

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

3.5.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

An abbreviated edition as your faithful editor (and my wife) recovers from Covid. It has made it hard to read-concentrate-remember, but here's what I could come up with.

Old guys, odd award winners, happiness in San Diego, bring back pitching phenoms, miscellaneous stuff and trivia.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Since 2000 four players have won back-to-back batting titles.

2008-2009 lefty batting American League catcher-first baseman.

2011-2012-2013 right-handed American Leaguer who won MVP in two of these three seasons, also won AL batting title in 2015.

2016-2017 American League second baseman who also won MVP in 2017, led AL in hits 4 straight years and won another batting title in 2014.

2018-2019 Lefty batting National League outfielder. In 2018 was also NL MVP. In 2019 he hit 44 HRs, stole 30 bases.

How many of the 7 players who retired with 6 or more batting titles can you name?

Since 2000 eight different Colorado Rockies have won the NL batting title. I bet you can get more than half. One is in the Hall of Fame, one also won an AL batting title, one is a former AL MVP, one played all of his 17 seasons with Colorado and had over 2500 hits.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Start your day with a smile. **Bob Uecker** will be calling his 53rd season for the Milwaukee Brewers.

Major League Baseball's average salary rose 14.8 percent to a record \$4.22 million last year after the end of the lockout.

You could probably win a bar bet knowing these two:

The last pitcher with back-to-back 20-win seasons--the Astros' **Roy Oswalt** (20 wins each in 2004 and '05)

The last pitcher to lead MLB in saves in consecutive seasons--the Orioles' **Jim Johnson** (51 saves in 2012, 50 in '13)

Great quote from Mississippi State coach Ron Polk – “thinking back to when I was tossed at Arkansas for arguing balls & strikes...the ump told me to go where he couldn't see me. So naturally I stood on home plate”.

Pitcher **Kyle Hendricks** is the last member of the 2016 World Series-winning Cubs still with the team.

Tough to bet that these Red Sox guys stay healthy and productive. **Corey Kluber** turns 37 in April, **James Paxton** is 34, and **Chris Sale** turns 34 on Opening Day. No team since the 2011 Yankees has had three starters age 34 and older pitch at least 120 innings in the same season. The 2003 Yankees were the last team with three pitchers in that demographic to handle 150-plus innings each.

What are the Sox hoping for? 2017-18 versions of Sale, Kluber, and Paxton would emerge immediately as one with World Series ambitions.

Over those two years — with Sale unleashing comets in his first two Red Sox campaigns, Kluber joining him as a perennial Cy Young front-runner (and winner in 2017), and Paxton at the peak of his Big Maple powers — the trio combined for a 90-34 record, 2.80 ERA, and 11.6 strikeouts and 1.9 walks per nine over 1,087 innings.

Since 2019 collectively they have 40 starts, 185 innings pitched. We will see if the time machine works.

No way I would have guessed **Torrey Lovullo** has been Arizona Diamondbacks manager for 7 seasons.

Remember **Luis Arraez**? He won the AL batting title last year with the Twins. Arraez hit .316, keeping **Aaron Judge**, the runner-up at .311, from winning the American League triple crown. Arraez was traded over the winter to Miami for **Pablo Lopez**, a dependable right-handed starter.

The Marlins will need Arraez. They went 69-93 last season with the lowest batting average in club history (.230) and the National League's lowest slugging pct at .363. Miami was last in the National League in runs (586) and next to last in OPS (.658) last season. The Marlins did lead the league with 122 stolen bases.

The Rays are playing their spring training games at Tropicana Field after their complex in Port Charlotte, Fla., was badly damaged by Hurricane Ian. An announced crowd of 2,531 was so quiet on Thursday that the Tampa Bay hitters could hear the PitchCom device in the helmet of Twins catcher **Tony Wolters** and knew what pitch was coming from **Kenta Maeda**. It didn't help as Maeda worked two scoreless innings.

If you've been to Camden Yards, you've surely noticed the large sign under the vintage clock atop the center field video board with the logo of the local newspaper, the Baltimore Sun. When the iconic ballpark opened in 1992, the Orioles wanted the city's culture represented and the newspaper was a perfect fit. But the sign was recently removed, the Sun having fallen behind in its payments. No replacement has yet been installed. Ouch.

Liberty Media, the corporation which owns the Braves, is a publicly traded company. As a result, they're one of two teams (the Blue Jays being the other) whose books are opened to the public.

Liberty Media collected a franchise-record \$588MM in Braves-related revenue last year. That's a \$20MM jump over 2021's previous franchise-record figure, which the corporation attributed to increased ticket demand and additional retail on the heels of Atlanta's World Series championship.

The franchise's operating income before debt and amortization (OIBDA), on the other hand, was down relative to last season. Its \$71MM OIBDA was down from last year's \$104MM figure. The corporation reported an operating loss of \$15MM after reporting \$20MM in operating income during the prior season. However, those figures do not include revenue from the Battery Atlanta, a mixed-use development complex adjacent to Truist Park and owned by Liberty Media. Liberty Media reported \$28MM in additional net operating income and \$53MM in total revenues related to that project.

Atlanta's Opening Day payroll checked in around a franchise-record \$178MM in 2022 after sitting at approximately \$131MM in 2021. another significant change for the organization between 2021 and '22 was the club's postseason fortune. The Braves, of course, won the championship in the former season and benefited from eight playoff home games. Their defeat in last year's NL Division Series kept them to two postseason home contests. As a result, Liberty Media reported significantly lower fourth quarter revenues in 2022 than they had the prior season. Barring a repeat World Series run, the franchise's playoff-related income always seemed likely to regress.

From Joe Sheehan's Dodgers preview--remember that the Dodgers, two years ago, projected to have a top two starters of **Walker Buehler and Trevor Bauer** for the next couple of seasons. Bauer's career has been stopped by charges of sexual violence, Buehler's by a torn UCL. Between the two they are being paid \$32 million. Ouch.

Fastest player in spring training? That would be Brewers rookie second baseman **Garrett Mitchell**. His home-to-first sprint speed of 4.01 seconds. That was the fastest time of more than 500 players tracked by Major League Baseball's Statcast system. Unofficially he has clocked 3.89.

Mitchell is 6-foot-3 and 224 pounds. Mitchell played only 132 games in the minors, with 34 steals in 37 attempts and a .382 on-base percentage. Promoted to Milwaukee in late August, he batted .311 in 28 games and swiped eight bases without being caught.

Ichiro Suzuki was clocked in 3.7 seconds. Former Yankee **Brett Gardner** was clocked at 3.5. Batting lefty **Mickey Mantle** is considered to be the fastest ever—clocked 3.1 with a full swing and 2.9 on a drag bunt. According to Statcast, **Jose Altuve** ran at 29.9 feet per second, reaching first base in just 3.33 seconds in 2017, fastest ever for a right-handed batter.

You know you're getting older, becoming a real grown-up, when you realize you're the same age as Major League Baseball players. Then it dawns on you that players your age are considered "grizzled veterans." And then, eventually, there's no one your age in MLB left. Then you are old. Here are the 10 oldest MLB players:

- 1. Rich Hill, LHP, Pirates (age 43)**
Born: March 11, 1980 | 1st season: 2005
- 2. Nelson Cruz, DH, Padres (age 42)**
Born: July 1, 1980 | 1st season: 2005
- 3. Adam Wainwright, RHP, Cardinals (age 41)**
Born: Aug. 30, 1981 | 1st season: 2005
- 4. Justin Verlander, RHP, Mets (age 40)**
Born: Feb. 20, 1983 | 1st season: 2005
- 5. Miguel Cabrera, DH, Tigers (age 39)**
Born: April 18, 1983 | 1st season: 2003
- 6. Jesse Chavez, RHP, Braves (age 39)**
Born: Aug. 21, 1983 | 1st season: 2008
- 7. Joey Votto, 1B, Reds (age 39)**
Born: Sept. 10, 1983 | 1st season: 2007
- 8. Zack Greinke, RHP, Royals (age 39)**
Born: Oct. 21, 1983 | 1st season: 2004
- 9. Charlie Morton, RHP, Braves (age 39)**
Born: Nov. 12, 1983 | 1st season: 2008
- 10. Craig Stammen, RHP, Padres (age 39)**
Born: March 9, 1984 | First season: 2009

As we get used to the new rules I liked his:

These are the greatest baseball players on earth. They can adjust to any situation you give them. The problem in my mind has been exactly this kind of thinking: Players should not decide

how much time they get. Football players don't get to decide how much time they get to run a play. Basketball players don't get to decide how much time they get to take a shot. Tennis players don't get to decide how much time they get to serve. And as much respect and admiration and regard I have for baseball players, the game isn't supposed to be catered to them.

The game is supposed to be catered to THE FANS. The people paying to attend. The people watching and listening. The people who buy the merch. The people who stay loyal to their teams and connect with other fans and draw joy from baseball. They — we — are the ones who should matter when it comes to how much dead time is in baseball. The league has given us no say on the matter for decades — they just allowed the game to stretch and stretch and stretch on.

Baseball has gained an average of more than a half hour of dead time in the last 40 or so years. Maybe you can live with that, maybe you even think it adds to the drama, but would you feel the same way if there was ANOTHER 15 minutes of dead time in the next decade? What about another half hour of dead time? What about another hour of dead time? Baseball was meant to move. It's so good to see it moving again.

IT'S A GOOD TIME TO BE A PADRES FAN

First a look back (per Sports Illustrated)

Major League Baseball had a problem. It was 1968, A's owner Charlie Finley had just moved his team from Kansas City to Oakland, and Missouri Senator Stuart Symington was threatening to revoke the league's antitrust exemption, the carve-out that allows the sport to operate as a legal monopoly. To placate Symington, baseball's 20 owners agreed to create the Royals, plus three other teams.

Walter O'Malley, the Dodgers' owner and the most powerful man in baseball, suggested that one franchise go to San Diego. It was a clever bit of maneuvering by him. O'Malley arranged for the Dodgers' team president, Buzzie Bavasi, to become a part owner, thus freeing up Bavasi's job for O'Malley's son, Peter. And as a market, San Diego came with some competitive disadvantages; as Bavasi would later say, it was hemmed in by Mexico to the south, the desert

to the east, the Pacific Ocean to the west and Vin Scully to the north. O'Malley was basically giving his own team a neighbor to torment a dozen or more times a year.

More often than not over the next half century, that's exactly what happened. During the 1970s, while the Dodgers carried hefty payrolls and saw the results, the cash-strapped Padres once asked players to wait three days to deposit their checks. In '74 the team needed a \$71,000 advance from the city of San Diego. Finances were so dire in '92 that the team did away with its lobby Christmas tree.

It has not been all bad for the Padres: They twice made the World Series, in 1984 and '98, although they were quickly dispatched by superior teams. But mostly, they have dwelled in the reality that San Diego, which Nielsen categorizes as the No. 27 media market in the United States, cannot match the revenue, and therefore the payroll, of such heavyweights as Los Angeles (No. 2) and San Francisco (No. 6), or even Phoenix (No. 11) or Denver (No. 16), its divisional rivals. And for years, the Padres' payrolls reflected that reality; a three-year sample from a decade ago: No. 29 in 2011, No. 27 in '12 and No. 25 in '13, according to Spotrac.

Over their first three years, the Padres averaged 7,054 fans per game in their 50,000-seat ballpark. In his book *Lords of the Realm: The Real History of Baseball*, John Helyar describes a moment when Bavasi learned that a former player was on his way to ask for a loan: "Bavasi groaned and asked [Padres trainer Doc] Mattei where he might hide. 'You might try the ticket windows,' he said. 'Nobody's ever there.' "

Fast Forward to Today

But in August 2012, a group including Peter Seidler bought the team for \$800 million. Seidler, a two-time cancer survivor, was undergoing treatment at the time; when he felt healthy enough, in '20, he took over as principal owner and chairman. Since that day, payrolls have looked like this: No. 8, No. 5 and, entering March, No. 4. Upon signing 30-year-old third baseman **Manny Machado** to an 11-year, \$350 million extension in late February, San Diego became the first franchise in history to employ two \$340 million players. The Padres' coffers have swelled to the point that they have gone from receiving revenue sharing to contributing to it.

The Padres maxed out FanFest—150,000 free tickets distributed; 48,000 people in attendance; the event extended an hour to accommodate the lines of people snaking around the ballpark—and capped season-ticket sales this winter at 24,000, all due to what they call "unprecedented demand." The Padres appear poised to draw three million fans for only the second time in club history and could set a club record.

Seidler tends to take the long view. He is especially fond of what the Padres call "statue contracts," or deals that secure players for double-digit years, because he believes that consistency matters to the community. "The fans know that they're going to be able to see a lot of these players to the end of their career," he says. And he feels confident the team will be

able to withstand those financial commitments. He likes to tell people, “The business of baseball is good.”

The Padres find themselves in an unusual situation: San Diego is the only city with an MLB club as its only men’s major professional sports team. It also boasts 1.4 million residents, many of whom harbor Los Abandonment issues: The NBA’s Clippers spent six years in San Diego in the 1970s and early ’80s before decamping for L.A., and the NFL’s Chargers broke even more hearts when they followed suit in 2017 after 56 seasons. This city is desperate for a winner to embrace, especially at the expense of its neighbor up the coast.

Can this last forever? Will the Padres run out of money? No less an authority than commissioner Rob Manfred asked that question as spring training opened: “The trick for smaller markets has also always been sustainability,” he said. “Hats off to Peter Seidler. He’s made a massive financial commitment personally to making this all happen. The question [becomes]: How long can you continue to do that?”

Seidler says, “I don’t think I use the word *sustainability*. People do. . . . I know, as much as you can know these things, that we have everything we need to put a winning team on the field every single year.” “There is a risk in doing nothing, too.”

He declines to be specific about his finances, but he points out that he’s been a businessman for a long time: He opened his investment firm, Seidler Equity Partners, in 1992; it now manages some \$3.5 billion in assets. Between his personal wealth and the furor around the team—the Padres have seen unprecedented demand for sponsorships in addition to tickets—he believes he can make the math work.

Between Machado, **Fernando Tatis Jr.**, **Xander Bogaerts**, **Yu Darvish** and **Joe Musgrove**, the **Padres have given out over \$1 billion in contracts this offseason.**

No wonder **Tony Clark** says the MLBPA will never agree to a salary cap.

Coming soon Seider has to figure out if he can afford extensions for **Juan Soto**, **Blake Snell** and **Josh Hader**—they won’t come cheap. But that is a problem for another day.

JOE POSNANSKI CALLS OUT A FEW ODD AWARD WINNERS

Steve Bedrosian wins Cy Young Award, 1987.

As you will see throughout this list, there was a time when baseball writers went a little bit nutso celebrating relief pitchers. Actually, more than a little bit nutso. I have a theory about it: I

think baseball writers were so entirely smitten by the relatively new save statistic (invented by baseball writer Jerome Holtzman!) that they simply lost all sense of perspective about it.

This is, actually, not an uncommon thing. Through the years, baseball writers and fans have attached way too much meaning to various statistics, such as pitcher wins, RBIs, saves and batting average. There's an argument to be made that writers — and I definitely include myself in this — are falling for the same trap by putting too much stock in Wins Above Replacement.

Bedrosian in 1987 did not have a particularly great season. He gave up 11 homers in 89 innings, he had a 3.79 FIP; I'd say all things considered he was probably the third- or fourth-best RELIEVER in the National League, and it was probably his third- or fourth-best season in the big leagues. There had to be 20 starters in the league who were better than Bedrock in 1987.

BUT

... Bedrock led the league with 40 saves.

And they gave him the Cy Young Award.

Well, it wasn't quite *that* simple. They didn't just give the Cy Young to the saves leader every year. It's also that the top starters in 1987 had really weird years. Nobody won 20 games. **Nolan Ryan** led the league in ERA and strikeouts but went 8-16. **Bob Welch** and **Orel Hershiser** won 15 and 16 games, respectively. It was one of those years where no starter quite fit the voters' eyes, and so they went with a reliever and obviously they went with the one who had the most saves.

Justin Morneau wins MVP Award, 2006.

The thing that gets me about this one is: Why? It's not that Morneau had a bad MVP season — I mean, he hit .321/.375/.559 with 34 homers and 130 RBIs; that statistical season fits neatly in with most of the others. I mean, you wouldn't look at a list of MVP seasons and pick that one out as one of the weaker ones.

But ... why? That same year, **David Ortiz** hit 54 homers with 137 RBIs and 40 or so more points of OBP.

That same year, **Derek Jeter** hit .343/.417/.483 and scored 20 more runs, stole 31 more bases and played shortstop.

That same year, Morneau's teammate **Joe Mauer** hit .347/.429/.507 and he was a freaking catcher.

That same year, Morneau's teammate **Johan Santana** won the pitcher Triple Crown.

I mean, it's unclear how Morneau had a better season than **Travis Hafner, Jermaine Dye, Jim Thome, Carlos Guillen or Alex Rodriguez**. Ichiro had 224 hits that year, scored 110 runs and played his usual brilliant rightfield. **Manny Ramirez** hit .321/.439/.619. Heck, **Raul Ibanez, Vernon Wells and Troy Glaus** had comparable seasons to Morneau.

Joe Nathan was virtually unhittable as a closer. So was Mariano.

It's not that Morneau was a bad pick. He was just an incredibly weird pick.

Juan Gonzalez wins MVP Award, 1996 and 1998.

Here's the simple fact: Juan Gonzalez won two MVP awards. **Ken Griffey Jr.** won one.

That kind of voting philosophy has not aged well.

And this is especially true because in BOTH of Gonzalez's MVP seasons, Griffey was the clearly better player.

1996: Gonzalez .314/.368/.643, 47 homers, 144 RBIs, 89 runs, 3.8 WAR

1996: Griffey, .303/.392/.628, 49 homers, 140 RBIs, 125 runs, 9.7 WAR

1998: Gonzalez, .318/.366/.630, 45 homers, 157 RBIs, 110 runs, 4.9 WAR

1998 Griffey, .285/.365/.611, 56 homers, 146 RBIs, 120 runs, 6.6 WAR

This is not to say that Griffey deserved the MVP both seasons. I think Griffey did deserve it in 1996, though I (heaven help me) probably would have given the award to Jeter in 1998. And A-Rod might have deserved it both years, too.

No, I'm just saying that Griffey deserved the award OVER Juan Gonzalez. I cannot for the life of me understand what the voters were thinking, especially because Griffey was the most popular player in baseball at the time and clearly the better overall player.

Dennis Eckersley wins MVP Award, 1992.

OK, see if you can pick out Dennis Eckersley's MVP season from this collection of 1992 reliever statistics:

Pitcher A: 1.85 ERA, 93-17 strikeout-to-walk, 2.8 WAR.

Pitcher B: 1.91 ERA, 93-11 strikeout-to-walk, 2.9 WAR.

Pitcher C: 2.18 ERA, 69-27 strikeout-to-walk, 3.1 WAR

Pitcher D: 1.63 ERA, 48-25 strikeout-to-walk, 3.3 WAR

Pitcher E: 2.05 ERA, 58-24 strikeout-to-walk, 2.8 WAR

I put strikeout-to-walk ratio in there so you COULD pick out Eckersley — he's the one with the best, he's pitcher B.

Pitcher A: **Doug Jones**

Pitcher B: Eck

Pitcher C: **Jeff Montgomery**

Pitcher D: **Jeff Russell**

Pitcher E: **Steve Farr**

I guess the point I'm making is that even as a relief pitcher, Eckersley's 1992 season wasn't all that special. He did have 51 saves, which is what the voters looked at, I'm sure, but this, I think,

was the worst MVP choice in my lifetime. This is especially true because in this same year, **Roger Clemens** was absolutely fantastic, **Kirby Puckett** was absolutely fantastic, **Frank Thomas** was absolutely fantastic, **Mike Mussina** was absolutely fantastic, there were so many good choices for MVP.

Willie Hernandez wins MVP Award, 1984.

What strikes me about this season is not just the selection of Hernandez but the complete and utter ignoring of **Cal Ripken Jr.** Hernandez was not the right choice, but you can see why they picked him. He really did have a spectacular season in relief — he pitched in 80 games, 140 innings, he had a 1.92 ERA and a 0.941 WHIP. Plus, the Tigers were the whole story of baseball in 1984. Personally, assuming it had to go to a Tiger, I would have given the award to Alan Trammell.

But that's not the real crime here. Ripken put up a 10-WAR season in 1984. A TEN-WAR SEASON. You know how many shortstops in baseball history have put up a 10-WAR season? Seven. They are:

- **Honus Wagner (2)**
- **Lou Boudreau**
- **Ernie Banks**
- **Rico Petrocelli**
- **Robin Yount**
- **Cal Ripken (2)**
- **Alex Rodriguez**

And do you know how many MVP votes Ripken got in 1984? One 10th-place vote. Yeah, that's right. He hit .304/.374/.510 with 27 homers, 103 runs, he played every inning of every game, he was brilliant defensively, and he received one 10th-place vote.

The two reasons, best I can make out, is that the defending champion Orioles had a terribly disappointing 1984 season and that Ripken had already won an MVP the year before. It's really

quite amazing. He basically put up the same numbers he had a year earlier and the voters were like, “Yeah, last year that was cool. This year, that means nothing to me.”

Editor’s Note—I regularly promote two newsletters and recommend you subscribe—Joe Posnanski and Joe Sheehan. Posnanski wrote for the Kansas City Star and The Athletic, Sheehan wrote for Sports Illustrated and was a founder of Baseball Prospectus. Every day these guys put out great stuff. Here is a sample:

The Joe Sheehan Newsletter
Vol. 15, No. 7
March 3, 2023

One of the most exciting stories from the first week of exhibition games is Phillies prospect **Andrew Painter** (Keith Law #13, MLB #7, *Baseball America* #5). After getting an unusual amount of attention in an intrasquad appearance, Painter made his debut Wednesday afternoon against the Twins, throwing two innings. His box score line -- a run allowed on three hits, one strikeout -- understates his performance. Painter looked every bit a stud, touching 99 and showing off a cutter that made **Max Kepler** look bad for his only strikeout.

Painter is not two years removed from pitching for the greater glory of Calvary Christian Academy in Florida. He has just 109 2/3 pro innings under his belt, 28 of those above A ball. The guy on the mound and the guy on the page are incongruent. Painter, still a teenager for a few more weeks, can’t possibly be ready to pitch to **Matt Olson and Pete Alonso**, can he?

Stories like Painter’s used to be a much bigger part of baseball. Young pitchers coming out of nowhere have a rich history. We don’t use the word “phenom” any more, but in the past it would have been tagged to **Jose Fernandez and Dwight Gooden and Don Gullett** and many more apple-cheeked youngsters whose talent in March demanded they pitch in the bigs in April.

I ran a chart recently that listed the pitchers in recent years who have, at 23 and younger, thrown at least 180 innings in a season. None of the pitchers on that list did so even at 22, much less at younger ages. We simply don’t allow it any more. Just two 22-year-olds threw at least 100 innings last year, **Hunter Greene and Reid Detmers**. Over the last seven seasons, six of them full, just eight pitchers 22 and younger have thrown 100 innings in a season. It’s not just a pandemic oddity we’re still dealing with; it was happening long prior to 2020.

Andrew Painter turns 20 next month. No pitcher 20 years old or younger has thrown 100 innings in the majors since Fernandez threw 172 in 2013. (Fernandez tore his UCL in 2014 and

would throw just 116 innings over the next two seasons.) In the nine seasons since then, pitchers 20 and younger have thrown a total of 341 innings in the majors, and pitchers 20 and younger have made a total of 35 starts in the majors.

Raise the bar to 21, and you get a few more hits, and also my favorite statistic from the 2022 season. How many innings did pitchers 21 and younger throw last year? Take a second, I'll wait.

Five.

Simeon Woods Richardson made one appearance and threw five innings in a start for the Twins on the final weekend of the season. Woods Richardson was the only 21-year-old to pitch in the majors last year. In 2021, there were six. Those six combined for 202 innings, or fewer than CC Sabathia threw as a 21-year-old in 2002 -- his second full season in the majors.

I've thrown a lot of numbers at you, so let me sum it up this way: We've eliminated the pitching phenom. He no longer exists. The modern approach to pitcher development, which as you know has produced the healthiest group of pitchers in history and forced Dr. James Andrews into poverty, simply doesn't allow for Fernandez, for Gooden, for Gullett...or for Andrew Painter.

It's time to change that. You're no doubt familiar with the idea that There's No Such Thing As A Pitching Prospect, usually shortened to TNSTAAPP, a mantra coined by Baseball Prospectus founder Gary Huckabay. It's most often used as a disclaimer, a means of tamping down the heat on any young hurler, because they get hurt. As Gary wrote in 2007, though, there's more to it than that:

"When I first wrote that 'There's No Such Thing as a Pitching Prospect,' it meant two things, one of which has kind of become lost over time. Yes, it means that pitchers get hurt at approximately the same rate that methheads swipe identities and lose teeth. That's what all pitchers do, not just prospects. But it also had another meaning -- that guys who are totally blowing people away in the minors like they're so many hot dog pretenders before Kobayashi are absolutely not pitching prospects -- they're already pitchers, and more time in the minors only means time off the living, pulsating clocks that are their labrums, rotator cuffs, and elbows."

Over a long enough timeline, every pitcher gets hurt, and over pretty short timelines, most of them do. Given that, the way we develop pitchers nowadays is too cautious, an understandable overreaction to prior eras in which teenagers would throw 188 innings in A ball, or 20-year-olds were allowed to walk 126 men and strike out 189 as a matter of course. That was too far one way, and 19-year-old Andrew Painter throwing 103 innings and averaging 18 batters a start in a full season is too far the other way.

It's not just about volume, though, which is Gary's point. If Painter is one of the five best Phillies starters -- and he probably is -- he should be in the majors, not wasting his pitches entertaining

the citizens of Reading, Pa. There's no such thing as a pitching prospect because what we call a pitching prospect is just a pitcher.

Gary's point is more salient today because of how the game has changed. For one, across the board, modern baseball is more about tools than skills. It's not the game of the 20th century, all smallball and nuance, something to be learned over time, but rather a game of size and strength and speed and power. Andrew Painter can play in that game right now.

Moreover, he's not going to be asked to tap into too much of that power because few pitchers are any more. No one turns a lineup over four times, and almost no one is asked to turn it over three times. **Spencer Strider** won the NL Rookie of the Year award facing fewer than 22 batters a start. **Justin Verlander** won the AL Cy Young Award facing fewer than 24 batters a start. Sandy Alcantara was praised as a throwback to horses of old for facing just over 27 batters a start. No one is going to ask Andrew Painter to do what Gooden (218 IP, 28 BFP/GS) or Sabathia (180 IP, 23 BFP/GS) did. If he's going to be a five-inning starter, as seemingly all minor-league pitchers are now, he may as well be one for the Phillies.

You can take this well beyond Andrew Painter. The Blue Jays' **Ricky Tiedemann** is the AL version of Painter, a 2021 draft pick who ate the minors last year and can help a contender win. **Gavin Williams** is clearly better than **Aaron Civale** and **Zach Plesac** in Cleveland. **Brandon Pfaadt** doesn't have much left to learn at Reno. **Grayson Rodriguez** should have been in Baltimore on Opening Day a year ago.

It's not that every single pitcher in the minors is ready for the jump, but it's time to let the ones who are make it, and not be trapped in a failed system that doesn't protect arm health or help teams win games.

Bring back the pitching phenom!

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Since 2000 four players have won back-to-back batting titles.

2008-2009 lefty batting American League catcher-first baseman.

Joe Mauer, Minnesota

2011-2012-2013 right-handed American Leaguer who won MVP in two of these three seasons, also won AL batting title in 2015.

Miguel Cabrera, Detroit

2016-2017 American League second baseman who also won MVP in 2017, led AL in hits 4 straight years and won another batting title in 2014.

Jose Altuve, Houston

2018-2019 Lefty batting National League outfielder. In 2018 was also NL MVP. In 2019 he hit 44 HRs, stole 30 bases.

Christian Yelich, Milwaukee

How many of the 7 players who retired with 6 or more batting titles can you name?

Ty Cobb – 12

Tony Gwynn – 8

Honus Wagner – 8

Rod Carew – 7

Rogers Hornsby – 7

Stan Musial – 7

Ted Williams – 6

Since 2000 eight different Colorado Rockies have won the NL batting title. I bet you can get more than half. One is in the Hall of Fame, one also won an AL batting title, one is a former AL MVP, one played all of his 17 seasons with Colorado and had over 2500 hits.

Charlie Blackmon 2017

DJ LeMahieu 2016 won AL batting title in 2020 with Yankees

Justin Morneau 2014 won AL MVP in 2006

Michael Cuddyer 2013

Carlos Gonzalez	2010	
Matt Holliday	2007	
Larry Walker	2001	Hall of Fame
Todd Helton	2000	all 17 seasons with Rockies

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