

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

12.11.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Fred McGriff and the Veterans Committee, big dollar free agents, traded twice for **Rickey Henderson**, long time Yankees, miscellaneous stuff and trivia. (don't forget to check out sundaybaseballtidbits.com). Enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE.

Here are clues for 17 pitchers who won multiple major awards—some combo of Rookie of the Year, Cy Young, MVP. How many can you name? 10 or better is a good score. (if you did good on our Pitchers as MVP question from six weeks ago you have a leg up).

2006 AL ROY, 2011 AL CY, 2011 AL MVP, 2019 AL CY, 2022 AL CY, righthanded starter

1949 NL ROY, 1956 NL CY, 1956 NL MVP, righthanded starter

2014 NL ROY, 2018 NL CY, 2019 NL CY, righthanded starter

1984 NL ROY, 1985 NL CY, righthanded starter

1981 NL ROY, 1981 CY, lefthanded starter, complete game win '81 World Series vs. Yankees.

1979 NL ROY, 1984 NL CY, righthanded starter, AL era leader '82 with Indians, Cy Young with the Cubs.

1967 NL ROY; 1969, 1973, 1975 NL CY, righthanded starter, HOF

2011, 2013, 2014 NL CY; 2014 NL MVP, lefthanded starter

1992 AL CY, 1992 AL MVP, righthanded reliever, HOF

1986, 1987, 1991, 1997, 1998, 2001 AL CY; 2004 NL CY; 1986 AL MVP, righthanded starter

1984 AL CY, 1984 AL MVP, lefthanded reliever

1981 AL CY, 1981 AL MVP, righthanded reliever, pitched in 72-73-74 World Series

1971 AL CY, 1971 AL MVP, lefthanded starter

1968 NL CY, 1968 NL MVP, righthanded starter, HOF

1968, 1969 AL CY; 1968 AL MVP, righthanded starter, 31 game winner

1963, 1965, 1966 CY; 1963 NL MVP, lefthanded starter, HOF

2018 AL ROY, 2021 AL MVP, righthanded starter

Answers at the bottom

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

MLB's Draft began in 1965. The first draftee to be elected to the Hall of Fame--Johnny Bench (drafted in the second round by the Reds in 1965 and inducted in 1989).

Last pitcher to start 40 games in a season--Charlie Hough (for the Rangers in 1987).

How would you like to be an owner paying players million? **Anthony Rendon** \$39 million per year and **Mike Trout** \$37 million missed a combined 158 games last year, and 230 games in 2021.

When we last saw them together, **Max Scherzer** and **Justin Verlander**, it was 2014, it was Detroit, and they made \$35 million. Combined. Scherzer won 18 games and set himself up for a nice free-agent paycheck.

And here we are, nine years later, they signed the two richest average-annual-value contracts in baseball history — each of them will make a record \$43,333,333 the next two seasons

Trea Turner has led the NL in stolen bases twice. Have to go back more than 20 years for the last Phillie to pace the circuit--**Jimmy Rollins** (46 SB in 2001, tied with Colorado's **Juan Pierre**).

I knew **Bo Jackson** (Royals, White Sox, Angels, 1986-94) was a Heisman Trophy winner who played Major League Baseball but no clue on **Vic Janowicz** (Pirates, 1953-54). He was a halfback for Ohio State, played for the Washington Redskins as well as the Pirates.

Two pitchers topped both 3,000 career strikeouts and 300 complete games: **Gaylord Perry** had 3534 K's and 305 complete games, **Walter Johnson** finished his career with 3,509 strikeouts and 417 wins.

1997 and 2003 Florida Marlins both were World Series winners. Did you remember their managers were **Jim Leyland and Jack McKeon**?

Frank Robinson, Pete Rose, Bucky Dent, all World Series MVPs and later managers.

Whitey Ford, Sandy Koufax, Frank Robinson, Bob Gibson, Brooks Robinson, Roberto Clemente, Reggie Jackson, Rollie Fingers, Johnny Bench, Willie Stargell, Mike Schmidt, Alan Trammell, Jack Morris, Paul Molitor, Tom Glavine, Mariano Rivera, Derek Jeter, Randy Johnson, David Ortiz. All World Series MVPs, all in the Hall of Fame.

HALL OF FAME NOTES

Last Sunday the Veteran's Committee Spoke. He was the definition of 'guy on the line—is he worthy of the hall or a very good player?'. **Fred McGriff** in, not **Don Mattingly, Dale Murphy**. Where do you draw the line?

McGriff

493 HRs, 1550 RBI, .284 career batting average, 2490 hits, 1349 runs.

Compared to

384 HRs, 1628 RBI, .289 average, 2866 hits, 1299 runs

Harold Baines

McGriff played for six franchises over 19 seasons and hit at least 30 home runs in a season for five of them. He was one of the most consistent sluggers of his era, producing 10 seasons with 30 homers from age 24 to 38.

He also became the first player to be the single-season home runs leader in each league since the Dead Ball Era. He smashed 36 for Toronto to top the American League in 1989 and 35 for San Diego in 1992 to pace the National League.

McGriff, while playing for Toronto, San Diego, Atlanta, Tampa Bay, the Chicago Cubs and the Los Angeles Dodgers, also finished with 1,550 R.B.I. A left-handed hitter, he was a five-time All-Star and helped power Atlanta to a World Series title in 1995. He finished in top 10 in most valuable player voting five times.

He peaked at 39.8 percent of the vote in 2019, his final year of eligibility. Before that, he had never surpassed 23.9 percent.

After McGriff, Don Mattingly received eight votes, **Curt Schilling** got seven and Dale Murphy got six. **Albert Belle, Bonds, Clemens and Rafael Palmeiro** each received less than four votes but no total was specified for any of the four.

Initially, there were seven Hall of Fame players on the committee but **Chipper Jones** was a last-minute scratch with the coronavirus and was replaced by the Diamondbacks executive Derrick Hall. **Greg Maddux, Jack Morris, Ryne Sandberg, Lee Smith, Frank Thomas and Alan Trammell** were on the committee, along with seven executives (Paul Beeston, Theo Epstein, Hall, Arte Moreno, Kim Ng, Dave St. Peter and Ken Williams), two media members (LaVelle E. Neal III and Susan Slusser) and a historian (Steve Hirdt).

As Jayson Stark wrote: For a decade and a half, the 15 seasons from 1988 through 2002, the Crime Dog was pretty much *exactly the same player*. He never changed. What did change, obviously, was the sport around him.

So over the first five years of his consistently great 15-year peak, McGriff was a constant presence on the league leaderboard, a home run champion waiting to happen. And then, in 1993, everything changed — except him.

Over the next 10 years, McGriff's production was virtually identical. The only difference was, instead of finding him all over those league-leader lists from 1993 on, you suddenly couldn't find him on those leaderboards with the Webb Telescope — *even though he hadn't changed at all*. Here's the breakdown:

1988-1992 — .283/.393/.531

1993-2002 — .290/.373/.506

TOP 5 IN HR — 5 of first 5 seasons, 2 of last 10 seasons

TOP 5 IN HR RATIO — 5 of first 5 seasons, 0 of last 10 seasons

TOP 5 IN OPS — 5 of first 5 seasons, 2 of last 10 seasons

TOP 5 IN SLUGGING — 4 of first 5 seasons, 1 of last 10 seasons

The writers had 10 years to figure that out and right that wrong. We never came close. It took this committee to see McGriff from a different perspective and honor his greatness. It's the reason these committees exist, and it's an important one.

So this group didn't merely make a statement about the PED era by punishing the players it viewed as that era's greatest offenders. The committee made just as powerful a statement by unanimously electing the man it honored. And it was a statement that made more people happy, in the always complicated sport of baseball, than you could possibly imagine.

The Blue Jays shipped a Hall of Famer (McGriff) and a five-time All-Star (**Tony Fernandez**) to the Padres for another future Cooperstown inductee (**Robert Alomar**) and another five-time All-Star (**Joe Carter**) in December 1990. Baseball was buzzing for weeks about the audacity of that deal, which helped Toronto win a pair of World Series.

1981. Yankees drafted Fred McGriff in the 9th round. In that same draft the Yankees took NFL Hall of Fame quarterback John Elway in the 2nd round.

There's the historic angle on how the committee handled Curt Schilling: When a guy gets 70 percent in the writers' election, that's always been an automatic ticket to election by these committees. Always.

The history of the writers' modern voting system goes back about half a century. And until now, *every* player who reached 70 percent on the writers' ballot — and then came before some version of the Veterans Committee — had gotten elected by that committee *on the first try*. It's not a long list of players who got that many votes *without* getting elected by the writers. But still

Orlando Cepeda — elected by the committee in 1999. Peaked at 73.5 percent in his final year on the writers' ballot (1994).

Nellie Fox — elected by the committee in 1997. Peaked at 74.7 percent (two votes short) in his final year on the writers' ballot (1985).

Jim Bunning — elected by the committee in 1996. Followed a very Schilling-like path before that. Got 70-plus percent in two writers' elections. Peaked at 74.2 percent in 1988, when he still had three elections to go, but never even got back to 64 percent after that. Strange.

So this year, it was Curt Schilling's turn. And for whatever reason, he was the one who brought that streak to a crashing halt. One thing we should keep in mind, though, is that the voting rules also changed this year, now that each committee member can vote for just three players instead of four.

Once McGriff collected his 16 votes, there were only 32 total spots left on 16 ballots. So the chances of any other candidate occupying at least 12 of those 32 spots were incredibly small. Ask your favorite mathematician to explain it sometime.

MOST MVPs, NOT IN HOF, RETIRED PLAYERS*

(* - no longer eligible on writers' ballot)

Barry Bonds — 7
Dale Murphy — 2
Roger Maris — 2
Juan Gonzalez — 2

NOT ON BALLOT YET

Albert Pujols — 3
Mike Trout — 3
Miguel Cabrera — 2
Bryce Harper — 2

STILL ON WRITERS' BALLOT

Alex Rodriguez — 3

MOST HRs NOT IN HOF

Barry Bonds	762	PED TIES
Albert Pujols	703	NOT ON BALLOT YET
Alex Rodriguez	696	PED TIES
Sammy Sosa	609	PED TIES
Mark McGwire	583	PED TIES
Rafael Palmeiro	569	PED TIES
Manny Ramirez	555	PED TIES
Gary Sheffield	509	PED TIES
Miguel Cabrera	507	ACTIVE

Dale Murphy is one of 28 different players who has won the Baseball Writers' MVP award more than once. Of those 28:

- Nineteen are in the Hall of Fame:
- Four are not yet eligible for the Hall of Fame but will surely be elected when their time comes (Albert Pujols, Miguel Cabrera, Mike Trout, Bryce Harper).

- Two are not in the Hall of Fame because of assumed PED usage (Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez).
- Three have been overwhelmingly passed over by Hall of Fame voters.

Those three are: Roger Maris, Juan Gonzalez and Dale Murphy.

In addition to his two MVP seasons, Murphy led the league in homers two other seasons, he won five Gold Gloves, he started in five straight All-Star Games,

POSNANSKI ON DALE MURPHY

How often do MVPs end up in the Hall of Fame?

Let's go decade by decade:

In the 1930s, 15 different players won the MVP award. All but one — pitcher **Bucky Walters**, who won the award for Cincinnati — are in the Hall of Fame. That's 93%. No decade will ever come close to this percentage.

In the 1940s, again, 15 different players won the MVP. But this time, only eight are in the Hall of Fame (53%). Some of this is obviously because of World War II — wartime MVPs like **Mort Cooper, Spud Chandler, Phil Cavarretta and Marty Marion** thrived against the lesser competition in ways they did not on either side of the war. Marion has actually received some Hall of Fame consideration despite his career 81 OPS+ because he was, at his best, a dazzling defensive shortstop.

In the 1950s, 14 different players won MVP. Again, eight are in the Hall of Fame (57%). The six non-Hall of Famers include reliever **Jim Konstanty**, starters **Bobby Shantz and Don Newcombe**, and every-day players **Hank Sauer, Al Rosen and Jackie Jensen**. There was a moderate push to get Newcombe into the Hall, but none of the others were ever seriously considered.

In the 1960s, 18 different players won MVP and 11 are in the Hall of Fame (61%). This was a golden age for Hall of Fame MVPs — **Willie Mays, Sandy Koufax, Frank and Brooks Robinson, Roberto Clemente, Bob Gibson, Harmon Killebrew, Yaz, Willie McCovey**, etc.

Roger Maris is obviously one of the seven not elected. **Maury Wills and Ken Boyer** are two others, and both have had pretty vocal fan bases behind their Hall of Fame candidacies, particularly Wills. The other three are **Dick Groat, Elston Howard and Denny McLain**.

The 1970s was kind of a Hall of Fame disaster for MVP candidates. Nineteen different players won the MVP — **Johnny Bench and Joe Morgan** were the only repeat winners in the decade — but only SEVEN are in the Hall of Fame. That's just 37%. And even that's a bit of an overstatement because one of the seven is **Joe Torre**, who was not elected as a player but as a manager.

So what the heck happened in the 1970s? It's a great question, one probably worth a full-fledged investigation. But I think it comes down to a couple of things. Of course, the 1970s — like every other decade — had a handful of good but not great players win MVP awards, guys like **Jeff Burroughs, Don Baylor**, I suppose you could throw **Boog Powell** on the list as well.

And as for the rest? Well each one is a story.

1971 MVP: Vida Blue. One of the most talented and remarkable young pitchers in baseball history, but alas he faded much too quickly, undoubtedly in part because of his battle with substance abuse.

1972 MVP: Dick Allen. As feared and controversial a hitter as has ever lived. He fell one vote short on the veterans ballot.

1973 MVP: Pete Rose. His own thing.

1974 MVP: Steve Garvey. Also his own thing. Many people are still fighting to get him into the Hall.

1975 MVP: Fred Lynn. He'd be in the Hall of Fame, surely, if he'd never left Boston. Actually still has a viable Hall of Fame argument even now, but has largely been forgotten as a candidate.

1976 MVP: Thurman Munson. A very popular Hall of Fame candidate, I would not be surprised to see him get elected at some point.

1977 MVP: George Foster. From 1975 through 1981, Foster hit .297/.359/.543 with 221 home runs, and he seemed well on his way to Hall of Fame consideration. Then he signed with the Mets and it kind of went downhill pretty quickly.

1978 MVP: Dave Parker. Was a surefire Hall of Famer until his own issues with substance abuse. Returned to the game with a flourish afterward, though, and there are many fans who would like to see him in the Hall of Fame.

1979 MVP: Keith Hernandez. He's moving pretty rapidly up my chart of "best players not in the Hall of Fame."

In the 1980s, 16 players won MVPs and seven are in the Hall of Fame (44%). Two of the non-Hall of Famers just finished second and third on the Contemporary Era Ballot — **Don Mattingly** and **Murph**. **Roger Clemens** won an MVP in the 1980s, and we know why he's not in the Hall of Fame.

The other six are: **Willie Hernandez, Willie McGee, George Bell, Jose Canseco, Kirk Gibson and Kevin Mitchell.**

Finally, the 1990s, 15 different players won MVP and nine are in the Hall of Fame (60%). I was actually surprised the percentage was that high, I thought steroids would knock out several candidates. Four of the six non-Hall of Famers have been accused or have admitted to using steroids — **Barry Bonds, Sammy Sosa, Juan Gone and Ken Caminiti.**

So, all in all, MVPs through the 1990s (most of the MVPs after 2000 are either on the ballot or not yet eligible), here's our count:*

**Don't just add up the numbers above because that includes some double counting as some players won MVPs in multiple decades:*

Number of players who have won MVPs: 108.

Number of MVPs in the Hall of Fame: 60

Percentage: 56%

So, if you win an MVP, there's a better than 50-50 shot of you going to the Hall of Fame. And that percentage goes up significantly if:

(A): You don't use drugs, particularly the performance-enhancing kind.

(B) You don't do anything to shame the sport.

(C) You're such a good guy you win the Lou Gehrig and Roberto Clemente Awards for your spirit and character and good work in the community.

(D) You make it to, I don't know, at least seven All-Star Games.

Among players who have done all of that, hmm, what do you know, the only player to do all that and not make it to the Hall of Fame is... Dale Murphy. How did that happen? You bet, it might be time to put my guy Murph in.

RICKEY HENDERSON AND ERIC PLUNK

Rickey Henderson retired after the 2003 season, with a Major League-record 1,406 stolen bases and 2,295 runs scored. He was a legendary leadoff man and one of the most electrifying players in the history of the sport.

But Rickey also changed teams 12 times and was traded four times. did you know he was twice traded for reliever **Eric Plunk**. From Oakland to the Yankees in 1984 and then from the Yankees to the A's in 1989.

Tim Cullen and Ron Hansen were the first players dealt for each other twice in the same season, flip-flopping between the Chicago White Sox and Washington Senators in February and August of 1968.

Dec. 5, 1984, the A's gave up Henderson, pitcher **Bert Bradley** and cash and landed **Jay Howell** (a big league right-hander on the cusp of an All-Star season of his own) and four of the Yankees' top five prospects -- right-hander **Jose Rijo** (widely considered the centerpiece of the A's haul), outfielder **Stan Javier**, left-hander **Tim Birtsas** and Plunk.

Henderson wasn't a rental for long. Upon arrival, they gave him a five-year contract worth \$8.5 million, making him the third-highest paid player in baseball at the time. Henderson lived up to it by finishing third in AL Most Valuable Player Award voting in 1985. (Yanks teammate **Don**

Mattingly actually took home AL MVP honors that year. New York won 97 games, yet finished second to Toronto in the pre-Wild Card AL East, just missing the postseason.)

On the whole, Henderson's New York tenure was excellent. By the final season of the deal in 1989, however, the Yankees weren't willing to meet Henderson's asking price of \$2.8 million per year in a new deal. Henderson was 30 years old, and 65 games into the season, he was hitting just .247 with 25 steals (a light total for him). So there was concern that his star was fading.

Fast forward to 1989

With the A's just two games ahead of the Royals in the AL West as of June 21 and looking to get back to the Series stage, it was prime time to bring Rickey back to his roots. Henderson had the right to veto any trade the Yankees presented to him, so Oakland had a leg up on the other suitors.

It was Plunk, left-hander **Greg Cadaret** and outfielder **Luis Polonia** going to the Yanks for Henderson.

In the months that followed, a revitalized Rickey hit .294 and stole 52 bags in the remainder of the regular season, then ignited the A's with a 15-for-34 showing with eight extra-base hits, 11 steals and nine walks in the postseason, in which he was the MVP of the AL Championship Series against the Blue Jays. Oakland swept cross-bay rival San Francisco in the World Series.

Henderson ended up signing a four-year, \$12 million deal with the A's after the 1989 World Series (more than the \$2.8 million average annual value he sought from New York).

Plunk faced 829 big league batters. The hitter he faced more than any other was a Hall of Famer was **Cal Ripken Jr** but second was Henderson.

Henderson was limited to five hits (only one for extra bases) in 38 plate appearances. But he also drew 15 walks off Plunk, good for a .526 OBP. 14-season career spent primarily in the 'pen is quite a success. Plunk got to pitch in four postseasons, compiled 1,151 innings with an above-average ERA+ (112), made more than \$10 million (per Baseball Reference).

THEY CASHED IN—FREE AGENCY NOTES

Jacob deGrom's \$185 million, five-year contract with Texas includes a pair of conditional options, one that protects the Rangers against an arm injury and another that would make the deal worth \$222 million over six seasons if he remains a top pitcher at the end of 2027.

The deal agreed to Friday with the two-time Cy Young Award winner includes salaries of \$30 million next year, \$40 million each in 2024 and '25, \$38 million in 2026, and \$37 million in 2027.

DeGrom's \$37 million average annual salary is second among pitchers behind the \$43.3 million for former New York Mets teammate **Max Scherzer**, topping **Gerrit Cole's** \$36 million with the New York Yankees as part of his \$324 million, nine-year contract.

Texas has a conditional option for 2028 that would be triggered if, from 2023-26, deGrom has Tommy John surgery on his right elbow or has any right elbow or shoulder injury that causes him to be on the injured list for an extended period — 130 consecutive days during any season, or 186 days in a row during any service period.

The conditional option would be for \$30 million if deGrom finishes among the top five in Cy Young voting during the contract or pitches at least 625 innings. The option price would increase to \$37 million if he finishes among the top five three times or more or pitches at least 725 innings. If he falls short of those specifications, the conditional option price would be \$20 million.

DeGrom's conditional option would be triggered at \$37 million if the conditional team option doesn't get met, he pitches at least 160 innings in 2027 and finishes among the top five in Cy Young voting, and an independent doctor examines him and determines he is more likely than not to be healthy for the start of the 2028 season.

He gets a full no-trade provision and would earn a \$250,000 bonus for winning a Cy Young, \$200,000 for finishing second, \$150,000 for third, \$100,000 for fourth, and \$50,000 for fifth.

DeGrom would get a \$150,000 bonus for winning the World Series MVP award and \$100,000 for All-Star election or selection, winning a Gold Glove or a League Championship Series MVP Award.

He has the right to buy six of the best available premium seats for all home games and agrees to make a \$150,000 annual charitable contribution.

The New York Mets re-signed outfielder **Brandon Nimmo** to an eight-year, \$162 million deal on Thursday, and the team's 2023 payroll now exceeds \$300 million, per Tim Healey of *Newsday*.

Worth a note, Nimmo in seven years hit one more home run than **Aaron Judge** hit last season alone.

The Mets' 2023 payroll will be the highest in baseball history, Healey added. It projects to be around \$325 million, according to Joel Sherman of the *New York Post*.

However, Sherman notes that the Mets "are going to do more" in free agency, so that figure could rise in the coming weeks and months.

In addition to inking Nimmo, the Mets also signed reliever **David Robertson** to a one-year, \$10 million deal on Thursday, per ESPN's Jeff Passan.

Earlier this week, the club signed reigning Cy Young Award winner **Justin Verlander** to a two-year, \$86.7 million deal. Star closer **Edwin Díaz** also put pen to paper on a five-year, \$102 million deal, and **José Quintana** agreed to a two-year, \$26 million contract.

The highest earners on the Mets' payroll in 2023 are Scherzer and Verlander, who will both receive \$43.3 million next season, per Spotrac. Shortstop **Francisco Lindor** will earn \$34.1 million in 2023, and outfielder **Starling Marte** will earn \$20.8 million.

Yankees become the first major-league team to carry three \$300 million players — **Aaron Judge** at a cool \$360 million, pitcher **Gerrit Cole** on a nine-year, \$324 million contract and **Giancarlo Stanton** on a 13-year, \$325 million deal they acquired from the Marlins.

More judge... The deal covers Judge's age 31 through 39 seasons. Not many hitters 6-foot-7 or taller have even reached the majors, and of those that have, none has been productive past age 34. Only two players listed at 6-7 have even had 400 plate appearances in a season after age 30, **Frank Howard** four times and **Richie Sexson** twice. Even if we lower the bar slightly to 6-6, only three players have reached the 400 plate appearances threshold: **Dave Winfield** (10 times!), **Dave Kingman** (twice), and **Giancarlo Stanton** (once, in 2021).

Another way to look at it-- There have been 411 major league players at least 6'6". Only two of them have hit 10 home runs at age 37 or older: Dave Kingman and Dave Winfield. They were not as thickly muscled as Judge.

Weights are trickier since players' listed figures aren't always accurate, but **Miguel Cabrera** is the only player with a listed weight of 260 pounds or more to have a 5 WAR season after age 30, doing so twice, at 31 and 33. (His 260 pounds is not exactly equivalent to Judge's 282 pounds, too.) There have been only 53 players listed at 270 pounds or more. There has been only one home run ever hit by someone that large at age 37 or older: by Bartolo Colon, most amusingly in 2016.

If you're telling me Aaron Judge is a unicorn, a player who'll age well and stay healthy into his mid-30s despite his height and size, you might be right, but we haven't seen any unicorns yet.

Since the Yankees last won the World Series, the Giants (three times), Red Sox (twice), Astros (twice), Cardinals, Royals, Cubs, Nationals, Dodgers and Braves have all won the World Series.

He is a career .211 hitter in the postseason. The Yankees are 21–23 in postseason games with Judge. For \$360 million expectations are for these to change.

One reason free agent pitcher **Kyle Gibson** cited for signing with Baltimore-- The Orioles moved the left-field wall back almost 30 feet and increased its height by more than 5 feet in some areas.

A total of 86 home runs were pulled at Oriole Park last season, down from 157 the year before. MLB.com, using Statcast data, found 57 balls that would have been home runs in the park's previous design.

Wilson Contreras as replacement for **Yadier Molina**. over the last five years, his OBP has been a full 50 points higher than Molina's, which would have amounted to about 21 more times on base per 162 games over the retired Cardinals great.

Contreras compared to Molina in 2022:

Contreras: .243/.349/.466, 22 HR, 128 OPS+, 3.9 bWAR, 3.3 fWAR

Molina: .226/.295/.367, 5 HR, 53 OPS+, 0.2 bWAR*, 0.1 fWAR

Most of Contreras's value comes from his hitting, whereas Molina, even during his 10-year peak from 2009 to '18 when he was a solid offensive player, has always been a glove-first catcher. There will be a drop-off defensively for the Cardinals with Contreras behind the plate.

That said, the concerns about Contreras's fielding are overblown. He is an elite thrower and an adequate, if not great, blocker. Really, his biggest problem defensively has always been his framing, and even there, he's made pretty remarkable strides in recent years. In 2018, his first All-Star season, Contreras was worth -14.6 framing runs, per *Baseball Prospectus*, and -10, according to Baseball Savant. This year, he was worth -2.5 and zero framing runs, respectively.

Moreover, he's one of the catchers who stands to gain the most by some of the rule changes coming over the next handful of seasons. Framing could become obsolete fairly soon, as MLB is expected to implement the automatic balls and strikes system at some point during Contreras's five-year deal. Even if the league chooses to use the ABS system for only manager challenges instead of for every pitch, the arrival of robo umps in any capacity would benefit Contreras and St. Louis.

Another change to consider is the new rule limiting pitcher pickoff attempts. Beginning next season, pitchers will be allowed no more than two "disengagements" from the rubber per plate appearance, except if a base runner advances. (In that case, the pitcher would get two more

step-offs). The rule, however, does not apply to catchers. And no catcher likes to throw behind runners more than Contreras. As R.J. Anderson of CBS Sports pointed out on Twitter this week, Contreras led all catchers with 48 back-pick attempts last season, which is three more attempts than the next two catchers combined. His willingness to throw behind runners should help to keep their leads small even after two pickoff attempts from the pitcher.

Regardless of new or future rule changes, though, the Cardinals didn't want Contreras for his glove. They signed him for his bat.

They aren't Happy in Boston

(various comments from the Boston press)

Xander Bogaerts played in 1,264 games for the Sox, 15th in team history. His 1,192 games and 1,179 starts are franchise records for a shortstop, as are his nine Opening Day starts.

Bogaerts's 44 playoff games rank fourth among Sox players. Only **David Ortiz** (76), **Jason Varitek** (63) and **Dustin Pedroia** (51) had more. He earned two World Series rings.

Those players all retired as Red Sox, having agreed to contracts that recognized their importance to the franchise.

So the Red Sox, a team that has quadrupled in value since John Henry and friends bought it 21 years ago, are no longer competing with the Yankees, Dodgers, Cubs, Phillies, or even Padres. They are charging you the highest prices in baseball to go to a game at Fenway Park, but they won't go big on talent anymore. No more splashes. The Sandoval-Hanley-Rusney-Price-Sale mistakes damaged ownership and in 2019 a new philosophy was born: *sell "the illusion" of contention. Try to win 85 games and maybe you'll get lucky and hot in September/October. Tell the fans you are all about draft and development now — like the Rays. Tell them you want to win every year. Not just some years.*

And now the Red Sox have lost Bogaerts . . . after losing Betts and **Andrew Benintendi**. And they have so little to show for those prized assets that were signed and drafted and developed in the Boston system. The only player left from the starting lineup in Game 5 of the 2018 World Series is **Rafael Devers**. And the clock is ticking on Devers. His contract extension looms as the Bogaerts-level distraction for next season.

Ultimately, the Red Sox approached a franchise icon clumsily. The result? Bloom, who often speaks of the need to work in service of the present and future, weakened the roster, failed to make decisive moves to improve its prospect talent base, and left a distrustful fan base to confront the void of a departure of a beloved star.

As the Sox build an increasingly anonymous roster, there are only so many tourists who can visit Fenway Park.

An abused and enraged Red Sox Nation awoke to soul-crushing news of another cornerstone player gone with little coming in return. The notion that ownership cares more about money than winning was reinforced. The Red Sox can afford to keep their best players. They just won't do it anymore.

The Yankees surely can't be comfortable about what Aaron Judge will give them eight or nine years from now, but Brian Cashman understands where he works. There's a lot to be said for that. The last of the Sox sycophants will insist, as they always do, that the Sox are smart not to pay all that money . . . that the Padres are stupid . . . that Bogaerts is on the decline and that he was going to leave anyway.

But we know that none of this is true. Just as it's not true that Bogaerts was the Sox' top priority this offseason, as Sam Kennedy and Chaim Bloom repeatedly stated. This did not have to happen. This was a result of ownership/front office malpractice. The Sox erred when they insulted their loyal, four-time All-Star, two-time World Series champion with a lowball contract extension offer in spring training — just as they did with Jon Lester in 2014. It was never right after that and the Sox were never truly serious. The Sox wound up at six years and \$160 million, but that is not 11 years and \$280 million. That is \$120 million less. It is not competitive. And the intrepid Peter Abraham reports that three or four other teams were willing to go higher than Boston.

They are Happy in San Diego

The Padres realize that extending Juan Soto, the sport's most accomplished 24-year-old hitter, could be a long shot. For at least one season, San Diego should benefit from one of the most potent offensive foursomes in baseball: **Juan Soto, Manny Machado, Xander Bogaerts and Fernando Tatis Jr.**

In light of recent nine-figure contracts, Manny Machado appears increasingly likely to opt out after the 2023 season and perhaps pursue another \$300 million payday.

There is some risk. Bogaerts hit a lot better at Fenway Park than he did on the road, and Petco Park can be a batter's nightmare

The Red Sox are a top tier market team. The Padres play in the fifth-smallest media market in baseball.

Small market vs. large market comments from Jayson Stark

It'll be interesting to see if other smallish-market teams follow the Padres' lead and get caught up in the frenzy of the moment. But an exec who has worked mostly for small-market teams shot down that idea quickly. Asked if he could see any clubs from *his* payroll tier diving into this pool, he immediately shook his head.

"No," he said emphatically. "It's all about the margin for error that the larger markets have and the small markets just don't have it. That margin for error just does not exist in the small markets. And it's a very small margin in the mid-markets."

"So when that player that's being paid, 10 years from now, as a \$30-million player but he's performing as a \$10-million player, that's crushing to a small market. But in a major market, they just put it in the corner and move on."

Let's start by paying attention to the sage thoughts of Dan O'Dowd, the longtime Rockies general manager and current MLB Network analyst, who also happens to be one of the smartest and most insightful people I know.

"Listen, I'm not saying that it's not a risk anymore to give a guy a long-term deal in his mid-to-late 30s," O'Dowd said. "But I think the game is changing. So I think age-regression models are dramatically different in today's game than they were in previous generations."

So how can that be? It starts with all the high-performance departments teams are now funding and empowering, to maximize players' health and longevity in every way imaginable. And increasingly, he said, players themselves are "taking some of the personal wealth they get from these contracts and they're pouring them into a lifestyle that will allow them to sustain health."

But also, remember, we're just in the beginning stages of these sorts of innovations and the science that is making them possible. Every cutting-edge team is buying into that science, literally. So in five years, 10 years, 20 years, who knows what that might mean?

"I think it's crucial," O'Dowd said, "because of the biomechanics in our game and the way they're being studied. I think certain types of movement patterns are going to be rewarded, versus other movement patterns. Guys that are rotationally stiff — that's a red flag. But for certain guys like Trea Turner, whose bodies move exceptionally well — it's less of a red flag."

"And clubs are going to be spending so much time and energy on this. So the models that have been talked about, that show you don't get Player X past a certain age — in my humble opinion, those models are outdated, because the game has evolved from when those models have been developed."

Let me assure you, he's far from alone in how he sees that. You know who else sees it? A guy who just dropped \$387 million on three free agents this week: Phillies president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

I asked him Wednesday if the wave of signings this week defy the recent conventional wisdom that it's a bad idea to invest significant money in players with contracts that take them deep into their 30s or beyond. Without commenting specifically on any of his own deals, Dombrowski pushed back forcefully.

"That is generally the philosophy, right," he said. "But you also have seen that some guys have continued to perform well. You look at a Verlander, and you get some reassurance there. But the other thing I think you have to look at is, we've also improved our conditioning, our nutrition, our integration of all that. So there's a lot of things that lead you to believe that the top, most talented players can continue to play longer in their careers."

And the best example of that, he said, was not even the best baseball players in the world.

"Look at the top tennis players and how much older they are now than they used to be," Dombrowski said. "So there's a reason. There's a reason why that's happening. ... Those players never used to last until they were 40 years old. But they're finely tuned athletes that train well, that commit to doing it. And again, I'm not saying that it happens with everybody. But when you have elite athletes, they're a little bit different than the average athlete."

That has always been true of certain, special players, Dombrowski believes. Henry Aaron is one Dombrowski has cited a lot, for many years. Randy Johnson is another. Derek Jeter is on that list. Later, after our conversation had ended, he shouted one more name across the room: "Ichiro!" he added, with a forceful point of his index finger.

So are old dudes now cool or not? Is the science working or not? Are the Bogaerts/Judge/Turner deals guaranteed to be disasters by the year 2030 — or is the world of aging in sports about to transform itself in ways we hadn't comprehended until this week?

Oh, some things have changed, said one longtime executive. But here's what hasn't changed: If you hand out the kind of contracts these teams doled out this week, it'll be really helpful if there's Champagne and ticker tape coming on the front end. Or else the heat is coming on the back end.

"There's an old quote I remember from Kevin Malone (the former Dodgers GM) after he signed **Kevin Brown**," that longtime exec said. "He said, 'If this deal goes well, it'll be a good contract for me. ... And if this deal goes bad, it'll be a bad contract for someone else.'"

It is not just the big money. Look at the age of these guys at the end of the contracts:

Xander Bogaerts — 11 years, \$280 million (Padres). Last year of deal: age 40.

Aaron Judge — nine years, \$360 million (Yankees). Last year of deal: age 39.

Trea Turner — 11 years, \$300 million (Phillies). Last year of deal: age 40.

Justin Verlander — two years, \$86.6 million (Mets). Last year of deal: age 41.

Jacob deGrom — five years, \$185 million (Rangers). Last year of deal: age 39.

LONG TIME YANKEES

If **Aaron Judge** plays out the full length of his deal, he'll have played with the Bronx Bombers for 16 seasons. He'll be 39 years old at the end of it, and he'll have been a Yankee since the team drafted him as a 21-year-old in 2013.

That would make Judge one of the longest-tenured Yankees of all time. Here are the legends he'd join on the list for the storied franchise.

1. **Derek Jeter -- 20 seasons.** first round in 1992, put on the pinstripes for the first time as a 20-year-old in 1995 and didn't take them off until he retired at age 40 after the 2014 season. The Hall of Fame shortstop collected 3,465 hits, the sixth most all time, was a 14-time All-Star and anchored the Core Four that led the Yankees to five World Series championships.
2. **Mariano Rivera -- 19 seasons.** Rivera debuted the same year as his fellow Core Four member, 1995, and was also on all five World Series-winning teams until he retired a year before Jeter in 2013. He's MLB's all-time leader in saves with 652, he's a playoff legend, with a 0.70 ERA and 42 saves in the postseason, and his cutter is the most iconic pitch in baseball history. Rivera is the only unanimous Hall of Famer.
3. **Mickey Mantle -- 18 seasons.** Debuting with the Yankees as a 19-year-old in 1951, Mantle went on to hit 536 home runs and win three MVP Awards, a Triple Crown in 1956 and seven World Series titles in his career.
4. **Yogi Berra -- 18 seasons.** Berra won 10 World Series championships with the Yankees, the most of any player in history. He's one of the greatest catchers ever, hitting 358 home runs, winning three MVP Awards and making 18 All-Star teams in his career in pinstripes, which lasted from 1946-63
5. **Lou Gehrig -- 17 seasons.** The Iron Horse played 2,130 consecutive games for the Yankees between June 1, 1925, and April 30, 1939, a record that stood for 56 years until

Cal Ripken Jr. finally surpassed him. Part of the first generation of Yankees legends alongside Babe Ruth, Gehrig was a lifetime .340 hitter, hit 493 home runs and won two MVP Awards and seven World Series championships in his Hall of Fame career with New York.

6. **Jorge Posada -- 17 seasons.** The Core Four catcher was a member of four World Series-winning teams, the Yankees' three-peat from 1998-2000 and their 27th championship in 2009. Posada was a five-time All-Star and Silver Slugger and hit 275 home runs in his career, ninth most among catchers.
7. **Bill Dickey -- 17 seasons.** Dickey actually caught more games for the Yankees (1,708) than both Berra (1,697), whom he mentored, and Posada (1,574). The Hall of Famer was an eight-time World Series champion with New York, as well as an 11-time All-Star. Dickey played for the Yankees from 1928-46, and his career could have spanned 19 seasons but he missed the 1944 and '45 seasons for military service in the Navy during World War II.
8. **Frankie Crosetti -- 17 seasons.** Crosetti played 17 seasons for the Yankees from 1932-48 and then coached the Yankees for 20 more. That made him a part of an incredible 17 World Series championship teams, seven as a player, one as a player/coach and nine as a coach after his retirement.
9. **Bernie Williams -- 16 seasons.** Williams actually preceded the Core Four in New York, arriving in the big leagues in 1991, four years before Jeter, Rivera, Posada and Andy Pettitte. But he was just as big a part of winning those four championships in five seasons from 1996-2000. Williams was a five-time All-Star and four-time Gold Glove in center field, and he won the AL batting title in '98.
10. **Whitey Ford -- 16 seasons.** Ford won six World Series titles with New York and the 1961 AL Cy Young Award. The Hall of Fame southpaw pitched for the Yankees from 1950-67, missing two years for military service just after his big league debut at 21. The Chairman of the Board was a 10-time All-Star, two-time MLB ERA leader and the 1961 World Series MVP.

Babe Ruth, Red Ruffing and Andy Pettitte played 15 years for the Yankees though they also played for other teams. **Roy White** played 15 seasons as a career Yankee.

14 seasons -- **Don Mattingly*, Ron Guidry*, Brett Gardner***

13 seasons -- **Joe DiMaggio*, Phil Rizzuto*, Lefty Gomez, Elston Howard**

12 seasons -- **Alex Rodriguez, Tony Lazzeri**

11 seasons -- **CC Sabathia, Thurman Munson*, Lou Piniella, Graig Nettles**

- Career Yankees

Speaking of Career Yankees

Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Derek Jeter, Lou Gehrig ... Mariano Rivera ... Whitey Ford ... Bill Dickey ... Phil Rizzuto ... **Earle Combs** ... the Yankees have nine Hall of Famers who played their

entire careers in pinstripes. There are only 55 such modern players in the Hall of Fame, so roughly one-sixth of them are Yankees.

REUNITED

Star teammates throughout MLB history have split up only to come back together on a different team later in their careers. Some top examples:

Bryce Harper and Trea Turner, Nationals to Phillies (2023)

Max Scherzer and Justin Verlander, Tigers to Mets (2023)

Freddie Freeman and Craig Kimbrel, Braves to Dodgers (2022)

J.D. Martinez, David Price and Rick Porcello, Tigers to Red Sox (2018)

Jon Lester and John Lackey, Red Sox to Cubs (2016)

Chase Utley and Jimmy Rollins, Phillies to Dodgers (2015)

Albert Pujols and David Freese, Cardinals to Angels (2014)

Alex Rodriguez and Mark Teixeira, Rangers to Yankees (2009)

Jim Thome and Manny Ramirez, Guardians to Dodgers (2009)

Roger Clemens and Andy Pettitte, Yankees to Astros (2004)

Mark McGwire and Dennis Eckersley, A's to Cardinals (1997)

Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden, Mets to Yankees (1996)

Andres Galarraga and Larry Walker, Expos to Rockies (1995)

Rickey Henderson and Dave Stewart, A's to Blue Jays (1993)

Pete Rose, Joe Morgan and Tony Perez, Reds to Phillies (1983)

Catfish Hunter and Reggie Jackson, A's to Yankees (1977)

BASEBALL ALMANAC FABULOUS FEATS

From baseball-almanac.com

18 times in MLB history pitchers from each team homered off each other in the same game.

Matt Cain of the Giants and **Cole Hamels** of the Phillies were the last (and quite possibly the last ever) on 7/21/2012.

On 7/3/1966 **Ray Sadecki** of the Giants homered off **Tony Cloninger** of the Braves. Cloninger hit a grand slam off Sadecki in the 4th inning. Sadecki was in relief of **Bob Priddy**, who Cloninger hit a grand slam off in the first inning.

KOUFAX AND DRYSDALE REVISITED?

I love lists—here is a fun one from mlb.com naming today's strongest starting pitching duos—any others you'd include?

1. **Max Scherzer and Justin Verlander, Mets**
2. **Shane Bieber and Tyler Glasnow, Rays**
3. **Corbin Burnes and Brandon Woodruff, Brewers**
4. **Max Fried and Spencer Strider, Braves**
5. **Aaron Nola and Zack Wheeler, Phillies**
6. **Alek Manoah and Kevin Gausman, Blue Jays**
7. **Yu Darvish and Blake Snell, Padres**
8. **Clayton Kershaw and Julio Urías, Dodgers**
9. **Gerrit Cole and Nestor Cortes, Yankees**
10. **Framber Valdez and Cristian Javier, Astros**

SAL DUARTE, WHO CAUGHT A BIT OF BASEBALL HISTORY, DIES AT 81.

At Yankee Stadium on Oct. 1, 1961, Mr. Durante, a 19-year-old truck driver, stood on his seat in right field and nabbed **Roger Maris's** 61st home run one-handed.

Sal Durante, who became an instant celebrity when he boldly snared Roger Maris's record-breaking 61st home run in one hand at Yankee Stadium during the final game of the 1961 regular season, died on Thursday on Staten Island. He was 81.

His son Sal Jr. said the cause was dementia.

On that fall afternoon, Maris was tied with Babe Ruth for the single-season major league record of 60 home runs. Mr. Durante, a 19-year-old truck driver who delivered auto parts and had played sandlot baseball, got seats in right field for himself; his fiancée, Rosemarie Calabrese; his cousin John; and John's date. Mr. Durante was broke, so Ms. Calabrese paid \$10 for the four tickets.

With one out in the fourth inning, Maris smashed the third pitch off the Boston Red Sox right-hander **Tracy Stallard** beyond the short fence in right field.

"I watched the pitching motion, the release of the ball, and I had my eye on the ball all the way to Roger's bat," Mr. Durante said at a commemorative event 50 years later at the new Yankee Stadium, which had replaced the old one in 2009. "I didn't take my eye off that ball for a second."

As the ball soared toward him, he said, he jumped onto his seat and caught it in the palm of his right hand. "I got it! I got it!" he shouted, before falling into the row behind him.

After a scuffle with other fans, two security guards hustled Mr. Durante to the Yankees' clubhouse, where he planned to give the ball to Maris.

But as they stood together, Maris refused to take it. He knew that Sam Gordon, a restaurateur in Sacramento, had offered \$5,000 for the ball Maris hit for his 61st home run to whoever caught it. He told Mr. Durante to take the cash.

Mr. Durante did, and Mr. Gordon then gave the ball to Maris. He kept it until 1973, when he donated it to the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

After meeting Maris, Mr. Durante was brought to the WPIX-TV broadcast booth to be interviewed and was greeted by **Phil Rizzuto**, one of the team's announcers and a former star shortstop for the Yankees. Mr. Durante recalled Mr. Rizzuto telling him, "I'm glad you're a paesano."

Mr. Durante and Ms. Calabrese were married at a church in Brooklyn a few weeks after he caught the ball and then flew to Sacramento to collect the \$5,000 (nearly \$50,000 in today's dollars). Half the money went to start the Durantes' married life, half to help Mr. Durante's parents. Mr. Gordon also paid for the couple's honeymoon in Palm Springs.

The next August, Mr. Durante was invited to the Seattle World's Fair, where he was offered \$1,000 to catch a ball off the Space Needle. When it was determined that a ball thrown from the 605-foot-tall tower would generate too much speed, the stunt (with Stallard, then pitching for a local minor league team, throwing the ball) was moved to a 100-foot-tall Ferris wheel.

After catching some practice throws from lower heights, Mr. Durante dropped the one for all the money (he got the money anyway). When Stallard asked what happened, Mr. Durante told

United Press International, “I guess I wasn’t relaxed when I knew the money was riding on the toss.”

At the 50th-anniversary event, Mr. Durante was asked if Maris’s 61-home-run season should stand as the major league record despite having been exceeded decades later by **Barry Bonds** — who holds the mark with 73, which he hit in 2001 — and by **Mark McGwire** and **Sammy Sosa**. All three men’s legacies are clouded by ties to performance-enhancing drugs.

“How about if I just say Roger deserved it,” he said. “He did it on his own, you know, the skill.”

TURNAROUND

Mlb.com

13 teams since 1969 have won 27 or more games from the previous season. All but the 1991 Braves regressed the next season (like the 2014 Red Sox losing 26 wins vs. 2013).

Every season has its storylines, and in 2022, one of the most captivating surrounded the Baltimore Orioles. After a five-year rebuild that reached staggering depths (including a season in which they finished *61 games* out of first place), the tides have turned in Baltimore. With a brand new core, the 2022 Orioles clawed their way into contention and hung around until the final week of the season, closing out the year with an 83-79 record, just a year after a 52-110 last-place finish. This turnaround made them just the fifth team since 1969 to gain 31+ wins in a single season.

1999 D-backs: +35 wins

65 in 1998, 100 in '99

How they did it: As is typical for expansion teams in their first year, the D-backs had a lackluster 1998 season, to which they responded by adding **Randy Johnson, Steve Finley** and **Luis Gonzalez** to the mix. Roster fortified, the 1999 club finished with the second-best record in baseball. Eliminated in the first round of the playoffs, the '99 D-backs -- still the winningest team in franchise history -- sadly aren’t remembered so fondly as the 2001 World Series champs.

1989 Orioles: +33 wins

54 in '88, 87 in '89

How they did it: The 1988 Orioles finished the season in last place, and they seemed resigned to the same fate in '89, especially after trading future Hall of Fame first baseman **Eddie Murray** to the Dodgers in exchange for a trio of players who had a combined -1.5 WAR as Orioles. Paradoxically, after losing Murray, the Orioles went from having the worst offense in baseball in 1988 to the fifth-best in '89, and with Rookie of the Year **Gregg Olson** anchoring the bullpen, they soared to a second-place finish, just two games out of a playoff berth.

2022 Orioles: +31 wins

52 in 2021, 83 in '22

How they did it: The narrative surrounding the Orioles' 2022 resurgence centered mainly around catcher **Adley Rutschman**, whose debut in May clearly separated the club's 16-25 start and the 67-54 record it posted over the remainder of the season. But Rutschman was one of *six* top prospects (as ranked by MLB Pipeline on Opening Day) to debut for Baltimore in 2022, and right-hander **Grayson Rodriguez**, baseball's No. 4 prospect, still waits in the wings, which begs the question – with a full season of these incredibly talented young players, what kind of gains could the O's make in 2023?

2008 Rays: +31 wins

66 in 2007, 97 in '08

How they did it: From their inaugural 1998 season through 2007, the Rays had an MLB-worst .399 winning percentage, and their best season came in 2004, when they went 70-91 and finished fourth in the AL East. So it was something of a change of pace when the 2008 club went from worst to first and stormed all the way to the franchise's first AL pennant with the help of Rookie of the Year **Evan Longoria**'s breakout season and strong campaigns from **Matt Garza**, **James Shields** and **Scott Kazmir**, even if they were ultimately taken down by the Phillies in the World Series.

1993 Giants: +31 wins

72 in 1992, 103 in '93

How they did it: The Giants were poised to relocate to Tampa Bay in 1992. By '93, the move had been ruled out, and the club's new ownership had a powerful opening gambit to revive their sputtering offense – signing **Barry Bonds**. It worked like a charm. After hitting .244/.302/.355 as a club in '92, the Giants were up to .276/.340/.427 in '93. But a playoff berth was contingent on winning the NL West, and both the Giants and Braves sat on 103 wins on the final day of the season. A loss to their rival Dodgers sealed the fate of the '93 Giants, and they remain the winningest non-playoff team since 1942.

2011 D-backs: +29 wins

65 in 2010, 94 in '11

How they did it: Pitching was responsible for the D-backs' worst-to-first resurgence in 2011 – the addition of free agent closer **J.J. Putz**, a breakout season (and subsequent top-five finish in NL Cy Young voting) from **Ian Kennedy** and strong first full season performances from both **Josh Collmenter** and **Daniel Hudson** brought the team ERA down a full run from '10. The '11 D-backs, with essentially the same lineup as the year before, won the NL West and cruised into the playoffs for the first time since 2007, where they were eliminated in a five-game NLDS matchup with the Brewers.

2004 Tigers: +29 wins

43 in 2003, 72 in '04

How they did it: It'd be hard to do much worse than the Tigers did in 2003, but they put in some work to revive the club ahead of the 2004 season, adding **Carlos Guillen**, **Iván Rodríguez**

and Rondell White to the lineup to address an anemic offense that had scored the second-fewest runs in MLB the year before. The boost from 3.65 runs per game to 5.10 in 2004 made a major difference while the growing pains for Detroit's young pitching continued.

1991 Braves: +29 wins

65 in 1990, 94 in '91

How they did it: Not only did the '91 Braves benefit from breakout performances by starting pitchers **Tom Glavine** and **Steve Avery** – who contributed to the club going from giving up an MLB-worst 5.04 runs per game in '90 to a fourth-best 3.98 in '91 – but they also found a perfect free-agent addition in third baseman **Terry Pendleton**, who won the batting title and was named NL MVP in his first season in Atlanta. The '91 Braves went to the World Series for the first time since 1958, where they lost to the Twins in seven games.

1980 A's: +29 wins

54 in 1979, 83 in '80

How they did it: The '80 A's jumped all the way from last place into second with the help of a couple of iconic breakout seasons – most notably, it was the first full season of **Rickey Henderson's** career, a personal milestone he celebrated by stealing 100 bases. A then-26-year-old **Tony Armas** also had a major breakout, topping 30 homers for the first time. Then there were the combined improvements of starters **Rick Langford**, **Mike Norris** and **Matt Keough**, who combined for a 4.67 ERA over 541 2/3 innings in '79 and followed up that performance by tossing 824 1/3 collective innings with a 2.90 ERA in '80.

2013 Red Sox: +28 wins

69 in 2012, 97 in '13

How they did it: The downfall of the '12 Red Sox was bad pitching. The '13 staff hovered around league average in most categories, but it was enough, because offensively, the team was almost comically dominant against the rest of the league – they scored 57 more runs than the second-best Tigers. Not only did they go from last place in the AL East to first within a year, they capped off the season with a thrilling playoff run, culminating in their third World Series championship in 10 seasons.

1993 Phillies: +27 wins

70 in 1992, 97 in '93

How they did it: After finishing last in the NL East in '92, the Phillies became an offensive juggernaut in '93, upping their run production from 4.23 runs per game to 5.41 (second-most in MLB). The pitching staff also buckled down, striking out 266 more batters than they had in '92 (5.4 K/9 in '92, 6.8 in '93.) After locking up the division, they took down the Braves in the NLCS, then lost their World Series matchup against the reigning champion Blue Jays.

1974 Rangers: +27 wins

57 in 1973, 84 in '74

How they did it: In 1973, the Rangers had the worst team ERA in baseball (4.64), and ranked 27th in runs scored. But one significant offseason move -- acquiring future Hall of Famer **Fergie**

Jenkins -- proved enough to turn things around for an embattled pitching staff. Meanwhile, **Mike Hargrove**, who would later be named AL Rookie of the Year, quickly took over as the everyday first baseman and sometime-DH and hit .323/.395/.424, pacing a lineup that ended the season with the second-most runs scored in the AL.

1969 Mets: +27 wins

73 in 1968, 100 in '69

How they did it: The 1968 Mets had excellent pitching – but they also averaged a measly 2.9 runs per game, relegating them to a ninth-place finish. When the roster remained largely unchanged and the 1969 Mets sat 10 games out of first on May 27, they seemed destined for another disappointing season. They then rattled off 11 straight wins, which kicked off an 82-39 (.678) run that propelled them into first place. The game-changer? One more run per game. Literally -- the '69 Mets averaged 3.9. In their first playoff appearance, the Mets swept the Braves in the inaugural NLCS and met the 109-win Orioles in the World Series, neatly taking them down in five games to win their first championship.

10 PLAYERS WITH LONGEST CURRENT TENURE WITH 1 CLUB

Mlb.com, you need 10 years to make the top ten.

1. Adam Wainwright, Cardinals

Debut: Sept. 11, 2005

2. Joey Votto, Reds

Debut: Sept. 4, 2007

3. Clayton Kershaw, Dodgers

Debut: May 25, 2008

4. Stephen Strasburg, Nationals

Debut: June 8, 2010

5. Brandon Crawford, Giants

Debut: May 27, 2011

6. Charlie Blackmon, Rockies

Debut: June 27, 2011

7. Mike Trout, Angels

Debut: July 8, 2011

8. Jose Altuve, Astros

Debut: July 20, 2011

9. Salvador Perez, Royals

Debut: Aug. 10, 2011

10. José Ramírez, Guardians

Debut: Sept. 1, 2013



THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS.

Here are clues for 17 pitchers who won multiple major awards—some combo of Rookie of the Year, Cy Young, MVP. How many can you name? 10 or better is a good score. (if you did good on our Pitchers as MVP question from six weeks ago you have a leg up).

2006 AL ROY, 2011 AL CY, 2011 AL MVP, 2019 AL CY, 2022 AL CY, righthanded starter

Justin Verlander

1949 NL ROY, 1956 NL CY, 1956 NL MVP, righthanded starter

Don Newcombe

2014 NL ROY, 2018 NL CY, 2019 NL CY, righthanded starter

Jacob deGrom

1984 NL ROY, 1985 NL CY, righthanded starter

Dwight Gooden

1981 NL ROY, 1981 CY, lefthanded starter, complete game win '81 World Series vs. Yankees.

Fernando Valenzuela

1979 NL ROY, 1984 NL CY, righthanded starter, AL era leader '82 with Indians

Rick Sutcliffe

1967 NL ROY; 1969, 1973, 1975 NL CY, HOF, righthanded starter

Tom Seaver

2011, 2013, 2014 NL CY; 2014 NL MVP, lefthanded starter

Clayton Kershaw

1992 AL CY, 1992 AL MVP, HOF, righthanded reliever

Dennis Eckersley

1986, 1987, 1991, 1997, 1998, 2001 AL CY; 2004 NL CY; 1986 AL MVP, righthanded starter

Roger Clemens

1984 AL CY, 1984 AL MVP, lefthanded reliever

Willie Hernandez

1981 AL CY, 1981 AL MVP, righthanded reliever, pitched in 72-73-74 World Series

Rollie Fingers

1971 AL CY, 1971 AL MVP, lefthanded starter

Vida Blue

1968 NL CY, 1968 NL MVP, righthanded starter

Bob Gibson

1968, 1969 AL CY; 1968 AL MVP, righthanded starter, 31 game winner

Denny McLain

1963, 1965, 1966 CY; 1963 NL MVP, lefthanded starter

Sandy Koufax

2018 AL ROY, 2021 AL MVP, righthanded starter

Shohei Ohtani

USEFUL LINKS

<https://www.mlb.com/glossary/advanced-stats>

Definitions of 49 advanced metrics for defense, offense and pitching.

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