced opinion of The Washington Post.

That was hit No. 1 — and it lifted Lajoie's average to .377.

That hit was the least controversial Lajoie at-bat of the day.

Next time up, Lajoie noticed that Corriden was playing deep. And by "deep," I do not mean that he was playing at the back of the infield dirt. No, this guy was playing in left field. Lajoie couldn't run by then and loathed bunting — he was famous for hitting the ball hard — but he wasn't a fool. He bunted the ball down the third-base line. It wasn't a great bunt, but it didn't have to be. By the time Corriden raced in for the ball, Lajoie was on first and he was 2-for-2.

That made Lajoie's average .378 — five points back.

Third time up, Corriden was back in left field again. Lajoie laid down another bunt, Rowdy Jack didn't go for it, and Corriden raced in it too late.

Lajoie's average was .379.

Fourth time up. Same thing. Corriden in left field. Rowdy Jack all but incapacitated. Another bunt. Another hit. The first game was over, and Lajoie's average was .380, just three points behind Cobb.

People in the crowd and the press box probably wondered how long these teams could keep this charade going. The answer came with Lajoie's first at-bat in the second game. He came up, Corriden was still planted in left field, Lajoie bunted for a single, and his average was .381.

Then there was a complication. Lajoie's second time up, everything was set up just like before. But this time, Lajoie's bunt was too hard and not down the line enough — it rolled to shortstop and future Hall of Famer **Bobby Wallace**. And Wallace, incredibly, bobbled the ball, and then there was no time to throw. This didn't actually hurt Lajoie's batting average because a run scored on the play and the official scorer ruled it a sacrifice.

But the official scorer, E.V. Parrish — a sportswriter for the St. Louis Republic — did not give Lajoie a hit on the play. He ruled an error on Wallace.

If that seems reasonable enough, well, it wasn't for the St. Louis Browns. Within minutes, Browns coach and scout Harry Howell raced up to the press box to ask how the play was scored.

"A sacrifice hit and an error," Parrish said.

"Can't you stretch it a point and make it a hit?" Howell asked.

"I can. But I won't."

Howell argued for a couple of moments, then left. A few minutes later, a Browns batboy came up to the press box and asked to speak to Parrish privately. When Parrish refused, the boy handed him a note written in pencil.

It read: "Mr. Parrish — If you can see where Mr. Lajoie gets a B.H. (base hit) instead of a sacrifice I will give you an order for a \$40 suit of clothes — sure. Answer by boy. In behalf of — I ask it of you."

The note was sent by Howell. And I'm sorry, I don't care how much Rowdy Jack and the Browns hated Cobb or how much they loved Lajoie, you can't tell me that they would go to this sort of effort unless there was some real money on the line.

Lajoie came up three more times, Corriden played left field for all three, and Lajoie bunted for singles each time. We now know that raised his batting average to .384 and gave him the batting title. But nobody knew that then. Nobody knew anything then; it was all confusion and darkness. Lajoie still wanted that extra hit.

How badly? After the game, Parrish got a call at home. He picked up and recounted this conversation:

"You don't know who this is."

"I do not," Parrish replied.

"This is Mr. Lajoie."

"Who?"

"Mr. Lajoie. I understand that you are having some trouble regarding my hits in today's games."

"No. No trouble."

"Don't you think I should have had nine hits in nine times at bat?"

"If I had thought so, I would have scored it as such."

Lajoie then asked Parrish to meet him at the hotel where they could discuss the matter face to face. Parrish refused. And the conversation ended abruptly there.

The sham was conducted so inelegantly, so absurdly, that the newspapers immediately called it out.

"Never before in the history of baseball," The Washington Post wrote, "has the integrity of the game been questioned as it was by the 8,000 fans this afternoon."

"In 'Fixed' Game, Browns Loaf and Let Larry Win," the St. Louis Star-Times wrote, along with a photo of Lajoie under the caption "HE WON (?) THE AUTOMOBILE — HA HA!"

"Some things that happened looked funny," umpire Billy Evans said.

"Race tracks were closed for less than this," sports editor H.W. Lanigan wrote.

There wasn't much for Lajoie and O'Connor to do in the immediate aftermath except feign shock that anyone could believe they had done anything wrong. "He fooled us," O'Connor insisted, and Lajoie confirmed his strategic brilliance.

"The talk about my not earning those eight hits in St. Louis, though, makes me tired," he wearily told writers. "The first time up I smashed one to the outfield that went over Northen's head, yet some say he misjudged it. Then I hit one that Wallace was lucky to knock down. If that wasn't a hit, there never was one. Then we get down to those six bunts I beat out. Suppose

Corriden did play fairly well back. If he had played in for a bunt and I had swung hard on the ball, I suppose the youngster would have been roasted to a turn because he did not play deep.”

Yeah. Well, for one thing, it was actually seven bunt hits, not six, and the one Wallace was “lucky to knock down” was barely moving, and it was well known that Lajoie couldn’t run, so there was no reason to play in on a bunt and ... well, his explanation, like most explanations of the kind, was just kind of pathetic.

Ban Johnson found himself in a bad spot. On the one hand, he had to investigate this thing. On the other, he did not exactly want to uncover anything that would make Larry look bad — Lajoie *was* the American League, he practically founded the whole thing by leaving the National League and coming over in the first place.

So, he did what commissioners have done ever since: He investigated his own way. He brought in O’Connor and Corriden and Howell for questioning. Days later, O’Connor and Howell were fired and banished from the American League. (Rowdy Jack did reappear in the Federal League.) Corriden was forgiven because he was just a rookie following orders.

And Lajoie was left alone entirely.

But there was still a batting race to decide and a car to give out. The papers had more or less settled on Lajoie winning the car mathematically — .387 to .383 was the general consensus — but they all knew it was illegitimate. Some suggested that Johnson just forget all about the numbers and simply award Cobb the batting crown.

Johnson had a better idea: He would mess with the numbers. On Oct. 16, the same day that Rowdy Jack and Howell were made to disappear, Johnson announced the final numbers.

And the winner was — Ty Cobb! What a lucky break!

Cobb had 196 hits in 509 at-bats for a .384944 batting average.

Lajoie had 227 hits in 591 at-bats for a .384084 batting average.

Cobb had won by 0.000860 points!

“I am simply delighted, delighted, delighted,” Cobb told reporters.

“The Cobb-Lajoie affair is a closed matter,” Johnson said.

And while everybody smelled a rat, well, in those days, long before Baseball-Reference and FanGraphs, nobody fully understood what had just happened. For one thing, even if the numbers were legit, Ban Johnson’s long division was terrible.

Cobb's average should have been .385068.

And Lajoie's should have been .384095.

But, basic math aside, the numbers were not kosher. Johnson, in cahoots with his statistician Bob McRoy, had gone through the numbers and they "discovered" that Cobb had not been credited for the two hits he got in the second game of a Sept. 24 doubleheader. It was a statistical oversight, and with those two hits, Cobb's average jumped up to .385.

But as Pete Palmer and Leonard Gettelson would discover some 60 years later, those hits in fact *had* been entered into the record already. Johnson double-counted them to give Cobb the batting title. It was a sham meant to nullify a sham. It was baseball's most notorious statistical makeup call.

Looking back, you can understand Johnson's predicament. He didn't want to investigate Lajoie, who was probably in on the fix. He didn't want to try to figure out what role gamblers might have played in this mess. But he also didn't want to give Lajoie the batting title. Adding two hits to Cobb's record seemed the cleanest and easiest way out.

Baseball hid the fraud for many, many years and continued to say that Cobb's hit record was 4,191 when it was, in fact, 4,189. Palmer tried to get Bowie Kuhn to change the record *before* Pete Rose broke that record, but as usual, Kuhn erred on the wrong side of history and refused to do anything about it. **Pete Rose** "officially" broke the hit record on Sept. 11, 1985, when he lined his 4,192nd hit off Eric Show at Riverfront Stadium.

Rose *actually* broke the hit record three days earlier at Wrigley Field, with a first-inning line drive to left against Reggie Patterson in a game that ended 5-5 tie because of darkness.

Well, it just goes to show that baseball numbers are so much more ephemeral than we would like to believe. A hit called an error ... an error called a hit ... a bunt that rolls just foul ... a fly ball that clashes against a bright sun ... it's all what we make of it. Cobb got the batting title. Now, we know, Lajoie had the higher average.

Chalmers gave them both a car, which is probably the closest thing there is to justice.

EXPANSION?

From SBNation.

(editor's note-It skips Nashville).

DMA (Designated Market Area) regions are the geographic areas in the U.S. in which local television viewing is measured by Nielsen. DMA data is essential for any marketer, researcher or organization seeking to use standardized geographic areas within their business.

A DMA region is a group of counties and zip codes that form an exclusive geographic area in which the home market television stations hold a dominance of total hours viewed. There are 210 DMA regions, covering the entire continental U.S., Hawaii, and parts of Alaska.

DMA's are measured in size by the amount of *homes* in a loose geographic region, and therefore can differ from a city's metro population.

Orlando

- DMA Rank: 17th
- DMA Size: 1.775 million homes

Theoretically, Orlando is a slam dunk as an expansion candidate. It is the only city on this list with a top-25 ranking in both DMA size and metro population. It features warm weather and is one of the biggest tourist destinations in the country thanks to the Disney and Universal parks. Orlando is also home to an NBA team, the Magic. Florida is also one of the top ten fastest growing U.S. states.

But when you get into the nitty gritty, Orlando doesn't fully fit the bill. Downtown Orlando is less than 100 miles from the home of the Tampa Bay Rays. This is a problem, as the Lakeland/Winter Haven/Haines areas are probably closely aligned with the Rays already. Plus, even with a nice new stadium and an even larger metro, the Miami Marlins have struggled in drawing crowds for a long time.

Sacramento

- DMA Rank: 20th
- DMA Size: 1.502 million homes

Again, by DMA and population figures, Sacramento would make a lot of sense. Sacramento ranks 20th in DMA size and 26th in metro population size, and it's got more available population and viewership than half a dozen current MLB teams. It already supports the Sacramento Kings of the NBA.

Unfortunately for Sacramentons (Sacramentoans?), Sacramento suffers some of the same issues as Orlando. It's less than a 100-mile drive from not one but two current MLB teams, both of which are well-established teams with a lot of history. And would MLB put a *sixth* team in California when there are other alternatives? Seems like a stretch.

Metro Size

You gotta put butts into the seats, and no one is putting an MLB team in a metro that can't support 81 games a year. Metro size is a big deal. We're using Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as estimated by the United States Census Bureau and conveniently viewable on Wikipedia.

Charlotte

- MSA Rank: 22nd
- MSA Size: 2.701 million

The Charlotte metro is sneaky big, at about the size of the St. Louis metro. Charlotte itself is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Interestingly, Charlotte is a sort of larger mirror version of Kansas City: both have NFL teams and MLS teams, and both are big enough to have a Cedar Fair amusement park (Charlotte's is better, and they have an NBA team to boot).

Charlotte ticks all the boxes, to be honest. With the 21st ranked Nielsen DMA, its television audience is as broad as its metro population. If you were looking to nitpick, you could say that only one metro area with less TV viewership than Charlotte has three of the Big Four sports teams. But Milwaukee is doing just fine, St. Louis was doing just fine until Rams ownership saw dollar signs in L.A., and there is no doubt in the world that KC could support an NBA or NHL team.

Las Vegas

- 230 miles from nearest franchise
- DMA Rank: 40th
- Metro Rank: 29th

Las Vegas is having a moment in the sports world. In the last few years, it picked up a National Hockey League team and the Raiders, who I refuse to believe left California. With a top-30 size metro and a projection as one of the five fastest growing U.S. cities over the next 40 years, there's a lot of reason to think that it can support a baseball team.

But while Las Vegas' population size is certainly enough to support attendance, TV deals are a huge revenue stream for MLB franchises. Unfortunately for Las Vegas, it lags behind a few competitors in that area because, well, no one lives outside the metro. It's in a desert, after all. With 840,000 homes, its DMA ranking is 40th.

Salt Lake City

- 371 miles from nearest franchise
- DMA Rank: 29th

- Metro Rank: 46th

Salt Lake City's MLB case looks a lot like Denver's did in the 1990s: it's hundreds of miles away from the next closest franchise. It also already supports another Big Four sports team.

However, Salt Lake City has the opposite problem that Las Vegas has: it's got the DMA covered, but it's the population that isn't as competitive. Salt Lake City barely cracks the top 50 in metro population. So, why does it have a top-30 DMA? That's easy: the Salt Lake City DMA is basically the entire state of Utah and then some, which is hilarious to look at on a map. Can a city the size of Salt Lake City support an NBA and MLB franchise in attendance? That's the question.

New Jersey

The New York City metro is ridiculously big. It has 7.73 million homes and a population of nearly 20 million. There are a lot of people there.

So, why New Jersey? Why a third team in the area? Consider: with 1.775 million homes, Orlando is the largest metro by DMA size without a sports team. The New York City metro divided into three—one for each MLB team supported in our hypothetical—is 2.58 million homes.

Yes, the Yankees and Mets would not be happy about a third team in their backyard. But if you put a team in New Jersey, you can create a distinctive enough difference from a branding perspective. Plus, the population allows for it. Heck, the NYC area already has 3 NHL teams.

Montreal

The dark horse: Montreal doesn't show up in the Nielsen DMA list or the U.S. metro population because it's in Canada. Montreal is very big, though, with an urban population in Montreal proper of 1.76 million and a greater metro population north of 4.2 million. Those figures dwarf any of the cities listed (non-NYC division).

Plus, that the Montreal Expos even existed at all is evidence that MLB could exist there again. The downside? It's in Canada, which makes for added logistical issues in a number of ways.

While the SBNation piece doesn't include Nashville they are definitely trying to get an MLB franchise. mlbtraderumors.com notes

Don Mattingly Named Advisor To Nashville Stars Baseball Group

The Nashville Stars, a hopeful expansion franchise led by a group including former big league pitcher and D-backs GM **Dave Stewart**, announced Tuesday that Blue Jays bench coach Don

Mattingly has been named an advisor to the organization's ownership group (officially titled Music City Baseball, LLC). The Stars/Music City Baseball also count **Tony La Russa** and Vanderbilt head coach Tim Corbin among their baseball advisors. Stewart, La Russa and Dave Dombrowski joined the Nashville group back in July 2020, and the Stars' web site still lists Dombrowski as an advisor even after his hiring as Phillies president of baseball ops in Dec. 2020.

Mattingly will still serve as the Blue Jays' bench coach this coming season. The Stars' press release indicates that he will "provide counsel on key strategic matters and work to gain support in bringing a Major League Baseball franchise to Nashville."

"Simply put, Don Mattingly knows baseball," Stewart said in a statement within today's press release. "He was a pure hitter, played near-flawless defense, and has been successful as a manager and coach because of his baseball mind. He is well-respected around the game of baseball, and we are lucky to have him with us."

Mattingly, indeed, has an immensely impressive baseball resume spanning 14 seasons as a player and another dozen as a manager. The 1985 American League MVP, Mattingly was named to six All-Star teams and also won nine Gold Gloves and three Silver Slugger Awards. He retired after his age-34 season with a career .307/.358/.471 batting line, 222 home runs, 442 doubles and vastly more walks (558) than strikeouts (444).

Since retiring, Mattingly has served as both the hitting coach and bench coach for the Yankees, as well as the hitting coach for the Dodgers. Following the 2010 season, the Dodgers tabbed Mattingly as the successor to manager **Joe Torre**. He managed in L.A. from 2011-15 and in Miami from 2016-22. Mattingly remained at the Marlins' helm through a sale of the franchise and a front office overhaul, but he and the team agreed to part ways late in the 2022 season. The 2023 campaign will be his first as the Blue Jays' bench coach, and he'll provide some valuable experience to John Schneider in his first full season as a Major League manager.

In addition to Mattingly, La Russa, Corbin and Dombrowski, some of the current and former advisors to the Stars/Music City Baseball include **Bruce Bochy, R.A. Dickey, Mike Shildt, Barry Zito, Jarrod Parker and Todd Jones**, per the Stars' web site. There's no clear timetable for when the league might earnestly seek to expand beyond its current slate of 30 teams. Commissioner Rob Manfred has stated at multiple times in the past that he indeed hopes to bring about further expansion of the league, though he's also indicated that the long-running stadium issues for both the A's and Rays must be addressed.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

3 questions, increasing difficulty. Answers at the bottom.

I am the only pitcher to debut after 1920 (Live Ball era) to win 300 games with an ERA under 3.00.

I pitched from 1967 to 1986. I played in 2 World Series.

I spent 17 seasons of my 20-year career in the National League.

I was Rookie of the Year and won 3 Cy Young Awards. I was a 12 time All Star and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1992 with the highest percentage of votes up 'til then.

Who am I?

Tom Seaver

Five players hit 500 HRs, Hall of Fame, played entire career with one team. Name the 5 sluggers.

NL infielder retired 1971. **Ernie Banks**

AL outfielder retired 1968 **Mickey Mantle**

NL outfielder retired 1947. **Mel Ott**

NL infielder retired 1989. **Mike Schmidt**

AL outfielder retired 1960. **Ted Williams**

Four organizations have claimed four Rookie of the Year winners apiece since 2000. **Julio Rodríguez and Michael Harris II** helped Seattle and Atlanta, respectively, join that group in 2022. What two other clubs from the same state have also won four Rookie of the Year Awards in that time frame?

- A. Mets, Yankees
- B. Athletics, Dodgers
- C. Astros, Rangers
- D. Marlins, Rays

D. **Dontrelle Willis** (2003), **Hanley Ramirez** (2006), **Chris Coghlan** (2009) and **José Fernández** (2013) won for Florida/Miami, while **Evan Longoria** (2008), **Jeremy Hellickson** (2011), **Wil Myers** (2013) and **Randy Arozarena** were honored for Tampa Bay.

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