

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

1.8.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

Coffee and a bear claw looking out at fresh snow in Maine.

This week another piece on the Dominican Republic, the ventriloquist pitcher and trivia (easy, medium and hard). Enjoy.

If you did not receive last week's issue please email me. It seems the Yahoo mail algorithm didn't like the combination of a long recipient list and the embedded links of the highlight plays, decided I was a spammer and shut me down for a couple of days.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

9 players have won 5 or more batting titles. I will spot you Hall of Famer Dan Brouthers who won 5 between 1879-1904 for Buffalo, Boston and Brooklyn. You need to name the other 8.

Lefty batting centerfielder, AL

1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1919

Lefty batting OF, NL

1984, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997

Righty batting SS/1B/OF, NL

1900, 1903, 1904, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1911

Lefty batting 1B/2B, AL

1969, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1978

Righty batting infielder

1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1928

Lefty batting 1B/OF, NL

1943, 1946, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1957

Lefty batting OF, AL

1941, 1942, 1947, 1948, 1957, 1958

Lefty bating 3B, AL

1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988

I am not in the Hall of Fame

My 8 gold gloves place me fourth all-time for 3B behind Brooks Robinson (16), Mike Schmidt (10) and Nolan Arenado (10).

I was NL Rookie of the Year in 1997.

From 1997 through 2004 I averaged .287, 28 HRs, 102 RBI.

Over those 8 seasons my WAR was 46.2, trailing only Barry Bonds and ARod.

I am one of 35 hitters with at least 2,000 hits, 300 homers and 500 doubles.

My best season was 2004 when I hit .314 with 34 HRs and 124 RBI for the Cardinals.

My 17-year career included 7 seasons for the Phillies and 6 seasons for the Cards.

Who am I?

The record for the number of 30–30 players in a season is four. I'll give you the four years and the teams, give us the players (one repeats from '87 to '96 and one repeats '96-'97, it is three different Colorado Rockies).

1987

Indians	1B/OF
Reds	OF
Mets	3B
Mets	OF

1996
Rockies OF
Giants OF
Rockies OF
Reds OF

1997
Astros 1B
Giants OF
Dodgers OF
Rockies OF

2011
Brewers OF
Red Sox OF
Dodgers OF
Rangers 2B

Answers at the bottom.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

The pitch timer in the minors last season shaved 25 minutes off average game time with limits between pitches of 14 seconds with the bases empty and 19 with runners. The MLB timer allows 15 and 20 seconds, respectively.

Violations in the minors last year started at 1.73 per game in Week 2 and dropped to 0.73 in Week 5—and by Week 21 it stabilized at 0.45, or about one violation every two games.

Joe Sheehan thought--The Marlins are three stars short of a lineup, and coincidentally, three stars short of the luxury tax threshold. More, really. Their projected payroll in 2022 is, like many teams, a near match for what they are guaranteed from national and local television revenue. Even a team like the Marlins, which has turned off all of South Florida with a quarter-century of antics, is profitable drawing fewer than a million fans a season. That, and not Steve Cohen's largesse, is baseball's biggest off-field problem.

Interesting thought from Jim Callis on mlb.com--Brian Sabean's return to the Yankees as an executive advisor got me to wondering ... Why doesn't he get more mention as a potential Hall of Famer?

Sabean won three World Series championships while running the Giants' baseball operations for 22 seasons, part of a 30-year run in San Francisco. Those three titles match the total won by Pat Gillick and exceed the two won by John Schuerholz, the last two modern general managers enshrined in Cooperstown.

Before he joined the Giants, Sabean spent nine seasons with the Yankees, one as a scout, five as scouting director and three overseeing both scouting and player development. He didn't get as much attention for his efforts in New York as he did in San Francisco, but he played a major role in laying the groundwork for five World Series championships by the Yankees. He ran several productive Drafts, highlighted by getting **Andy Pettitte and Jorge Posada** as draft-and-follows in 1990 and **Derek Jeter** with the No. 6 overall pick in 1992, and he also helped develop talents such as **Mariano Rivera and Bernie Williams**.

The next group of contemporary managers, executives and umpires will be considered by the Hall of Fame's era committee in December. Sabean deserves inclusion when that vote happens.

Hunter Greene of the Reds' fastball averaged 99 mph, fastest in MLB for pitchers over 100 IP. There was one issue however—opposing batters slugged .512 off his fastball.

The Rangers hit the free agent market hard over the last two years--\$685 million committed to **Corey Seager, Marcus Semian and Jacob deGrom**. Glad to see ownership making the investment for that much money those wouldn't be the three names I'd put on top of my list.

Over the last 23 seasons the White Sox have had three Opening Day first basemen: **Frank Thomas** (1999-2000), **Paul Konerko** (2001-13) and **José Abreu** (2014-22).

Darwinzon Hernandez struck out the side on eight pitches in a game for the Worcester WooSox last summer? Starting against the Lehigh Valley Iron Pigs at Polar Park, Hernandez fanned the side in the second inning with the help of two automatic strikes called because the batters were not ready with nine seconds left on the pitch clock. Get ready for some of this in the big leagues next season.

Over the past 13 years, when the team with the highest payroll has won the World Series twice (2018 Red Sox and '20 Dodgers) and lost it once ('17 Dodgers). It missed the postseason twice and was knocked out in the LDS four times and in the LCS four times.

The average World Series matchup over the past 13 years has been the No. 8 payroll against the No. 13 payroll:

World Series Teams Average Payroll Rank, 2010–22

Winner: 8.2

Loser: 12.9

However, the No. 1 payroll team has reached the World Series three times in the past six years, while the likelihood of a team from outside the top 10 in payroll reaching the World Series is a fraction of what it was seven years ago:

Top 10 Payroll Teams in World Series

2010–16: 3 of 14 playoff teams (21%)

2017–22: 10 of 12 playoff teams (83%)

World Series Teams Average Payroll Rank, 2017–22

Winner: 7.3

Loser: 8.3

Rafael Devers is \$331 million richer, the sixth-largest contract in MLB history. The 3B has the sixth-most career homers (139), fifth-most extra-base hits (333), and 11th-highest OPS (.854) of any third baseman with at least 2,000 plate appearances through his age-25 season.

He leads the AL in extra base hits over the last four seasons. He also has more extra-base hits before the age of 26 than any player in Red Sox history and is eighth in hits. Four of the seven players ahead of him are Hall of Famers (**Bobby Doerr, Jim Rice, Tris Speaker, and Carl Yastrzemski**). The others are **Mookie Betts, Rafael Bogaerts and Tony Conigliaro**.

Devers has the fifth best slugging pct. for 3B through age 25 season.

Player	SLG	From	To	Age
Dick Allen	.558	1963	1967	21-25
Eddie Mathews	.556	1952	1957	20-25
David Wright	.533	2004	2008	21-25
Bob Horner	.521	1978	1983	20-25
Rafael Devers	.512	2017	2022	20-25

Player	SLG	From	To	Age
Scott Rolen	.511	1996	2000	21-25
Eric Chávez	.502	1998	2003	20-25
Jim Ray Hart	.499	1963	1967	21-25
Harlond Clift	.496	1934	1938	21-25
Troy Glaus	.495	1998	2002	21-25

In related news...

Manny Machado has an opt-out after the 2023 season for a reason: so he could re-enter the market and get another \$300 million contract after free agents have gotten higher and higher salaries since his 2019 agreement.

Machado using his opt-out seems more and more likely after the Boston Red Sox locked up Rafael Devers on a 11-year, \$331 million contract.

Why would he settle for \$150 million over the last five years of this current contract when he could get more than double that if he opts out?

Machado knows he's better than Devers, who just got \$31 million more than Machado got in total money in his Padres deal. Sure, Devers is 26 and Machado is already 30 but we all saw the NL MVP caliber season he just had this past season. Additionally, **Xander Bogaerts** just got paid through age 40 so Machado will as well.

Cruising through baseballreference.com, wondering about 40 starts in a season as some teams contemplate 6-man rotations.

Wilbur Wood had five seasons with 40+ starts.

Mickey Lolich four.

Phil Niekro and Gaylord Perry had three.

Catfish Hunter, Steve Carlton and Don Sutton two.

Bob Gibson, Ron Guidry, Whitey Ford, Warren Spahn none.

The last pitcher to start 40 games in a season—**Charlie Hough** started for the Rangers in 1987 (his only season with 40 starts).

There have been seven position players 6'6" or taller in mlb history. Three of them played less than 100 games. Only two played over 1,000 games (**Frank Howard and Adam Dunn**). Be interesting how **Aaron Judge** at 6'7" and 282 pounds navigates the next decade.

Former major leaguer **Nate Colbert** has passed away, the Padres announced. He was 76 years old. (I remember him well from the yellow and brown Padres uniforms).

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Padres Hall of Famer Nate Colbert," team chairman Peter Seidler said as part of the club's statement.

Seidler's statement goes on to note that Colbert still holds the Friars' franchise record for home runs, with 163 longballs in a San Diego uniform. That's perhaps his most famous achievement, though the St. Louis native was a three-time All-Star who spent a decade in the big leagues. Originally signed by his hometown Cardinals in 1964, Colbert made it to the majors with the Astros just two years later. He appeared in 39 games with Houston between 1966-68 and got his first extended action after landing with the Padres during their first year of existence.

Selected by San Diego during the expansion draft that predated their 1969 debut, the right-handed hitting Colbert quickly cemented himself as one of the game's better sluggers. He hit 24 home runs during his first full season, then connected on 38 longballs during his second campaign. That figure tied for eighth in the majors in 1970 and set the stage for three consecutive All-Star showings from 1971-73.

That three-year stretch saw Colbert hit 27, 38 and 22 longballs, respectively. Only **Johnny Bench** had more homers in 1972. Over his first five seasons with the Friars, the 6'2" first baseman hit .260/.333/.483 in just over 3000 plate appearances. Colbert finished ninth in cumulative homers and 19th among qualified hitters in slugging. His overall offensive production was 28 percentage points above that of the league average hitter during that time, as measured by wRC+.

Colbert's numbers fell off after his 28th birthday. He had his first below-average season in 1974 and the Padres traded him to the Tigers as part of a three-team deal with St. Louis the ensuing offseason. Colbert subsequently made brief stops with the Expos and A's but struggled. He retired after the 1976 season, his age-30 campaign.

While he didn't have as long a playing career as it once seemed he would, Colbert had a strong half-decade peak as one of the sport's better power hitters. He collected a trio of All-Star appearances and placed eighth in NL MVP balloting in 1972. Over parts of 10 seasons, he hit .243/.322/.451 with 173 homers, 520 runs batted in and 481 runs scored. The Padres selected him for their organizational Hall of Fame as part of their inaugural class in 1999.

Colbert is the team all-time HR leader but he never hit 40 in a season. The five players to hit 40 or more home runs in a season for the Padres--**Greg Vaughn** (50 in 1998), **Fernando Tatis Jr.** (42 in 2021), **Phil Nevin** (41 in 2001), **Ken Caminiti** (40 in 1996) and **Adrián González** (40 in 2009).

<https://baseballbiography.com/>

Another web site worth a look. History, biographies, teams and historical moments.

From the “do you remember him?” file, **Huston Street**. 42-34, 2.95 ERA, 324 saves, two-time All-Star, won Rookie of the Year in 2005. Street pitched for the Padres, A’s, Rockies and Angels. Over 13 seasons 2005-2017 he pitched in 668 games, every one in relief.

Son of the great University of Texas quarterback James Street—his dad also played baseball and threw the only no-hitter in Longhorn history.

Also playing at Texas, in 2002 Huston was named the College World Series’ Most Outstanding Player. In 2010, he was named to the College World Series Legends team.

His 324 saves rank 20th all-time (ahead of some big names like **Aroldis Chapman** (315), **Goose Gossage** (310), **Bruce Sutter** (300) and **Dan Quisenberry** (244).

Nice parallel -- **Adrián Beltré** and **Scott Rolen** were the starting third basemen in the 2011 All-Star Game. Beltré (93.5) and Rolen (70.1) have the highest WAR of any third basemen not yet in Cooperstown (min. 75% games played at third base).

Four Tampa Bay Rays have won the American League Rookie of the Year Award--**Evan Longoria** (2008), **Jeremy Hellickson** (2011), **Wil Myers** (2013) and **Randy Arozarena** (2021).

Iván Rodríguez holds the Major League record with 2,427 games caught.

Japanese legend **Katsuya Nomura** -- who hit 657 home runs in the NPB -- caught an astronomical 3,017 games.

Francisco "Paquín" Estrada played one game for the Mets in 1971—he subbed for **Jerry Grote**, caught Nolan Ryan and went 1 for 2 in his only MLB appearance. He never got above AAA again. But for the Diablos Rojos in the Mexican League. When he finally set down his catcher's gear at the end of the 1994 season, Estrada had caught a remarkable 2,415 games and bashed out 84 HRs, 923 RBIs, and 2,089 hits in the Mexican League. He had also played another 30 seasons in the winter league, adding 1,538 more games, 1,269 hits, 74 home runs, and 514 RBIs. **3,953** games behind the plate.

Despite his nearly 4,000 games behind the plate, he is perhaps best known as a manager, leading his teams to 12 titles and a record 800-plus victories in the Mexican Pacific League. He was also Team Mexico's manager for the World Baseball Classic in 2006

Yankee fans complain the lineup is too righthanded. But consider the Blue Jays (before they traded for **Daulton Varsho** of the D'backs). Insights from Joe Sheehan

No team in MLB took as many right-on-right PAs as the Jays did last year, and it wasn't close.

Unbalanced (RHB vs. RHP PA, 2022)

	PA
Blue Jays	4085
Marlins	3489
White Sox	3363
Yankees	3152
Astros	3083

The Jays' figure was, in fact, the second-highest in the 162-game era.

Historically Unbalanced (RHB vs. RHP PA, 1901-2022)

	Year	PA
Reds	1945	4519
Reds	1944	4084
Padres	1970	4175
Reds	1942	4112
Blue Jays	2022	4085

That's three World War II teams and a second-year expansion team, so you can see that teams don't really go out of their way to be this right-handed if they can avoid it. In this century, just two teams outside of last year's Jays had taken even 3600 right-on-right PAs in a season.

Now, it didn't hurt them overall. The Jays had the third-best wRC+ in baseball against right-handed pitching, and they were tied with the Dodgers as the best right-on-right team in the game. The Astros, fifth on that first list, had a pretty good offense as well. (The Yankees had Aaron Judge.) As was pointed out here heading into the playoffs, though, that kind of imbalance can hurt you in leveraged spots. It can make you easy to manage against. In the Division Series against the Mariners, the Jays did knock **Paul Sewald** around, but Seattle's two-game sweep came about in part because the rest of the team's right-handed relievers dominated the Jays. The Jays, with Varsho replacing **Yuli Gurriel**, will be harder to manage against this season, will be less vulnerable to power right-handed relief.

There are 13 retired position players (since 1900) with a WAR higher than 68 who are not in the HOF:

Albert Pujols and Adrián Beltré—not eligible yet.

Barry Bonds, Rafael Palmeiro, ARod and Pete Rose—not in for non-baseball issues.

Bobby Grich, Kenny Lofton, Graig Nettles, Lou Whitaker, Carlos Beltrán, Manny Ramirez and Scott Rolen—haven't gotten enough votes.

HALL OF FAME, ONE TEAM

Last week I posed an All-Star team made up of players who only played for one team. A subscriber came back with a list of Hall of Famers. There are 234 former Major League Baseball players in The Baseball Hall of Fame. But only 54 of them played for only one team in their career.

Derek Jeter, NY Yankees (1995-2014)

Chipper Jones, Atlanta Braves (1993-2012)

Craig Biggio, Houston Astros (1988-2007)

Jeff Bagwell, Houston Astros (1987-2005)

Barry Larkin, Cincinnati Reds (1986-2004)

Edgar Martinez, Seattle Mariners (1987-2004)

Cal Ripken Jr., Baltimore Orioles (1981-2001)

Alan Trammell, Detroit Tigers (1977-1996)

George Brett, Kansas City Royals (1973-1993)

Robin Yount, Milwaukee Brewers (1974-1993)

Mike Schmidt, Philadelphia Phillies (1972-1989)

Brooks Robinson, Baltimore Orioles (1955-1977)
Bill Mazeroski, Pittsburgh Pirates (1956-1972)
Ernie Banks, Chicago Cubs (1952-1971)
Pee Wee Reese, Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers (1940-42, 1946-1958)
Phil Rizzuto, New York Yankees (1941-42, 1946-1956)
Jackie Robinson, Brooklyn Dodgers (1947-1956)
Bobby Doerr, Boston Red Sox (1937-1943, 1945-1950)
Luke Appling, Chicago White Sox (1930-43, 1945-1950)
Charlie Gehringer, Detroit Tigers (1924-1942)
Lou Gehrig, New York Yankees (1923-1939)
Pie Traynor, Pittsburgh Pirates (1920-1935, 1937)
Bill Terry, New York Giants (1923-1936)
Travis Jackson, New York Giants (1922-1936)

Johnny Bench, Cincinnati Reds (1967-1983)
Roy Campanella, Brooklyn Dodgers (1948-1957)
Bill Dickey, New York Yankees (1928-1943, 1946)

Tony Gwynn, San Diego Padres (1982-2001)
Kirby Puckett, Minnesota Twins (1984-1995)
Jim Rice, Boston Red Sox (1974-1989)
Carl Yastrzemski, Boston Red Sox (1961-1983)
Willie Stargell, Pittsburgh Pirate (1962-1982)
Al Kaline, Detroit Tigers (1953-1974)
Roberto Clemente, Pittsburgh Pirates (1955-1972)
Mickey Mantle, New York Yankees (1951-1968)
Stan Musial, St. Louis Cardinals (1941-44, 1946-1960)
Ted Williams, Boston Red Sox (1939-42, 1946-1960)
Joe DiMaggio, New York Yankees (1936-42, 1946-1951)
Mel Ott, New York Giants (1926-1947)
Earle Combs, New York Yankees (1924-1935)
Ross Youngs, New York Giants (1917-1926)

Mariano Rivera, New York Yankees (1995-2013)
Jim Palmer, Baltimore Orioles (1965-1984)
Bob Gibson, St. Louis Cardinals (1959-1975)
Don Drysdale, Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers (1956-1969)
Whitey Ford, New York Yankees (1950, 1953-1967)
Sandy Koufax, Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers (1955-1966)
Bob Lemon, Cleveland Indians (1946-1958)
Bob Feller, Cleveland Indians (1936-41, 1945-1956)
Ted Lyons, Chicago White Sox (1923-42, 1946)
Carl Hubbell, New York Giants (1928-1943)
Red Faber, Chicago White Sox (1914-1933)

Walter Johnson, Washington Senators (1907-1927)
Addie Joss, Cleveland Indians (1902-1910)

A PRETTY EXCLUSIVE CLUB

9 players have hit 4 HRs in a 9 inning game:

Bobby Lowe	1894
Ed Delahanty	1896
Lou Gehrig	1932
Gil Hodges	1950
Joe Adcock	1954
Rocky Colavito	1959
Willie Mays	1961
Bob Horner	1986
Mark Whiten	1993

(**Mike Schmidt** and **Chuck Klein** did it in 10 inning games).

SLINGING SAMMY

I bet you didn't know football great Sammy Baugh also played baseball--he was a terrific third baseman — his nickname Slingin' Sammy Baugh actually comes from his baseball playing. Rogers Hornsby said Baugh had the best infield arm he'd ever seen. TCU's legendary football coach Dutch Meyer first saw Baugh on a baseball diamond. Baugh did play briefly in the minor leagues, but he hit only .200. "I couldn't hit the curveball," was Baugh's self-scouting report.*

Joe Holley's wonderful book Slingin' Sam tells a great story about Baugh's baseball team going to Denver in 1937 to play in the biggest semipro baseball tournament in the country. What made that tournament so special was: It was open to everyone. Baugh got to face **Satchel Paige there ("I hit one off him!" he said proudly) and he got to see **Cool Papa Bell** run, an experience*

that stayed with him for the rest of his life. "As soon as I saw that team," Baugh would say, "I knew we weren't going to win that tournament."

In his 16-year career, he would lead the NFL in completion percentage eight times — including every year from 1945 through '49. This is part of what I mean when I call him a modern player. He was deadly accurate as a passer at a time when nobody else was. In 1945, he completed an unbelievable 70.3% of his passes — unbelievable because nobody else in the NFL completed even half their passes. That percentage record would last for 37 years.

He finished his career with almost 22,000 passing yards. He'd have that record until the late 1960s. He finished his career with 187 touchdown passes. That record would hold until the early 1970s.

In 1943, he did the unthinkable. That year, he set the NFL record for pass completions in a season (133 — and he, of course, led the league in completion percentage), and as a defensive back he set an NFL record for interceptions in a season (11!), and he also led the NFL in punting at 45.9 yards per punt (it was the fourth straight year he'd led the league in punting average).

Until the mid-2000s, Baugh still had the all-time punting average record of 45.1 yards per punt.

HE WAS BETTER THAN I THOUGHT

BOBBY ABREU, on base machine.

Stats such as on-base percentage and walks don't make for the sexiest Hall of Fame arguments, but Abreu's calling card as a player was his incredible ability to reach base. It's a skill that wasn't properly valued by many during Abreu's prime in the late '90s and early 2000s, when crazy home run totals ruled the day, but anyone can now see just how elite Abreu was at getting on base.

Over the course of his career (1996-2014), only **Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez and Chipper Jones** reached base more times than Abreu (3,979). He ranks 49th all-time in that category, just ahead of **Tim Lincecum and Tony Gwynn**. Of the 44 players ahead of him on the list who have been eligible for induction, 38 are in the Hall of Fame.

Abreu led the majors with 1,396 walks from 1998-2011 and ranks 20th on the all-time list. He recorded at least 100 walks or a .400-plus on-base percentage eight times over a nine-season

span from 1998-06. The only players with more 100-walk seasons in the Divisional Era are **Barry Bonds, Frank Thomas and Jim Thome**. Twelve players during that same period have finished more seasons with at least a .400 on-base percentage. Half of them are in the Hall while the other six are Bonds, **Manny Ramirez, Albert Pujols, Joey Votto, Gary Sheffield and Todd Helton**, who has his own convincing Hall of Fame case.

fans likely remember him winning the 2005 Home Run Derby, he didn't put up ridiculous power numbers; his single-season career high in homers was 31. However, Abreu did plenty of damage with his bat and was a terror on the basepaths. He completed nine seasons with at least 60 extra-base hits and at least 20 stolen bases. No one else has done that more often in AL/NL history. The only player with eight such seasons is Bonds.

Let's have some more fun with random endpoints. Abreu tallied 288 home runs and 400 steals during his 18-year career; only four other players in AL/NL history have reached those benchmarks: **Craig Biggio, Rickey Henderson**, Barry Bonds and his father, Bobby.

Also, Abreu registered 921 extra-base hits in the Majors, making him one of seven players in the Modern Era with at least 900 XBHs and 400 steals, joining Biggio, Barry Bonds, **Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner, Tris Speaker and Paul Molitor**. Only Bonds, Cobb and Speaker recorded a higher career on-base percentage than Abreu's .395.

Abreu hit more than twice as many dingers as Gwynn, a first-ballot Hall of Famer, and topped him in OBP by seven percentage points. The comparison between those two is probably much closer than you think. While Ichiro had about 600 more hits in the Major Leagues, Abreu has him beat by significant margins in on-base percentage (.395-.355), slugging percentage (.475 to .402), wOBA (.378 to .328), wRC+ (129 to 104). Ichiro's single-season career high in wRC+ 131, a number that Abreu bested eight times during his career.

There are 27 right fielders in Cooperstown, and Abreu ranks inside the top 10 in OBP, walks, stolen bases, extra-base hits and doubles. His 60.2 WAR sits 15th among enshrined right fielders and surpasses the likes of **Vladimir Guerrero Sr.** (59.5) and **Enos Slaughter** (57.8). He also edges out **Ichiro** in WAR (60.2 to 60.0).

Abreu completed seven seasons with at least 5.0 WAR -- more than Jeter, Ichiro, Guerrero, Biggio and Gwynn, to name a few -- which really speaks to his plate prowess since he was not a plus fielder for the bulk of his career.

Abreu was able to stay in the lineup nearly every day and produce boffo numbers. He appeared in at least 150 games in each season from 1998-2010. The only players who played in that many games in 13 or more seasons during the Divisional Era are Ichiro, Jeter, **Rafael Palmeiro, Cal Ripken Jr., Pete Rose and Eddie Murray**.

Abreu suited up for more games (2,031) than any other player during that 13-season span while posting a .297 average, a .402 on-base percentage and a 132 OPS+.

THE PITCHER WHO GOT PLAYERS EJECTED THROUGH VENTRILOQUISM

The legend of **Jack "Waddy" Wadsworth**

Matt Monagan, mlb.com

Over the last 150 years, there have been a number of baseball players who have used their unique, not-necessarily-baseball-related skillsets to assist them on the diamond.

Walter Carlisle, the former circus acrobat, turned an unassisted triple play from center field.

Rube Foster used his pipe-smoking abilities to deliver baserunning signs to his players.

Pat Venditte utilized his ambidexterity to become the first regularly appearing switch-pitcher in pro baseball history.

But one of the strangest, and, let's face it, coolest off-the-field talents was that of pitcher **Jack "Waddy" Wadsworth**.

You've probably never heard of Jack. He wasn't that great at baseball.

The right-hander pitched four seasons in the Majors (one for the Cleveland Spiders, one for the Orioles and another two for the Louisville Colonels), putting up a 6-38 record with a 6.85 ERA. He had over 100 more walks than strikeouts in his career. He even set a record for inefficiency during a game in 1894.

But even though Wadsworth couldn't get many batters out with his pitching, he could literally get them kicked out. Of games. Here's more from an in-depth profile on the Ohio native in the July 1952 edition of Baseball Digest.

"[Wadsworth's] real claim to fame rests upon the fact that he used ball games in which he pitched on various occasions for exercising his really eerie talents as a ventriloquist. Through the medium of that art, he caused more batsmen to be ejected from games than were ever ejected at other times and places."

Yes, like the great Edgar Bergen, Wadsworth would throw his voice from the pitcher's mound toward home plate to send hitters to the showers.

And according to Digest, Wadsworth picked certain opportune times to use his hidden talent. He'd wait for "tight spots" in the game or when "big hitters" were up to the plate. He once got **"Big" Dan Brouthers** tossed from a contest when he imitated a, for the late 19th-century at least, savage insult to umpire Tim Hurst.

"If you didn't squander your money on booze, your wife wouldn't have to take in washing."

Big Dan couldn't have been happy about that.

Another time, Wadsworth got future Hall of Famer **Roger Connor**, who was once the all-time home run leader before Babe Ruth took the title. Connor stepped into the box, looking to add on to his historic tater totals. But then, somehow, a scathing remark slipped from his mouth to umpire Hank O'Day without his lips even moving.

"Hank, you are a lot of things I'd hate to be."

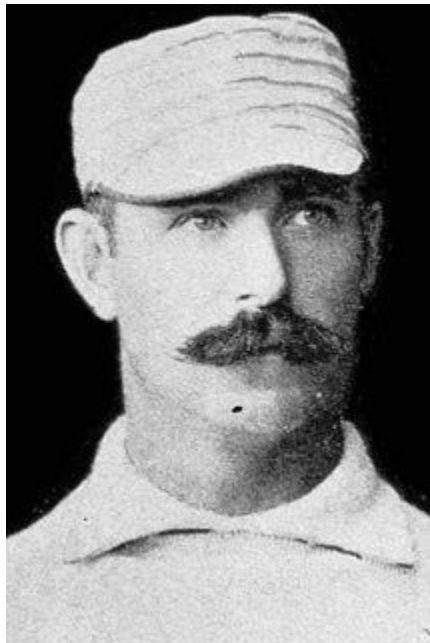
Brutal.

O'Day, who's third all-time in umpire ejections, wasted no time in sending Connor packing.

Even Wadsworth's teammates didn't know he was throwing his voice. That is, until he appeared on a local church program as a ventriloquist act. And eventually, after one too many times, umpires became, as Digest put it, "hep" to Wadsworth's tricks. He didn't try it any longer.

But maybe it's something, more than 100 years later, teams can work with pitchers on this spring? Maybe every club should hire a team ventriloquist. Fastball's not what it used to be? Try throwing your voice to make **Mike Trout** call Dan Iassogna a nincompoop.

Aren't those the types of intangibles baseball scouts always talk about?



A FAILED SYSTEM: A CORRUPT PROCESS EXPLOITS DOMINICAN BASEBALL PROSPECTS.

Maria Torres and Ken Rosenthal, The Athletic

For Nationals star **Juan Soto**, the process of becoming a professional baseball player was clean, simple. Unlike his peers in the Dominican Republic who started boarding at independent baseball academies at 13 or 14, Soto waited until he was 15 to start working closely with one of the trainers who develops prospects scouted by major-league teams.

“I was one of the last ones from my class who hit the market” for the 2015-16 international signing period, Soto said.

Soto’s abbreviated journey to netting the \$1.5-million signing bonus he’d eventually receive would be difficult to replicate these days. The landscape in the international market has changed dramatically since the 2017 implementation of a cap on how much teams could spend on international amateurs, who become eligible to go pro after turning 16. Clubs are reaching verbal agreements with players in their early teens with alarming frequency. And longtime player-agent Ulises Cabrera and others say that corruption in the system, including a scheme in which some trainers pay MLB team scouts under the table, is more prevalent and widespread than in the past.

“MLB has allowed the industry to spiral out of control,” said Cabrera, who co-founded the Dominican Prospect League in 2009 with a mission to improve the evaluation process of amateurs in his native land.

A number of officials for major-league clubs agree with Cabrera that the situation is untenable, with one high-ranking team executive referring to the amateur player situation in the Dominican Republic as a “cesspool.” A number of the trainers — who serve as a combination of agents, mentors and coaches for young Latin American amateurs — also are fed up with the current situation. Eddy Fontana, a long-time trainer based in the Dominican Republic’s northern region of Cibao, calls the signing process “a failed system.”

The question is how to fix it.

Major League Baseball has long sought to implement an international draft in an effort to control the often-times frenzied acquisition of — and spending on — international amateurs. The league, according to sources, proposed an international draft in recent collective-bargaining discussions with the Players Association, after failing to reach agreement on one in the 2017 CBA. The union has made proposals separate from a draft to address the problem of early agreements, which are prohibited by MLB but remain common practice due to the league’s lack of enforcement.

Questions persist about whether a draft would be a cure-all for the problems in the international market, and how the league would implement such a process in Latin American countries that don't have the same travel, high school and college baseball infrastructure that exists in the United States. The league already has certain programs in place — combines, showcases and the like — and would scale up those programs under a draft system, sources said.

Cabrera acknowledges a draft would put an end to verbal agreements with players in their early teens. Yet both he and the union believe the league can accomplish the same thing simply by establishing and enforcing a rule prohibiting teams from becoming involved with players below the age of 15. He also points to another concern: Dominican stars such as Soto, **Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Fernando Tatis Jr.**, three of the current faces of the game, receiving lower signing bonuses as amateurs than their draft-eligible counterparts from the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. The league says more money would flow into the system with an international draft, drawing the bonuses of Latin American players closer to those of players in the domestic draft.

Dominicans comprised about 10 percent of the 780 players on opening-day active rosters in 2021, the most of any country outside of the United States, which had about 72 percent. Prospects from the Dominican Republic, however, would not be the only ones affected. All told, players from Latin American countries accounted for more than one-fifth of the major-league playing population. Latino players occupy an even higher percentage of roster spots in the domestic minor leagues — 35 percent, according to MLB.

“Latin American players have suffered and continue to suffer through great inequities,” said Cabrera, who works for the Octagon agency. “Not only do they typically sign for less despite similar skill compared to American players but they also are subjected to an evaluation and signing system that doesn't protect them in any way. It's time for all of us in positions to effect change to do what is right, independent of the interests we might hold.”

The proper way to address those inequities is up for debate. But those who know the system best were not fooled by the annual burst of excitement that occurred when the 2021-22 international signing period opened with a flurry of official deals on Saturday. Not when so much remains amiss.

Corruption in the international market accelerated after the introduction of a hard cap in the most recent collective bargaining agreement, according to those familiar with the market's workings.

Under the 2012-16 CBA, teams routinely exceeded their bonus pools with little regard to penalties that included taxes and limits on future spending. The league responded by seeking firmer restrictions in the next agreement and the union proposed to cap the pools rather than accept an international draft. The pools increased at the rate of industry revenue, giving clubs a rough idea of how much they could spend in each signing period in the five-year term.

Eager to beat their rivals in the market, teams started reaching deals with players at even younger ages, telling them in essence, “If you don’t agree with us now, the money might be gone by the time you are eligible to sign.” It became the norm for top prospects to commit to teams by the time they were 14, two years prior to becoming eligible to sign. Once the terms were set, the players would disappear from the market, working out only at their trainers’ facility. In some cases, teams are said to have pledged contracts to players even as young as 12.

At this stage, teams often don’t even try to hide their circumvention of the system. At least one director of international scouting who spoke to reporters last weekend said he and his staff had been working for three years to sign many of the players they inked to deals at the start of the current signing period.

Trainers had to adjust their development timelines to the level of demand. It is no longer unusual for trainers — who usually take as much as 50 percent of players’ signing bonuses to help cover years of development and housing — to have 10- and 11-year-olds practicing and staying at their academies. One NL executive with extensive experience in Latin American countries cites competition as the reason clubs are willing to commit to increasingly younger players. Given the prominence of Latin American players in baseball, the executive said, “teams have to win in this environment.”

The trend appalls Soto, one of the game’s biggest stars.

“They want you to be able to run 60 yards and throw 100 and hit the ball everywhere from birth,” Soto said. “That’s not how it works. That’s impossible. As much as you try to make it normal, that just won’t happen.”

An international draft assigning players to the teams that select them would eliminate pre-arranged deals. But the union believes such deals can be eradicated without a draft if the league implements stricter enforcement and creates additional flexibility within the pool system, sources said. The ability to carry over pool space from one year to the next, the union believes, would make the claim by a club to a youngster that money was running out more of a hollow threat.

Cabrera, meanwhile, says a draft will not stop what he calls “nefarious dealings” between trainers and major-league scouts. He did not provide specific examples of such dealings, but others in the industry, including multiple international scouting directors speaking on condition of anonymity, support his contention that unethical behavior is rampant.

“There is common knowledge throughout the industry that a significant number of team personnel are working for both their MLB team *and* receiving some form of compensation from trainers,” Cabrera said.

The system, as Cabrera and others with knowledge describe it, works like this: An area scout from a major-league club ventures outside his assigned region to find talented players. The

scout, after identifying a prospect he likes, influences the player's trainer to sell a percentage of the youngster's future bonus to another trainer from the scout's own region. The player transfers to the trainer and commits to signing with the scout's team, often for an inflated bonus. And the scout is compensated by the new trainer, sometimes in the form of cash, other times with housing arrangements, vehicles or other material goods.

"It's a mafia," said Chico Faña, a former Phillies minor league hitting coach and catching instructor with more than 20 years experience as an amateur trainer in his town of La Vega. Faña estimated that scouts from nine teams engage in the underhanded activity with a select group of trainers.

Cabrera says the kickback schemes proliferated during the coronavirus pandemic. He and other agents say they made the league aware of the unethical dealings, but that the league did not take action. MLB has tolerated the chaos, Cabrera and some club officials believe, in part to convince teams and trainers that a draft is the best way to solve many of the issues in the international market.

"They want it screwed up, so the teams will say it's screwed up and that they want to change," one club official said. "It's like an NHL fight. They just let it go."

The league acknowledged hearing allegations of corruption, but found them difficult to prove, sources said. As for the charge that the league willfully ignores corruption, an MLB spokesperson said, "That's absurd."

The latest proposal for an international draft, according to some with knowledge of the league's plans, stemmed from a collaborative effort between league officials, local officials and some trainers asking for system change. Yet even with a draft, Cabrera says, a trainer still could pay a scout to identify and recruit players from other trainers. And the scout still could receive a benefit from the bonus the player receives once he is drafted.

"The issue is everybody has to be on an even field," Faña said, referring to players who get shut out of the market. "Everybody has to have the same opportunity and no one is giving it to us. No one is letting us do it because they have a ring of people who are controlling the system."

A solution, Cabrera says, could be to hold scouts and their teams accountable for their actions, as the league has done at times in the past. In 2016, MLB penalized the Red Sox for orchestrating international package deals — that is, funneling money to highly regarded players through the signings of lesser ones. In November 2017, MLB banned former Braves general manager John Coppolella for life after his team was found guilty of a series of violations in the international market. The league voided the contracts of 13 Braves prospects, prohibited the team from signing two high-profile players it had been expected to sign and put strict limits on how much the club could spend internationally for three signing periods.

In a country like the Dominican Republic, Cabrera says, “it should not be a very difficult assignment to determine whose quality of life and standard of living is not consistent with their job title and earnings.”

The unscrupulous practices of clubs in the Dominican Republic extend beyond the questionable relationships between certain scouts and trainers. Under the current system, teams on occasion will renege on the verbal agreements they strike with players.

“Let’s say a team sees a kid. He’s 15. They love him,” an international scouting director said. “They say, ‘We want him. We’ll give you \$2 million.’

“Then they go and do that with several other players. They’ve gone over the max. They can only spend \$5 million. They’ve promised \$7 million. So (when the market opens) they go to some of those kids and say, ‘Hey, we overspent.’ You’re going to take a cut of \$500,000 or \$1 million.”

Fontana experienced that first-hand during the 2020-21 signing period. One of his players had been committed for over a year to sign with a specific team for \$1 million. The team informed the player in early June — less than a month before the original signing period was supposed to open — that its international budget had been slashed.

“I was fortunate enough that I was able to sign him the same night with another team, but for (less than half of the original amount),” Fontana said. “It’s not just me. I have a lot of colleagues that are seeing their verbal agreements being taken away. Because they (the teams) have that right. We can’t do that as trainers. If we say to a team ‘Oh sorry. I’m getting more money from X team. I’m gonna go back on my agreement,’ then we’re irresponsible. So these are the things that the system itself is allowing teams to do. That’s why I say it’s a failed system.”

When a team seeks reductions in bonuses, it will do so not with the top player in its class, but the ones below him, the team official says. Those players often will have nowhere to turn, because by the time the market opens, other clubs need to honor their own pre-existing deals, and have reached their limits.

Teams also will back off deals after citing problems in a player’s physical, forcing the player back into a market where his value is dramatically reduced. “Now if you’re 16,” Soto said, “scouts don’t even want to see you.”

Which exacerbates another problem: The use of performance-enhancing drugs, and not just by players trying to reach verbal agreements with clubs well before they turn 16. Some older players who get passed over during their original international signing period also turn to PEDs.

In 2018, MLB established a partnership program with independent amateur trainers in the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Panama and Venezuela. According to the league’s web site, the program focused on developing players in a “safe and healthy environment while following rules and acting ethically.” It introduced random testing of registered amateurs for steroids and

other banned substances. The process, in theory, holds trainers accountable. But not every trainer is in the voluntary program, which boasts about 100 members.

Some in the industry suspect that certain trainers who operate outside the program administer PEDs to their players for a period of time before registering them with the league; players only need to be registered six weeks in advance of their intended signing period. Recently, a prospect from the signing class of 2024 who had reached a verbal agreement with a team tested positive for PEDs, according to a rival official. That player was training at an academy not affiliated with MLB.

Some players who get passed over in their original signing period, meanwhile, turn to PEDs in a last-ditch attempt to counter their depressed values after they turn 16. Multiple clubs report they had several players 17 or older test positive this year. The older players who don't turn to PEDs often must accept bonuses of \$10,000 or less, an amount that doesn't count against a team's signing pool.

Fontana is among the trainers in favor of a draft. He frets that older players are being deprived of opportunity, and says the current system leaves trainers financially strapped because they must start developing players at younger ages.

"At the end of the day," Fontana said, "this cannot continue."

Yet Fontana also is aware of baseball's unique place in Dominican culture, in part because so many youngsters view the sport as a path to a better life. As of 2020, nearly one-fourth of the Dominican population, representing about 2.5 million people, lived in poverty.

"The other side of it (is) people say it's an abuse to bring in a kid at 12 years old — that's not true," Fontana said. "Let's be realistic. Most kids that are in our academies are kids that are coming from poverty, kids that don't have the opportunity (to get ahead). And when they come to an academy, in the majority of cases, we're providing them an opportunity that they probably didn't have back home to eat three meals, to dress well, to go to school."

The league believes an international draft would provide certain advantages.

It would reduce the pressure on scouts to recruit 12- and 13-year olds. Scouts might monitor youngsters at that age in the United States to build a database of information, but because verbal commitments with those players make no practical sense, they focus almost all of their attention on draft-eligible types.

It also might further reduce the use of PEDs among Latin American youngsters; the league plans to follow a drug-testing procedure similar to the one it employs domestically, where the top 300 prospects identified by MLB are required to undergo a random, unannounced test prior to the draft.

Teams that scout extensively in Latin America might privately oppose a draft, knowing they would lose their competitive edge over teams that invest less. But the league points to broader benefits, believing the increased structure from a draft would help diminish corruption by creating more transparency and a more level playing field and forcing clubs to be more open and collaborative. The league could increase scouting and player development staffing in the countries subject to the draft, and believes its relationships with baseball federations in those countries would create plentiful opportunities for player exposure.

Rather than give players up until six weeks before their intended signing date to register for their period, the league would require them to declare for a draft at least nine months in advance. The use of steroids could be counteracted by a uniform drug-testing policy that would apply to all players, not only those working with trainers in the current partnership program.

Scouts, following a more robust calendar of evaluation opportunities, could focus their efforts on evaluating draft-eligible prospects. Teams then could draw from a stronger base of knowledge when offering bonuses, which the league could theoretically increase as teams become more confident in players' projections. Under the league's plan, 94 percent of amateur players who signed during the last international signing period would have received more money through a draft, sources said.

Additionally, players would be protected from being low-balled. Each pick in the international draft would come with a hard slot, meaning that a player would receive the assigned value of his selection.

A draft, however, would eliminate the freedom of choice in the current market — though in practice, that choice can already be limited. The system would remain capped, making it impossible for a Latin American prospect to strike as lucrative a deal as Cuban infielder **Yoán Moncada** did with the Red Sox in 2015, the penultimate period before the hard cap went into effect. Moncada, later traded to the White Sox as part of a package for left-hander **Chris Sale**, received \$31.5 million. The Red Sox also paid a \$31.5 million tax on his bonus, bringing their total outlay to \$63 million.

For Cabrera and other advocates of amateur Latin American talent, therein lies the rub. The international pools for the 2021-22 period range from \$4.64 million to \$6.26 million. The pools for signing players in the first 10 rounds of the 2021 domestic draft ranged from \$2.9 million to \$14.3 million, and the top pick had a slot value of \$8.4 million, more than \$2 million above what any one team could spend internationally.

"When (the Royals' **Bobby Witt Jr.**) signs for (\$7.79 million) as a high-school shortstop (in 2019), then the No. 1 player in the Dominican Republic should be signing for something similar," Cabrera said. "And if they're not signing for something similar, you've got to have a pretty good reason why a kid in the Dominican Republic who has just as much skill as the American version is receiving \$2 million to \$3 million less than his counterpart, if you don't have an excuse like, 'We've got to stop the underhanded dealings out there.'"

League officials say the higher bonuses in a draft would help correct the disparity. International prospects, according to people involved in the process, currently receive lower amounts because teams don't see them in game settings as frequently as players who are eligible for the domestic draft. International prospects also lack the leverage that domestic players wield. Top high school picks often extract lucrative bonuses from major-league clubs by threatening to accept a college scholarship. Most Latin American players have no such recourse.

Yet, for all the league's optimism about the potential of an international draft, the adoption of one through collective bargaining might be no more likely than it was in 2016, when the union, reacting to widespread pushback from international major leaguers and independent amateur trainers, opposed the idea.

The union generally is more concerned with the interests of its members than amateur players, as evidenced by its acceptance of caps both domestically and internationally. But an unknown yet significant percentage of international players are believed to remain opposed to a draft.

Cabrera believes with better oversight, the league could accomplish many of the same things it wants to achieve with a draft, without the complications. As he puts it, "What MLB needs to do in the Dominican to help protect players and our industry is to simply hold people accountable and have them feel the pain of doing things the wrong way." No team has been publicly penalized for misconduct in the international market since the Braves in 2017.

In the end, Cabrera says, the question is whether an international draft is the right solution for Latin American prospects who too often are exploited by a system that does not treat them the same as their counterparts in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

"These kids," Cabrera said, "are the future of our sport."

A subscriber pointed out this Facebook post on Cardinals page last week:

Happy Baseball Solstice 🏆 We made it to the half way point between the last out of the World Series and the first pitches of Spring Training ☀️



THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

9 players have won 5 or more batting titles. I will spot you Hall of Famer Dan Brouthers who won 5 between 1879-1904 for Buffalo, Boston and Brooklyn. You need to name the other 8.

1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1919 **Ty Cobb** (12)

1984, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 **Tony Gwynn** (8)

1900, 1903, 1904, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1911 **Honus Wagner** (8)

1969, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1978 **Rod Carew** (7)

1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1928 **Rogers Hornsby** (7)

1943, 1946, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1957 **Stan Musial** (7)

1941, 1942, 1947, 1948, 1957, 1958 **Ted Williams** (6)

1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 **Wade Boggs** (5)

I am not in the Hall of Fame

My 8 gold gloves place me fourth all-time for 3B behind **Brooks Robinson** (16), **Mike Schmidt** (10) and **Nolan Arenado** (10).

I was NL Rookie of the Year in 1997.

From 1997 through 2004 I averaged .287, 28 HRs, 102 RBI.

Over those 8 seasons my WAR was 46.2, trailing only **Barry Bonds** and **ARod**.

I am one of 35 hitters with at least 2,000 hits, 300 homers and 500 doubles.

My best season was 2004 when I hit .314 with 34 HRs and 124 RBI for the Cardinals.

My 17-year career included 7 seasons for the Phillies and 6 seasons for the Cards.

Who am I? **SCOTT ROLEN**

The record for the number of 30–30 players in a season is four. I'll give you the four years and the teams, give us the players (one repeats from '87 to '96 and one repeats '96-'97, and its three different Colorado Rockies).

1987

Indians	1B/OF	Joe Carter
Reds	OF	Eric Davis
Mets	3B	Howard Johnson
Mets	OF	Daryl Strawberry

1996

Rockies	OF	Dante Bichette
Giants	OF	Barry Bonds
Rockies	OF	Ellis Burks
Reds	OF	Eric Davis

1997

Astros	1B	Jeff Bagwell
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Giants	OF	Barry Bonds
Dodgers	OF	Raul Mondesi
Rockies	OF	Larry Walker

2011

Brewers	OF	Ryan Braun
Red Sox	OF	Jacoby Ellsbury
Dodgers	OF	Matt Kemp
Rangers	2B	Ian Kinsler

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