

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

1.29.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

Bravo Scott Rolen, newest Hall of Famer. This week plenty of Hall of Fame stuff and of course, trivia. Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Three questions to get your brain going this morning. Answers at the bottom. Good Luck.

1. Only two teams have retired No. 22.

One was a Hall of Fame righthander who pitched in three World Series. He was a 20 game winner 8 times in a career that ended in 1984. He won AL Cy Young awards in 1973-75-76 and won 268 games.

The other was a sweet swinging lefty first baseman. He played his first 8 seasons with the team that retired his number. He finished 5th in Rookie of the Year voting in 1986 and made 5 All-Star games for the NL team that retired his 22. Strong career numbers-- .303, 2176 hits and 284 HRs.

Name them.

2. In 2018, the year he won the AL MVP, Mookie Betts hit 32 home runs and stole 30 bases and won the batting title with a .346 average. Who is the only player with a higher average in a 30/30 season?

He was runner up to Tony Gwynn (.377) for the 1997 NL batting title. That year he batted .366 with 49 home runs and 33 stolen bases to win the NL MVP. This Hall of Famer was born in Canada. He won three batting titles and was a 7x Gold Glove outfielder (he also played some 1B).

Name him.

3. Only five switch-hitters have been able to hit 40 or more home runs in one season. The one AL player who did it hit 54 in 1961, 52 in 1956, 42 in 1958 and 40 in 1960.

Four players in the NL did it too.

2008 1B/OF with 46, played his first 11 seasons with one NL team but played in the 2011 World Series with the Cards.

1999 3B with 45, Hall of Famer.

1996 Catcher with 41, the only season he hit more than 30, son of a MLB catcher.

1997 3B with 40, the only season he hit more than 29, '97 NL MVP, played in 1998 World Series.

Name them.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

The Angels enter the 2023 season with seven consecutive losing years. The Angels haven't finished above .500 since 2015 or won a playoff game since 2009.

Bet you didn't know **Rick Honeycutt** (2.42 ERA in 1983) is the only Rangers pitcher to lead the AL in ERA.

Who knew? The KC Royals first halter top give away was in 1976. The tradition continues this season June 27 against the Guardians. Grab you tickets soon.

After a months-long search, longtime Atlanta Braves television play-by-play broadcaster Chip Caray is leaving his position with Bally Sports South and will join the Bally Sports Midwest broadcasting team as the lead play-by-play announcer for the St. Louis Cardinals, multiple industry sources told *The Athletic* on Monday. Here's what you need to know:

- Caray, grandson of legendary former Cardinals broadcaster Harry Caray, will replace Dan McLaughlin, who was set to begin his 25th season as the lead television voice with the Cardinals this season.
- McLaughlin was arrested on suspicion of driving while intoxicated in early December. He was eventually charged with a felony persistent DWI.
- Caray will be paired with Brad Thompson and Jim Edmonds

- He was raised in St. Louis, and Chip's parents were divorced. He told *The Athletic* he rarely saw his father, legendary broadcaster Skip Caray, after he went to Atlanta to work as a Braves broadcaster in 1976.
- There have been a few changes over the last few seasons within the Cardinals broadcasting team, with the most notable being **Mike Shannon's** retirement in 2021 after 50 seasons as the team's radio broadcaster.
- With Chip Caray leaving, it will end a run of 46 years with at least one Caray in the Braves' broadcast booth.

Question posed by a newsletter I read—at their peak who were the best ten pure hitters who debuted in the last 40 years? While you think about your top ten, here is what their editor offered:

1. **Barry Bonds**
2. **Albert Pujols**
3. **Mike Trout**
4. **Frank Thomas**
5. **Manny Ramirez**
6. **Alex Rodriguez**
7. **Jim Thome**
8. **Ken Griffey Jr.**
9. **Miguel Cabrera**
10. **Gary Sheffield**

Honorable mention: **Jeff Bagwell, Joey Votto, Edgar Martinez, David Ortiz, Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa.**

Editor's note—**Wade Boggs and Don Mattingly** debuted in 1982 so I'm not sure if they were included in the "debuted in last 40 years" thinking but they were pretty good pure hitters.

Frank Thomas is a pretty strong candidate. And your best are...?

Another in our series of interesting comparisons. These two lefties were in the discussions around who should qualify for the HOF.

<u>Mark Buehrle</u>	<u>Andy Pettitte</u>
16 seasons	18 seasons
214-160 record	256-153 record
3.81 ERA	3.85 ERA
3282 innings pitched	3316 innings pitched
WAR 59.1	WAR 60.2
1870 K/734 BB	2448 K/1031 BB
1.28 WHIP	1.35 WHIP

New Astros general manager **Dana Brown** was the center fielder and leadoff hitter of the famed 1987 Seton Hall team that sent **Craig Biggio, Kevin Morton, John Valentin, and Mo Vaughn** to the majors. Brown's playing career ended in Double A in 1991 and he became an accomplished scout.

Pitch Clock Impact?

Baseball Savant keeps tabs on the tempo of pitchers, for both bases-empty situations and situations with men on base. Players who made both lists in **Bold**.

Here are 10 slowest with the bases empty from 2020 to 2022:

- **Aroldis Chapman — 26.0 seconds between pitches**
- Kyle Finnegan — 25.8
- **Giovanny Gallegos — 25.7**
- Joe Kelly — 24.8
- **Kenley Jansen — 24.8**
- Hunter Strickland — 24.2
- Josh Staumont — 24.2
- Emilio Pagán — 24.1
- Alex Vesia — 23.8

- Ryan Pressly — 23.5

And here are the 10 slowest with runners aboard:

- **Giovanny Gallegos — 32.4 seconds between pitches**
- Devin Williams — 30.2
- Hirokazu Sawamura — 30.1
- **Kenley Jansen — 29.9**
- **Aroldis Chapman — 29.9**
- Alex Colomé — 29.9
- John Gant — 29.3
- **Kyle Finnegan — 29.0**
- Craig Stammen — 28.6
- Mark Melancon — 28.5

Perhaps you notice a pattern? These are all relievers. They tend to appear in high-leverage situations where an extra few seconds of concentration feels sensible. They also often pitch with maximum effort, and require that extra time to recover in between offerings. It will be interesting to see how folks adapt.

Rafael Devers the only Red Sox position player remaining with a 2018 World Series and one of only three overall, along with **Ryan Brasier** and **Chris Sale**.

Want to feel old New Englanders? **Fred Lynn** turns 71 this week. (Larry Bird is 66, Bobby Orr is 74, **Yaz** is 83, Bob Cousy is 94).

Most Common Yankees Post-Season Opponents

World Series

Yankees-Dodgers (11 series)

Results: Yankees 8, Dodgers 3

Most recent matchup: 1981 World Series

Yankees-Giants (7 series)

Results: Yankees 5, Giants 2

Most recent matchup: 1962 World Series

Cardinals-Yankees (5 series)

Results: Cardinals 3, Yankees 2

Most recent matchup: 1964 World Series

Playoffs

3-T) Yankees-Twins (6 series)

Results: Yankees 6, Twins 0

Most recent matchup: 2019 ALDS

3-T) Guardians-Yankees (6 series)

Results: Yankees 4, Cleveland 2

Most recent matchup: 2022 ALDS

8-T) Red Sox-Yankees (5 series)

Results: Red Sox 3, Yankees 2

Most recent matchup: 2021 AL Wild Card Game

TRADES THAT GM'S MIGHT WANT A DO OVER

Padres got: Trevor Hoffman, Andres Berumen, José Martínez

Marlins got: Gary Sheffield, Rich Rodriguez

Date: June 24, 1993

Sheffield helped Marlins to 1997 world title. Hoffman to HOF and MLB career saves leader until past by Mariano.

Astros got: Jeff Bagwell

Red Sox got: Larry Andersen

Date: Aug. 30, 1990

Anderson helped in pennant race but left as free agent. Bagwell was blocked by **Wade Boggs** at 3B so expendable. Bagwell won rookie of the year, then played 15 seasons in Houston.

Braves got: John Smoltz
Tigers got: Doyle Alexander
Date: Aug. 12, 1987

Alexander went 9-0 in Tigers pennant push. But Smoltz would go on to win 40 post-season games for the Braves.

Cubs got: Ryne Sandberg, Larry Bowa
Phillies got: Iván de Jesús
Date: Jan. 27, 1982

Bowa was getting old. Sandberg was a shortstop prospect. Oops, Cubs moved him to 2B...

Angels got: Nolan Ryan, Frank Estrada, Don Rose, Leroy Stanton
Mets got: Jim Fregosi
Date: Dec. 10, 1971

Mets needed offense. Fregosi was a six-time All-Star and had a career 115 homers. Ryan, despite averaging nearly a strikeout per inning, had a ghastly walk rate of 15.4% and had lost more games (38) than he'd won (29), which were stats teams lived by back then. Ryan goes on to become MLB strikeout king. Fregosi hit .233 and was gone from the Mets after one season.

Dodgers got: Pee Wee Reese
Red Sox got: \$35,000 and two players to be named later (Red Evans, Art Parks)
Date: July 18, 1939

Joe Cronin was Red Sox shortstop so Reese was expendable. Reese went on to become a Dodgers captain, a 10-time All-Star, a 1955 World Series champion.

Giants got: Christy Mathewson
Reds got: Amos Rusie
Date: Dec. 15, 1900

Mathewson's story begins and ends with him as a Giant, and as such, it's quirky. After going winless with a 5.08 ERA in an abbreviated first MLB season, the Giants demoted Mathewson to

the Minors, which led the Reds to select him in the Rule 5 Draft. But before he'd ever suit up for Cincinnati, Mathewson was dealt back to the Giants for Rusie, who was in the twilight of his Hall of Fame career.

So there went the chance for Mathewson to blossom within the Redlegs' rich history. Or was it?

According to [SABR](#), the Giants would've had to pay the Minor League team \$1,000 to take Mathewson, and the Reds only paid \$100 to draft him away. So the entire ploy was to save \$900 and send away Rusie, who made just three starts for the Reds.

R.I.P. SAL BANDO



Yet another dead baseball card. **Sal Bando**, the former third baseman and captain of a trio of World Series-winning A's teams in the 1970s who was the first free agent pickup in Brewers history and later Brewers general manager, died this week at 78.

Bando made four All-Star teams and three times finished in the top five in American League MVP balloting while developing a reputation as the leader of a team that won three straight World Series from 1972-74. His 61.5 WAR ranks top-20 all-time for third basemen.

In 44 playoff games spanning six different postseasons, Bando hit five home runs and drove in 13 runs.

Bando played 16 years in the major leagues, beginning his career with the Kansas City A's in 1966. The former Arizona State star — who is a member of the National College Baseball Hall of Fame — moved with the A's west to Oakland in 1968 and he would play at least 146 games for the A's from 1968-76. From 1971-74, Bando averaged 23 home runs and 90 RBIs and finished in the top-four in the AL MVP voting three times.

In 11 years with the A's, he hit 192 home runs, was one of the elite defensive third basemen in the game and accumulated 61.5 career WAR. Bando was inducted into the Oakland A's team Hall of Fame in a ceremony at the Coliseum on Aug. 7.

He signed with Milwaukee on Nov. 19, 1976, two and a half weeks before the Brewers traded George Scott to the Red Sox for **Cecil Cooper**. In January, Milwaukee signed free agent closer Ken Sanders. And later in 1977, the Brewers drafted **Paul Molitor**, traded for **Mike Caldwell** and **Ben Oglivie** and signed another big free agent, **Larry Hisle**.

The pieces of a winner were falling into place, even though it didn't show up in the standings until 1978.

The Brewers remained contenders in '79 and '80 before finally breaking through in 1981, which was split into halves because of a midseason players' strike. Bando had slipped into a reserve role under manager Buck Rodgers, but he got opportunities to start the American League Division Series against the Yankees and notched three hits in Game 2.

Bando finished second in the 1971 MVP vote to teammate **Vida Blue**.

He wrapped his career with 1790 hits, 242 HRs, a .254 batting average. Bando scored 982 runs, drove in 1039 runs, .352 on base pct., .408 SLUG and .760 OPS. He led the AL in total bases in 1974 with 295.

HITTING COACH – NOT AN EASY JOB

From The Athletic

More data and more information can have their caveats, though. In today's game, it's easy for hitters to get overwhelmed with all the different numbers they're presented with. And worse,

pitchers have had a distinct advantage since science and technology infiltrated baseball like never before over the past decade.

As pitchers design sliders in labs and use biomechanics to alter their deliveries and increase velocity, hitting has become more difficult. Last year's league-wide batting average was .243, the lowest since 1968. Strikeouts across the league have increased precipitously almost year over year, from 23,853 in 1990 to 40,812 last season. The average MLB fastball is now 93.9 mph, pitchers are throwing breaking balls more than ever and teams use a revolving door of relief pitchers to lock down games.

All that makes life tough for a hitting coach.

"The velocity has been the big difference, and it's not just on the fastball," Braves hitting coach **Kevin Seitzer** said. "It's on the secondary stuff, too. Then you've got the spin rates to go with it and you're still getting break at 5-6 mph harder than what you're used to seeing. It's like (the ball) is on plane and then it's gone.

"To me, that's the reason strikeouts are up so much. Everybody thinks it's because they're trying to slug and hit homers and OPS numbers and all of that. That's part of it, but for me, it's the strike-to-ball stuff that is so hard to see."

"Pitching is a very controllable skill," **AJ Hinch**, Tigers manager, said. "You control your grip, you control your delivery, the things that you can enhance. Hitting is reactionary, so it's hard to get too scientific in the hitting department, because we're reacting to 98 with sink and cut, and he might slide it and he might change it and he might have split. There's a lot more that goes into it than the simple science of swing mechanics. It's the reaction part of our sport."

In 2018, per Sports Illustrated, the average age of 13 newly hired hitting coaches was 42.3, down from an average age of 53 among the coaches they replaced.

In 2023, there will be 19 lead hitting coaches under age 40.

As staffs grow younger, they are also growing larger. Teams are increasingly hiring assistant hitting coaches or finding other ways to divvy up responsibilities to help handle massive amounts of information. Seitzer has worked with an assistant hitting coach since the start of his time in Atlanta. **Gabe Kapler's San Francisco Giants** now have 13 coaches on his staff, including hitting coach Justin Viele, director of hitting Dustin Lind and assistant hitting coach **Pedro Guerrero**.

One problem: Despite all the changes in personnel, hitters across the league have yet to find more success. Teams scored 4.28 runs per game last season, down slightly from 4.53 in 2021. Teams averaged only 8.16 hits per game, the 11th-lowest total in MLB history.

Next season, only six teams — the Braves, Rays, Astros, Dodgers, Giants and Blue Jays — will have a primary hitting coach who has been in the same role for more than two seasons.

MORE FUN FROM BASEBALL ALMANAC.COM

Randomly looked at Grand Slams page this week.

Most career Grand Slams – **Arod** 25 (Mariners 7, Rangers 3, Yankees 15)

NL Career Record **Willie McCovey** 18 (Giants 16, Padres 2)

Most Career Pinch Hit Grand Slams 3. **Rich Reese**, Twins, McCovey and **Ron Northey** who played for the Cards and Cubs in the 1940's.

Pitchers **Camilo Pasqual**, **Dizzy Trout**, **Madison Bumgarner**, **Tony Cloninger**, **Bob Gibson**, **Denny Neagle** and **Rick Wise**. All hit 2 grand slams. Cloninger and Bumgarner hit 2 in the same season. Cloninger hit both in the same game—July 3, 1966.

Most grand slams in a season-6. **Travis Hafner** 2006 Indians, **Don Mattingly** 1987 Yankees.

Bobby Bonds is one of 6 players in history to hit a grand slam in his first MLB game.

Robin Ventura on May 20, 1999 became the only player ever to hit grand slams in both ends of a double header.

JANUARY 28, 1901

The American League moves from minor-league status to the majors, with the existing Washington Senators, (the 1900 AL's Kansas City Blues were relocated to the nation's capital) Cleveland Lake Shores (renaming themselves the Blues), Detroit Tigers, Milwaukee Brewers and Chicago White Sox joined by new additions the Baltimore Orioles (who had sat out a season after being booted from the National League in 1899), and the expansion Philadelphia A's (created to compete against the NL's Phillies) and Boston Americans (created to compete with the NL's Boston Braves). Three clubs are cut from the AL: The Indianapolis Hoosiers, who joined the Western Association; the Buffalo Bisons, who joined the Eastern League; and the Minneapolis Millers, who joined the Western League.

All eight original AL teams still exist, seven contiguously. The White Sox and Tigers still completely intact, with no changes. Four clubs changes cities and/or nicknames: The Blues are now the Guardians, the Senators became the Minnesota Twins, the A's are now in Oakland, and

the Americans became the Red Sox. The Orioles have a more complicated history, by almost immediately moving to St. Louis to become the Browns, but returning to Baltimore in 1954 and reverting to the Orioles nickname.

The last team, Milwaukee, exists in 2023, but not as the same franchise as 1901. The Brewers are now in the National League, but this Brewers team were born in Seattle in 1969 as the Pilots and were moved to Milwaukee in 1970.

The league played a 140-game schedule in 1901, and with roster limits set at 14, commenced a raid on National League talent. The AL also (temporarily) did away with the reserve clause, setting a five-year limit on team ownership of a player.

HALL OF FAME

It was fun to watch the announcement on MLB channel. I have stood in that hall of plaques with many subscribers of this newsletter.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown features 340 individuals, enshrined with plaques. Of those, 268 are former players. **Scott Rolen and Fred McGriff** will make it 342.

Just 58 have reached in their first year of eligibility.

That's a little over 1 percent of the nearly 23,000 players in history, including known Negro Leagues players.

Bravo to Scott Rolen:

2018: 10.2%

2019: 17.2%

2020: 35.3%

2021: 52.9%

2022: 63.2%

2023: 76.3% — elected to the Hall of Fame.

At 10.2% in his first year of eligibility, Rolen had the lowest first year percentage to eventually be elected. He finished 17th in the 2018 voting. Four players were elected that year: **Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero, Jim Thome and Trevor Hoffman**. And the 16 ahead of Rolen also included three others who would go on to be elected on the BBWAA ballot – **Edgar Martinez, Mike Mussina and Larry Walker**.

Not a bad career, M. Rolen.

17 seasons

70.1 WAR

2077 hits. 1211 runs scored. 1287 runs driven in.

.281 average, .364 on base pct.

316 HRs, .490 SLUG. .855 OPS, 3628 TB

Rookie of the Year, 8 Gold Gloves, 7x All Star

In the 2006 World Series Rolen hit .421 for the Cards with 3 doubles and an HR helping St. Louis to a win over Detroit.

In 39 post-season games he hit 5 HRs.

Once Rolen reached the majors in 1996, he only played third base. He never took even one day as a designated hitter. In the expansion era, only fellow Hall of Famers **Ozzie Smith** (2,511 games at shortstop) and **Brooks Robinson** (2,870 games at third base) played more games at one position than Rolen (2,023).

Rolen is only the 18th third baseman in the Hall. He and **Chipper Jones** are the only two who made their major league debuts in the last 40 years.

Before that you have to go back to **Wade Boggs**, who debuted in 1982.

Another great third baseman, **Adrian Beltré**, makes his debut on the ballot next year. He should be an easy choice given his 3,166 hits, 477 home runs, and 5 Gold Gloves.

Besides **Scott Rolen**, six other players got more than 40% of the baseball writers' votes:

Todd Helton	72.2%
Billy Wagner	68.1%
Andruw Jones	58.1%
Gary Sheffield	55.0%
Carols Beltran	45.5%
Jeff Kent	46.5%

I was surprised that **Jimmy Rollins** 12.9% and **Bobby Abreu** 15.4% didn't do better. Jones and Sheffield, Helton and Wagner all gained 15%+ so there is some momentum there—Rolen only had 10.2% his first year eligible. (four players gaining 15% has not happened in 50 years).

Rolen made the 75% threshold by 5 votes. Fewest since **Pudge Rodriguez** made it by 4 in 2017. The only other player to make it by 5 or less votes in the last 35 years was **Fergie Jenkins** who made it by one vote in 1991.

Rolen got 73 votes/17.2% in 2019. Four elections later he topped 75%.

Rolen was NL rookie of the year in 1997. Andruw Jones finished 5th in that year's voting.

If you are betting HOF futures in Vegas, **Todd Helton** would be a good bet. 72.2% with 5 years eligibility to go—over the last 50 elections no one has gotten that close and not been elected in the next year.

Carlos Beltran's 45.5% vs. **Barry Bonds** (36.2%), **ARod** (34.3%), **Manny Ramirez** (33.2%) and **Rafael Palmiero** (11.0%) suggests cheating via sign stealing is viewed by voters as not as bad as PED cheating.

The only two HOFers drafted back-to-back in the first round--**Robin Yount** (No. 3 by the Brewers) and **Dave Winfield** (No. 4 by the Padres) in 1973

Jeff Kent may be resurrected by the Veteran's Committee. They are sure to discuss 351 HRs (most ever by a 2B), 1428 RBI (most ever by a 2B), 8 100 RBI seasons (most ever by a 2B), highest slugging pct (.509) by a 2B since **Rogers Hornsby**.

16 players from the 1980 ballot eventually made it to the Hall:

Richie Ashburn, Lou Boudreau, Bobby Doerr, Joe Gordon, Gil Hodges, George Kell, Ralph Kiner, Bob Lemon, Johnny Mize, Hal Newhouser, Pee Wee Reese, Phil Rizzuto, Red Schoendienst, Enos Slaughter, Duke Snider and Early Wynn.

Rolen had just 10.2% in his first year on the ballot. Others who started low but reached election include **Duke Snider 17%, Bert Blyleven 17.5%, Mike Mussina 20.3%, Larry Walker 20.3%, Don Drysdale 21%**

We have discussed the importance of making baseball fun and interesting for the next generation of fans. The Athletic made a good point-- **the voters have elected just two players in the last three years.** Where's the fanfare? The fun? I get that this is supposed to be an exclusive club, but sheesh. The entire concept loses its meaning if no one gets in. **While we wait, memories can fade.** Rolen last made an All-Star team in 2010. How many young fans remember watching him play?

Peter Gammons had an interesting question--if admission to the Hall of Fame can be denied by what is considered "wrong" or "cheating," can we consider what a player has given the game, and if he leaves the baseball world better than we found it, can we then take that as an addition to OPS+?

Joe Posnanski had a fan dialogue going this week for his newsletter subscribers.

A fan sent this question: Joe, it seems starting pitchers are getting shafted again. Even assuming **Verlander, Kershaw, Scherzer, Greinke** and maybe **CC**, the number of starting pitchers going forward will still be low. In your opinion, what should the standards be going forward?

Response--I think the shift in starting pitching is still happening, even now. Starters are going fewer and fewer innings, and it doesn't feel to me like that's a trend that is likely to turn around anytime soon unless there's a rule change (such as the number of pitchers a team is allowed to carry).

With that in mind, even the guys you mention feel like they pitched in a completely different era. I mean you look at all the pitchers born after 1992 -- who is going to the Hall of Fame? **Aaron Nola? Luis Castillo? Max Fried? Sandy Alcantara?** Who can even tell? The Hall of Fame starter is definitely a moving target.

Another Posnanski point:

The Hall of Fame inductions have given us a lot of that stuff lately, if I'm being honest. It's been a whole lot of Scott Rolen, **Larry Walker, Fred McGriff, Ted Simmons, Lee Smith, Harold Baines, Mike Mussina, Edgar Martinez**. I'm not saying anything at all about their Hall of Fame worthiness. I'm saying these are simply not players that my watch-baseball-a-couple-times-a-year friend would know.

Meanwhile, she absolutely does know a bunch of those players who are famously not going to the Hall of Fame: **Bonds, Clemens, McGwire, Sosa, A-Rod, Rose, Sheffield**, etc. It's not great when someone can instantly name the players not in the Hall of Fame but not know the players who are in there.

Baseball historian John Thorn has talked quite a bit about the word "Fame" in "Hall of Fame." He is of the belief that the Hall should celebrate fame. And it does feel the best when a famous player is elected to the Hall of Fame and everybody — obsessive fans and heavy-duty fans and casual fans and even non-fans — says, "Oh yeah! I remember that guy! I have an opinion on that guy!"

That's what happened when **David Ortiz** was elected, when Derek Jeter was elected, when Ken Griffey Jr., was elected, when **Mariano Rivera** was elected, when **Vladimir Guerrero** was elected, when **Chipper Jones** was elected, etc. It's not that everybody agreed on all those guys, it's that everybody had a powerful viewpoint.

Does everybody have a powerful viewpoint on Scott Rolen?

I'll leave that question for you to answer.

Of course, there are those of us who would argue with John Thorn and say that, no, the Hall of Fame is about CELEBRATING fame, it is about BESTOWING fame. Scott Rolen was a great player, an all-time player, and by him getting elected to the Hall of Fame, he will finally get the fame he has long deserved.

And Posanski on Jeff Kent

If you're going to make Jeff Kent's Hall of Fame case, just make it honestly. I could give you an honest Jeff Kent case, one that points to the fact that he hit 377 home runs, most for a second

baseman (different from saying he was the greatest power-hitting second baseman) and he was incredibly consistent, and he was a key part of some fine teams, and he won an MVP award and had a few other seasons where he got MVP consideration, and in his prime with San Francisco, he probably was an average defensive second baseman, and he was a very good run producer for almost a full decade for three different teams.

But the majority of voters think that case falls short. That's just how it goes when you are talking about Hall of Fame altitude. Jeff Kent was a very good player. And very good players sometimes fall short of Hall of Fame heights.

I suppose that's a hard thing to swallow, though. And so Kent fans begin to exaggerate. "Most home runs for a second baseman," becomes "greatest power-hitting second baseman." That's ludicrous. You're telling me that Jeff Kent was a greater power hitter than Hornsby? I mean, that's laughable. Kent hit a lot of home runs in a time when everybody was hitting a lot of home runs.

Then "greatest power-hitting second baseman," becomes "greatest offensive second baseman," which is sheer lunacy, I mean, Rogers Hornsby, **Joe Morgan, Eddie Collins, Charlie Gehringer, Jackie Robinson**, all of these guys were certainly better offensive players than Kent, and same probably goes for **Bobby Grich** and probably **Robby Cano**, and probably **Jose Altuve**, too. Me, for total offense, I might also take **Ryne Sandberg and Robbie Alomar and Chase Utley**.

Look, being a top-seven or top-10 offensive second baseman is excellent, it puts you right there in the Hall of Fame discussion. But calling him the best offensive second baseman ever is gaslighting at its finest. You're saying that the voters, who with almost no exceptions are earnestly trying to put the best players in the Hall of Fame, purposely left out the GREATEST OFFENSIVE SECOND BASEMAN IN BASEBALL HISTORY because, what, he was mean to some writers?

See, this is the nonsense that drives me batty.

I didn't vote for Jeff Kent. I looked at his case again and again and came away with a few thoughts.

Thought 1: If he wasn't a second baseman, he would not be an especially compelling Hall of Fame candidate. You know who put up strikingly similar numbers? **Aramis Ramirez**. Also **Andres Galarraga**. **Norm Cash** was probably a better hitter. **Rocky Colavito** was probably a better hitter. **Lance Berkman** was probably a better hitter. I could keep going. **Ellis Burks**. **Mark Teixeira**. **Jason Giambi**. **Carlos Delgado**. **Matt Holliday**. **Jim Edmonds**. All these guys might have been better hitters than Kent. So his case has to rely HEAVILY on the fact that he was a second baseman.

Thought 2: Looking over his career, he wasn't a very good second baseman. In his day, he wasn't regarded as a very good second baseman. The defensive stats over his career suggest he wasn't a very good defensive second baseman.

Thought 3: Kent was not the best choice for the MVP award in 2000, in my opinion. Before the voting, Giants manager **Dusty Baker** announced that if he had an MVP vote, he would give it to Kent over Barry Bonds because of Kent's RBIs and clutch hitting. That certainly swayed voters. Truth is, neither one of them had the best year in 2000. That was Colorado's **Todd Helton**, who hit .372/.463/.698 with a league-leading 147 RBIs. Helton might have been elected to the Hall this year had he won that award.

Thought 4: In my view, Kent is the third-best second baseman not in the Hall of Fame — behind **Lou Whitaker** and Bobby Grich.

Jayson Stark's Jeff Kent counter-point

Jeff Kent deserved more love, even though he's now off our ballot. I never could figure out why it took him seven years on the ballot just to get above 20 percent. And now he's off without ever reaching 50 percent?

I used to say McGriff was the most criminally under-supported candidate in my time as a voter. I'm now handing that crown to Kent. As I wrote in my column explaining my ballot, I always look for players with a claim to historic greatness. And it's so easy to argue that Kent is the most dominant offensive second baseman of modern times. He has something for everybody.

For the old-school crowd: the most home runs and RBIs by any second baseman in history. For the new-age crowd: the highest slugging percentage by any second baseman in the live-ball era

— plus a .500 slugging percentage in the postseason, over 43 games (not a small sample), and some incredible October moments. As I wrote in my piece on the five things we learned from this election, nobody feels like a more slam-dunk choice to get elected by the Contemporary Era committee in a few years than Kent does.

Bill James is a baseball genius. He created the Baseball Abstract in the 1970's. He was the early voice of analytics. He is credited with coming up with the formulas for runs created, range factor, win shares. He built ball park differentials into stats. He worked for teams, he was the subject of a chapter in MoneyBall. Trust me—smart, innovative guy who moved our view from back of the baseball cards stats to other way to look for a player's true value.

For choosing players for the Hall of Fame, James suggested going beyond stats and analytics and asking a series of questions about each candidate:

Question 1: Was he ever regarded as the best player in baseball?

Question 2: Was he the best player on his team?

Question 3: Was he the best player in baseball (or in the league) at his position?

Question 4: Did he have an impact on a number of pennant races?

Question 5: Was he a good enough player that he could continue to play regularly after passing his prime?

Question 7: Are most players who have comparable career statistics in the Hall of Fame?

Question 8: Do the players' numbers meet Hall of Fame standards?

Question 9: Is there evidence to suggest that the player was significantly better or worse than is suggested by his statistics?

Question 10: Is he the best player *at his position* who is eligible for the Hall of Fame but not in?

Question 11: How many MVP-type seasons did he have?

Question 12: How many All-Star-type seasons did he have?

Question 13: If this man were the best player on the team, would it be likely that the team could win the pennant?

Question 14: What impact did the player have on baseball history?

Question 15: Did the player uphold the standards of sportsmanship and character that the Hall of Fame, in its written guidelines, instructs us to consider?

Not every answer must be yes for you to vote for a player. But it helps the voter look at a player beyond just WAR or batting average or homeruns or gold gloves.

A former player, a contemporary of Sheffield's, commented "the Sheff defense argument is maddening." The former player's point: Sheffield, for better or worse, actually *played* defense. **Edgar Martinez**, on the other hand, barely was out in the field, whether due to health or lack of skill. "Can't hold it against Sheff if it wasn't held against Edgar," the former player said. "And that is where WAR comes up short."

Some voters probably demur on Sheffield because of what he said was an inadvertent use of PEDs before and during the 2002 season. Each voter is entitled to his or her opinion on that subject, but we've already elected a number of alleged PED users. Sheffield hit 509 home runs and had a career OPS+ 40 percent above league average. **Ken Griffey Jr.** was a mere 36 percent above.

Along with those 509 home runs, and with one of the fiercest swings in the game, Sheffield had 304 more walks than strikeouts in his 2,576-game career. Perspective? The only players who hit 500 homers and had fewer strikeouts are **Ted Williams and Mel Ott**.

The writers have only elected two center fielders in the last 40 years: Ken Griffey Jr. and Kirby Puckett. We have three of them still on this ballot: Carlos Beltrán, Andruw Jones and Torii Hunter. It has been tough for these center fielders — and more like Jim Edmonds, Kenny Lofton, Dale Murphy and Bernie Williams.

Edmonds fell off the ballot after one year despite eight Gold Gloves and 393 homers. Lofton also was one-and-done even though his 622 stolen bases rank 15th all-time. Williams lasted only two years despite his .850 career OPS in 545 (!) career plate appearances in the postseason. 1981-90 Murphy started more games in center than anyone but **Lloyd Moseby**, hit 398 homers, won two MVPs, started all 162 games every year from 1982 to 1985, and in 1988 was honored by Sports Illustrated in its Athlete of the Year issue with those from other sports with the cover, "Athletes Who Care."

Jay Hart in Sports Illustrated raises another interesting question. Make this make sense: In 2019, Jeff Kent, the longtime second baseman for the San Francisco Giants, received more Hall of Fame votes (77) than Scott Rolen (73), Billy Wagner (71) and Todd Helton (70). Tuesday, Rolen received 297 Hall of Fame votes, enough to gain induction, while Helton earned 281 and Wagner 265. Kent received just 181.

Apparently in retirement, Rolen, Wagner and Helton all became better players than Kent, at least in the eyes of voters.

This has become an annual event, bashing the Baseball Hall of Fame voting process, but it's for good reason. Results such as Tuesday's defy simple logic. Five years ago, just 43 voters thought Rolen was a Hall of Famer. Tuesday, 297 did.

The stats haven't changed, so what has?

In 1955, **Joe DiMaggio** was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. It was the third try on the ballot for the "Yankee Clipper," who received 88.8% of the vote after registering 44.3% in 1953 and 69.4% in '54. I'd love to read what those 50%+ who passed on Joe D in his first year were thinking.

Scott Rolen benefits from a voting process that has changed

Peter Abraham, Boston Globe

Scott Rolen was barely a footnote when the Hall of Fame voting was announced in 2018. He received only 10.2 percent of the vote.

Much of the attention that year was focused on another third baseman, Braves great **Chipper Jones**. He rolled into Cooperstown at 97.2 percent.

Only five years later, Rolen stands with Jones after one of the most unlikely journeys in Hall of Fame history.

In the latest example of how much the process is changing, the Hall announced Rolen as its newest member on Tuesday night. He received 76.3 percent of the vote from the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Rolen had the lowest percentage of votes in his first year of eligibility of any candidate who went on to the Hall. He reached with five votes to spare.

The Hall of Fame induction is July 23. Rolen will join **Fred McGriff**, who was a unanimous selection of the Hall's Contemporary Baseball Era Committee in December.

Rolen is a clear beneficiary of the electorate getting increasingly younger and more comfortable using modern statistics to evaluate players.

Rolen had 70.1 bWAR during his career, which stretched from 1996-2012. Only four players had more during that time: **Alex Rodriguez, Barry Bonds, Albert Pujols** and Jones.

Rodriguez and Bonds have been denied admission because of their ties to performance-enhancing drugs. Pujols is not yet eligible, having retired after last season. He is sure to be a first-ballot choice in five years.

Rolen's traditional statistics — .281 batting average, 316 home runs, 1,287 RBI — were strong. But bWAR, which also encompasses defense and baserunning, showed he was elite.

Rolen was the 1997 National League Rookie of the Year, a seven-time All-Star and an eight-time Gold Glover. The bulk of his career was spent with the Phillies and Cardinals.

Todd Helton is another player on the rise. The former Rockies first baseman fell 11 votes shy this year with 72.2 percent. Helton has five years left on the ballot and likely will only need one more.

Former Astros and Mets closer **Billy Wagner** climbed to 68.1 percent and is on a path that will lead to Cooperstown. He has two more chances on the BBWAA ballot.

Wagner, who spent part of the 2009 season with the Red Sox, peaked at 16.7 percent in his first four years on the ballot. He has advanced steadily since.

As Rolen benefited from voters having a greater appreciation of defense, Wagner has been aided by better ways to evaluate relievers beyond earned run average and saves. His 11.9 strikeouts per nine innings, for instance, are better than Hall of Famer **Trevor Hoffman** (9.4). Opposing hitters had a paltry .558 OPS against Wagner, also better than Hoffman (.609).

Other than Wagner, the other former Red Sox players on the ballot did not receive much support.

Bronson Arroyo, John Lackey, and Mike Napoli received one vote. **Jacoby Ellsbury** didn't get any.

Manny Ramirez received 33.2 percent in his seventh year on the ballot, a 4.3 percent jump from last year but hardly a sign of momentum.

While one of the greatest hitters in history, Ramirez was suspended in 2009 for using performance-enhancing drugs. He tested positive again in 2011 but retired rather than serve another suspension.

Voters have largely shunned players who tested positive.

Jeff Kent, a hard-hitting second baseman, ended his 10 years on the ballot with 46.5 percent. He will be a candidate for the Class of 2026 via the Contemporary Baseball Era Committee.

Carlos Beltrán, who has the statistics of a first-ballot selection, received only 46.5 percent. That Major League Baseball named Beltrán a ringleader of Houston's 2017 sign-stealing scheme damaged his candidacy. Whether he can recover in the next nine years is uncertain.

Next Year Should be Fun

To be eligible for the Hall of Fame ballot, a player must have played 10 seasons in the big leagues and have been retired for five full seasons. Five interesting new additions for next year:

Adrián Beltré: Let's see — 3,166 hits, 477 home runs, five Gold Gloves, two Platinum Gloves. Those numbers get the old-school votes. A total of 93.5 WAR according to Baseball-Reference (rWAR) — more than fellow third basemen **George Brett, Wade Boggs and Chipper Jones** — and in the Jaffe WAR Score System (JAWS), he's behind only **Mike Schmidt, Eddie Matthews** and Boggs at third base.

Joe Mauer: Mauer's injuries limited him in his later years, but he still had a career that should eventually find him enshrined in Cooperstown, even if the first ballot seems unlikely. Mauer finished with a .306/.388/.439 slash line and had 2,123 hits. That's more hits than all but five catchers in the Hall of Fame and more hits than **Johnny Bench and Gary Carter**. Mauer's age 26-30 years were historic, with an MVP and three batting titles in five years

Chase Utley: Utley was as good of a second baseman as there was in baseball at his peak, and teamed with Jimmy Rollins and **Ryan Howard** to form the core of a team that won five consecutive NL East titles and the 2008 World Series.

David Wright: Wright made seven All-Star teams in eight years from 2006 to 2013 and had four top-10 MVP finishes. Through the 2013 season, Wright was a .301/.382/.506 hitter with a 137 OPS+. He had 1,558 hits, 345 doubles, 222 homers and 876 RBI through age 30. Unfortunately he played in just 211 more games, with a total of 219 hits and 20 home runs over four more seasons.

Bartolo Colon: Colon had one heck of a career, spanning parts of 21 big-league seasons, wearing 11 different uniforms starting with Cleveland in 1997 and finishing with the Rangers in 2018.

Colon won the American League Cy Young Award in 2005 and made four All-Star teams. He's the top starting pitcher on this list, winning 247 games and striking out 2,535 batters with a 4.12 ERA.

Holdovers Helton and Wagner were both over 68%. Next year will be just the fifth election with two holdovers with that high a %. All four previous elections those holdovers got it:

2018 **Trevor Hoffman and Vladimir Guerrero**

2017 **Jeff Bagwell and Tim Lincecum**

2011 **Bert Blyleven and Roberto Alomar**

1987 **Billy Williams and Catfish Hunter**

Will **Carlos Beltrán** make it in the next year or two as the 2017 Astros scandal recedes further into the past? There is absolutely no questioning that he is a Hall of Fame performer. He is one of five players to finish with 400 homers and 300 stolen bases, alongside **Barry Bonds, Willie Mays, Alex Rodriguez and Andre Dawson**. He has the highest stolen base success rate (86.8 percent) in history. His 1.021 career postseason OPS is topped only by **Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and George Brett**. Reliability and availability are what Buck Showalter calls "the sixth tool;" Beltrán played center field in 1,312 games and started 1,306 from 2001-10.

MLB.COM's LIST OF EACH TEAM'S BEST PLAYER NOT IN THE HOF.

Who would you change?

Blue Jays: Dave Stieb, RHP

Key fact: Blue Jays' all-time leader in wins (175), starts (408) and innings (2,873)

Orioles: Rafael Palmeiro, 1B

Key fact: He is one of six Major Leaguers with at least 3,000 career hits and 500 home runs

Rays: Jose Canseco, OF

Key fact: The first player in the 40/40 Club, he's one of only 14 AL/NL players to hit 400 home runs and steal 200 bases in his career

Red Sox: Roger Clemens, RHP

Key fact: His seven career Cy Young Awards are two more than any other pitcher has

Yankees: Alex Rodriguez, SS/3B

Key fact: 696 career home runs (fourth all-time)

Guardians: Kenny Lofton, OF

Key fact: One of seven players all-time with 600 steals and 100 homers

Royals: Frank White, 2B

Key facts: Five All-Star Games, eight Gold Glove Awards

Tigers: Lou Whitaker, 2B

*Key facts: 1978 AL Rookie of the Year Award winner, five All-Star selections, three Gold Glove Awards, four Silver Slugger Awards, one of just three second basemen all-time with 1,000 runs, 1,000 RBIs, 2,000 hits and 200 home runs, alongside Hall of Famers **Rogers Hornsby and Joe Morgan**.*

Twins: Joe Mauer, C/1B

Key fact: Will become eligible on 2024 ballot

White Sox: Dick Allen, 1B/3B

*Key fact: Among players with 7,000 career plate appearances, his 156 OPS+ places him in a tie for 14th all-time with **Frank Thomas**.*

Angels: Bobby Grich, 2B

Key fact: He was a six-time All-Star, four-time Gold Glove winner and one-time Silver Slugger

Astros: Lance Berkman, OF/1B

Key fact: His 52 bWAR is first among switch-hitters with fewer than 1,900 games played

Athletics: Mark McGwire, 1B

Key fact: 583 career home runs (11th all-time)

Mariners: Alex Rodriguez, SS/3B

Key fact: 696 career home runs (fourth all-time)

Rangers: Adrián Beltré, 3B

Key fact: One of seven players all-time with 450 homers and 600 doubles

Braves: Dale Murphy, OF

Key facts: Two-time NL MVP Award winner (1982 and '83), seven-time All-Star, four-time Silver Slugger, five-time Gold Glove winner

Marlins: Gary Sheffield, OF

Key fact: Hit 509 career home runs, including 42-homer season with Marlins in 1996

Mets: Keith Hernandez, 1B

Key fact: 11-time Gold Glove Award winner

Nationals/Expos: Jeff Reardon, RHP

Key fact: 367 career saves (10th in MLB history)

Phillies: Dick Allen, 1B

Key fact: He earned the 1964 NL Rookie of the Year Award, 1972 AL MVP Award and seven All-Star selections

Brewers: Ryan Braun, LF

Key fact: Brewers' all-time leader with 352 home runs

Cardinals: Albert Pujols, 1B

Key fact: He's just one of four players in AL/NL history to hit 700 home runs

Cubs: Sammy Sosa, OF

Key fact: Only player in MLB history to hit 60-plus homers in three seasons

Pirates: Barry Bonds, OF

Key fact: 762 career home runs (most in MLB history)

Reds: Pete Rose, OF/1B

Key fact: All-time leader in hits (4,256), games played (3,562) and at-bats (14,053)

D-backs: Curt Schilling, RHP

*Key fact: 2.23 ERA in 19 career postseason starts, including 2.06 in seven World Series outings (split 2001 World Series MVP Award with **Randy Johnson**)*

Dodgers: Adrián Beltré, 3B

Key fact: One of seven players all-time with 450 homers and 600 doubles

Giants: Barry Bonds, OF

Key fact: 762 career home runs (most in MLB history)

Padres: Gary Sheffield, OF

Key fact: He racked up 509 homers and 60.5 WAR over 22 seasons

Rockies: Todd Helton, 1B

Key fact: One of eight players all-time with at least 350 homers and a .315 batting average

Editor's note—they wimped out on ARod, Bonds, Sheffield and Beltre. Better to leave Arod just in Seattle and wade into the **Bernie Williams-Thurman Munson-Jorge Posada** discussion.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Only two teams have retired No. 22.

One was a Hall of Fame righthander who pitched in three World Series. He was a 20 game winner 8 times in a career that ended in 1984. He won AL Cy Young awards in 1973-75-76 and won 268 games.

The other was a sweet swinging lefty first baseman. He played his first 8 seasons with the team that retired his number. He finished 5th in Rookie of the Year voting in 1986 and made 5 All-Star games for the NL team that retired his 22. Strong career numbers--303, 2176 hits and 284 HRs.

Name them. **Jim Palmer and Will Clark**

In 2018, the year he won the AL MVP, Mookie Betts hit 32 home runs and stole 30 bases and won the batting title with a .346 average. Who is the only player with a higher average in a 30/30 season?

This player was runner up to Tony Gwynn (.377) for the 1997 NL batting title. That year he batted .366 with 49 home runs and 33 stolen bases to win the NL MVP. This Hall of Famer was born in Canada. He won three batting titles and was a 7x Gold Glove outfielder (he also played some 1B).

Name him. **Larry Walker**

Only five switch-hitters have been able to hit 40 or more home runs in one season. The one AL player who did it hit 54 in 1961, 52 in 1956, 42 in 1958 and 40 in 1960.

Four players in the NL did it too. Name them.

2008 1B/OF with 46, played his first 11 seasons with one NL team but played in the 2011 World Series with the Cards. **LANE BERKMAN**

1999 3B with 45, Hall of Famer. **CHIPPER JONES**

1996 Catcher with 41, the only season he hit more than 30, son of a MLB catcher. **TODD HUNDLEY**

1997 3B with 40, the only season he hit more than 29, '96 NL MVP, played in 1998 World Series. **KEN CAMINITI**

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