

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

4.16.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

In this issue a fun profile of RetroSheet, who will reach 500 HRs?, Tom Verducci argues to keep the pitch clock in the post season, pickoffs and game theory from WSJ, horizontal sliders. Grab yourself a coffee and enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Which two teams have had the most players (4) wearing their uniform when hitting home run No. 500? Name the teams (one AL, one NL) and the players.

The NL team's first to reach 500 did it in 1945, the latest in 2001.
The AL team's first did it in 1940, the latest 2015.

Name seven major leaguers who hit at least 500 homers and stroked at least 3,000 hits? Their career dates are listed.

Righty 1954-1976
Righty 1951-1973
Switch hitter 1977-1997
Lefty 1986-2005
Righty 1994-2016
Righty 2001-2022
Righty 2003-2023

Of the 28 members of the 500 HR club, who had the highest batting average at .344? He won 6 batting titles, 2 Triple Crowns and 2 MVPs.

Who had the lowest at .256? He was AL MVP in 1969 with 49 HRs, righty slugger played his whole career in the AL.

(answers at the bottom)

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

The Rays lost their first game following a record-tying 13-0 start as reliever **Colin Poche** forced in two runs with bases-loaded walks and second baseman **Brandon Lowe** made a key error in a four-run fifth inning that lifted the Toronto Blue Jays to a 6-3 win on Friday night.

Tampa Bay's 13-0 record matched the 1982 Atlanta Braves and 1987 Milwaukee Brewers, trailing only the 20-0 start by the 1884 St. Louis Maroons of the Union Association.

George Springer hit a leadoff home run and **Bo Bichette** had five hits and an RBI as the Blue Jays denied Tampa Bay's bid to establish Major League Baseball's post-1900 record for consecutive wins at a season's start.

The Rays went unbeaten in 13 games against Detroit, Washington, Oakland, and Boston. Those four teams are currently in last place in their divisions.

Toronto, the first Rays opponent this season with a winning record, has won eight of 10.

During the streak the Rays somehow hit more home runs (32) than they have allowed runs (30). They've also outscored opponents by an average of 5.5 runs and have trailed after only six innings all season. The 13th consecutive win also sets a new franchise record, surpassing the 2004 Rays, who won 12 straight from June 9 to 22. The Rays won 11 of the 13 wins by at least four runs.

Springer homered on the night's second pitch from **Drew Rasmussen** (2-1), who pitched 13 innings in his first two starts. Springer's 53rd leadoff homer tied **Craig Biggio** for third all time, behind **Rickey Henderson's** 81 and **Alfonso Soriano's** 54.

Maybe the 13-0 start is the Rays springboard to the World Series. But there is a lot of baseball to be played. Observe if you will...

The last team to start the season 13-0 was the 1987 Milwaukee Brewers. After losing in Chicago, they won four more in a row, so they were 17-1 at one point.

Then, two weeks or so after that, they began a 12-game losing streak. Then they had a six-game losing streak. In late May, they were 22-21.

Two from the “Want to feel old?” file... It was 49 years ago this month that **Henry Aaron** hit his 715th career home run, surpassing **Babe Ruth** on baseball’s all-time list.

Gentleman **Jim Lonborg** is 81. He was 68-65 with a 3.94 ERA for the Red Sox from 1965-71. Lonborg was the Cy Young Award winner in 1967, going 22-9 with a 3.16 ERA. He beat the Twins in Game 162 and went 2 for 4 with a run scored, to send the Sox to the World Series. Lonborg then won two games in the Fall Classic, allowing one run over 18 innings before losing Game 7 against **Bob Gibson**. Lonborg was traded to Milwaukee after the 1971 season, then to Philadelphia a year later. After finishing his career in 1979, Lonborg attended dental school at Tufts and worked as a dentist in eastern Massachusetts until 2017.

Rafael Devers of the Red Sox had his 13th multi-homer game, including a grand slam against the Tigers. In 7 seasons with Boston Devers has 143 HRs.

Jarred Kelenic of the Seattle Mariners started living up to the hype. The 414-foot blast to straightaway center was much like the three that preceded it on this home run streak. It’d been two days since his 482-foot blast at Wrigley Field that drew awe from anyone who witnessed it, yet in his very next at-bat to open a homestand, Kelenic followed up with a 107.4 mph shot that sent Seattle’s home crowd into a frenzy en-route to a 5-3 win over Colorado.

Kelenic became the first Mariner to homer in four straight since **Tom Murphy** from Aug. 13-20, 2019, and if he homers on Saturday, he’d join **Richie Zisk**, **Alex Rodríguez**, **Jay Buhner** (twice) and **Nelson Cruz** (twice) as the only others to homer in five straight. The franchise best is eight straight -- which is also the MLB record -- co-held by none other than **Ken Griffey Jr.**, who did so in 1993 when he was 23 years old, the same age as Kelenic.

Franchy Cordero hit four homers and knock in 11 runs in his first week with the Yankees was perhaps the ultimate insult to a beleaguered Sox Nation. Cordero became the first player in Yankee history to record four or more homers and 11 or more RBIs in his first seven games with the Bronx Bombers. Not Ruth. Not Gehrig. Not DiMaggio. Not Costanza. *Cordero*.

In the last four full (162-game) seasons, there have been 15 100-loss teams. In 13 years between 2005-17, there were only 14. The A's, Nationals, Pirates, and Reds all lost 100 or more last year. The Tigers certainly look capable of joining the 100-loss club in 2023.

You could win a beer with this one...Three other Hall of Famers were on the field during **Jackie Robinson's** debut vs. the Boston Braves on April 15, 1947--**Pee Wee Reese** (Dodgers' starting shortstop), **Arky Vaughn** (Dodgers pinch-hitter) and **Al Barlick** (first-base umpire)

Big day last Sunday for **Nelson Cruz** of the Padres—6 RBIs. Nelson Cruz became the third oldest player in the NL/AL since 1901 with a 6+ RBI game. He's the second player, after **Barry Bonds**, with multiple 6+ RBI games after turning 40.

Carlton Fisk 6 rbi 10/3/1991 age 43 years/281 days for the White Sox

Barry Bonds 6 rbi 7/19/2007 age 42 years/360 days for the Giants

Nelson Cruz 6 rbi 4/9/2023 age 42 years/282 days for the Padres.

Others in the top ten include **Stan Musial, Jorge Posada, Ted Williams, Rafael Palmeiro, Raul Ibanez.**

Since 2002, the Yankees are 99-41 against the Twins, the Majors' best record by any team against an opponent in the same league over that span. Including the postseason, the Yankees have gone 114-41 against the Twins since 2002.

The Emory Eagles scored 31 runs in the first game of a doubleheader against the Brandeis Judges on Saturday. How do you top that?

Do it again in the second game.

Yes, the Eagles scored 62 runs in one day of Division III college baseball action. They did it on 49 hits and 20 walks. Game one Emory 31 Brandeis 4. Game two Emory 31 Brandeis 7

Third baseman Jack Halloran went 5-for-5 with three home runs and nine RBIs in Game 1 -- before going 4-for-5 with six more RBIs in the nightcap. The Eagles bashed nine homers and 22 extra-base hits. They scored in 12 of the possible 14 innings. They punctuated each win by plating 12 runs in the sixth inning of each game.

White Sox reliever **Joe Kelly** is on the injured list with a strained groin suffered while he was running in from the bullpen last Sunday when the benches cleared during a game against the Pirates

From FANGRAPHS, a question I whiffed on. "Which player has appeared in the most regular-season games over the past 10 seasons?" and the now-Pittsburgh Pirates first baseman **Carlos Santana** had played in 1,440 — 13 more than **Paul Goldschmidt** and 40 more than **Freddie Freeman** and **Anthony Rizzo**.

The Bally Sports bankruptcy saga took another step this week, with Bally Sports not paying the Twins or Guardians (yet still airing the games). Those two teams join the Diamondbacks (who are technically "creditors," it's complicated) in not being paid. MLB has filed an emergency motion, with aims at allowing Bally-broadcasted teams to take over the broadcasts themselves.

Cards rookie **Jordan Walker** set a Cardinals record for consecutive games with a hit to start his career, passed a mark set by Hall of Famer **Ted Williams** in 1939 and then equaled **Eddie Murphy's** 111-year-old record for hits in 12 straight games by a player 20 years of age or younger. Ultimately, Walker's streak to start an MLB career finished five games shy of the NL mark of 17 set in 1941 by **Chuck Aleno** and matched in 2016 by Colorado's **David Dahl**.

Walker is still 6-plus weeks shy of his 21st birthday. His streak ended Friday against Pittsburgh.

Walker came into Thursday hitting .319 with two home runs, eight RBIs and 19 hard-hit balls (95-plus mph) -- more than MLB superstars **Aaron Judge**, **Mike Trout**, **Julio Rodríguez** and **Shohei Ohtani**. During the first 12 games of his MLB career, Walker hit .333 at home and .304 on the road. Also, he had hit .313 when the Cardinals were ahead and .391 when they were trailing before Thursday.

Most games for Twins since the team moved to Minnesota (from Washington) in 1961--**Kirby Puckett**, with 2,304 hits. **Joe Mauer** is second with 2,123, followed by **Rod Carew** (2,085), **Harmon Killebrew** (2,024), and **Tony Oliva** (1,917).

April 14, 1955: **Elston Howard** became the first Black player in Yankees history, making his Major League debut with an RBI single in New York's 8-4 loss to the Red Sox at Fenway Park.

Howard played 13 seasons with the Yankees from 1955-67, batting .279 with 161 home runs and 733 RBIs in 1,492 games. A 12-time All-Star and the 1963 American League MVP, Howard won four World Series championships as a player and two as a coach, plus two Gold Glove awards. His No. 32 is retired by the club.

Howard was traded to the Red Sox in 1967 for the pennant push. 1967-68 he played in 113 games for Boston before retiring.

Many fans of baseball history know that **Virgil Trucks** threw two no-hitters for the Detroit Tigers in 1952, a season in which the right-hander had a record of 5-19. Not as well known is that he nearly had a third no-hitter. On July 22nd of that year, Trucks surrendered a single to the first batter he faced — Washington Senators third baseman **Eddie Yost** — but allowed no hits thereafter. The final score of all three games was 1-0.

St. Louis Cardinals right-hander **Miles Mikolas** has allowed 19 hits and one walk one walk in two starts. Miami Marlins right-hander **Edward Cabrera** has allowed two hits and 13 walks in two starts.

With home runs on April 11, 1959, and April 12, 1965, who is the only pitcher to hit two Opening Day homers? That would be **Don Drysdale**. In addition to being a Hall of Fame pitcher with a 2.95 career ERA, Drysdale was also one of the best hitting pitchers ever.

Drysdale hit 29 homers in his career, the sixth most among pitchers all time (counting at bats when the player was in the lineup only as a pitcher). **Wes Ferrell** is first on that list with 38. (Ferrell was such a competent hitter that during his 1933 All-Star season, he started 13 games in left field.) Drysdale hit seven homers in a single season twice, in '58 and '65, tied for the

second most in a season by a pitcher. (Ferrell is at the top of that list, as well, having hit nine in '31.) Those lists include only players who were primarily pitchers, though. Players like **Babe Ruth**, **Rick Ankiel** and, yes, **Shohei Ohtani** are not included. Only three of Ohtani's 130 career homers have come in games where he pitched.

As *SB Nation's* Alex Rubenstein and Jon Bois wrote in 2020, Drysdale's 1958 season was particularly impressive. All seven of his home runs came in a 14-game span from June 26 to Aug. 23. Drysdale had 24 official at-bats and went yard in nearly a third of them. The only player with more homers in a 24-at-bat span that season was **Willie Mays** with eight.

Through 13 games, no Red Sox starting pitcher has completed more than five innings. The team ERA of 5.42 ranks 26th in the majors. Opponents are 17-for-19 in stolen-base attempts.

The Rangers' **Andrew Heaney** struck out 9 straight Kansas City Royals this week to tie the AL record. He is tied with Detroit's **Doug Fister** who set the AL record in 2012 (against the Royals) and Detroit's **Tyler Alexander** tied it against Cincinnati in the COVID season. The major league record is 10, held by **Tom Seaver**, **Aaron Nola** and **Corbin Burnes**. Seaver struck out the last ten Padres on 4/22/1970.

The only pair of brothers to throw a no-hitter in MLB history? (Friday was the anniversary of when the feat was accomplished.) **Bob and Ken Forsch**. On April 16, 1978, Bob threw a no-hitter for the Cardinals against the Phillies. Almost exactly a year later, on April 7, 1979, Ken threw a no-hitter for the Astros against the Braves in Houston's second game of the season. (April 7 was the earliest date for a no-hitter until **Hideo Nomo** threw one April 4, 2001.)

Brothers **Pascual (Expos)** and **Mélido Pérez** (White Sox) also threw unofficial no-hitters that did not count because they were shortened by rain. Incredibly, **Dizzy and Paul Dean** also came close to throwing no-hitters—*on the very same day*. In the first game of a doubleheader Sept. 21, 1934, Dizzy threw a three-hit shutout against Paul's Dodgers. In the second game, Paul went out and threw a no-hitter, leading Dizzy to famously quip, "If I had known you were gonna pitch a no-hitter, I'd have pitched one, too."

Max Muncy of the Dodgers Monday night against San Francisco

Max Muncy (LAD): 3-3, 2 HR, 7 RBI, 2 R

Ties Babe Herman 1929 and Juan Uribe in 2005 for most Dodger rbi's vs. the Giants.

Then on Wednesday night against the Giants Muncy went 2-5, 2 HR including a grand slam, 4 RBI, 2 runs scored.

During their 30-year existence, the Marlins have captured two World Series championships and have thrown six no-hitters. But never had a batter hit for the cycle.

That moment finally came courtesy of newcomer **Luis Arraez** in the 4,700th game in franchise history in Tuesday night's 8-4 victory over the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park.

Until Tuesday, there had been 111 cycles in MLB since the Marlins debuted 30 years ago. Former Marlins **Christian Yelich** (2018), **Mark Kotsay** ('08), **Randy Winn** ('05) and **Greg Colbrunn** ('02) went on to hit for the cycle for other clubs. Every other active franchise had at least two. The Marlins' inability to achieve the feat sooner is remarkable considering the spacious ballparks they've called home since 1993.

Not only did Arraez make Marlins history, but he also joined exclusive company by becoming the sixth Venezuelan to hit for the cycle:

Eduardo Escobar, Mets, June 6, 2022

Pablo Sandoval, Giants, Sept. 15, 2011

Carlos González, Rockies, July 31, 2010

Carlos Guillén, Tigers, Aug. 1, 2006

César Tovar, Twins, Sept. 19, 1972

Miami acquired Arraez in a trade with Minnesota on Jan. 20, and he has come as advertised. The 26-year-old second baseman leads the Majors in average (.537) and on-base percentage (.596) through 12 games. He won the AL batting title last year with the Twins.

The team that has now gone the longest since it last had a player hit for the cycle--the Reds (Eric Davis, June 2, 1989).

For three years of club control with Arraez, the 2022 American League batting champion, the Marlins parted with not only two years of starter Pablo López, but also highly regarded infield prospect **Jose Salas** and minor-league outfielder **Byron Chourio**.

Things could get ugly in Boston. The Globe described the Red Sox this way--this is Chaim Bloom's fourth season in charge of baseball operations and the Sox are the worst team in the

American League East. With a few exceptions, the roster is a collection of spare parts and aging veterans signed to short-term deals.

Bloom insists the best is yet to come. But any clear-headed evaluation would also see the Blue Jays, Orioles, Rays, and Yankees better positioned for future success. The Yankees and Jays have premium talent, strong farm systems and owners intent on winning.

The Rays routinely excel at drafting good players and improving the ones they obtain via trade or free agency.

The Orioles have some of the best young talent in the game and are on the verge of a renaissance. Their catcher, 25-year-old **Adley Rutschman**, looks every bit the cornerstone of a championship team.

After Rafael Devers, what Red Sox player can you clearly identify as being a key member of a playoff team in a year or two or three?

Because he's running baseball ops, Bloom is an easy target for angry fans who have seen a series of talented players sent away with little in return.

But his bosses — John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy — are equally responsible if not more so. They ultimately determine the direction of the franchise through times good and bad.

They deserve credit for the four World Series championships and blame for the two last-place finishes in the last three seasons. It was their decision to hire Bloom and they approve of the major moves. The season is only a dozen games in and the Sox are already looking up.

Shohei Ohtani turned in his third straight dominant start on Tuesday, as he held the Nationals to just one hit over seven scoreless innings in a 2-0 win. And he again did it despite not having his best control early this season, as he walked five and hit a batter, but struck out six and pitched his way out of a couple of jams.

Ohtani improved to 2-0 with a 0.47 ERA and 24 strikeouts in 19 innings through three starts this season, his last before becoming a free agent.

Ohtani set an Angels franchise record by allowing two or fewer runs in his tenth consecutive start -- passing the previous mark set by **Nolan Ryan** in 1972-73. And by going 1-for-4 at the plate, Ohtani is batting .300/.404/.575 with three homers, two doubles and eight RBIs in 11 games.

To get a deeper look at his dominance as a pitcher, batters are hitting .100 (6-for-60) against him this year with just two extra-base hits -- a pair of doubles and no homers. His .979 OPS as a hitter is .566 points higher than his .413 OPS allowed.

He's also reached base safely in all 11 games this season and 34 straight going back to last year, which is tied for the sixth longest such streak in club history.

Ryan Mountcastle jolted a grand slam to put Tuesday's game with the A's out of reach and seal the Orioles' 12-8 victory at Camden Yards. His nine RBIs matched the single-game franchise record held by Baseball Hall of Famer **Eddie Murray** (Aug. 26, 1985) and **Jim Gentile** (May 9, 1961).

There have been only 42 instances of a player driving in nine or more RBIs in a game in AL/NL history. The most recent had been **Adam Duvall**, who achieved the feat with the Braves vs. the Marlins on Sept. 9, 2020. The AL/NL record for RBIs in a game is 12, both for the Cardinals (**Jim Bottomley** on Sept. 16, 1924, and **Mark Whiten** on Sept. 7, 1993).

Tough days to be a shortstop--**Carlos Correa** is out with back spasms. It started this offseason when **Trevor Story** (Red Sox) had elbow surgery, costing him at least the first half of the season. Or maybe even before that — **Royce Lewis** (Twins) is still on the IL recovering from tearing his ACL last May. That's the same injury **Gavin Lux** (Dodgers) suffered this spring. Out for the entire season. **Paul DeJong** (Cardinals) also started the season on the IL due to a lower back injury.

This week, in addition to Correa's dodgy back, **Oneil Cruz** (Pirates) broke his ankle on a play at the plate. Gone for four months. **Tim Anderson** (White Sox) promptly sprained his knee, which will sideline him for two-to-four weeks.

Then **Corey Seager** beat a weird-looking outfield shift by cracking a ball to an unoccupied left field. As he hustled for what looked like a slam-dunk triple, he pulled up rounding first, grabbing the back of his left leg. Prognosis is four weeks. Of note, Seager missed almost a month in 2019 with a left hamstring strain.

We've written about Nashville, Montreal, Las Vegas, Portland and Charlotte all interested in landing an MLB team. MLB says stadium issues in Oakland and Tampa must be resolved before considering adding two teams to reach 32. A new city has thrown its hat into the ring for a potential MLB expansion team.

A Salt Lake City group is exploring potential avenues to attract an expansion team in the coming years, according to ESPN's Jeff Passan.

"Salt Lake City is a major league city," Steve Starks, the CEO of the company behind the expansion bid, told ESPN. "We believe that as a top-30 media market in the fastest-growing state in the country with the youngest population, that's where our attention should be."

Gail Miller, the former owner of the Jazz, is reportedly at the helm of the project, which also includes former major league pitcher **Jeremy Guthrie** and outfielder **Dale Murphy**. Salt Lake City has been home to professional baseball in some form or fashion since 1901. The Bees, currently the Angels' AAA affiliate, have called the Pacific Coast League home under various names since 1994.

When the Astros played their first official game at the Astrodome, what was the primary playing surface? It wasn't AstroTurf. The answer is natural grass. Monsanto had developed a special type of grass that was designed to be able to grow indoors, as long as it had enough sunlight. The Astrodome's roof was composed of translucent tiles to let light in, allowing the grass to survive in the dome.

The issue was players had a hard time tracking fly balls against the glare of the roof. For the 1966 season, the roof was swapped out for something more opaque. That solved the glare problem but also caused the indoor grass to die. Monsanto then installed an experimental new surface at the Astrodome before the '66 season. It was originally known as ChemGrass, but after being installed in Houston was then known as AstroTurf. But there wasn't enough material to cover the whole field, so the outfield remained covered in the dead natural grass. Finally, during the All-Star break, after Monsanto had manufactured more AstroTurf, the outfield was covered in the fake grass, and the Astros and Phillies played the first game in MLB history solely on artificial turf on July 19, 1966.

A THIN 2024 FREE AGENT HITTER CLASS

Well, at least there is **Shohei Ohtani**. The Cubs' signing of left fielder **Ian Happ** to a three-year, \$61 million extension on Wednesday made a thin free-agent class of position players this offseason even thinner.

Outside of Ohtani, who is in a category of his own, Blue Jays third baseman **Matt Chapman** projects to be the most attractive hitter on the open market. Mariners right fielder **Teoscar Hernández** probably will rank second. Neither is exactly a superstar. And after that, good luck.

Tigers shortstop **Javier Báez** can opt out of his remaining four years and \$98 million, but such a move is not likely when he had a .671 OPS last season and is 4-for-40 to start this one. Other players with opt outs, including Guardians first baseman **Josh Bell**, Giants right fielder **Michael Conforto** and Cubs first baseman **Trey Mancini**, should be more eager to jump.

So few quality bats will be available, modestly accomplished hitters such as Diamondbacks left fielder **Lourdes Gurriel Jr.**, Yankees center fielder **Harrison Bader** and Angels infielder **Gio Urshela** figure to hold inordinate appeal.

Teams seeking offense will need to **explore the trade market**, putting general managers who are bold and creative at an advantage. Another option for clubs willing to spend would be a top-of-the-rotation starter.

The non-Ohtani potential free-agent starting pitchers currently include Dodgers lefty **Julio Urías**, Phillies righty **Aaron Nola** and Japanese righty **Yoshinobu Yamamoto**.

That rate of 2023 stolen bases (1.4 per game) would “only” be the most since 1999 — and would have to jump another 21 percent to reach peak 1987 **Whitey Herzog/Vince Coleman**-ish levels (1.7 per game).

And the frequency of stolen-base attempts (1.7 per game) would “only” be the most since 2012 — and would have to ratchet up by another 41 percent to approach those 1987 rates.

So whatever we thought might happen when baseball changed the rules this season, we’ve actually gotten only a taste of that. The truth is, this still isn’t the Olympic 400-meter relays that commissioner Rob Manfred and company are overseeing.

“If you go back and ask, ‘What was the golden age of base stealing?’ — it was the 1980s,” Epstein said. “And in the 1980s, we had 2.27 stolen-base attempts per game. So where we are now (at 1.7), we’re nowhere close to even where we were in the 1980s.”

Nobody has stolen 60 bases in a season since 2017, when **Dee Strange-Gordon** did it. No American Leaguer has reached 60 since **Juan Pierre** pilfered 68 for the 2010 White Sox. The only 70-steal season in the last 15 years came from **Jacoby Ellsbury** — in 2009. Last season the Reds, Tigers and Twins did not have one player with 10 steals.

500 HOME RUN CLUB

When I was a kid it was easy:

Ruth

Aaron

Mays

Mantle

Foxx

Williams

Banks

Mathews

Ott

And then **Killebrew and Frank Robinson**

Even now, only 28 sluggers have joined the 500 home run club, and when Miguel Cabrera follows Albert Pujols into retirement after this season, there will likely be zero active players on the list.

The trick is to start early. Of the 28 members of this esteemed club, all but four hit their first homer in their age-21 season or earlier, and all but two reached the 100-homer mark by their age-26 campaign.

MLB.com looked ahead.

1. Mike Trout

Age: 31 | Career HR: 353

Why he could do it: Trout's path to 500 home runs is relatively simple. He's already hit 353 home runs, the fourth-most among active players. He's only in his early-30s and is on a guaranteed contract through 2030. Perhaps most importantly, Trout is hitting for more power as he ages. Through his age-24 season in 2016, he homered once every 21.2 plate appearances. Since then, he's homered once every 14.4 plate appearances. Despite injuries that have limited him to 109 games per full season since 2017, he has still slugged 185 home runs during that span, the fifth most in the Majors.

2. Juan Soto

Age: 24 | Career HR: 128

Why he could do it: There's a ton working in Soto's favor here. He debuted as a 19-year-old, so he has time on his side. His 125 homers before turning 24 ranked seventh all-time, and that's with a shortened 2020 season working against everyone, cumulative stats-wise. His plate discipline is legendary, but when he *does* swing, the power is unleashed. Consider this: 111 batters have swung at least 2,250 times since the start of 2020 entering Wednesday. In that

span, only three batters have had a higher percentage of their swings result in home runs than **Juan Soto's** 3.1%: **Aaron Judge** (4.3%), **Kyle Schwarber** (3.7%) and **Pete Alonso** (3.4%).

3. Nolan Arenado

Age: 32 | Career HR: 301

Why he could do it: There are three main reasons Arenado could reach the 500-homer mark: durability, work ethic and consistency. Arenado hates taking even needed days off, and he's rarely been injured throughout his decade-long Major League career. The seven-time All-Star and 10-time Gold Glove Award winner is also as intense a player as you'll find, especially when it comes to putting in the work it takes to keep himself playing at an elite level. He has said he wants to play until he's 38, meaning he's got seven seasons to hit 199 more homers. That seems doable, given that he has exceeded 30 homers in every season he's played in more than 133 games.

4. Giancarlo Stanton

Age: 33 | Career HR: 381

Why he could do it: While he's the oldest player on this list at 33, Stanton is also the closest to 500 of any active player not named **Nelson Cruz**. The veteran sits 119 home runs shy of 500 with five years left on his 13-year, \$325 million contract -- an average of around 25 homers per season in that span would put him north of the 500 mark. Even considering Stanton's age and injury history, that seems doable for a player who remains one of the most powerful hitters in the game.

5. Bryce Harper

Age: 30 | Career HR: 285

Why he could do it: The case for Harper is simple. First, he's (somehow) just now entering his age-30 season (or will be once he returns from Tommy John surgery, likely sometime around the All-Star break.). Second, he's set an absurd pace to this point, with a 162-game average of 33 home runs. Third, he's under contract until 2031, giving him a possible eight more full seasons to knock out the final 215. That works out to just under 27 home runs per season. To be honest, it might be more surprising if he *doesn't* make it to 500.

6. Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

Age: 24 | Career HR: 106

Why he could do it: If Soto's on this list, Vlad Jr. has to be here. These two will be in a race to 500. Vladdy will get there first. He has the top-of-the-scale power that even Soto doesn't possess. Vlad Jr. reached the 100-homer mark at 23 years, 182 days old, and his 80 homers over the past two seasons are just the start. He can hit 30 a year in his sleep, and he's got some 40s in him ... maybe even 50. Vlad Jr. is going to fly past his dad (449 homers) and become the first Guerrero in the 500-home-run club.

7. Ronald Acuña Jr.

Age: 25 | Career HR: 122

Why he could do it: Pete Alonso earned a hefty amount of consideration here, but Acuña – three years Alonso’s junior -- is the safer choice. Despite the shortened 2020 season and missing half of the ‘21 campaign due to a right knee injury, Acuña is one of only 27 players in the Modern Era to record at least 120 homers prior to his age-25 season. His 2022 homer total (15) left something to be desired, but there was and continues to be nothing wrong with Acuña’s bat; he consistently ranks among the league leaders in max exit velocity while posting strong barrel rates. Fully healthy and with lots of baseball in front of him, set a reminder for Acuña’s 500th-homer celebration for some point during the 2034 season.

8. Manny Machado

Age: 30 | Career HR: 283

Why he could do it: You may be surprised to see that Machado, who is only three months older than Harper and debuted in the Majors three months after him, is virtually tied with the two-time NL MVP on the career homer list. After all, we don’t necessarily think of Machado as a *home run hitter*. Aside from the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, he’s never finished higher than ninth in either the AL or NL in that category. Sometimes, though, slow and steady wins the race. Machado stays on the field (second in games played since 2015), and he is remarkably consistent (28-37 homers in each full season over that span). With no signs of slowing down, Machado just inked an extension to keep him in San Diego through 2033, which also gives him the benefit of time. He’s a steal in this spot.

9. Yordan Alvarez

Age: 26 | Career HR 101

Why he could do it: Because he’s 25 and might be the best hitter in the game right this very second. If that sounds like a hot take, realize that since he came up in 2019, he’s been outperformed at the plate by only Mike Trout and Aaron Judge, and he’s hit a home run once every 3.8 games. Last year, do you know who turned swings into hard-hit balls the most often of any hitter? It wasn’t Judge. It wasn’t Trout. It was Alvarez, five years younger than each, who is already 20% of the way there, with potentially another dozen years of great hitting ahead of him.

10. Pete Alonso

Age: 28 | Career HR: 152

Why he could do it: Alonso didn’t get the head start that former wunderkinds such as Harper, Trout and Soto did; his MLB debut didn’t come until age 24 in 2019. But if his career so far has been any indication, he is more than equipped to make up for the lost time. In Alonso’s three non-pandemic-shortened seasons, he has averaged 43.3 home runs per year. Perhaps equally important for this exercise, he has never missed more than 10 games in a season. Let’s assume

a sizable power reduction as Alonso ages: Even if he averaged 35 home runs per season for the remainder of his career, he would need to play only 10 more seasons to reach the 500 mark, which is a reasonable ask for the first baseman who doesn't turn 29 until December.

11. Aaron Judge

Age: 31 | Career HR: 224

Why he could do it: Wait, this guy is still available to be picked? Like, the reigning home run champion coming off an AL-record 62 dingers? Sure, he's a little on the older side in his age-31 season this year, but Judge is just about halfway to 500. Considering that he's capable of putting up 50-plus homers in any given year and averages 49 per 162 games in his career, Judge really just needs to stay healthy enough over the next five or six seasons to put himself on the verge. With his natural size, strength and power, Judge's ability to hit the ball hard, far and out should hold up well into his late 30s. Plus, now that he's staying with the Yankees for the long haul, he'll be able to take full advantage of his homer-friendly home ballpark.

STREAKS

In 1976 **George Brett** had six straight games with three or more hits. Brett is tied all time with **Sam Thomson** in 1895 and **Jimmy Johnston** in 1923

Wee Willie Keeler had eight 20 or more game hitting streaks. The only players with 7 are **Ty Cobb**, **Pete Rose**, **Ichiro Suzuki**.

HRs in 3 consecutive pinch-hitting at bats

Lee Lacy, 1978 Dodgers

Del Unser, 1979 Phillies

HRs in 8 consecutive games

Dale Long, 1956 Pirates

Don Mattingly, 1987 Yankees

Ken Griffey Jr., 1993 Mariners

Good luck passing **Randy Johnson's** five straight seasons with 300+ strikeouts.

In 1957 **Ted Williams** reached base in 16 straight at bats, most since 1900. (**Frank Thomas** 1997, **Barry Bonds** 1998 and **John Olerud** 1998 all had 15 at bat streaks.

Williams also reached base in 84 straight games in 1949.

HOBIE LANDRITH, THE FIRST NEW YORK MET, DIES AT 93

A major league catcher for 14 seasons, he was the first player picked by the newly formed Mets in the expansion draft in 1961.



Hobie Landrith caught for seven teams in his 14 major league seasons. He was mostly a backup, good enough at handling pitchers but a light hitter. He was never an All-Star. But he did possess a modest claim to fame.

When Landrith died on Thursday at 93 in Sunnyvale, Calif., he was remembered as the original Met.

His death was announced on Saturday by Jay Horwitz, the Mets' vice president of alumni public relations.

The Mets and the Houston Colt .45s (now the Astros), founded as 1962 National League expansion teams, began stocking their rosters in an October 1961 draft. They alternated in selecting players whom the eight N.L. teams viewed as too young, too old or too ordinary to keep.

Houston chose **Eddie Bressoud**, a shortstop with the San Francisco Giants, as the first pick of the draft. The Mets chose Landrith, also a Giant, as their first selection.

When reporters asked Mets Manager **Casey Stengel** why Landrith, 31 years old, was anointed as the first Met, he replied: "You gotta have a catcher or you'd have a lot of passed balls."

The Mets played their first game on the night of April 11, 1962, facing the Cardinals in St. Louis. Landrith was catching **Roger Craig**, who was selected from the Los Angeles Dodgers as the Mets' sixth draft pick. Batting No. 8, Landrith went 0 for 4 and committed one of the Mets' three errors, an errant throw to second base on a steal attempt by **Julian Javier**, who eventually scored. The Cards stole three bases in their 11-4 victory.

Joe Ginsberg replaced Landrith for the Mets' second game and **Chris Cannizzaro** was behind the plate for their third game, both losses to the Pirates. The Mets went 0-9 before **Jay Hook** stopped Pittsburgh in a 9-1 complete-game victory.

Landrith, a left-handed batter, listed at 5 feet 10 inches and 170 pounds, played in 23 games for the Mets. His shining moment came on May 12 when he hit a ninth-inning, two-out, pinch-hit homer into the upper deck at the Polo Grounds off the Milwaukee Braves' future Hall of Fame left-hander **Warren Spahn** to give the Mets a 3-2 victory.

The Mets used seven catchers in their inaugural season. After Landrith, Ginsberg and Cannizzaro, they trotted out **Choo Choo Coleman**, **Sammy Taylor**, **Joe Pignatano** and **Harry Chiti**, whom they obtained from the Cleveland Indians in April for cash and a player to be named. That player turned out to be Chiti, whom the Mets returned to the Indians in June.

Landrith was traded to the Baltimore Orioles on June 7 although he was batting .289 with three doubles and his home run and had driven in seven runs. His departure completed a deal in May

in which the Mets received first baseman **Marv Throneberry**, better known as Marvelous Marv for his stumbles in the field.

The Orioles sent Landrith to the Washington Senators in May 1963. They released him after that season and then hired him as a coach in 1964, his last year in baseball.

Landrith had a career batting average of .233 with 34 home runs and 203 runs driven in.

JOE POSNANSKI, THE BASEBALL 100

More notes from his excellent book, The Baseball 100

Chipper Jones

peak 5 seasons – 1998-2002

Didn't hit lower than .311 or higher than .330

Drove in 100 runs every season.

Scored 100 runs every season.

OBP over .400

Averaged 35 HRs, Averaged 15 stolen bases.

Switch hitters.

Mickey Mantle lifetime .321 righthanded, .281 lefty.

Frankie Frisch .326 lefty, .292 righthanded.

Roberto Alomar, Pete Rose over .300 lefty. **Bernie Williams** over .300 righthanded.

But only Chipper Jones was effective from both sides:

Chipper Jones .303 lefty and .304 righthanded.

Best 3B seasons ever:

Al Rosen, 1953 Indians. Led AL in HRs (43), RBI (145), Runs scored 115, lost batting title and triple crown by one point to Tigers **Mickey Vernon**.

George Brett, 1980 Royals. .390/.454/.664.

Mike Schmidt, 1980 Phillies. Led NL in HRs (48), RBI (121), total bases (342), scored 100 runs, won gold glove and MVP.

Arod, 2007 Yankees. 54 HRs, 156 RBI, 1.067 OPS, 24 stolen bases, MVP (his third)

Adrian Beltre, 2004 Dodgers. 48 HRs, 121 RBI, 200 hits, 104 runs scored.

Best season ever by a 20 year old

Mike Trout 2012 Angels. .326/.399/.564, 30 HRs, led league with 49 stolen bases and 129 runs scored.

Arod, 1996 Mariners. .358 wins batting title, led league in doubles (54), runs scored (141), total bases (379).

Al Kaline, 1955 Tigers. .340 wins batting title, leads AL in hits with 200, 27 HRs, 100 RBI.

Mel Ott, 1929 Giants. .328 with 42 HRs, 151 RBI, 138 runs scored.

Ty Cobb, 1907 Tigers. .350 wins first of 12 batting titles, led AL in hits and RBI.

Nolan Ryan developed his arm throwing newspapers with his father—they had a 1500 paper route.

Nolan Ryan 1977 Angels. Walked 204 batters in 299 innings. The league hit just .193 against him and he allowed just 198 hits. Only pitcher ever to throw 250+ innings and give up more walks than hits.

Warren Spahn came back from WWII (Purple Heart, Battle of the Bulge) and won 20 games in 1949, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961 and 1963. 363 career wins, 374 complete games, 63 shut outs.

You've heard of "Spahn and Sain, and pray for rain"? 1948 Boston Braves had a 2 ½ game lead on September 6 but thin pitching. Spahn and **Johnny Sain** started 15 of their final 22 games. The Braves held on and faced Cleveland in the World Series. Spahn and Sain each went 1-1 but the Indians won in six games.

Greatest teammate HR hitters.

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig didn't overlap as long as you think—Gehrig's first full season was 1925, Ruth was already 30 years old. They hit 859 HRs as teammates.

Hank Aaron and Edie Mathews hit 863 HRs as teammates with the Braves.

Hall of Fame pitcher **Bob Gibson** was a good hitter (73 extra base hits, 18 sac flies, 26 HRs) In games Gibson homered the Cards went 23-3, 6 shutouts. and fielder (9 straight gold gloves) as well.

1984 **Cal Ripken Jr** had 583 assists. Most in a season at any position.

You know 16 seasons, 2632 consecutive games.

Did you know he had an 8,243 consecutive innings streak?—that's 904 consecutive games at shortstop without missing an inning.

RUN, RUN, RUN

The Guardians stole four bases Monday, which is noteworthy, but the interesting part? They did so without **Myles Straw** stealing one. Straw currently leads the big leagues with six steals in 10 games. That's a little over a 97-steal pace for the Guardians' center fielder. Let's dig into that a little bit ...

- Before this year, Straw had a total of 67 steals in 408 games over five years with the Astros and Guardians, with a career high of 30 back in 2021. It seems likely he'll surpass that number this year.
- Helping his case in 2023: a whopping .489 on-base percentage. His career OBP before this season was a more-reasonable .322.
- OK fine, so he's not going to steal 100 bases. But if he (or someone else — stolen bases are way up around the league, thanks to the new throw-over restrictions) can eclipse 50, he'll be the first to do that since **Dee Strange-Gordon** stole 60 in 2017. The last to do it in the AL? Straw's former Astros teammate **Jose Altuve**, who stole 56 in 2014.
- The last person to steal more than 90 bases in a season? C'mon, you know who it was: **Rickey Henderson**, who swiped 93 in 1988.
- And if someone goes nuts and hits triple-digits, they'll be the first since **Vince Coleman**, who stole 109 in 1987, his *third year in a row* with over 100 steals.

When he retired after the 1979 season, **Lou Brock** held the MLB records for single-season steals (118 in 1974) and in a career (938). Both were subsequently broken by Henderson, who swiped 130 bags in 1982 and passed Brock with his 939th steal in 1991 en-route to 1,406.

The Guardians are on pace for 280 steals. The Rangers led MLB last year with 128.

INTERESTING IDEA FROM THE JOE SHEEHAN NEWSLETTER

Rangers 11, Royals 2

Eaton 1 IP, 2 Hits, 2 runs, 0 earned runs, 0 walks, 1 strikeout

That's not a comeback by Padres hurler **Adam Eaton**, but rather Royals utility player **Nate Eaton** mopping up in an 11-2 loss. The righty got some attention for his impressive velocity and movement, better than some of the actual relievers the Royals have been using this year.

Still, it was the latest in what seems like the daily use of position players as pitchers. What was once a fun little quirk that happened less than once a month is now standard operating procedure in a blowout, this despite teams carrying more pitchers than ever in baseball history. On any given day, there are more pitchers on rosters than position players, with the

concomitant lack of bench talent and tactical options for managers. Yet managers will refuse to use those pitchers in a blowout for fear of not being able to use them in some future game.

Having seen teams use position players 132 times last year, highlighted, if you can call it that, by **A.J. Hinch** using three in a single June blowout, MLB tightened the rules this year. Now, you have to be down eight runs, or up ten in the ninth, to use a position player on the mound. You can also use a position player any time in extras.

The result? The highest rate of position player pitching in baseball history, nine appearances in 12 days. Mind you, this is in April, before pitchers have been overworked and injured and teams are desperate for innings. The Phillies used Josh Harrison to finish off their second game of the season! **Hanser Alberto**, now with the White Sox, is on pace to better his ten appearances with the Dodgers in 2022.

MLB's rules aren't working, and we are all now fans of a sport that is comfortable changing rules in-season, so let's suggest a new one: A team may only use a position player to pitch if it is carrying fewer than 13 pitchers. If you have eight relievers, nearly a third of your active roster charged with pitching in relief, you shouldn't be using a position player to pitch. If you want the option, then add a bench player. This would be a soft incentive to lengthen your bench and provide better hitter/pitcher balance, giving teams stronger tactical options and making late-game situations more interesting. I don't expect a return to 16/9 splits, but surely we can encourage 13/12 and dream about 14/11. If you're under 30, trust me when I tell you the game was more interesting when teams had as many bench players as they did relievers.

You can only use position players to pitch if you're carrying fewer than 13 pitchers, Simple, elegant, and a force for good. Make it happen, MLB.

THE NEW BASEBALL RULE THAT HAS TURNED PICKOFF MOVES INTO GAME THEORY

Pitchers are now allowed a total of just three pickoff attempts per at-bat, which has launched a radical re-evaluation of how and when to use them

Lindsey Adler, Wall Street Journal

Baseball fans have historically paid little attention to the pickoff move, except perhaps to boo it.

Until now, pitchers have been allowed to keep baserunners in check by throwing over to first base as many times as they pleased—discouraging stolen bases, irritating spectators and causing long games to grow even longer.

Now, however, MLB has a new rule for what it calls pitcher “disengagements.” Suddenly, this seemingly perfunctory ritual is at the heart of a race to radically reinvent the strategy of stealing bases in Major League Baseball’s season of new rules.

Pitchers are now allowed a total of just three pickoff attempts per at-bat, and there’s a catch: If the third one is unsuccessful, it counts as a balk and the runner is simply awarded the next base.

The new rule has instantly changed the calculus of stealing a base, primarily because every pickoff attempt tilts the scales in favor of the baserunner. After one unsuccessful throw over, there’s only two left. After a second, the pitcher faces sudden death. At that point, baserunners can take enormous leads off first base knowing that the pitcher likely won’t throw over. It’s easy to see why a pitcher might feel like he’s dug himself into a hole, instead of standing on a mound, after using even one.

That’s causing an instant reassessment—by pitchers, catchers, managers and front offices—to quickly develop new strategies for how and when to use their pickoff attempts to prevent serial theft on the base paths.

“The fact that the runner knows the limits are there, it changes things,” said Giants pitcher Alex Cobb. “Once we throw over once, he knows we’re probably not going to throw over a second time. Once I throw over twice, it almost feels like a free pass for runners. Maybe that’ll change as the season goes on, but that’s why pitchers are being conservative with pickoff attempts.”

So far this season, there has been an average of 1.3 stolen bases per game, which across a full season would be the highest rate since the year 2000, per Stats LLC. Attempts are up, too, with 1.7 attempts per game compared with 1.3 in 2022.

While baseball analysts and coaches work out their approach to baseball’s new rules, there’s a group of economists with a special brand of expertise in modeling situations just like these. They’re experts in evaluating risk-reward situations because their life is studying game theory.

These academics see the new pickoff rule as a zero-sum game: What’s good for one side is bad for the other. In this case, everything that’s a benefit to baserunners is to a pitcher’s detriment.

Yet there may be a way for pitchers to neutralize the playing field in a zero-sum game: manufacturing randomness. Economists recommend that pitchers vary how often they attempt a pickoff and how many they use. That way the threat of it will always persist as a deterrence to baserunners.

“You don’t want your behavior to be predictable,” said David McAdams, a professor at Duke’s Fuqua School of Business. “If the other side knows what you’re going to do, they can take advantage of that.”

The baseball players in the middle of this upheaval are already thinking about this, too. There are other ways to keep runners close, after all. One is a back pick—in which the catcher receives a pitch and quickly fires to first to try to pick off a runner. Another is a pitchout, in which the pitcher deliberately throws a ball that allows the catcher to position himself to throw out a runner.

“I think you’ll see more backpicks, pitchouts, just any way to put in the runner’s mind that we are active,” said White Sox pitching coach **Ethan Katz**. “This is new for everyone, but I think it can be a weapon for pitchers as well.”

There is one problem with this approach, says Colin Camerer, a behavioral economist at CalTech. People tend to intuitively stink at randomizing.

When most people are asked to randomize something—such as predicting a number of coin flips—they tend to over alternate, he said. What they perceive as random is actually rife with patterns. In baseball, a pitcher who uses his second pickoff throw every other time might think he’s being clever, but he’s actually leaving a trail of information that can inform a baserunner’s actions.

“There seems to be two groups of people that are good at randomization,” Camerer says. “It’s children and professional mathematicians.”

Baseball’s new pitch clock itself is a detriment to a pitcher’s ability to create randomness. Pitchers now have 20 seconds to deliver a pitch with runners on, but it is important for them to create variety in the timing of their deliveries. Otherwise, opponents will soon figure out if a starter begins his delivery with seven seconds left on the clock each time. From there, it becomes a simple math problem for baserunners to determine whether to take the risk and run.

“If the clock is under five seconds, it’s probably a good bet that they’re not going to use a pickoff attempt,” said Giants pitcher **Alex Wood**. “The guys who get back on the mound quickly, they’re going to have different hold times. Whether they hold the ball for three seconds or five seconds, they can use that to their advantage.”

The rule changes may also alter the conventional algorithm typically used to determine the risk-reward of base stealing. Traditionally, pitchers aim to complete their delivery in 1.3 seconds or less, while catchers aim to be able to throw to second base in under 2 seconds. The runner’s speed creates the other variable, but this math problem may need some updating under the new rules.

This season, MLB increased the size of its bases from 15 inches to 18 inches, shortening the distance between first and second base by 4½ inches. While it means that runners have less ground to cover, there may also be a psychological benefit for runners who simply decide to become more aggressive baserunners than before.

However things settle out in the new math of stolen bases, it's going to take a while to figure out.

"Game theory is applicable as the game becomes more dynamic and the variables change," said Yankees ace **Gerrit Cole**. "I think we need more data from this year to really calculate risk-rewards because the rules are different than ever before."

Even some of the finest minds on the planet admit they aren't certain what the ultimate effect of the pickoff rule would be.

When asked about the potential ramifications of the new pickoff rules, Richard Thaler, a Nobel Prize winner for his work on behavioral economics, wrote in an email:

"Dunno."

DAN SHAUGHNESSY IN THE BOSTON GLOBE ON RED SOX INJURIES OVER THE YEARS

How about Cy Young winner **Jim Lonborg**'s devastating ski accident during the Christmas holidays after he went 22-9 for the 1967 Red Sox, then twice dominated the Cardinals in the World Series? Lonborg tore ligaments in his left knee at Lake Tahoe while making the proverbial "last run of the day" during the 1967-68 offseason. He came back in the middle of 1968, but went 6-10 and was traded three years later. Lonborg never had another 20-win season.

The Sox have had more of these episodes than any other Boston team. When two Sox pitchers — **Rogelio Moret and Reggie Cleveland** — were involved in car crashes during the 1975 season, Boston lefty **Bill Lee** said, "We don't need a pitching coach, we need driver's ed."

A couple of years later, colorful Red Sox third baseman **Wade Boggs** suffered a minor elbow injury when he fell out of the family Jeep while Debbie Boggs was wheeling out of Christy's Sundown restaurant onto Route 17 in Winter Haven.

This was not Boggs's only strange accident. In 1986, the Chicken Man missed a week of games with sore ribs and said he'd damaged his rib cage while trying to remove his cowboy boots in a Toronto hotel room.

In January 1988, Red Sox hard-luck righty **Bob Stanley** severed tendons in his pitching hand when he fell outside his home while taking out the trash. The lovable Steamer lasted only two more seasons in the big leagues.

Remember Sox righty **Paxton Crawford**? Of course not. No one does. Crawford's promising career was cut short when he went on the injured list with a cut on his back and said it

happened when he fell out of bed and landed on a drinking glass, smashing the glass. Long after he was out of baseball, Crawford admitted to using steroids and HGH.

In 1996, young Sox hurler **Vaughn Eshelman** went on the injured list when he burned his hand putting out a fire that had started when his wife lit candles to heat a baby bottle in their Fort Myers hotel room.

More recently, we had **Chris Sale** breaking his wrist wiping out on his bicycle in Chestnut Hill last summer.

ONE SITE'S MISSION TO UNEARTH BASEBALL HISTORY

Brian Murphy, mlb.com

Dave Smith has spent the vast majority of his 75 years poring over baseball's smallest details. On a Sunday afternoon in February, his attention was fixed on finding out exactly what happened on every play in a 1919 ballgame between the Tigers and Yankees.

Over the next few hours in his home office, Smith used six newspaper stories from the game to piece together the action. But more information isn't necessarily better.

"They don't always agree," he admitted.

Information and evidence are what Smith craves. A longtime University of Delaware biology professor, Smith categorizes these baseball deep dives as his hobby. But that hobby has a name and a legacy: Retrosheet.

An indispensable source for researchers, writers and fans alike, Retrosheet laid the foundation for today's most popular baseball statistics sites.

"Before Baseball-Reference, there was no other place to get this except us. There really wasn't," Smith said.

For 34 years, Smith along with hundreds of volunteers have collaborated to achieve Retrosheet's extremely ambitious quest: Providing play-by-play accounts for as many Major League games as possible, archive them and make them available to share with anyone for free.

To date, the organization has produced 184,000 play-by-play accounts for games since 1920 -- all American League and National League games played throughout the past 102 years. If you include just box scores, Retrosheet contains information on 205,000 games since 1901. They are compiling the same data for Negro Leagues games as well.

And there are no plans to stop until *every* Major League game is accounted for.

It's a task so immense that MLB's official historian, John Thorn, stated that it "might have daunted Imhotep, the pharaoh's architect, as he contemplated the pyramid before setting a first stone."

'This is the most wonderful thing in the world'

Retrosheet formally began in 1989, but the seeds for the idea were planted on July 18, 1958, when a 10-year-old Smith went to his first MLB game with his father: Phillies vs. Dodgers at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum -- with Smith's boyhood hero, **Sandy Koufax**, on the mound for L.A. However, the game didn't impact Smith's future as much as what he received at the stadium; his father bought him a Dodgers almanac compiled by Allan Roth, the first full-time statistician in baseball history.

Month-by-month statistical breakdowns on each player. Home and away splits. Platoon splits. They were all here, and Smith was hooked.

"I was absolutely convinced that this is the most wonderful thing in the world," he said.

Fast-forward to 1983, when sabermetric pioneer Bill James began "Project Scoresheet," a collective effort by volunteers to record every play of every game, starting with the 1984 season and moving forward in time.

Smith doesn't consider Retrosheet a sequel or subsidiary to James' invention, but it did evolve out of it with two key differences:

1. Smith was more interested in sharing baseball's past than its present.
2. As Project Scoresheet collapsed over discord due to money, Smith decided his creation would be non-profit.

"The very first decision was that no dime would ever change hands, period," he said. "It has to be free. And everyone who volunteers for us ... they always know from our first conversation, everything you do can and will be given away for free to anyone who wants it. If you don't like that, that's great. If you don't want your labor to be used that way, I've got no problem with it. But I've told you up front -- and if you don't like it, now is the time to get out."

Smith adds that no volunteer has ever asked him for any money for their contributions.

Members of Project Scoresheet were among those who joined Smith in '89 to begin capturing baseball's past, one game and one play at a time.

Early on, Smith discovered that many newspapers of the early 20th century, before the advent of radio and television, published full play-by-play or extremely detailed game stories each day. They were all accessible through the University of Delaware via interlibrary loan.

“We’ve got tens of thousands of games that I got that way,” he said. “... I spent I-don’t-want-to-know-how-many hours sitting at microfilm machines reading on this.”

The Orioles were the first MLB team to allow Retrosheet access to their scorebooks, providing sheets dating back to 1954. Although most clubs ignored Smith’s initial requests to photocopy what they had, eventually every team handed over batches of records. Smith quickly found himself stuffing filing cabinet after filing cabinet with baseball history.

For the first few years of Retrosheet, whatever was found through a variety of sources was compiled and summarized for a newsletter. Whoever wanted their data could get it on a floppy disk.

As word spread of their efforts, people began reaching out to Smith, either asking if he could find a play-by-play account of a certain game or submitting one of their own. Perhaps it was from their first game. Perhaps it was from their last with a cherished family member.

“People are inviting me into their lives 50 years later and they don’t even know it,” he said. “That’s really powerful.”

The legendary San Francisco sports writer Bob Stevens once gave Smith 30 years’ worth of Giants scorebooks and told him, “I don’t know why I saved these things. I haven’t looked at them in years. I guess I was saving them for you.”

A century of numbers

Inarguably, the most important set of documents in Retrosheet’s possession came from the Baseball Hall of Fame. Specifically, giant year-by-year ledgers that contain a daily record of what each player accomplished in each game of a season.

These ledgers, which Smith guesses each weigh between 20 and 30 pounds and are 25 inches by 30 inches big, feature player stats submitted every day by a game’s official scorer. Those statistics were then compiled and transcribed by the league office. The end result was handwritten player game logs for the large majority of the 20th century. A new line of stats was added to a player’s page for each game played, and each enormous page featured about 40 lines worth of numbers. So, a hitter who participated in 150 games might take up three or four pages in that season’s ledger.

The early years of these accounts from official scorers had plenty of missing data, such as strikeouts for hitters or the number of hit-by-pitches charged to pitchers, but they are the “gold

standard,” according to Smith, and serve as the backbone of Retrosheet’s earliest box-score files.

“Without [the ledgers], we’d be dead,” Smith said.

The Hall of Fame microfilmed multiple copies of the entire set of ledgers -- dating from 1903 in the NL and 1905 in the AL and covering every year into the 1990s -- and let Retrosheet purchase one. Smith admitted this gigantic cache wasn’t cheap, but he felt lucky that his wife, Amy, told him, “Your hobby is supposed to cost you money.”

Now, considering how that treasure trove of information was put together, you are probably wondering one thing:

How are Smith and company so sure that what they input into Retrosheet is the absolute truth?

Perhaps the official scorer made a mistake a century ago. Maybe the press coverage contains contradictions.

The quick answer: They do the best they can with what they have.

“Dave, in particular, doesn’t want to say we’re right,” said Tom Thress, who became Retrosheet’s president in June after Smith decided to take a step back from the organization. “We create a plausible account and it’s kind of left as an exercise for the reader.”

With the help of those scorebooks, newspaper articles, radio and TV accounts, et cetera, Retrosheet deduces the most likely occurrence of each play. These “deduced games” -- like that 1919 Tigers-Yankees game that Smith was working on -- comprise a large chunk of Retrosheet’s play-by-play output. Whenever Retrosheet’s determination differs from the official scorer’s files, that’s noted in the site’s discrepancy files.

Smith says that just in the 1920s alone, the American League and the National League each have more than 2,000 discrepancies each year.

“I’ve been challenged by people -- sometimes it’s a little annoying -- ‘How do you know that you’re right?’ Well, I don’t know that we’re right. I’m not presenting truth. I’m presenting what we have the best evidence for. And if you give me better evidence, I’ll change what we have.

“But in the meantime, the best evidence is what the official scorer wrote down and got transcribed onto these logs. Sometimes, they made mistakes and so we keep track of places where we differ from them.”

Retrosheet takes off

Retrosheet's maiden venture to compile a full play-by-play record of the 1983 season took three years to complete. But by that point, the internet age was peeking over the horizon, and Retrosheet's website launch in 1994 enabled it to find, upload and disseminate information to its rapidly expanding fan base at exponentially faster rates. According to Thorn, Retrosheet represented "the new frontier in statistical baseball research, in tandem with sabermetric analysis."

By the mid-2000s, Retrosheet's reach and impact within the baseball community were easy to spot. Smith recalls a story told by David Vincent, Retrosheet's founding secretary and the Washington Nationals' official scorer from 2005-15. As he strolled through the press box during a Nats game at Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium, Vincent glanced over the shoulders of six or seven sportswriters. All of their computer screens displayed the same site: Retrosheet.

"That was when I knew we had really hit it," Smith said.

Today, those screens might be more likely to display Baseball-Reference or FanGraphs, both of which acknowledge their use of Retrosheet's play-by-play data on their homepages. That's just fine with Smith; making Retrosheet's discoveries accessible to anyone free of charge is one of the organization's chief tenets.

"America's national game, the primary record of what happened," he said, "it just seemed so appropriate that it should be made available to everybody.

"The fact that other people find it interesting kind of blows my mind. That it's usable by other sites is just superb. I couldn't be happier about that."

No matter the level of outside interest, Retrosheet's ultimate mission of presenting play-by-play data for every Major League game continues apace. A development a few years ago, however, made the mission simultaneously more comprehensive and likely impossible.

The Negro Leagues are Major Leagues

Taking inspiration from Bill James' Win Shares metric, Thress used Retrosheet's play-by-play information to create his own metric -- Player Won-Lost Record -- years before he first volunteered for the site in 2014. He remembers his first assignment called for him to deduce what happened in a 1949 Phillies game, and he has been enraptured by the process ever since.

"I'm always dazzled by how much was recorded at the time and how much of what was recorded has survived to the present," Thress said.

In 2020, Thress, an economist based in Chicago, had an idea: He wanted to incorporate Negro Leagues players and stats into his won-lost metric and suggested that Retrosheet should delve into that history the same way it has tackled the American and National Leagues.

“My first thought was this is the most wonderful thing I’ve heard in a long time,” Smith recalled.

Near the end of that year, MLB bestowed Major League status upon seven professional Negro Leagues that operated between 1920 and 1948.

If Retrosheet’s goal is like putting together a massive puzzle, more pieces had just been added.

“I guess we’re all in,” Thress thought when the announcement came down. “We’ve got to do this.”

Thress and Smith knew that this endeavor would be much more difficult than Retrosheet’s work on AL and NL games. There were no giant ledgers to guide them. Many records from the time have been lost, and those that survived give sparse details.

There were games that received a lot of coverage: Black publications published full play-by-play of the Negro League World Series during the 1920s as well as of East-West All-Star Games in the 1930s and ‘40s. For season-level data such as team rosters and approximate schedules, Retrosheet’s starting point is the Seamheads Negro Leagues database, which is also used by Baseball-Reference. Those resources were where Thress and other volunteers began Retrosheet’s reconstruction of the Negro Leagues.

Beyond that, things get very murky. The site has released files for Negro Leagues seasons from 1942-48, but the details within are thin. A box score may contain only a handful of hitters and one starting pitcher, much less a full play-by-play account. Thress says that he dreams that he will have his own Bob Stevens moment, when someone contacts him after finding a pile of Negro League scoresheets in their grandfather’s attic. Any information that sheds more light on the rich history of this side of baseball is welcome.

“Because it’s so hard and it’s so rare to actually find really good stuff, oh my God, you’d find a box score and you’ve hit the lottery,” Thress said. “It’s just an amazing feeling.”

Negro League exhibitions and barnstorming games are also within the site’s purview. That includes a 16-game barnstorming tour that pitted the **Bob Feller** All-Stars against the **Satchel Paige** All-Stars in 1946. In this case, more information is better.

“Dave likes to say that the thing about Retrosheet is it’s huge but it’s finite,” Thress said.

“There’s a finite number of games. In terms of AL/NL, there are. And Retrosheet will finish it. God willing, they will finish in my lifetime.

“The Negro Leagues throw a little twist in there because, in theory, there were a finite number of Negro League games, but we don’t necessarily know what that number was. Throwing the Negro Leagues in there has, to some extent, made the completion of the project impossible whereas -- in theory, it wasn’t before. But we’ll see.”

The work continues

Smith guesses that between 400 and 500 volunteers have contributed to Retrosheet over the years, with about a dozen people working on this baseball labor of love at any one time. They will likely complete deducing games from the 1919 AL/NL season within a few weeks and then move on to 1918. Thress is among those wrapping up the 1940 Negro Leagues season and beginning the site's dive into 1939. He is also looking into the 1900 National League season. Others have started deducing games from the 19th century, predating those enormous ledgers.

Smith understands there are box scores and plays that Retrosheet will probably never be able to display. But that doesn’t lessen his drive to help finish what he started.

“Finding the games to complete the set, that is my biggest push,” he said. “Always has been.”

A NEW (ISH) PITCH ON THE BLOCK

The sweeper — a horizontal slider — had long been lumped in with other breaking balls. Thanks to a change in the Statcast system, it is suddenly its own thing.

Tyler Kepner, The New York Times

There’s a new fixture at ballparks this year, besides the pitch clock and bigger bases. This one did not have its own marketing campaign, and it wasn’t tested with focus groups and minor leaguers. Even those responsible for it have been startled by its presence on stadium scoreboards.

“When it said ‘sweeper,’ we were like, ‘What the heck?’” said **Michael King**, a Yankees right-handed reliever. “We had no idea. But I think it’s just a different way to classify a pitch, because there’s so many different sliders out there.”

Major League Baseball’s Statcast system, which feeds information to scoreboards and television screens, has quietly introduced the sweeper and the slurve as new pitch types this season. The slurve is well known, though, as a combination of a slider and a curve. A sweeper is ... what, exactly?

“It’s kind of a glitch pitch,” said **Matt Blake**, the Yankees’ pitching coach. “Some guys were throwing it, but maybe didn’t really understand how they were doing it. And then as information came out, all of a sudden more people were starting to look at it and saying, ‘OK, I can take it to this guy or that guy,’ and now all of a sudden everybody’s got it.”

Specifically, a whole lot of Yankees throw it. While Blake said the trend began with the Houston and Cleveland staffs around 2017, the Yankees have eagerly preached the virtues of the sweeper throughout their system.

King, **Nestor Cortes**, **Clay Holmes**, **Ron Marinaccio** and **Clarke Schmidt** all throw it. So do a few pitchers traded last summer who were nurtured in the Yankees’ system, including **J.P. Sears** and **Ken Waldichuk** of the Oakland Athletics and **Hayden Wesneski** of the Chicago Cubs.

“It’s an opportunity to say, ‘OK, what’s their primary breaking ball, and does it get swing-and-miss?’” Blake said. “Maybe we have an opportunity to add something here — try this.”

The sweeper is a horizontal slider, Blake said, with less downward movement than a slurve. A classic slider, like **Gerrit Cole**’s — often referred to by the Yankees as a “gyro” slider — is meant to look like a fastball to the hitter, who then swings over it when it breaks downward. The sweeper never looks like a fastball, but baits the hitter by seeming like a hittable breaking ball before darting away from the bat.

“You want side-spin,” said King, who learned his sweeper from the former Yankees starter **Corey Kluber**, who is now with the Boston Red Sox. “We always talk about the nose of the ball, and if you’re throwing a gyro slider, the nose is pointed straight at the hitter, like a spinning red dot. With the sweeper, you want the nose up.”

Pitching is a brotherhood; teammates and even opponents routinely compare grips and share tips on finger pressure, seam orientation and so on. Now that high-speed cameras are a common teaching tool, pitch design is more precise and efficient, and teams devote more resources to it — in technology and manpower — than ever. The right breaking ball can turn a fringe prospect into a big leaguer.

Often, of course, data only popularizes what older generations already knew. Before it had a name, the sweeper helped fuel the Yankees’ dynasty in the 1990s and early 2000s through **David Cone**, a top starter, and **Jeff Nelson**, a standout setup man.

“A right-hander can start it at the hitter and break it over the inside corner for a front-door sweeper — I’d start that right at their hip,” Cone, now a television analyst, said in the YES Network booth before a game last week. “That pitch was kind of frowned on by old-school pitching coaches, because a mistake is a home run: off-speed and on the inner part of the plate, if hitters recognize it, they can launch it and pull a fly ball.”

He added: “But it’s about shape. A sweeper’s got that bigger, flatter break, and designed for a swing-and-a-miss or a flinch. If it’s front-door, it’s to get the guy to flinch. When you’re throwing it away, it’s to get them to swing and miss.”

Nelson, who now calls games for the Yankees and the Miami Marlins, said he always considered his signature pitch a slurver — “a hard, big-breaking slider,” he explained. Nelson, a 6-foot-8 right-hander, threw from a low three-quarters angle and used a riding, inside fastball to keep right-handed batters from reaching his sweeping breaking ball.

“Sometimes there was so much of a break, you’d try slowing it down and it still broke a mile,” Nelson said. “Some days it was like, ‘I don’t know how to control this thing.’”

Nelson indeed could be wild, but he routinely had more strikeouts than innings pitched, before that was common for relievers. Closer **Mariano Rivera**’s celebrated cutter got plenty of swinging strikes but was more famous for breaking bats — the ultimate result of weak contact. The cutter looks like a fastball before a late, lateral slice; Cone calls that pitch a “baby sweeper.”

The Yankees’ current closer, the right-handed Holmes, has an exceptional sinker that runs in on right-handed hitters. He complements it with both a slider and a sweeper, and said it makes sense to differentiate the pitches.

“Last year I threw both, but if you went on Statcast, it was all just one pitch,” Holmes said. “I was throwing a sweeper and a gyro but it had them as one, so the average was not indicative of either pitch, really — velocity, movement, anything. It was a blend of both, so the average wasn’t really showing this pitch shape and that pitch shape.”

Now, *this* shape and *that* shape have official names of their own.

STATS SAY GLOBAL WARNING HELPS BATTERS SLUG BALLS OVER WALLS

By: Christopher W. Callahan & Justin S. Mankin in Atlas Obscura

Home runs are exhilarating — those lofting moments when everyone looks skyward, baseball players and fans alike, anxiously awaiting the outcome: run or out, win or loss, elation or despair.

Over the past several Major League Baseball seasons, home run numbers have climbed dramatically, including Aaron Judge’s record-breaking 62 homers for the New York Yankees in 2022.

Baseball analysts have pointed to many different factors for this surge, from changes in baseball construction to advances in game analytics.

Our study, published April 7, 2023, offers solid evidence for another cause — rising global temperatures.

What We Learned From 100,000 Baseball Games

The physics tell a simple and compelling story: Warm air is less dense than cool air. As air heats up and molecules move faster, the air expands, leaving more space between molecules. As a result, a batted ball should fly farther on a warmer day than it would on a cooler day, owing to less air resistance.

This simple physical link has prompted speculation from the media about the connection between climate change and home runs.

But while scientists like Alan Nathan have shown that balls go farther in higher temperatures, no formal scientific investigation had been performed to prove that global warming is helping fuel baseball's home run spree — until now.

In our study, published in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society in collaboration with anthropologists (and baseball fans) Nathaniel J. Dominy and Jeremy M. DeSilva, we used data from over 100,000 Major League Baseball games and 200,000 individual batted balls, alongside observed game day temperatures, to show that warming temperatures have, in fact, increased the number of home runs.

Based on data between 1962 — when **Mickey Mantle** was American League MVP and **Willie Mays** topped the home run chart — and 2019, we found that a game that is 18 degrees Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius) warmer than the average game would have nearly 20 percent more home runs than average.

So, what about everything else that drives home runs?

We can't run a controlled experiment where we replay each pitch cast since the 1960s and vary only the temperature to assess its effect on home runs. But we can use the trove of data on home runs and temperature to statistically estimate its effect. Whether a game is hotter or cooler than average is not likely to be related to other factors driving home runs, like ball construction, steroid abuse, game analytics or elevation differences among ballparks. This fact allows us to statistically isolate the role of temperature.

To verify our game-level model, we use data from high-speed cameras that ballparks have had since 2015. The cameras provide the launch angle and launch velocity of each hit — 200,000 of them were included in our study. This means we can compare a ball coming off a bat at the same angle and velocity on a warm day and a cool day — near-perfect experimental conditions.

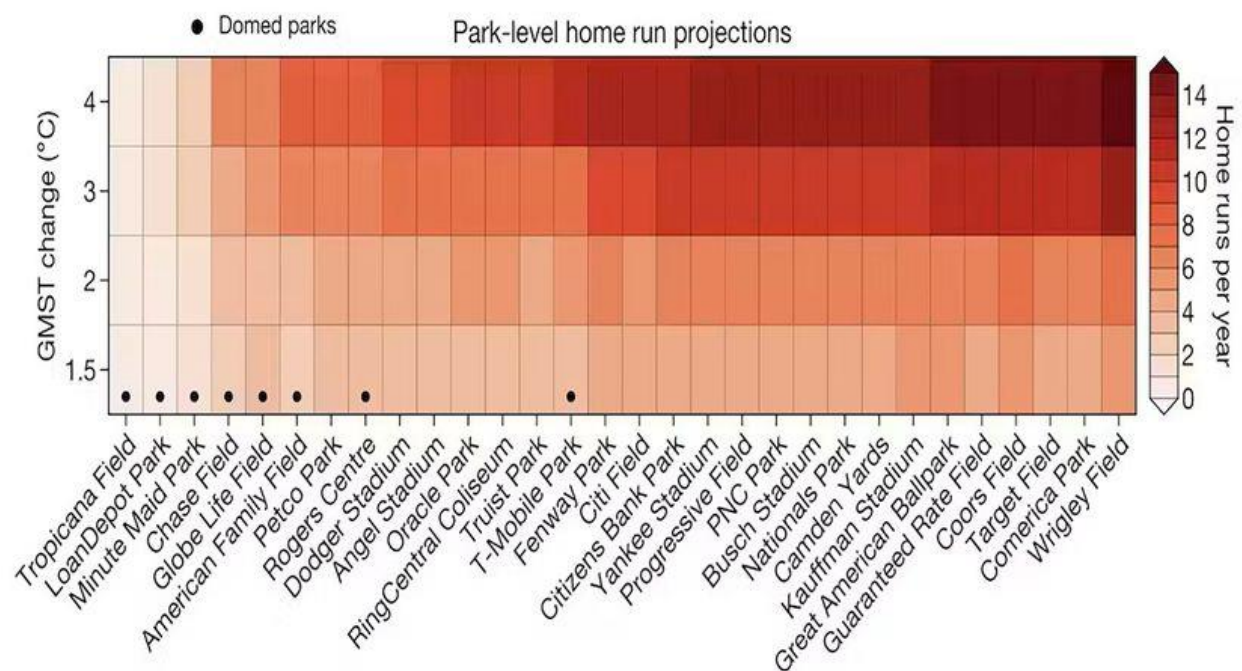
The high-speed camera model nearly exactly replicated the effect of temperature on home runs that we estimated with the game-level data. With this observed relationship between game day temperatures and home runs in hand, we were able to use experiments from climate models to estimate how many home runs have occurred because of climate change so far.

We found that more than 500 home runs since 2010 could be directly linked to reduced air densities driven by human-caused global warming.

More Homers in a Warming Future

We can use the same approach to make estimates about home runs in the future.

For example, if the world continues to pump out greenhouse gas emissions at a high rate, the temperature will continue to climb, and that could soon yield several hundred additional home runs per year. It could add up to several thousand home runs cumulatively over the 21st century.



Teams have ways to counter the heat. They can shift day games to be played at night, for example, or build domes over ballparks. In Denver, where the air is less dense because of its higher elevation, the Rockies started storing game balls in a humidifier in 2002 to make them "mushier," increasing their weight and giving pitchers more of a sporting chance.

It's Not All High-fives

More home runs might sound exciting, but that boost in homers is also a visible sign of the much larger problems facing sports and people worldwide as the planet warms.

Rising temperatures will threaten the health and safety of baseball players, fans in ballparks and people around the world. Without serious efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, rising temperatures will transform nearly all aspects of society, from cultural touchstones like baseball to basic human well-being.

NO, THE PITCH CLOCK WON'T TAKE ANYTHING AWAY FROM BASEBALL'S GREATEST MOMENTS

There's no reason to go back to the dawdling pace that the sport previously adopted, even for one inning.

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

Please, no. Just stop. Stop this foolish talk about adding more time on the pitch clock in the ninth inning or postseason or, good heavens, turning off the best thing to happen to baseball in years.

Stop telling me the pitch timer will deprive us of the "drama" of big moments. Stop telling me we can't have any more **Kirk Gibson** moments because players are "rushed".

Baseball is red hot right now because the timer has excised 28 minutes of dead time from the average game. More action, less time. And now you want to put dead time back in the game for the purpose of ... what exactly? To build a "narrative"? When did the World Series become a Kubrick flick that needs to take its sweet time for dramatic effect?

Last season Houston closer **Ryan Pressly** averaged one pitch every 32.9 seconds to throw seven pitches to get the last three outs of the World Series—*with a three-run lead and nobody on base*.

Why in the world would you ever want to go back to that dull game? Why would you want a completely different set of pace rules for one inning or one month of the season? Madness. Thankfully the competition committee, while open to tweaking some commonsense protocols, has shown no interest in expanding or eliminating time on the clock. "That's when we need it *more*," said one high-ranking executive about the postseason.

The average time of a postseason game last year was 3:32. That's 26 more minutes of dead time from the regular season.

The "we need more time" whine is a modern canard. Baseball was not played slowly for a hundred years, until recent years when analytics, Velcro, iPads in the dugout, sign stealing paranoia, deep bullpens, copious scouting reports and the "high performance" mantra of "slow the game down" ground a beautiful game to an inglorious slog.

The argument for slowing the ninth inning and/or the postseason likes to pretend the WBC-ending duel between **Shohei Ohtani and Mike Trout** was made dramatic because the tournament did not use a pitch timer. Ohtani threw Trout six pitches. His first pitch was an 88-mph sweeper. He used only 15 seconds to throw his next one, which would have been a legal pitch with a timer. But he exceeded 15 seconds after each of his next four pitches, probably because all of them were 100 mph or more and he took that time to recover and max out again. Those times between pitches: 19, 24, 28 and 24 seconds, all of which are violations in regular-season play this year with nobody on base.

Folks, that extra dead time did not make the moment. It was Ohtani vs. Trout with two outs in the ninth of a one-run championship game that made the moment. Somehow, we have a hundred years of dramatic moments without players dawdling, which I will prove to you with data, not some narrative gobbledygook.

You can't get much more dramatic than a World Series clincher. Let's look at pace of action in the past eight World Series clinchers and compare it to the pace of action in eight World Series clinchers from 30 years ago:

	Time of Game	Runs per Game	Minutes per BIP	Min. per Run
2015 to 2022	3:38	7.38	4.38	29.32
1985 to 1992	3:10	7.88	3.17	24.07

Which game do you prefer? Give me the World Series clinchers that took 28 minutes less with more runs and more action. Clinchers in the past eight years are *40% slower* than 30 years ago, as measured by the average wait to see a ball put in play. (That also accounts for an increase in strikeouts.)

In clinchers from 1985 to '92 we got to see the Blue Jays and Twins win the World Series in extra innings, **Orel Hershiser** throw a complete game and the Mets rally against the Red Sox but somehow you want to convince me those games weren't dramatic because the games were played too fast?

If you're young, you've been conditioned to equate slow with drama. (Get back to me when the NFL and NBA add time to their play clocks in the fourth quarter for "dramatic effect.") If you're older you've forgotten how baseball should be played—even in the ninth inning and even with the World Series on the line.

Time for more facts. Let's go back to some dramatic at-bats and put them under 2023 pitch timer protocols. I timed each pitch after the first one of the at-bat:

Joe Carter home run to end 1993 World Series

Action	Seconds
Ball	18
Pickoff attempt at second base	16
Called strike	15
Swinging strike	13
Home run	19

Timer "violations:" Zero of four

Mitch Williams never wanders off the back of the mound. Carter is ready to hit.

Mookie Wilson Ground ball (**Bill Buckner** error) to end 1986 World Series Game 6

Action	Seconds
Ball	10
Ball	10
Foul	14
Foul	10
Foul	12
Wild pitch	13
Foul	NA
Foul	19
Timeout (Wilson broken bat)	
Ground ball	10

Timer "violations:" Zero of eight

Trying to close out a world championship for Boston, **Bob Stanley** works quickly.

Kirk Gibson HR off **Dennis Eckersley** to end 1988 World Series Game 1

Action	Seconds
Pickoff attempt	19
Foul	17

Action	Seconds
Pickoff attempt	20
Pickoff attempt	18
Foul	11
Umpire timeout	
Ball	2
Foul	20
Ball	18
Pickoff attempt	17
Ball (and stolen base)	17
Mound visit	
Gibson timeout	
Home run	4

Timer “violations:” Zero of 11

Eckersley never wanders off the pitching rubber. Gibson was slow to get into the box initially but as a pinch hitter he would be afforded discretion by the umpire. Eckersley would not be allowed more than two unsuccessful pickoff attempts.

Compare those dramatic moments to more recent ones:

Yordan Alvarez HR off Jose Alvarado, 2022 World Series Game 6

Action	Seconds
Ball	26
Ball	20
Home run	27

Timer “violations:” Two of three

Alvarado likes to rub up the baseball between pitches.

Rajai Davis HR off **Aroldis Chapman**, 2016 World Series Game 7

Action	Seconds
Foul	14
Foul	24
Ball	27
Foul	15
Foul	21
Home run	35

Timer “violations:” Four of six
Chapman works very slowly.

The World Series clincher last season lasted 3:13, almost the same as the 1986 clincher by the Mets over the Red Sox. But there is no comparison in pace of action:

	Time	Runs	Balls In Play	Minutes/BIP
2022	3:13	5	35	5:31
1986	3:11	13	55	3:28

Players have done a tremendous job this season adapting to the pitch timer. Runs, singles, doubles, home runs and stolen bases are up (so are walks and strikeouts) in the quickest average time of game in 42 years. The average time between balls in play has been cut from 3:49 to 3:16. Five months from now this new pace of play will be even more ingrained.

Let’s never go back to the dawdling pace that caused so many people to stop following baseball because it was too slow. Not for a month. Not for an inning. Not for one moment of dead time.

THIS WEEK’S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Which two teams have had the most players (4) wearing their uniform when hitting home run No. 500? Name the teams (one AL, one NL) and the players.

The NL team’s first to reach 500 did it in 1945, the latest in 2001.
The AL team’s first did it in 1940, the latest 2015.

Giants (Mel Ott, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Barry Bonds)
Red Sox (Jimmie Foxx, Ted Williams, Manny Ramirez, David Ortiz)

Name seven major leaguers who hit at least 500 homers and stroked at least 3,000 hits? Their career years are listed.

Righty 1954-1976	Hank Aaron
Righty 1951-1973	Willie Mays
Switch hitter 1977-1997	Eddie Murray
Lefty 1986-2005	Rafael Palmeiro
Righty 1994-2016	Alex Rodriguez
Righty 2001-2022	Albert Pujols
Righty 2003-2023	Miguel Cabrera

Of the 28 members of the 500 HR club, who had the highest batting average at .344?. He won 6 batting titles, 2 Triple Crowns and 2 MVPs?

TED WILLIAMS

Who had the lowest at .256? He was AL MVP in 1969 with 49 HRs, played his whole career in the AL?

HARMON KILLEBREW

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