

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

3.11.2022

Good morning baseball fans,

Try to see some WBC baseball—the enthusiasm last night for Venezuela’s win over Dominican Republic was crazy. I am recovered and we have plenty of interesting stuff this week: Leo the Lip, a deep dive into how **Spencer Strider** thrives with just two pitches, **Todd Helton**, greatest lineups of all time.

And we wrap with Jayson Stark’s take rule changes (mound visits, the wind, how to score a strikeout on a non-pitch? bat boys on the road?). Enjoy.

THIS WEEK’S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Between 1959 and 1969 this righthanded slugger led or tied for the AL lead in homers 6 times.

From 1974 to 1986 he led or tied for the NL lead in homers 8 times

The St. Louis Cardinals have had three back-to-back HR leaders. All three played 1B.

1939-1940

1998-1999

2009-2010

Aaron Boone is one of 8 Yankees manager to lead the team for 5 or more years. (He is the first not to win the World Series in his first five years as New York skipper).

Name the other Yankee managers who managed more than five years:

Hall of Famer who won Yankee World Series 1923-1927-1928

Hall of Famer, won 7 World Series with Yankees, his first in 1932.

Hall of Famer, won 7 World Series titles with the Yankees, his first in 1949

Won World Series in his first two years as Yankee manager, 1961 and 1962.

He led the Yankees to 1977 World Series win.

Hall of Famer, won four World Series with Yankees including 3 straight starting in 1998.

He managed the Yankees for 10 seasons, won World Series in 2009.

(answers at the bottom)

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

In their home opener University Washington beat Northern Colorado 32-7.

Shooting for 2K/IP

Aroldis Chapman came close in 2014 (106 strikeouts in 54 innings).

Edwin O Díaz came close last year, striking out 118 batters in 62 innings.

The first two tournaments in WBC history were won by Japan, followed by the Dominican Republic in 2013 and the United States in 2017. Puerto Rico was the runner-up in each of the past two tournaments, while South Korea and Cuba also have second-place finishes. Venezuela and the Netherlands have also made it as far as the semifinals. Pitcher **Daisuke Matsuzaka** of Japan was MVP of the first two World Baseball Classics.

The payroll for Team USA, based on average annual value, is \$379.4 million, or more than the A's, Orioles, Pirates, Rays and Reds combined. The total value of active contracts for Team USA: \$2.05 billion. Mike Trout, **Mookie Betts**, **Trea Turner**, **Paul Goldschmidt** and **Nolan Arenado** will do that to you. And then there are **J.T. Realmuto**, second baseman **Jeff McNeil**, left fielder **Kyle Tucker**, DH **Kyle Schwarber** and pitcher **Adam Wainwright**. By comparison, the stacked Dominican Republic starting lineup pulls down \$153.2 million this year, or about the same as the USA's bench.

The tournament is structured similar to the World Cup, with teams first competing in round-robin group play (the WBC calls them pools) to determine who advances to the next round. Pools A and B began play this week in Taiwan and Japan, respectively, while Pools C and D (in Phoenix and Miami) begin play tomorrow. **Each pool has five teams, with the top two advancing to the quarterfinals.** Beginning with the quarterfinals, the tournament is single elimination.

The **U.S.'s pool-play games** will take place in Phoenix against **Mexico, Colombia, Canada and Great Britain.**

From 2013 to '22, 10 years, **Max Scherzer** has a .979 WHIP.

Here are the best WHIPs over a 10-year stretch since 1920:

1. **Clayton Kershaw**, 2011-2020, .935 WHIP
2. **Pedro Martinez**, 1997-2006, .978 WHIP
3. **Max Scherzer**, 2013-2022, .979 WHIP

Those are the only three players since Deadball with a sub-1.00 WHIPs over a decade. To give you an idea how hard it is to maintain a sub-1.00 WHIP for that length of time, **Sandy Koufax** in the 1960s — so not even counting his first five seasons — had a 1.005 WHIP.

Jacob deGrom has made 102 starts since the beginning of the 2018 season. Over that time, the league is hitting .188/.233/.297 against him, his WHIP is .868 and he had a 7-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio. This is **Pedro Martinez** at his best, **Bob Gibson** at his best, **Greg Maddux** at his best, Kershaw at his best.

After 13 years in the Mets organization — he was drafted in 2010, he won the National League Rookie of the Year Award in 2014 and he was named the N.L. Cy Young Award winner in 2018 and '19 — deGrom surprised some by joining the Rangers this winter. They lured him to Texas with a five-year, \$185 million contract. Based on certain conditions, the deal could add another year and reach \$222 million. Age (34) and injuries (he has started a total of 26 games over the last two seasons) make it a risky move for the Rangers. But if he comes back to health and effectiveness, he can be dominant.

Telling stat on a graphic while watching a Yankees spring training game-- 12 of the 13 teams with the worst strikeouts to walks ratio finished under .500 last year.

What a year 1987 was:

- **Joe Carter** **32 homers, 31 steals**
- **Eric Davis** **37 homers, 50 steals**
- **Howard Johnson** **36 homers, 32 steals**
- **Darryl Strawberry** **39 homers, 36 steals**

There have been four seasons in which four separate players recorded 30-30 seasons.

The second was 1996 (**Dante Bichette, Barry Bonds, Ellis Burks, and Barry Larkin**).

The third was in 1997 (**Jeff Bagwell, Bonds, Raul Mondesi, and Larry Walker**).

The latest was in 2011 (**Ryan Braun, Jacoby Ellsbury, Matt Kemp, and Ian Kinsler**).

Frank Thomas, 1991 age 23 he began a seven season run of hitting .300, scoring 100 runs, driving in 100 runs, 100 walks. Only player ever. In those 7 seasons he led the AL in on base pct 4 times, in walks 4 times, won 2 MVPs.

As Yankee rookies **Oswaldo Peraza and Anthony Volpe** battle to win the shortstop job, a look back. **Derek Jeter** won rookie of the year in 1996 with .314/10/78 RBI. Before him **Tom Tresh** won rookie of the year in 1962 with .286/20/93. Both shortstops who were in the World Series as Yankee rookies. Btw the last Yankees rookie to make his MLB debut on Opening Day was **Hideki Matsui** (March 31, 2003).

Atlanta Braves-- If you added the ages of third base coach **Ron Washington** (70), manager **Brian Snitker** (67), pitching coach **Rick Kranitz** (64), hitting coach **Kevin Seitzer** (60), bench coach **Walt Weiss** (59) and first base coach **Eric Young Sr.** (55), you would get to a number (375) that suggests they should be holding their staff meetings at a Denny's — while ordering from the 55+ menu, of course.

Chris Sale's start for the Red Sox against the Tigers on Monday was the first time since 2019 he pitched in a spring training game.

Sale injured his elbow during spring training in 2020 and had Tommy John surgery. He was still recovering in '21 and was in rehab mode throughout camp. Sale then fractured a rib during the lockout last season and missed all of spring training again.

Sale is 6-0 with a 1.99 ERA in 13 career Grapefruit League games.

Dodgers infielder **Miguel Vargas** has a fractured finger and can't swing a bat. But he is still playing in games and has been ordered to just take pitches. He nevertheless drew four walks in his first 12 plate appearances.

The Philadelphia Inquirer did an investigative story that linked chemicals in the artificial turf at old Veterans Stadium to the deaths of six Phillies players of brain cancer. **Ken Brett, Tug McGraw, Johnny Oates, John Vukovich, Darren Daulton, and David West** all died before the age of 60 from glioblastoma. The Phillies played at the Vet from 1971-2003

We measure catcher pop times -- the time it takes them to get the ball to second base -- to the hundredths of a second. The difference between the best and worst catchers in baseball is about four-tenths of a second. The difference between the best (**J.T. Realmuto** last year) and average is 15/100th of a second.

Catchers are selected more for their framing skill than anything else these days, but they're also more athletic than their predecessors. Poor throwing catchers are weeded out early, so the baseline throwing skill is higher than ever before.

According to Baseball Savant, the top ten catchers average between 1.82 and 1.92 seconds to second base.

Pop Time measures the time from the moment the pitch hits the catcher's mitt to the moment the ball reaches the fielder's projected receiving point at the center of the base. Pop Time is a combination of exchange time (how quickly the catcher releases the ball, measured in seconds) and arm strength (velocity of throw, in MPH). Arm strength is measured on "max effort" throws, or the average above a player's 90th percentile performance.

The Major League average Pop Time on steal attempts of second base is just under 2.0 seconds. Average times are calculated with the following ranges.

Pop Time to 2B: 1.6 sec to 2.5 sec

Pop Time to 3B: 1.2 sec to 2.5 sec

Exchange: .4 sec to 1.3 sec

Going into last season (2022) -- "Since 1947, when the color line was broken, 16 teams have won at least 105 games in a season, including last year's Giants and Dodgers. Two of the other examples happened in 2019, in advance of the shortened 2020 season, so we'll set those aside. That leaves 12 teams. Those 12 teams averaged 97 wins in the season after they won 105 games. Five won at least 100 games, and just one, the 2019 Red Sox, won fewer than 92 (they went 84-78). Winning 105 games is certainly the product of both skill and luck, but it is never a fluke."

The Giants, in 2022, set a new mark. Down their Hall of Fame catcher, and seeing regression from some key veterans, the Giants fell all the way to 81-81, the worst performance ever for a team coming off a 105-win campaign. Looking ahead to 2023, not signing **Aaron Judge or Carlos Correa** didn't help.

Oneil Cruz of the Pirates is a fun and exiting talent. He has a gun from shortstop—hardest throw measured by StatCast. He hits the ball hard—like **Giancarlo Stanton** hard. At 6'7" he is a big presence. But he better figure out how to make better contact at the plate. He struck out 126 times in only 87 games — that's record pace.

Most strikeouts in a season:

1. **Mark Reynolds**, 223, 2009
2. **Adam Dunn**, 222, 2012
3. **Chris Davis**, 219, 2016
4. **Yoán Moncada**, 217, 2018
5. **Joey Gallo**, 213, 2021

Those five averaged 648 plate appearances. At Cruz's 2022 pace, if given 648 plate appearances he would have struck out 226 times. But here's the thing: Cruz mostly hit in the leadoff spot last year (he also hit best up there) meaning that if he gets a full season, he will probably get more than 648 plate appearances, and could put that strikeout record where nobody will come close.

Part of the art of talent evaluation and coaching is knowing when to hold onto a player and work through bad stuff. Case in point:

Corbin Burnes, Brewers righthander

In 2019, he had an 8.82 ERA. It was in only 49 innings, but he gave up SEVENTEEN home runs in those 49 innings.

The Brewers took him to their pitching laboratory and reconstructed his four-seam fastball, helped him develop a cutter, He got LASIK surgery. In 2021, he won the Cy Young Award. In 2022 he went 14-8, threw over 200 innings, led the NL in strikeouts with 243.

Tale of Two Contracts

On Feb. 28, 2019, **Bryce Harper** signed a 13-year, \$330 million deal with the Phillies.

Seven days earlier, **Manny Machado** signed a 10-year, \$300 million deal with the Padres.

Machado had an opt-out clause in his contract. Harper did not.

Machado made a bit more than \$100 million in the first four years of his contract with the Padres (if you prorate the COVID year). And this year, he signed an 11-year deal for \$350 million — so in total, his contract is worth roughly 15 years and \$450 million.

Harper probably walked away from \$125 to \$150 million (at least) by not putting an opt-out in his deal. Instead, he got a full no-trade deal that guaranteed stability. Different priorities.

The Red Sox look at an outfield of **Masataka Yoshida, Alex Verdugo, Rob Refsnyder, Jarren Duran**. As Dan Shaughnessy wrote this week in the Boston Globe “Reminds me of when NL all-star manager had **Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Roberto Clemente and Frank Robinson** and had to start one on the bench.”

The team with the highest average ticket prices may want to think back to 2018. **Mookie Betts**. MVP. 346/.438/.640, 32 homers, 30 steals, 129 runs, Gold Glove. He led the majors in runs score, batting average and slugging.

As **Bryce Harper** rehabs from Tommy John Surgery:

Only 10 players took longer between pitches than Harper (Baseball Savant tracks these things). When Harper returns later this year he will need to adjust to the pitch clock.

Through his age-29 season, Harper is looking at this array of career numbers:

285 HR
606 extra-base hits
.523 Slugging Pct.
.913 OPS

What does that portend? Well, if you don't count **Albert Pujols** (not eligible yet) or players with PED ties, every retired player in history who matched or beat all those numbers before his age-30 season now has a plaque in Cooperstown. That group: **Mickey Mantle, Henry Aaron, Frank Robinson, Mel Ott, Jimmie Foxx, Eddie Mathews and Ken Griffey Jr.**

Jesus Alou

Former big league outfielder **Jesús Alou** passed away today at age 80. The Dominican Republic native played parts of 15 seasons in the majors during the 1960's and 70's.

Alou was a member of one of baseball history's most famous families. The younger brother of All-Stars **Felipe Alou** and **Matty Alou**, Jesús signed with the Giants headed into 1959. After three-plus seasons in the minors, Alou reached the majors during his age-21 campaign in 1963. That was a 16-game cameo but made history when he joined his brothers in the San Francisco outfield during Jesús Alou's rookie year. While Felipe would find himself traded to Milwaukee the following offseason, Jesús and Matty Alou spent the next few seasons as teammates in San Francisco.

Jesús Alou saw fairly significant action by his second season. He'd top 100 games every year from 1964-71. Alou played in San Francisco through 1968, hitting .279/.301/.348 in 633 games in a Giant uniform. During the 1968-69 offseason, he went to the Expos as part of the expansion draft. Alou would never play a game in Montreal, however. A couple months after selecting him, the Expos dealt Alou with right-hander **Jack Billingham** and lefty reliever **Skip Guinn** to Houston for All-Star outfielder **Rusty Staub**.

Alou played with the Astros until midway through the 1973 season, when Houston sold his contract to the Athletics. He was a role player for Oakland's World Series winning clubs in 1973 and '74. While he only got into 132 combined games in green and gold, he picked up a pair of championship rings. Alou signed with the Mets for the '75 season and returned to Houston late in the decade in a minor role. He played professionally in Mexico before retiring after the 1980 campaign.

In 1380 career big league contests, Alou hit .280/.305/.353. Never much of a power threat, he only connected on 32 home runs but he tallied 1216 hits and topped the double-digit mark in doubles in eight consecutive seasons. While he never achieved the lofty heights his brothers reached as players, he spent a decade and a half as a major leaguer and won a pair of World Series.

Alou's baseball career also went well beyond his playing days. He spent some time on the Houston coaching staff and eventually transitioned into scouting roles with the Expos and Red Sox. He'd worked for the Boston organization since 2002 and eventually spent more than six decades in the game.

Of live ball era Hall of Fame pitchers, fewest walks per 9 innings

Robin Roberts	1.73
Greg Maddux	1.80
Juan Marichal	1.82
Carl Hubbell	1.82
Roy Halladay	1.94

Speaking of Roberts. In 1951, the Dodgers and Giants came down to the wire at the end of the season. You know how that ended—the teams were tied at the end of the season, and they had a three-game playoff that ended with **Bobby Thomson** hitting a home run and radio announcer Rus Hodges screaming “the Giants win the pennant!”.

What you might not know is that the Dodgers had to win their last game against the Phillies to even force the playoff. And it did not look like they would. The Phillies led the game 6-1 early and 8-5 going into the eighth inning. But the Dodgers came back to tie it.

Philadelphia manager **Eddie Sawyer** called for Roberts to pitch in relief, and Dodgers manager **Charlie Dressen** called in **Don Newcombe** to match up. Talk about a different time—Roberts and Newcombe had both pitched the day before. They were on zero days rest.

The two greats matched zeros for 5 innings. Finally, in the bottom of the 13th Newcombe was spent and replaced by a pinch hitter. But Roberts went on.

In the 14th Roberts faced **Jackie Robinson**. In all, Jackie faced Roberts 176 times—more than he faced any other pitcher. Robinson won this battle—he crushed a long home run to win the game.

Baseball Primer Newsblog

Let’s begin the investigation by looking for a relationship between two of the newer Statcast measurements: pitch tempo and the defensive stat Outs Above Average (OAA). Statcast has

been calculating OAA since 2016 and Pitch Tempo for even longer, so we have a data set that includes the past six seasons where we have both measurements.

Pitch tempo measures the median time between pitches within a plate appearance and breaks those down by bases empty and runners on base situations at both the individual and team levels. I calculated a weighted average of the bases empty and runners on situations to get one tempo mark at the team level for each team season since 2016 (210 seasons in all) and compared that with each team's OAA marks from those seasons.

If the old adage that pace leads to better defense were true, we'd probably expect to see a relationship indicating that teams with the fastest pitch tempos would also be among the best by OAA. But that's not evident from this data. I ran a correlation analysis on the two data sets and got a statistically significant R-squared value of -0.049. The closer a correlation value is to 1 or -1, the stronger the relationship between the two variables. That value suggests the relationship between pitch tempo and outs above average is almost negligible.

TODD HELTON – we don't give him credit for how good a hitter he was.

Stripping out his Coors Field numbers, Helton was a great hitter. In 4,612 road plate appearances, the slugging first baseman hit .287/.386/.469 with 142 home runs. His .855 OPS away from his home ballpark is higher than the road OPS of Hall of Famers **Dave Winfield** (.841), **Eddie Murray** (.838), **Rickey Henderson** (.836), **Tony Gwynn** (.835), **Al Kaline** (.827) and **George Brett** (.826), among others.

And when it comes to on-base percentage, Helton's .386 OBP on the road is higher than Hall of Famers **Rod Carew** (.385), Gwynn (.384), **Honus Wagner** (.383), **Willie Mays** (.382), **Eddie Mathews** (.382), **Joe Morgan** (.380), **Tim Lincecum** (.378), **Vladimir Guerrero** (.376), **Fred McGriff** (.376), Frank Robinson (.376), Harmon Killebrew (.373), Willie McCovey (.372), Derek Jeter (.370), Helton's former teammate **Larry Walker** (.370), **Hank Aaron** (.369), Kaline (.369), **Duke Snider** (.369) and the list goes on.

Helton's road stats are Hall-worthy, and that's not even counting his incredible numbers at Coors Field.

Helton's numbers at Coors are phenomenal, which, even with the Coors discount, make his Hall of Fame case a strong one. In 4,841 home plate appearances, he hit .345/.441/.607 with 227 home runs at the corner of 20th and Blake Street in Lower Downtown Denver.

Helton was much more than a superb hitter -- he played great defense at first base, as well. That's evidenced by his three career Gold Glove Awards (2001, '02 and '04). He was also selected as an All-Star five times and a Silver Slugger Award winner four times.

In 2000 Helton won the slash line Triple Crown in the NL that year, hitting .372/.463/.698, with his batting average and slugging percentage leading the Majors. He also had MLB's highest OPS among qualified hitters, at 1.162. Helton slashed .353/.441/.633 away from home in 2000. He tied **Nomar Garciaparra** for the MLB lead at .372.

Back injuries slowed Helton toward the end of his career, but he had one of the all-time great peaks from 2000-05. Over that six-season span, only two players produced more bWAR than Helton's 42.1: **Alex Rodriguez** (52.9) and **Barry Bonds** (51.7). And only Bonds (240), **Albert Pujols** (167), **Jason Giambi** (166) and **Manny Ramirez** (165) had a higher OPS+ among qualified batters than Helton's 158 in that period.

Helton is undeniably "Mr. Rockie." No. 17 spent his entire 17-year career with the club, and he helped lead it to its only World Series berth in 2007.

Helton is at the center of countless iconic franchise moments and milestones, and his No. 17 was the first to be retired by the Rockies (Walker's 33 is the only other number the team has retired).

Compared with the average Hall of Fame first baseman, Helton fares well. He produced 61.8 career WAR per Baseball Reference (the average Hall of Fame first baseman's WAR is 65). His seven-year peak WAR (the WAR from his best seven-year stretch) was significantly higher than the average Hall of Fame first baseman's 41.8, at 46.6.

A DOZEN PLAYERS WITH A BIG WALK YEAR OPPORTUNITY

There are some big names in the 2024 free agent class—Angels superstar P/DH **Shohei Ohtani**, Blue Jays 3B **Matt Chapman**, Blue Jays OF **Teoscar Hernandez**, Phillies 1B **Rhys Hoskins**. Cubs CF **Cody Bellinger** and Giants OF **Michael Conforto** are on “prove it’ contracts.

Here are a few lesser-known players in their walk year who could significantly change the trajectory of their lives with a big 2023 season:

Harrison Bader, CF, Yankees

Lourdes Gurriel Jr., LF/DH, D-backs

Ian Happ, LF, Cubs

Kiké Hernández, SS/CF, Red Sox

Jorge Soler, LF/DH, Marlins

Gio Urshela, INF, Angels

BLUE JAYS HIRE JAMES GLICK AS VP BASEBALL STRATEGY

By Kaitlyn McGrath The Athletic

The Toronto Blue Jays hired James Click as their vice president of baseball strategy, the team announced Monday. Here's what you need to know:

- Click joins Toronto after spending three seasons as general manager of the Houston Astros.
- He was offered a one-year deal to stay with the Astros in 2023 but declined. Click parted ways with the Astros in November.

Backstory

Astros owner Jim Crane hired Click in January 2020 to stabilize the Astros in the wake of the sign-stealing scandal. Click did just that, compiling the most regular-season victories in the American League during his three-year tenure, capping off an 11-2 postseason with the 2022 World Series title.

He previously spent 15 years with the Tampa Bay Rays, becoming the team's vice president of baseball operations in 2017.

What does Click's role involve?

The former Astros GM will join the Blue Jays' baseball operations leadership team and work closely with general manager Ross Atkins and department heads on strategic planning, decision making and evaluation, according to a release from the team. The club said Click will help to "identify best practices, develop plans, and implement strategies."

How can he help the Blue Jays?

The Blue Jays are always seeking ways to make the club better, whether that's on the field or in the front office. Click brings a level of experience and success to the club that's hard to match. After scandal rocked the Astros organization, he still built a powerhouse team that other clubs could only wish to emulate.

Click also cut his teeth in the industry by working for the innovative Rays organization that's always done more with less. The Blue Jays are big on collaboration and it seems like Click is going to have the freedom to influence many areas of the organization. As Toronto tried to push its way into the top teams in baseball, Glick seems like a useful addition.

BEST LINEUPS EVER

Thinking of Team USA in the WBC, from Tom Verducci in Sports Illustrated, some other strong lineups:

BEST ONE GAME LINEUPS

March 28, 1970: The East-West Major League Baseball Classic (Dodger Stadium)

West Team

1. **Maury Wills**
2. **Pete Rose**
3. **Henry Aaron—***
4. **Reggie Jackson—***
5. **Johnny Bench—***
6. **Orlando Cepeda—***
7. **Joe Morgan—***
8. **Sal Bando**
9. **Earl Wilson**

Manager: Roy Campanella

Players left spring training to play a game to honor the memory and support the causes of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who had been assassinated almost two years ago to the day. All proceeds from the game went to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and to the construction of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Atlanta.

With **Jackie Robinson** watching, the game featured the first Black people in MLB to umpire (**Emmett Ashford**); play in the American League and win a home run title (**Larry Doby**); pitch in the World Series (**Satchel Paige**); play catcher (Campanella); win a strikeout title, 20 games and a Cy Young Award (**Don Newcombe**); win back-to-back MVPs (**Ernie Banks**); win the AL MVP (**Elston Howard**); be named team captain (**Willie Mays**); and win the Triple Crown (**Frank Robinson**).

The East starting lineup, managed by **Joe DiMaggio**, included Frank Robinson, Banks, **Willie Stargell**, **Ron Santo** and **Tom Seaver**.

1934 All-Star Game, Polo Grounds

AL All-Stars

1. **Charlie Gehringer**, 2B—*
 2. **Heinie Manush**, LF—*
 3. **Babe Ruth**, RF—*
 4. **Lou Gehrig**, 1B—*
 5. **Jimmie Foxx**, 3B—*
 6. **Al Simmons**, CF—*
 7. **Joe Cronin**, SS—*
 8. **Bill Dickey**, C—*
 9. **Lefty Gomez**, P—*
- Manager: **Joe Cronin**—*

Future Hall of Famers filled the entire AL starting lineup. The NL started eight future Hall of Famers. (**Wally Berger**, a four-time All-Star, was the only one of 18 starting players who did not gain enshrinement.) The game is famous for **Carl Hubbell** striking out Ruth, Gehrig, Foxx, Simmons and Cronin in succession. The AL won, 9–7.

1966 All-Star Game, Busch Stadium

NL All-Stars

1. **Willie Mays**, CF—*
 2. **Roberto Clemente**, RF—*
 3. **Henry Aaron**, LF—*
 4. **Willie McCovey**, 1B—*
 5. **Ron Santo**, 3B—*
 6. **Joe Torre**, C—*
 7. **Jim Lefebvre**, 2B
 8. **Leo Cardenas**, SS
 9. **Sandy Koufax**, P—*
- Manager: **Walter Alston**—*

The NL lineup missed second baseman **Joe Morgan**, who was out with a knee injury. The temperature in St. Louis was 105°. Twenty-six people died in the city that day from the heat. Three hundred people at the ballpark required medical attention. Of course, the game went into extra innings. The NL won, 2–1, when a single by **Maury Wills** knocked in **Tim McCarver**.

Sept. 27, 1917: Tim Murnane Memorial Game (Fenway Park)

MLB All-Stars

1. **Rabbit Maranville, SS—***
 2. **Ben Chapman, 2B**
 3. **Ty Cobb, RF—***
 4. **Tris Speaker, CF—***
 5. **Joe Jackson, LF**
 6. **Stuffy McInnis, 1B—***
 7. **Buck Weaver, 3B**
 8. **Tip O'Neill, C**
 9. **Urban Shocker, P**
- Manager: **Hughie Jennings—***

Stars traveled to Boston to play an in-season game against the Red Sox as a tribute to *Boston Globe* sportswriter Tim Murnane, who had recently died. More than \$13,000 was raised for a memorial fund for his children. Jackson won a pregame long throw competition (396 feet, 8 inches). **Babe Ruth** won the fungo hitting contest (402 feet, 8 inches). Will Rogers gave a roping demonstration. **Walter Johnson** and Ruth pitched. Jackson, Speaker and Cobb rotated among the three outfield positions. The Red Sox won, 2–0, in front of 17,119.

1986 All-Star Game, Astrodome

NL All-Stars

1. **Tony Gwynn, LF—***
 2. **Ryne Sandberg, 2B—***
 3. **Keith Hernandez, 1B**
 4. **Gary Carter, C—***
 5. **Darryl Strawberry, RF**
 6. **Mike Schmidt, 3B—***
 7. **Dale Murphy, CF**
 8. **Ozzie Smith, SS—***
 9. **Dwight Gooden, P**
- Manager: **Whitey Herzog—***

AL starter **Roger Clemens** faced this loaded lineup and threw three perfect innings on just 25 pitches, all but four of them strikes. The AL won, 3–2.

1998 All-Star Game, Coors Field

NL All-Stars

1. **Craig Biggio, 2B—***
 2. **Tony Gwynn, RF—***
 3. **Mark McGwire, 1B**
 4. **Barry Bonds, LF**
 5. **Chipper Jones, 3B—***
 6. **Mike Piazza, C—***
 7. **Larry Walker, CF—***
 8. **Walt Weiss, SS**
 9. **Greg Maddux, P—***
- Manager: **Jim Leyland**

The NL All-Stars lost, 13–8, in a typical Coors Field slugfest in the heart of the steroid era. Maddux did throw two scoreless innings.

BEST LINEUP AS PART OF A SERIES

Oct. 6, 1946: Barnstorming Tour (Yankee Stadium)

Satchel Paige All-Stars

1. **Artie Wilson, SS**
 2. **Hank Thompson, 2B**
 3. **Sam Jethroe, CF**
 4. **Johnny Davis, LF**
 5. **Quincy Troupe, C**
 6. **Howard Easterling, 3B**
 7. **Gene Benson, RF**
 8. **Buck O’Neil, 1B—***
 9. **Satchel Paige, P—***
- Manager: **Satchel Paige**

While the Cardinals and Red Sox played in the World Series, the Satchel Paige and **Bob Feller** All-Star teams brought their Barnstorming Tour to Yankee Stadium, drawing a crowd of 27,462. Feller, who had just thrown 371½ innings that season pitched almost every game as his team played 34 games in 27 days.

Paige’s team included some of the biggest Negro Leagues stars. Wilson was a career .360 hitter. Thompson hit .337 for the Kansas City Monarchs that year and later posted an .830 OPS over 12 seasons with the Giants. Jethroe would become a two-time NL stolen base champion.

O'Neil had just won the Negro National League batting title. Easterling hit .300 on the tour while facing Feller, **Bob Lemon, Spud Chandler and Johnny Sain**. The Paige All-Stars won, 4–0.

Oct. 25, 1934: Stopover on way to a tour of Japan (Hawai'i)

Big Leaguers

1. **Eric McNair, SS**
2. **Charlie Gehringer, 2B—***
3. **Babe Ruth, LF—***
4. **Lou Gehrig, 1B—***
5. **Jimmie Foxx, 3B—***
6. **Earl Averill, CF—***
7. **Bing Miller, RF**
8. **Frank Hayes, C**
9. **Lefty Gomez, P—***

Manager: **Connie Mack—*** (*Ruth acted as manager*)

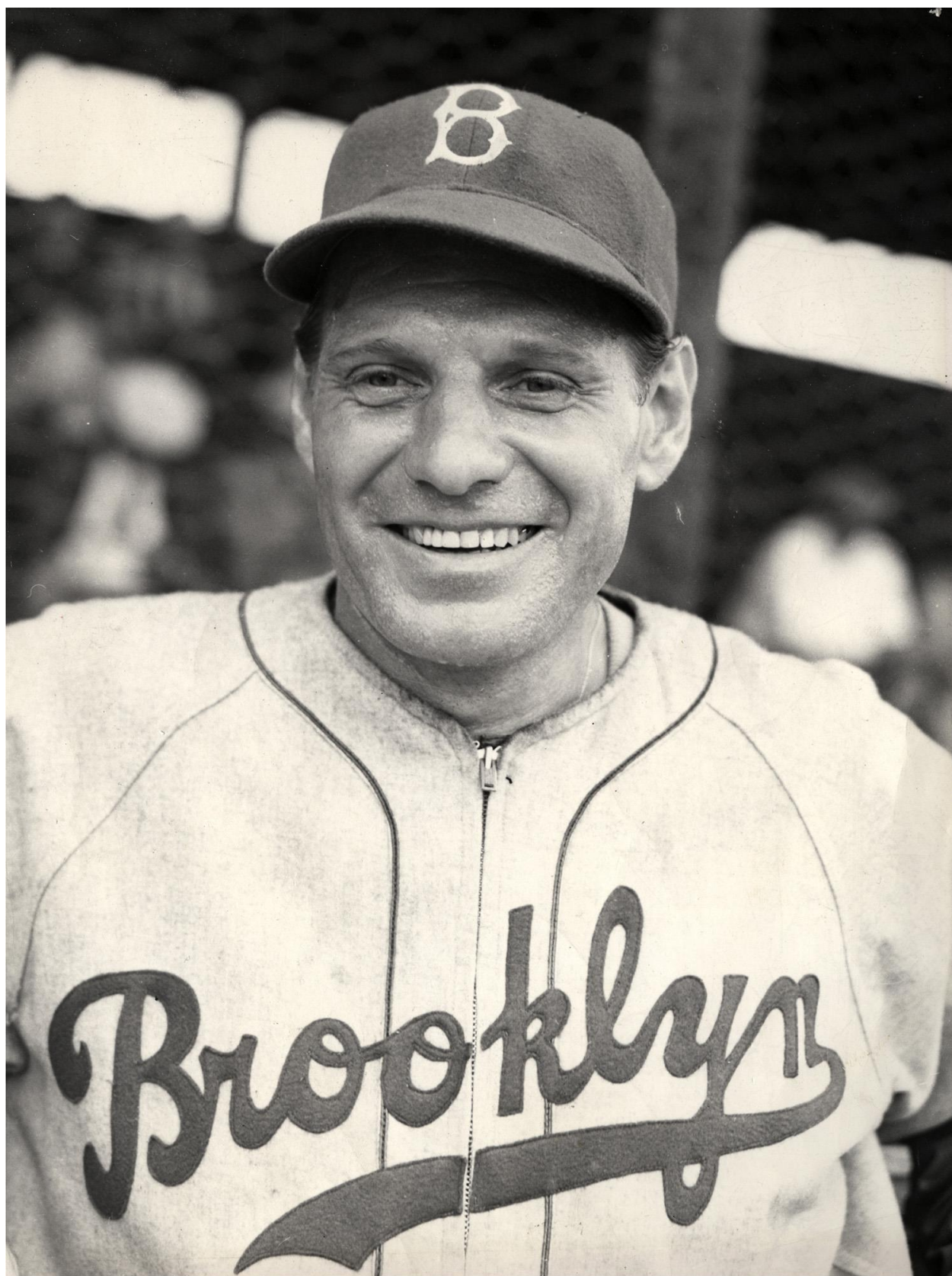
The All Americans beat the Hawaiian All-Stars, 8–1. Gehrig homered. Ruth had two doubles, including one long drive off the center field fence. According to *The Honolulu Advertiser*, "Like a portly old gentleman passing a contribution box in church, [he] toddled down to second base."

1927 Yankees

1. **Earle Combs, CF—***
2. **Mark Koenig, SS**
3. **Babe Ruth, CF—***
4. **Lou Gehrig, 1B—***
5. **Bob Meusel, LF**
6. **Tony Lazzeri, 2B—***
7. **Joe Dugan, 3B**
8. **Pat Collins, C**
9. **Waite Hoyt, P—***

Manager: **Miller Huggins**

You know you have a legendary lineup when almost one hundred years later the nickname still resonates: Murderers' Row. The famed 1927 Yankees went 114-44-1, including a four-game sweep of the Pirates in the World Series. They outscored opponents by 384 runs, or 2.41 per game.



LEO DUROCHER

Leo Durocher had many adjectives applied to him during his colorful career, both kind and unkind. He was a brash, abrasive, hustling, light-hitting, slick-fielding, umpire-baiting bench jockey who was in baseball for nearly five decades as a player, manager, coach, and commentator.

Durocher spent his first full major league season with the 1928 World Champion Yankees, and became New York's starting shortstop in 1929. He moved on to the Reds in 1930, and the Cardinals in 1933, becoming captain of the "Gashouse Gang" in 1934. His last season as a first-stringer came with the 1939 Dodgers. Never much of a hitter, he topped .260 only five times in 17 years, with a high of .286 in 1936. He became an All-Star mostly on the strength of his glove work; a flashy, acrobatic SS, he led the NL in fielding in '36 and 1938.

Durocher went on to a long, distinguished, and tumultuous career as a manager. He was player-manager of the Dodgers in 1939-41, 1943, and 1945, though he played only a few games in the latter three years. He guided the Dodgers to the NL pennant in 1941, and to second-place finishes in 1940, 1942, and 1946. Perhaps his finest moment as Dodger manager came in spring training of 1947 when he personally quashed a rebellion by players who were protesting the presence of **Jackie Robinson**.

Durocher's tenure in Brooklyn was marked by – among other things – feuds with GM Branch Rickey, who could not always tolerate Durocher's antics and managing style. Durocher lived life in the fast lane. He was a pro at the card table, and favored the horse track. Stories emerged that he was friendly with such characters as Bugsy Siegel. In 1945, he was indicted for assaulting a fan under the stands. His problems reached a peak in 1947, when he was suspended for the season for reputed association with gamblers. The Dodgers won the pennant with **Burt Shotton** at the helm instead.

Durocher returned in 1948, gave rookie **Roy Campanella** the catching job, and moved young **Gil Hodges** to first base. But the Dodgers fell to last place on July 7. Eight days later, Rickey fired Durocher and rehired Shotton, as the rival Giants fired their manager, **Mel Ott**, and hired Durocher. Durocher guided the Giants to a pennant in 1951, overtaking the Dodgers in a spectacular race and defeating them in the subsequent playoff, thanks to **Bobby Thomson**. In 1954, Durocher led New York to his only WS victory. After the 1955 season, he became a TV commentator.

Durocher returned to manage the Cubs from 1966 until late in 1972, and the Astros through 1973, finishing second several times. Toward the end, his players were aware that he was becoming senile; some were with Durocher for weeks before the manager knew who they were. He retired among the all-times leaders in games managed (3740), wins (2010), and losses (1710). His life story was told in his autobiography, *Nice Guys Finish Last*, co-written with Ed Linn. The phrase (or something to that effect) was one that had been attributed to Durocher in '47, referring to Ott, whose Giants had been losing.

In 17 seasons Durocher played in 1637 games. He had 1320 hits, batted .247. He played in two World Series and was in the top ten in MVP voting twice.

1899 Cleveland Spiders

Historicbaseball.com

The Cleveland Spiders had built a reputation in the early years of baseball as one of the BEST teams in the National League. That was until their owners, the Robison brothers, bought an additional franchise in St. Louis.

The brothers looked at the fan support base and decided that St. Louis held the most promise. So, the Robisons shipped every starter from the 1888 Spiders lineup to St. Louis. The Spiders were left with only a few quality players -- **Lave Cross, Joe Quinn and Tommy Dowd. Tommy Tucker** was talked out of retirement to play one more season.

The Spiders started the season by losing 30 of 38 games. The Robisons then transferred Cross to the St. Louis club and Quinn became the manager.

The Spiders were so bad that, beginning in June, they played out the rest of the season on the road and compiled an 11-102 record away from Cleveland. Because they were playing on the road, the Spiders picked up a new nickname, "The Wanderers."

The leading pitcher, **Charlie Knepper**, had a .154 winning percentage and no pitcher won more than four games. They were last in the league in runs (529 in 154 games), hits (1333), doubles (142), triples (50) home runs (12), stolen bases (12), team batting (.253), slugging, OBP and total bases.

THE SPENCER STRIDER CONUNDRUM: CAN A STARTING PITCHER DOMINATE WITH TWO PITCHES?

Eno Sarris, The Athletic

It's right there, in the definition of a changeup, on the league website. "The changeup is a common off-speed pitch, and almost every starting pitcher owns a changeup as part of his arsenal," it says on MLB.com. The changeup — or at least a third pitch of some sort — is almost considered a fundamental requirement for starting.

And then there's Spencer Strider, who broke the rookie strikeout rate record last year in 131.2 excellent innings, and did so without a changeup. Literally 95 percent of the time, he threw a fastball and slider, and only two starters threw 100+ innings and threw their primary two

pitches more often. Headed into this season, the obvious question is if he can continue this dominance with two pitches.

“I don’t want to throw a pitch that doesn’t have the prospect of getting an out,” Strider told me late last year. “Worse pitches are contacted more, put into play more, you have worse command of them like I do with my changeup, and so you’re falling behind and relying on pitches that are going to be fouled off rather than swung-and-missed in a two-strike count. So what’s the point of it then?”

The numbers say throwing a third pitch even just 10 percent of the time softens a pitcher’s third-time-through-the-order penalty. In other words, players get more accustomed to the shapes and velocities a pitcher throws, and being able to mix it up means a starter can go deeper into the games. That makes sense in theory, but Strider himself still struck out 38 percent of the batters he saw in the fifth inning and later, and they only managed a .180/.251/.281 line against him, which doesn’t suggest they were seeing him any better.

Maybe that’s just one year of noise, but there is a sense that Strider’s two pitches were engineered to fit together.

“Our whole approach with pitching is to identify what you’re good at,” Strider pointed out. “For me it was the fastball. Low (Vertical Approach Angle), high vert, good velo, that’s going to be the centerpiece of the arsenal, everything is going to build off that.”

That fastball is indeed excellent, as it has a low VAA (-4.3 degrees, in the top 20 percent), a high vertical movement (17.6 Induced Vertical Break, also in the top 20 percent), and both of those things are augmented by his lower release point, which was also something he manufactured on purpose.

“When I rehabbed (Tommy John surgery) I figured out I was a vert guy, and I needed to be a four-seam guy, so I catered some of my mechanical things to increasing my extension and getting lower on release, and that’s made my fastball really good,” Strider said. “My initial mechanical queue was a forward drift where my hips would tilt up towards the plate, and so now I’m trying to keep my hips level, and that helps me get further down the mound.”

Only one starter, **Ryan Pepiot** of the Dodgers, threw from the same vertical release point and had more vertical movement. Strider’s is a top-five fastball in the league by Stuff+, which looks only at the physical characteristics of the pitch and sums up the influence of things like release point, movement, and velocity.

PLAYER	4 SEAM STUFF PLUS
Tyler Glasnow	168.9

Spencer Strider	154.9
Jacob deGrom	153.4
Gerrit Cole	152.1
Hunter Greene	138.7

Once he had the fastball in hand, Strider and the Braves found the right slider to match that pitch. It had to be hard, and look like a fastball coming out of the hand.

“I had a curveball before, but I don’t supinate well, so I had to really hook it and try to get it over the top and roll out, so it didn’t have any velocity,” Strider said. “I was inducing a lot of movement but it wasn’t tunneling at that point. I need something hard with more vertical movement. Now I’m able to throw it hard, and the harder I throw it the more I can induce negative movement, so now I’m throwing it 86-88.”

Only three starting pitchers’ sliders resulted in lower production from hitters, so, yeah, Strider has two pitches, and they’re both insane. Haven’t we been told forever this doesn’t work?

Thanks to STATS Perform, we know there have been 193 pitcher seasons in which a starting pitcher put up more than 100 innings (prorated for 2020) and used only two pitches more than 90 percent of the time. Those starters had a 3.97 ERA and struck out 20 percent of the batters they faced. The league average starter over that time frame had a 4.24 ERA and struck out 19.8 percent of the batters they faced. So we actually see around 14 pitchers per season like Strider, and their average output is about the same as the average starting pitcher. Seems doable — except pitchers seem to be doing it less often every year.

Further delving into the data reveals a good portion of these players threw knuckleballs or changeups, so they don’t seem like great fits for this study. Strider threw a fastball and slider, and actually threw them 95 percent of the time. If we limit the pool in that way, we get 27 pitcher seasons since 2008, or about two in any given year. That cohort had a 3.98 ERA and struck out 19.6 percent of the batters they saw, so about the same as the larger sample. But if we focus on the few player seasons in which the player threw a slider and a fastball 95 percent of the time and *also* had an above-average strikeout rate, and an above-average ERA, we get his closest comps.

PITCHER	SEASON	PITCHES	IP	ERA	K%
Spencer Strider	2022	Fastball (67.0%), Slider (28.2%)	131	2.67	38.3
Dinelson Lamet	2020	Slider (53.4%), Fastball (46.4%)	69	2.89	34.8
Robbie Ray	2022	Fastball (60.2%), Slider (37.5%)	189	3.71	27.4

Justin Masterson	2013	Fastball (73.1%), Slider (26.7%)	193	3.45	24.3
Tyson Ross	2014	Fastball (54.9%), Slider (41.0%)	195	2.81	24.0
Ervin Santana	2008	Fastball (60.7%), Slider (35.1%)	219	3.49	23.9

OK, these seem like his compatriots. Now we can see it's not really that common to be this extreme — five in the last 14 seasons, so only one every three seasons — but a couple of these pitchers did manage some longevity and quality in the game with a slimmed-down approach. Justin Masterson in particular shows up on this list repeatedly. **Brady Singer and Brad Keller** attempted it in Kansas City most recently but fell off when we added results. Robbie Ray has benefitted from a small arsenal. It's not impossible to do well like this, just not super likely.

Strider still doesn't quite fit. You'll notice a few of these other pitchers threw two different kinds of fastballs, which we combined for this study. Ray sort of famously added a sinker this year to help keep hitters off balance. And then there's the quality of those fastballs. Strider averaged over 98 mph on his fastball last year. Dinelson Lamet's was the only other fastball on here that averaged over 95.5, mph and he only did so for 69 innings in 2020. Safe to say Strider has the best fastball of the group.

"There are very few right-handed starters that average over 98 with a low VAA," Strider affirmed. "It's just hard to hit. The harder you throw, the less time they have to decide so it's even harder to hit."

He's right. There are very few. Gerrit Cole (97.8 mph) and Dylan Cease (96.8 mph) are the only ones close at all.

"You can't really build a better four-seam fastball than what he has as a starting pitcher," said Chris Langin, director of pitching at Driveline Baseball. "(It's) 99.5 mph, with impressive carry relative to his release height."

The thing the other starters *did* have in common with Strider was slider velocity. All six of these pitchers, save Justin Masterson, threw their slider faster than league average. In fact, the group's average (85.8 mph) is clear of the 85 mph benchmark that people use for slider quality — almost every slider over 85 mph is a quality one.

Why is a hard slider so important in these cases? Consider how a two-pitch pitcher has to work when a hitter is trying to "keyhole" them and is looking for one of the two pitches in a spot.

"You throw one fastball down, all of a sudden they have to think about that," Strider said. "Even if they are sitting on the fastball up, still their brain cannot process 98 mph with 20 vertical inches of movement and still be on time every time and get the barrel to the ball, especially anyone that has a launch angle swing. I can tell what a hitter is trying to do, especially with a good catcher. When **Travis d'Arnaud** is catching, he knows what they are doing. As soon as a guy swings, he tells me what he's trying to do. Once that happens, I have another pitch."

Here's the key:

"That's why I have this slider, I built it so I could throw it, and it would look like a fastball," Strider said. "Even if they noticed it, they couldn't get under it and drive it. If the plan is to wait me out, I can throw fastballs, make them swing. If the plan is to jump me and be aggressive, I can throw sliders. You can't cover all of it."

So the track record says there have been some seasons like Strider's, but it's still rare and having a good fastball and a hard slider seems like the recipe for success. Strider has a hard slider and a really good fastball. Does the industry agree with him?

"We're essentially stockbrokers," Giants assistant pitching coach **J.P. Martinez** told me last year about **Kevin Gausman**, who primarily features a four-seam and splitter mix. "If you have five stocks and three are earning better than the other two, then let's just pour the money into those three. In the past, in working with other teams and other pitching coaches, it's been more about making the slider a feature pitch. The two main events for him are so high quality, we didn't see the use in throwing the slider more often."

In a related matter, Gausman threw the second-most sliders of his career the season after that piece was published. This is a thing that's been debated forever, from scouts to coaches to analysts. It was an early debate among the founders of Baseball Prospectus — James Click, former Astros General Manager did not think you needed three pitches to start — and there remains no clear consensus to this day.

"Does it make sense to force usage on that third pitch just because that's sorta the standard?" wondered Langin, of Driveline. "I'd say the concern is long-term contact quality maybe, as velo regression comes."

"There are definitely examples of pitchers dominating with two pitches. Robbie Ray won the Cy Young Award with two dominant pitches less than a handful of years ago," said one executive in player development who works with pitchers. "I think there is value in practicing other pitches and other variations of pitches to improve awareness of adjustment and feel for the ball but using those pitches in-game would just have to depend on those pitches' quality."

So the industry seems OK with it, provided it works, and yet there are fewer pitchers doing it every year, and Strider's dominance with two pitches has been rarely matched. Can it work for the Braves pitcher, with his two dominant offerings? We'll see. The pitcher himself is definitely still working on some wrinkles.

"I throw (the changeup) so infrequently, so when it's good I sort of forget about it and when it's bad I remember it," Strider joked. "I don't find it as fast. I'm tinkering with it more often. The slider, it's there, I pick it up and I can throw it. It's a power change because I throw hard, but I want it to be slow. I want it to be slow and more horizontal movement, I'm looking for something to move to my arm side."

“It’s more like a frustration than anything.”

He’s working on a curveball, too, and a cutter is a possibility. Those pitches could become more important as he ages, as pitchers lose velocity as they age. But it’s still all about what he expects from a pitch.

“When I throw my fastball and slider, I expect a miss. That’s what I want, that’s my goal, that’s what the pitches are supposed to do,” he said.

When he says it that way, it really seems like a solid approach. It’ll still be fascinating to see how this extreme two-pitch experiment works, since there really isn’t much of a precedent at his level of dominance.

WE’RE TWO WEEKS INTO BASEBALL’S NEW RULES. HERE’S WHAT I’VE SEEN SO FAR

Jayson Stark, The Athletic

We’re two weeks into rule-change baseball. And already, well, it’s been something to see.

We’ve seen an actual big-league baseball game end on a “clock-off.”

We’ve seen **Max Scherzer** turn spring training into his own one-man rule-change test lab.

And how all-powerful is the pitch clock? Just last week, a Mets–Nationals game — featuring 17 runs, 33 baserunners and 14 pitchers — still zipped along in 2 hours and 23 minutes. Yeah, really.

Welcome to spring training 2023, where the most tradition-entrenched of all our major sports is evolving in front of our eyes. So what has that meant? What has that looked like — as the 15-second pitch clock ticks ... as shift bans open up once-overcrowded infield real estate ... as pickoff limits and larger bases are already causing teams to lean into the running game as enthusiastically as the Vince Lombardi Packers?

It’s made for one of the most fascinating, closely watched spring trainings ever — for me, anyway. I’ve been trying to keep track of every wrinkle, large or small, from Day One. So here you go — pretty much every new dimension to rule-change baseball that I’ve witnessed so far.

Strike up the rhythm section

You can love the pitch clock. You can hate the pitch clock. But here’s the part that’s not worth debating: The pitch clock works.

It has vacuumed so much dead time out of every game that the average nine-inning game this spring is 25 minutes shorter than last spring so far — and a full half-hour shorter than the average regular-season game last year:

Average game time this spring*: 2:36

Average game time last spring: 3:01

2022 regular season: 3:06

(*Through Wednesday)

That's not just 25 minutes. It's 25 minutes of dead time, which was slowing too many games to a barely watchable slog. Now that's all gone. And not missed. And swapped for a bunch of 2 1/2-hour games played with a rhythm not seen in this sport in 25 years.

Are there issues? Sure. Are there timer-violation calls that sometimes make you scratch your head? Yep. Are there unforeseen consequences that might need to be dealt with? Of course. We'll discuss those shortly. But the games are flat-out more watchable. Period. And that's objective No. 1.

"So we don't complain," said Braves hitting coach **Kevin Seitzer**. "What we talk about is, let's just get used to it, deal with it, have fun with it, and if we win a ballgame every night and we get home a half-hour early, I'm happy."

This isn't going to be violation-palooza

Let me guess your worst pitch-clock nightmare. You're envisioning watching baseball games that feel more like that college hoop game you suffered through the other night featuring 67 free throws. But guess what. That isn't where this is going.

Look, stuff happens. Stuff will always happen. A Rays-Orioles game last weekend got so mixed up, two strikeouts and a walk busted out without a pitch being thrown (thanks to timer goof-ups). But there's also this:

Week two of spring training looked a lot better than week one.

Pitch-clock violations per game

Week 1: 2.03/game

Week 2: 1.50/game

That's very similar to the pattern in the minor leagues last season, where the violation rate dropped from 1.73 to 1.29 to 1.01 to 0.73 in the first four weeks, then leveled off at about one every two games for most of the season. And ohbytheway, that's nearly the exact rate of delay-of-game penalties in the NFL — one every other game. So players will adjust. Guess why?

What other freaking choice do they have?

“I have a lot of confidence,” said Rays president of baseball ops Erik Neander, “that, as humans, we are much more adaptable than we give ourselves credit for.”

And trust me. Some of those adaptations, you’ll be a big fan of. Such as ...

The batting gloves must be adjusting themselves

In the pre-pitch-clock era, how many times did the hitters adjust their batting gloves every game? Was it 100? A thousand? A million? Even Statcast never counted.

But I watched an entire game one day this spring and tried to keep track of how many times hitters fiddle with those batting gloves now. And the total I saw — in a nine-inning game — was two!

So maybe you’re thinking: What’s wrong with that knucklehead that he spent a whole game counting batting glove adjustments? Good question! But the point is, nobody ever needed to tighten those gloves every 15 seconds in the first place. And thanks to the clock, we’ve proved it.

The mound visit is back

Baseball’s war on mound visits was fun while it lasted. But mound visits are now a thing again. And why is that? Because they’re a sneaky way to stop the pitch clock when the alternative is a balk, or an automatic ball, or an illegal timeout.

Teams get five visits every game, plus an extra one in the ninth inning if they’re all out. Those visits are already coming in handy.

“My first time catching **Chris Bassitt** this spring,” said Blue Jays catcher **Danny Jansen**, “it was 3 and 2, first batter of the game, the clock was down to three (seconds), and I called time and ran out there for a mound visit. I had to. If I had just stayed there, or he’d have stepped off, that’s a ball — and ball four.”

Once, there was a time when the first-batter-of-the-game mound visit was not a thing anyone would brag about. But it’s about to become an integral part of clock-management strategy because when there are under eight seconds left on the clock, umpires no longer have to grant those emergency timeout requests.

Mound visits, however, are a whole different category. So as three different managers have already told me this spring, they’re going to use them!

But use those mound visits wisely

Then again, not all mound visits are worth making!

"I think this is just like the NFL," said Tigers manager **A.J. Hinch**. "I was talking to a football coach friend of mine, and he was telling me how for years, they've been trying to get coaches to stop calling timeout in the first half or at the beginning of the second half just because the (play) clock is ticking down.

"You have three timeouts left, and you waste one on third-and-6? Why? The difference between third-and-6 and a third-and-11 is not that big a deal in the NFL, so let's take the five yards because the timeouts are way more valuable."

So now, moving along to baseball ... Hinch thinks some mound visits could feel a lot like first-quarter timeouts. First inning? One out? Nobody on? Pitch clock ticking?

"That would not have been a time where I'm going to race out of the dugout," Hinch said. "Just take the (automatic) ball (for a pitch-clock violation). But (runners on) first and third? A 3-2 count? Or bases loaded? That's an obvious one. I'm going to go rescue you with that one. But in some cases, the mound visit is more valuable than that (automatic) ball."

The pitchout is also back

Bet you didn't know that 14 different managers never tried a single pitchout last season. Seriously. Not one.

It's all documented, by Sports Info Solutions, in the new 2023 Bill James Handbook. But I'd bet that number is about to change dramatically, since it's suddenly gotten a lot harder to control the running game without it.

One reason I'd make that bet is that as I've roamed around this spring, I've seen several teams working on their pitchout techniques. Hadn't seen that in years.

Another reason is hearing managers like the Braves' **Brian Snitker**, who attempted zero last season, talk out loud about how valuable pitchouts could be — if his catchers could just get the hang of them again.

"We incorporated them in our (throwing sessions before the games started), and we had some catchers who had never done one before," Snitker said. "They had no clue what to do when we did that, because we never used it."

Well, like a lot of things, that's about to change!

The spring track meet is a thing to behold

You know what the fans of this sport told Major League Baseball they wanted more of? Stolen bases. That's what.

So here we are, two weeks into a world of pickoff limits, larger bases and balk-a-mania. And guess what that's produced? Yep, exactly what it was supposed to produce. Spring training has turned into the Palm Tree Relays. Take a look.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>STOLEN BASES</u>	<u>SB/GAME</u>	<u>ATTEMPTS/GAME</u>
2022	300	1.1	1.6
2023	359	1.9	2.4

So if you haven't done that math, I'll do it for you. Stolen-base attempts are up 50 percent! The Reds are 23-for-26 in base stealing. The Yankees are 18-for-20. The Braves are 17-for-21. The Rockies are 17-for-20. The Royals are 17-for-18. Every one of those clubs has already stolen as many bases in two weeks as they stole all last spring — or more.

There's a lot of skepticism that you'll see anything close to this much base stealing when the games actually count. But let's just say this keeps up.

- The last time we saw this many stolen-base attempts per game: 1987! (**Whitey Herzog** alert!)
- The last time we saw this many successful steals per game: 1919! (**Ty Cobb** alert!)

That's strike one — on the bat boy!

This really happened last Sunday, in a Tigers-Twins game:

- Third inning: The Tigers' **Riley Greene** rockets a double to left.
- Tigers' bat boy jogs out to second base to collect Greene's shin guard, then trots off.
- The next hitter, **Javy Báez**, waits for the bat boy to get off the field, then steps into the box and learns ...
- They'd just called strike one on him because the clock was ticking all that time and he wasn't in the box on time.

So that went well! My understanding is that this actually should never have happened because the rules say the clock should have been reset until the bat boy exited the field. But it's also not the only time I've seen similar bat boy escapades. So ...

Time to dig in on your bat boy and bat girl depth chart

On most teams' lists of the 100 most important people in uniform, the bat boys and bat girls have always ranked — where? — 100th? But that, too, might need to be reevaluated, now that the pitch clock is wreaking havoc on what used to be the leisurely time hitters had to make it into the batter's box.

And who was the first manager to think along those lines? It could only have been Mets deep thinker **Buck Showalter**. Or at least that's what Mets broadcast legend Gary Cohen told me and **Doug Glanville** on the most recent edition of our Starkville podcast.

"Buck has talked about taking his best bat boy on the road with him, which teams don't generally do," Cohen reported, "in order to get the equipment into the hands of the players quicker, so that they are better able to take advantage of that 30 seconds that they have between batters."

That clock ticks faster than you think between at-bats and between innings. So believe it or not, *this makes sense!*

Watch out for wind delays

Once that pitch clock begins its march toward zero, not much (short of a pitch) can make it stop. But since I've been watching this stuff way too closely, I can report that there are exceptions.

The rules allow umpires to use "common sense" to wave off or reset the clock if the situation warrants it. And the reasons I've spotted so far include:

- **Foul balls that hurt!** This is one catchers have asked about: What happens when the catcher takes a hard foul ball off some sensitive area and needs a moment? I've seen that moment granted. Phew!
- **An up-and-in pitch knocks a hitter to the dirt.** A bunch of hitters have asked me about this one this spring. They should know umpires I've watched have repeatedly allowed the hitter a few extra seconds to jump up, dust off, refocus and get ready to hit. Phew again!
- **Shoe-tying!** If the pitcher or the shortstop has a shoelace he needs to tie, umpires are supposed to give leeway for those things. But if there are four shoelaces that need to be tied every inning, umpires aren't required to give that much leeway. So what could possibly go wrong?
- **PitchCom issues!** Those pesky PitchCom devices are always running out of batteries or losing contact with each other. So umpires are instructed to cut teams slack when that happens. But if they get suspicious that that's some sneaky stalling ruse, they could deny that slack. Just saying.

• **Wind-gust snafus!** This is actually my favorite clock-reset delay of the spring. Blue Jays pitcher **Kevin Gausman** literally blew off the mound last Friday, on a particularly gusty day, with six seconds left on the clock. Luckily for him, plate ump **Dan Iassogna** signaled for the clock to be reset. Afterward, Gausman wasn't sure who had saved him from a violation, so I checked and reported back that it was the umpires' call

"Good to know," Gausman texted back, then joked: "So when in doubt, act like it's windy!"

Good one! But in the bigger picture, it's been reassuring to see how umpires have handled these moments, because there will be more ahead.

"Those are the little things that are going to come up, or we haven't thought of, or that Major League Baseball hasn't thought of," Gausman said. "So we're all just kind of in a testing mode right now."

Coming right up — it's a mystery pitch

In theory, 15 seconds is plenty of time for a pitcher and catcher to agree on what pitch to throw. In real life, it hasn't always worked out that way.

There is time for a pitcher to shake off the call once. But twice? Not so much.

"So the other day," said Tigers catcher **Andrew Knapp**, "we didn't have time to (agree on a call), and I just said, 'Throw a pitch!' I didn't even care what was going to be thrown. There was no one on base, so I just needed to pitch to be thrown. If it's a strike, hopefully I catch it. If not, then we're in the same spot — and it's only ball one."

Fortunately, Knapp got a cutter, which was what he was guessing — and caught it. But this is a whole new level of cross-up, just waiting to happen. And it'll be coming to a regular-season game near you, almost guaranteed. And so might ...

The catchers shaking off the pitchers

Thanks to the latest developments in PitchCom technology, it isn't only the catchers who can call pitches these days. A bunch of pitchers this spring are fiddling with a new PitchCom gizmo that allows them to tell the catcher what pitch *they* want.

With those pitch timers ticking, it all makes sense to do anything to speed up this process. But here's a topic that comes up a lot: What happens if the pitcher calls a pitch and the catcher disagrees?

Will we actually see a catcher shaking off a pitcher? How new-age would that be?

"It hasn't happened yet," said Tigers pitcher **Matthew Boyd**. "But I want them to."

As a writer whose favorite annual column is the Strange But True Feats of the Year, is it OK if I mention: I want them to, too!

Yeah, but what's the count?

I'm not sure what year **Herb Score** or **Frenchy Bordagory** invented the scoreboard. I just know that for the last century or so, that scoreboard has come in handy — and not only because it gives you (yessir) the score. There's also one other feature we're always trying to keep track of:

The count!

It's always been extremely helpful that there was an easy way to keep track of how many balls and strikes there were in any given at-bat. But this spring? Well, not necessarily!

About a week and a half ago, in a game against the Phillies, **José Berríos** trotted to the mound to start the second inning. He was wearing one of those new pitcher PitchCom devices so he could try out calling pitches himself. It seemed like a good idea ... until the clock started ticking down, 5-4-3-2.

"I was trying to do the PitchCom," Berríos told me later. "But I kept pushing the wrong button."

So with the clock at two, his catcher, **Rob Brantley**, screamed for a timeout. But under the rules, it was too late on the clock. Except the plate ump granted it anyway, then admitted afterward that he should have called an automatic ball.

But that was only half the problem here. The bigger issue was: *Nobody knew the count! Including the guy pitching! And also the team he was pitching to!*

"Berríos didn't know the count," said one Phillie. "He kept saying, 'I just want to know the count.' Like, you can't take time to get the count. That's just common sense. We have to get that fixed."

Ya think? Scoreboard operators routinely miss pitch-clock violation strike or ball calls this spring. Broadcasters don't always catch them. Umpires don't clearly signal them. And the spring box scores don't even mention them. None of that is good.

But according to one coach I spoke with this week, it's about to change. Umpires have now been told to be more demonstrative about clearly indicating every violation they call. Teams are supposed to announce these going forward (good luck with that!). And once the season starts, every violation will make it into the box scores — so at least the pitches will add up again!

Why race the freeze when you can race the clock

How long is 2 minutes and 15 seconds? It's not enough time to recite Abe Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. But it sure seems like enough time to stuff in all the normal between-innings activity, unless ...

You're the guy who has to lead off the next inning!

And lots of hitters have told me this spring that the mere thought of having to rush in after the final out, put away their gloves, find their helmets, strap on their shin and/or elbow pads, and then be set in the batter's box in time is ... well ... stressful.

"There are still times I feel rushed," Rays utility man **Daniel Robertson** said the other day. "Like those times where you know you're leading off the inning and you're running in from the infield. And you're like, 'I've got to get back and in and get ready.'"

So last Sunday, he found himself playing second base against the Orioles. The third inning started with a 12-pitch at-bat by **Cedric Mullins**, then a pop-up. And then ...

"I'm running into the dugout, and then I realized," Robertson confessed, "there were only two outs. But that's what happens. He had a really long at-bat. I'm leading off. So I'm just making sure I get out there (to the plate) in time before I get a violation. And so that's where it speeds up on you, when you know you're leading off and you don't want to be rushing."

We've heard this tune sung by outfielders who catch the third out ... and by catchers who have all sorts of equipment they have to strip off ... and they'd appreciate a little umpire discretion with that between-innings clock. But will they get it? All they've heard from umps on this is that MLB is "monitoring" this situation.

The Mad Max Pitch Clock Lab

We're just two official spring starts into the **Max Scherzer** portion of the pitch-clock era. But they've been two of the most entertaining and innovative starts in spring-training history.

We've seen him speed up and finish off an entire three-pitch strikeout in 27 seconds. We've seen him hold the ball so long with runners on base that he actually got flagged for starting one delivery after the clock hit zero.

Scherzer launched a pitch to **Victor Robles** at the very first instant that Robles made the mistake of looking at him. Plate ump **Jeremy Riggs** called that a balk. And pitchers everywhere will benefit from that moment, even though Scherzer himself wasn't a fan of it.

"He calls time. I come set. I get the green light," Scherzer told the media scrum after that game. "I thought that was a clean pitch. He said no. We have to figure out where the limit is."

True! And it didn't take long. Coaches told me this week that within 48 hours, umpires informed them there is now "a Scherzer rule." From now on, all pitchers will have to give the hitter a chance not just to be "alert" to the pitcher but to be "set" in the box. If that doesn't happen, the umps can call time and warn the pitcher to stop Max-ing it up out there.

Into the great wide open

Does the shift ban work? Ask **Anthony Rizzo**. Ask **Kyle Schwarber**. Ask **Corey Seager**. It's shocking how much more room left-handed pull hitters are seeing this spring, on the right side of the field, than they did in the olden days — by which we mean, um, last year. And they're not complaining!

It's still early, but here's what you should know: This is working!

Leaguewide, runs scored are up by nearly half a run per game this spring. Batting average on balls in play is up eight points. And even strikeout rates are down. So voila!

Spring offense

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>RUNS/GAME</u>	<u>BA/BALLS IN PLAY</u>	<u>K%</u>
2023	11.0	.320	23.1
2022	10.6	.312	23.9

"I personally think, compared to what I thought coming in, there's going to be more offense," said Rays manager Kevin Cash. "I think there have been so many balls already this spring that, if you looked at what would have happened last year, they were outs. ... And not just for the left-handed hitter. (It's helping) the right-handed hitter, because right-handed hitters, the last two seasons, were shifted heavily."

The biggest change for those right-handed hitters so far? The single up the middle is back!

"I've had three hits already this spring," said the Phillies' **Rhys Hoskins**, "where in any other time in my professional career, I'm yelling at myself, 'Oh, s—,' a couple of steps out of the box. But now, the ball's going up the middle and the guy's not standing there. And that's good."

Time for some new terminology!

And finally, there's one more thing. Just when you thought we'd come up with every possible description of stuff we see on a baseball field, you know what we've learned this spring?

Apparently not!

Remember that Braves-Red Sox game earlier this spring that ended on a two-out bases-loaded strikeout — *on a 3-and-2 pitch that was never actually thrown* (because of a bizarre pitch-clock violation)? My friend Mike Ferrin, of MLB Network Radio, and I cooked up the important new terminology for that one. It's ...

"A clock-off!"

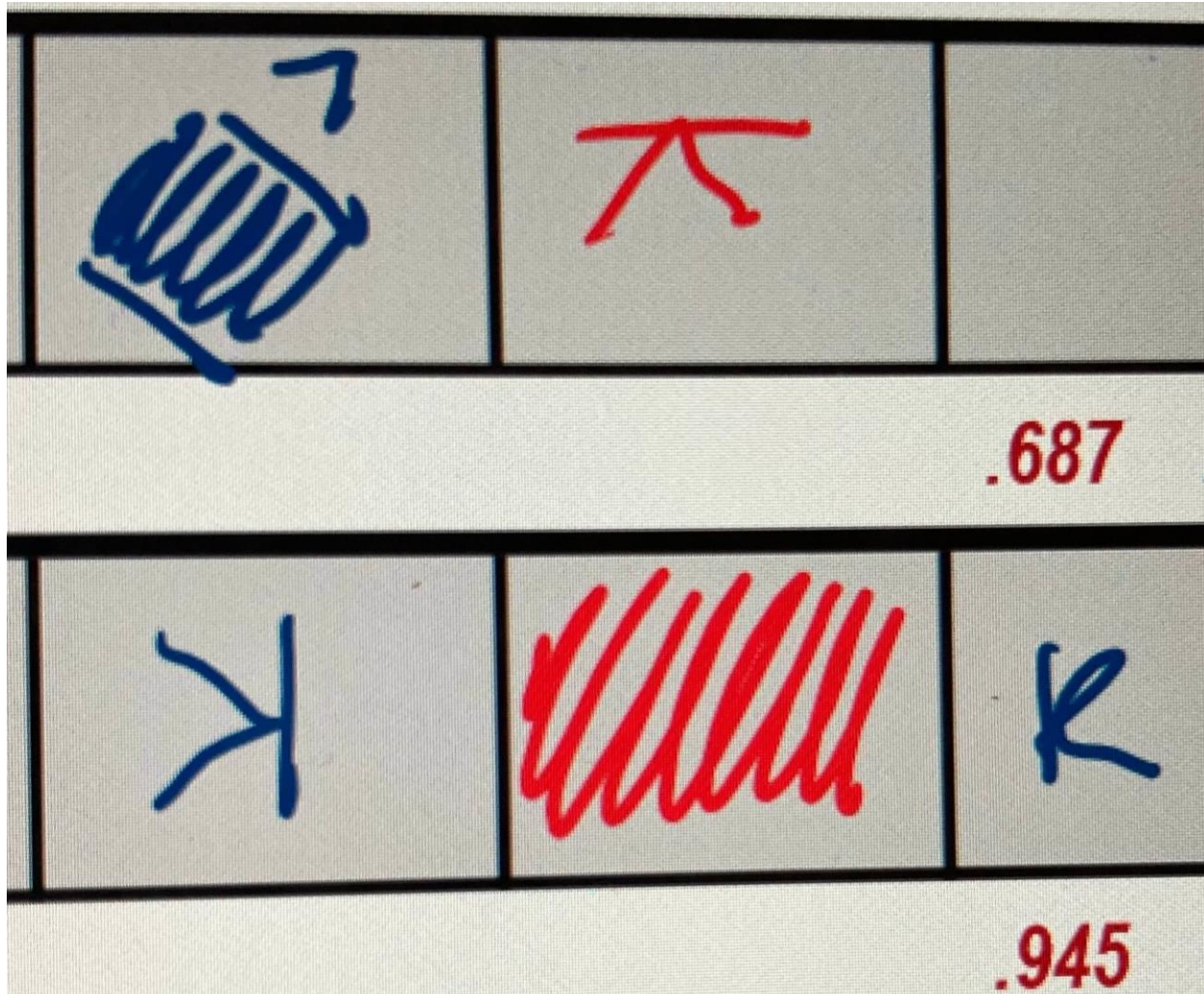
But what do we call that phenomenon in general? According to the great Phillies radio voice Scott Franzke, it's ...

"A strikeout not looking!"

But then Franzke asked one more question just as important: "How do we score it?"

Hmmm. Good question. So he has spent the spring experimenting with the answer. And now it can be revealed — a scorecard symbol sure to become essential, if not iconic, this season (and forever more).

It's the upside-down K to symbolize those "strikeouts not looking."



Are you ready for upside-down baseball in 2023? Hopefully, you are now!

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Between 1959 and 1969 this righthanded slugger led or tied for the AL lead in homers 6 times.

Harmon Killebrew

1959 42 tied with **Rocky Colavito**

1962 48

1963 45

1967 44 tied with **Carl Yastrzemski**

1969 49

From 1974 to 1986 he led or tied for the NL lead in homers 8 times

Mike Schmidt

1974 36

1975 38

1976 38

1980 48

1981 31

1983 40

1984 36 tied with **Dale Murphy**

1986 37

The St. Louis Cardinals have had three back-to-back HR leaders. All three played 1B.

1939-1940

1998-1999

2009-2010

Johnny Mize

1939 28

1940 43

Mark McGwire

1998 70

1999 65

Albert Pujols

2009 47

2010 42

Aaron Boone is one of 8 Yankees manager to lead the team for 5 or more years. He is the first not to win the World Series in his first five years as New York skipper.

Name the others:

Hall of Famer who won Yankee World Series 1923-1927-1928 **Miller Huggins** 1918-1928

Hall of Famer, won 7 World Series with Yankees, his first in 1932. **Joe McCarthy** 1931-1945

Hall of Famer, won 7 World Series titles with the Yankees, his first in 1949 **Casey Stengel** 1949-1960

Won World Series in his first two years as Yankee manager, 1961 and 1962. **Ralph Houk** 1961-1963, 1966-1973

He led the Yankees to 1977 World Series win. **Billy Martin** 1975-1977, 1979, 1983, 1985

Hall of Famer, won four World Series with Yankees including 3 straight starting in 1998. **Joe Torre** 1996-2007

He managed the Yankees for 10 seasons, won World Series in 2009. **Joe Girardi** 2008-2017

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