

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

4.30.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

Grab a coffee and enjoy the usual jumble of interesting stuff. From **Clayton Kershaw's** 200th win to celebrating **Yogi Berra**. Cheers,

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Five pitchers have had 350+ saves since 2000. All five are right-handed.

523 saves, Yankees

437 saves, Angels, Mets, Brewers, Orioles, Tigers

397 saves, Dodgers, Braves, Red Sox

396 saves, Braves, Padres, Red Sox, Cubs, White Sox, Dodgers, Phillies

376 saves, Giants, Twins, Rangers, Tigers, Cubs

Youngest Hall of Famers to make AL/NL debut

I'll spot you **Amos Rusie** -- 17 years, 344 days. pitcher and outfielder for Indianapolis in 1889. Name the other four:

17 years, 56 days. 1926 New York Giants. 511 career HRs

17 years, 191 days. 1925 Philadelphia A's. 534 career HRs

17 years, 259 days. 1936 Cleveland Indians. 266 career wins

17 years, 359 days. 1954 Washington Senators. 573 career HRs

WHO AM I?

I played 17 seasons with six teams—6 seasons with the Giants and 6 with the Braves.

I played in the 1962 World Series against the Yankees.

Right-handed outfielder/first baseman, I hit .286 with 206 career HRs and 2101 hits.

I later managed two of the teams I played for—the Expos and Giants.

Who am I?

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Harrison Bader hit .333/.429/.833 (10-for-30) with eight runs, five homers and six RBIs during the playoffs, joining **Reggie Jackson** (five HRs in 1977), **Bernie Williams** (six HRs in 1996), **Alex Rodriguez** (six HRs in 2009) and **Giancarlo Stanton** (six HRs in 2020) as the only Yanks to hit at least five homers in a single postseason.

The Athletic ranked minor league team names. Winners are the AA Amarillo Sod Poodles. (for those who don't know—prairie dogs are referred to as sod poodles in some parts). AAA Albuquerque Isotopes came in second.

The Philadelphia/Kansas City/Oakland Athletics had played 18,886 baseball games in their 123-year history coming into this week's series against the Angels. And in that time, only once had the same two Athletics hit back-to-back home runs twice on the same day. It was July 7, 1968 when **Sal Bando and Reggie Jackson** went back-to-back in the first game of a doubleheader in Detroit, then did it again in the second game (the A's lost both games).

But no two members of the A's had ever pulled it off in the same game until this week, when **Brent Rooker and Jesús Aguilar** went back-to-back in the first inning off Angels starter **José Suarez**, then did it again in the third inning (also off Suarez, who also allowed one to Kevin Smith).

Media Guide Oddities

Milwaukee Brewer **Eddy Alvarez** turned to baseball in college only to give his knees a break from speed skating. Nevertheless, he won a short track speed skating silver medal at the 2014 Winter Olympics and a baseball silver in the 2020 Summer Games, where he was also a flag-bearer for Team USA with Sue Bird.

Because of his childhood affinity for Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, the Mets **Tommy Hunter's** grandmother gave him judo lessons as a gift when he was five years old. Hunter eventually won the Junior Olympic gold medal in judo in back-to-back years when he was 11 and 12. (His older sister, Megan, trained with the U.S. Olympic team prior to the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.)

Giants right-hander **Sean Hjelle** is very tall. What? Hjelle is 6-foot-11 — one inch taller than **Randy Johnson** and officially tied with **Jon Rauch** for the tallest player in major-league history.

This season, **AJ Pollock** became the fifth Mariners player with an animal name to homer, joining **Butch Huskey** (1999), **Mike Carp** (2009-12), John Buck (2014) and **Jake Lamb** (2022).

Kevin Ohme made his major league debut with the St. Louis Cardinals two decades ago on April 14, then played his final game in the big leagues the following day. And in two days, he made history — escaping with a 0.00 ERA and a 1.000 batting average.

St. Louis Post Dispatch columnist Benjamin Hochman found Ohme — selected by the Yankees in the 35th round of the 1990 draft — in Valrico, Fla. He's 52 now, a driver's education teacher and high school pitching coach who cherishes his spot in the record books as one of only two players to do what he did.

For somebody who had only two appearances, 4 1/3 innings and one at-bat, for it to be like that, it's pretty cool."

Ohme's story, Reader's Digest version: He stayed in school after the Yankees drafted him and was selected by the Minnesota Twins in the ninth round in 1993. He scuttled around the minors, went to play in Japan, then returned to give it one more shot in the states. The Cardinals, playing under manager **Tony LaRussa**, called him up in 2003. He threw two-thirds of an inning on his first day, then came out of the bullpen the next day to throw 3 2/3 scoreless innings.

In his second appearance — a 7-1 blowout loss — he got an at-bat and a first pitch single against Brewers' All-Star **Ben Sheets**. Ohme hadn't hit in a game since high school. Before he appeared again, he was sent down, signed with the Angels, hurt his arm in 2004, balked at Tommy John surgery and walked away because he was 32 years old and had a growing family. The kids he coaches don't know he played in the majors.

Braves righthander **Spencer Strider** had a perfect game through 7 and took a no-hitter into the 8th versus the Marlins. In his 25th career start, he struck out 13, walked none, and allowed two singles in eight innings of an 11-0 rout that snapped a four-game Braves skid. Strider threw 81 strikes in 101 pitches — 58 fastballs, 40 sliders, three changeups — and got 65 swings including 31 misses.

For all their history, Strider's third 13+ strikeouts game places him in third place all time for the Braves.

John Smoltz did it 5 times, **Warren Spahn** 4. Strider is tied with **Phil Neikro** and **Gregg Maddux** with 3.

Alex Cobb of the Giants last threw a shutout in 2012. This week he blanked the Cards 4-0. Cobb allowed only six hits and one walk over nine innings, joining Yankees ace Gerrit Cole and reigning National League Cy Young Award winner **Sandy Alcantara** as the only pitchers to throw a shutout in the Majors this year. The 35-year-old veteran used his fastball-splitter combination to induce 17 ground-ball outs in the 109-pitch effort, which lowered his ERA to 1.91 over five starts this year.

Bill Bailey (1909-1921), **Socks Seibold** (1917-1929) and **Carmen Hill** (1915-1926) are the only pitchers who went longer between shutouts.

Masataka Yoshida is the first rookie to hit two homers in the same inning since **Joe Pepitone** of the Yankees in 1962. He also was the first player to hit two homers in an inning with one being a grand slam since **Edwin Encarnacion** of the Blue Jays in 2013.

It seemed unthinkable a week into the season when **Jordan Walker** was hitting .355 with a 1.007 OPS, but after hitting just .205 (.475 OPS) in his last 10 games, he's been optioned to Triple-A Louisville — a move that also addressed the Cardinals' outfield logjam.

Mike Trout is the active leader for most HRs on his birthday—5 on August 4.

Two MLB players in the modern era who have hit six home runs on their birthday to share the all-time lead. Those two are **Mark Reynolds** (born on August 3 and played 13 MLB seasons) and **Alex Rodriguez** (born on July 27 and played 22 MLB seasons).

No HRs for **Aaron Judge** this week on his 31st birthday but he did have 3 hits and 3 RBIs in 12-6 win over the Twins. Judge is one of just three Yankees to notch three or more hits and three or more RBIs on his birthday, joining **Lou Gehrig** (June 19, 1929 vs. Boston; June 19, 1935 at Detroit) and **Jerry Mumphy** (Sept. 9, 1981 vs. Milwaukee).

I didn't think of them as a running team but the record in the Divisional Era (since 1969) for most stolen bases in a season by a team that won the World Series is held by the 1976 Reds (210 stolen bases). Eight players with double digit stolen bases--**Joe Morgan** stole 63, **Ken Griffey** 34, **Caesar Geronimo** 22, **Dave Concepcion** 21, **George Foster** 17, **Dan Driessen** 14, **Johnny Bench** 13, **Tony Perez** 10.

The Oakland A's have a chance to produce the worst record in the last 20 years, maybe more. (The 2003 Detroit Tigers were 43-119, a .265 winning percentage.) The A's are 5-19, a .208 winning percentage, through 24 games. They are hitting .227 as a team. They have an abysmal 7.89 team ERA. Their farm system is thin. They have little trade ammunition at the major-league level. They're likely moving to Las Vegas at some point in the future. Yeah, it's bad.

The Nationals, Reds and Rockies have already fallen to the bottom of their divisions, and they don't have to play the 162-game schedule to know where they'll finish — in last. This shouldn't surprise anyone as their major-league rosters just can't compete with the rest of their respective divisions. The Nationals are 14th in the NL in runs scored, while the Rockies are 12th and the Reds are 10th. The Rockies are last in the league in ERA, and the Reds are second-to-last. It's going to be a long summer in Washington, Cincinnati and Colorado in terms of wins and losses.

Luis Arraez could become the first player to win batting titles in each league in consecutive years

DJ LeMahieu is the only major-league player to win a batting title in both leagues in the modern era. He won the National League batting crown in 2016 with the Rockies and the American League crown in 2020 with the Yankees. However, no player has ever won batting titles in both leagues in back-to-back years. Marlins second baseman Luis Arraez could be the first to do it. Last year, he led the AL, posting a .316 average with the Twins. This year, he leads the NL with a .444 clip. Arraez can really hit, and the infield shift ban has made him even better. History awaits.

Interesting observation... Who, as a manager, would you rather have had: **Barry Larkin** or **Derek Jeter**? Both HOF shortstops. Roughly equivalent as hitters and baserunners. Larkin had a considerable advantage defensively.

Jeter 3465 hits, 260 HRs, .310 average, 358 stolen bases, .817 OPS

Larkin 2340 hits, 198 HRs, .295 average, 379 stolen bases, .815 OPS

But Jeter had that one inexpressible quality that might vault him ahead: No, not his clutchness or magical instincts or Jeterosity. No, it was that he was basically indestructible: He played 150 games in a season 13 times. Larkin did it four.

AL Central teams have four of the eight worst walk rates in baseball. Of teams in that division, only the Guardians are drawing free passes at an above-average rate. In what could be a related story, AL Central teams are playing at a collective 100-loss pace, 39-66, outside the division.

I don't pay much attention to the White Sox but a quick glance shows they are terrible. extended their losing streak to eight games, but they ended their scoreless streak at 25 innings, scored more runs than they had in the previous four games (three), and matched their total of hits from the previous three games (11). When you've lost 13 out of your last 15 games, this counts as progress.

Chicago's current skid has dropped the team's record through Friday to 7-19, the third-worst in the majors. There's no ambiguity about whether the White Sox are bad: they also have the third-worst run differential and projected winning percentage. Under new manager **Pedro Grifol** replaced the retired **Tony La Russa** after the team declined from 93 wins and the division title in 2021 to 81 wins last year. No other team in the majors has seen as big a drop from pre-season odds. The White Sox have major issues on both sides of the ball. Through Thursday, their 3.88 runs per game and .373 slugging percentage both ranked 11th in the AL, their .289 on-base percentage and 84 wRC+ 13th, and their 6.6% walk rate 14th. They've scored three or fewer runs in 14 of their 26 games; only twice during this losing streak have they scored more than three. Thursday's loss broke a five-game streak in which they collected five or fewer hits and a four-game streak in which they collected four or fewer; over the latter stretch, they totaled just six runs, batting .122/.175/.199. We're talking Bad.

May 1, 1901. Chicago. White Sox beat Detroit 19-9 in a game that featured two historical firsts. In the bottom of the second Chicago center fielder **Herm McFarland** hit the first grand slam in AL history. Over the course of the game Detroit made 12 errors, a total that has been equaled just once but never surpassed. The game featured 28 runs, 29 hits, 14 walks, a hit batsman and 15 combined errors. Completed in 2 hours 30 minutes without a pitch clock.

Dick Groat died this week at age 92. He played 14 seasons in the majors as a shortstop. In 1960, he won the MVP award as the Pirates won it all. There were three good MVP choices on that Pirates team — **Roberto Clemente** (who hit .314/.357/.458 and should have won the Gold Glove), **Don Hoak** (who hit .282/.366/.445 with 97 runs) and Groat (who won the batting title at .325 and teamed up with **Bill Mazeroski** to form an impenetrable double-play combination). Groat was generally viewed as the team leader, and he won the award.

Groat played in both the NBA and MLB, almost singlehandedly led his Army team to championships in both baseball and basketball, and is a member of both the College Basketball AND College Baseball Halls of Fame. He graduated from Duke and went directly to the major leagues. Groat hit .286 for his career with 707 RBIs in 1,929 games and made the All-Star team in five seasons.

Think the AL east is stacked? Collective winning pct. against the rest of baseball extrapolates to a 112-win pace.

Shohei Ohtani came within a few feet of hitting for the ‘natural cycle’, single, double, triple and HR in order. His bid for a homer came up short. Interesting to read there have been 14 natural cycles MLB history. **Gary Matthews Jr.** logged the last one, in 2006 for the Rangers.

Ohtani was also trying to hit for the cycle in a game he pitched—last time that happened was since good ol’ **Jimmy Ryan** to hit for the cycle in a game he pitched. That one happened a bit longer ago: July 28, 1888, to be precise, back when Ryan played for the Chicago White Stockings. It’s a little surprising that **Babe Ruth** never did it — though Ruth did hit for the cycle 12 times, he never did in a game that he pitched.

Manny Machado overcame a seventh-inning deficit with his second homer, the 11th of the night, and the Padres outslugged the San Francisco Giants, 16-11, in Major League Baseball’s first regular-season game in Mexico City.

Nelson Cruz, Juan Soto, Fernando Tatis, and Xander Bogaerts also went deep for the Padres, who outhomered the Giants, 6-5, and outhit them, 17-13, in the thin air of Estadio Alfredo Harp Helú.

San Francisco’s **Brandon Crawford** and **Lamonte Wade Jr.** hit consecutive homers in the fourth off **Joe Musgrove**.

Bogaerts became the first player to homer in regular-season games in four countries, adding to his previous drives in the US, Canada, and England.



The Braves have been told they need to stop their “big hat” home run celebration, having run afoul of New Era, the manufacturer of the official on-field cap.

More than Sports, an area sports memorabilia collector, tossed the hat to Atlanta’s Ozzie Albies and A.J. Minter during opening weekend, according to WSB-TV. Dubbing it the “homer hat,” it got plenty of airtime as Atlanta hit 40 home runs in the season’s first 25 games, trailing only Tampa Bay and the Dodgers entering Thursday’s play.

That caught the attention of New Era, the league’s official cap supplier since 1993. WSB confirmed that the company spoke to Braves officials, who then told the players the unofficial hat would have to go. It last appeared Sunday, on the head of **Kevin Pillar** after his first home run with the team.

Jeff Dooley has called minor league games for 25 years, in recent years with the Double A Hartford Yard Goats. He got his own long-awaited call to the big leagues last weekend when the

Rockies needed an announcer to fill in for two games on their radio broadcast. Dooley, a Rhode Island native, has worked in the Hartford area for years. Minor league announcers often double as the public relations director and take on other jobs the team needs to be done.

Ten years ago, **Madison Bumgarner** was in the first season of four consecutive top-10 Cy Young finishes, At age 26, Madison Bumgarner had already won 100 big-league games, he was 4-0 with an 0.25 ERA in the World Series and he'd been named *Sports Illustrated's* Sports Person of the Year. Cooperstown? Well, on Opening Day 2017, he pitched seven solid innings and hit two home runs.

Yeah, he was looking quite Cooperstowny.

Less than three weeks later, after having nothing but healthy seasons — incredibly, he had never been on the disabled list — he crashed while riding his dirt bike, messed up his shoulder and missed three months. And so began a decline than ended with the D'backs eating \$37 million when they released him. Bumgarner won 2 silver sluggers, was on 3 World Series winners, 4-0 in World Series, 8-3 in post-season.

Fun Pitching Stats

Max Scherzer — his 10.7 strikeouts per nine innings is the highest for any pitcher in baseball history with more than 400 starts (higher than **Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez or Nolan Ryan**).

Highest winning percentage since 1901 (min. 400 starts):

1. **Clayton Kershaw**, .694
2. **Whitey Ford**, .690
3. **Pedro Martinez**, .687
4. **Lefty Grove**, .680
5. **Christy Mathewson**, .665

Lowest ERA since 1901 (min. 400 starts):

1. Christy Mathewson, 2.13
2. **Walter Johnson**, 2.17
3. **Eddie Plank**, 2.35
4. Clayton Kershaw, 2.48
5. **Pete Alexander**, 2.56

Most starts of seven innings and three or fewer hits allowed

1. Nolan Ryan, 134
2. **Roger Clemens**, 80
3. Randy Johnson, 78
4. **Tom Seaver**, 66
5. Clayton Kershaw, 65

Roger Clemens. Third all-time in pitching WAR, first by a long way among anyone born after 1890. Seven Cy Young Awards. Ninth in innings pitched in the live-ball era.

At the absolute peak of offensive levels, in 1999 and 2000, when baseball teams averaged five runs a game for the only seasons since 1930, Pedro Martinez threw 430 innings with a 1.90 ERA and a 1.79 FIP. His 2000 ERA+ of 291 is the best ever for an AL/NL pitcher throwing overhand, his 243 ERA+ in 1999 is seventh. Martinez didn't have the longevity, getting Cy Young votes in just seven seasons, all from 25 to 32, and his career was mostly over by 33. His very best season, 2000, wasn't quite up there with **Dwight Gooden's** 1985 or **Steve Carlton's** 1972, but his absolute peak, and his extended one, was perhaps the best since **Walter Johnson**.

Clayton Kershaw won his first ERA title and Cy Young Award at 23. From ages 23 to 29, Kershaw won five ERA titles, three Cy Young Awards, and finished in the top three of the balloting six times. Oh, in 2016 he had a 1.69 ERA.

Small sample size but more trends from the new rules:

Teams playing quicker games: Seven teams are playing games this year that average at least a half-hour shorter than last year: the Twins (35.1 minutes), Royals (34.8), Yankees (33.3), Marlins (33.1), Brewers (31.8), Giants (30.6) and Nationals (30.4). All of those figures are through Monday.

Teams playing slower games: No teams are averaging *more* minutes per game than last year, because of course not. But two teams are still less than 20 minutes' difference year over year — the A's (14.6) and Cubs (19.8).

Starters pitching fastest: It seems misleading to look at game times considering how rarely starters get into the ninth inning. So let's do this via Baseball Savant's pitch-tempo leaderboards. We found three starters who are using up less than six seconds per pitch on the pitch timer so far with no one on base: **Taijuan Walker** (5.6), **Wade Miley** (5.8) and **Steven Matz** (5.9).

Starters pitching slowest: On the other hand, I found five starters who are using up so much time, they're allowing the clock to tick under five seconds, on average, both with runners on base and nobody on: **Alek Manoah, Aaron Nola, JP Sears, Mike Clevinger and Zac Gallen**. (That's with a minimum of 100 pitches in each situation.)

LONGEST ACTIVE AFFILIATIONS IN THE MINOR LEAGUES

Through thick and thin, these 10 partnerships are still going strong

Reading Fightin Phils (Eastern League), Double-A affiliate of the Philadelphia Phillies since 1967
Stadium: FirstEnergy Stadium, built in 1951
Three Notable Alumni: **Mike Schmidt, Ryne Sandberg, Ryan Howard**

Lakeland Flying Tigers (Florida State League), affiliate of the Detroit Tigers since 1967
Stadium: Joker Marchant Stadium, built in 1963
Three Notable Alumni: **John Smoltz, Lou Whitaker, Justin Verlander**

Omaha Storm Chasers (International League), Triple-A affiliate of the Kansas City Royals since 1969
Stadiums: Rosenblatt Stadium (1969-2010); Werner Park (2011-present)
Three Notable Alumni: **George Brett, Frank White, Salvador Pérez**

Iowa Cubs (International League), Triple-A affiliate of the Chicago Cubs since 1981
Stadium: Sec Taylor Stadium (1981-91); Principal Park (1992-present)
Three Notable Alumni: **Greg Maddux, Joe Carter, Mark Grace**

Clearwater Threshers (Florida State League), affiliate of the Philadelphia Phillies since 1985
Stadiums: Jack Russell Memorial Stadium (1985-2003); Bay Care Ballpark (2004-present)
Three Notable Alumni: **Cole Hamels, Chase Utley, Ryan Howard**

Birmingham Barons (Southern League), Double-A affiliate of the Chicago White Sox since 1986
Stadiums: Rickwood Field (1986-87); Hoover Metropolitan Stadium (1988-2012); Regions Field (2013-present)
Three Notable Alumni: **Michael Jordan, Tim Anderson, Frank Thomas**

Toledo Mud Hens (Triple-A East), Triple-A affiliate of the Detroit Tigers since 1987
Stadiums: Ned Skeldon Stadium (1987-2001); Fifth Third Field (2002-present)
Three Notable Alumni: **Curtis Granderson, Mike Hessman, Max Scherzer**

Dunedin Blue Jays (Florida State League), affiliate of the Toronto Blue Jays since 1987
Stadiums: Grant Field (1987-89); TD Ballpark (1990-present)
Three Notable Alumni: **Dave Stieb, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Jeff Kent**

St. Lucie Mets (Florida State League), affiliate of the New York Mets since 1988
Stadium: Clover Park (1988 - present)
Three Notable Alumni: **Edgardo Alfonzo, David Wright, Jacob deGrom**

San Jose Giants (California League), affiliate of the San Francisco Giants since 1988
Stadium: Excite Ballpark (opened in 1942)
Three Notable Alumni: **Tim Lincecum, Buster Posey, Madison Bumgarner**

STEALS ARE UP, CAUGHT STEALING IS DOWN, WHATS UP WITH THE RANGERS?

Consider the New York Mets, whose catchers have an 8.3 percent success rate in throwing out base stealers this season. That is just two runners caught in 24 stolen base attempts, tied for the second-worst percentage in the majors.

The best way to offset that negative to steal more bases yourself. So that is what the Mets have done. Their 21 steals are tied for fourth in the National League. They have been caught stealing just three times, one of six teams with three or fewer.

So just how bad it is for opposing catchers these days? On average, not many teams are having it as hard as the Mets, although the success rate for base stealers is up in the early going.

Catchers are throwing out base stealers at a 20.6 percent success rate nearly a month into the season. That is down from 24.6 percent last season. But the success rate for catchers has been on a steady decline ever since masked men threw out 40.7 percent of base stealers in 1967.

In 2000, catchers threw out 31.2 percent of base stealers, with that figure dropping under 30 percent by 2004.

As analytics valued a potential run over the possible out by getting caught stealing, stolen bases dwindled to 0.46 per game in 2021 – the lowest average since 1971. But they are up to 0.69 per game this season, the highest figure since it was at 0.70 in 1999.

The offense's chances of stealing a base improved with the new limit of two times a pitcher can "disengage" from the rubber per plate appearance. Pickoff throws are included in the disengagements. Slightly enlarged bases also mean baserunners can reach the next bag a tick earlier.

A less-obvious assist to base stealers is not allowing pitchers to hold the ball for any length of time while on the mound as to give doubt if there would be a pickoff throw or a pitch to the plate. Baserunners now essentially know when the pitcher will go into action.

The Rangers led MLB in stolen bases last year with 128. (The league average was 83.) The steal may have been turning into something of an endangered species across the game—hence the need for the rule changes in the first place—but it was alive and well in Texas. And the team looked as if it would keep the trend going under the new rule book in 2023. While they did bring on a new manager in **Bruce Bochy**, the players who contributed the most steals last year are still all in town with playing time, a group led by **Marcus Semien, Adolis García and Bubba Thompson**. The Rangers' 13 stolen bases through Wednesday are tied for 21st in MLB and would put them on pace for roughly 88 on the season. While other teams are stealing more than they have in a long, long time, Texas is actually tracking *behind* where it did at this point in the season last year. Maybe they don't need to—the Rangers offense has produced the second best run differential in the AL. There's more to baserunning than base stealing. And there are some curiosities in the Rangers' other running statistics. Take a look at the percentage of extra bases taken, which accounts for runners advancing from first to third on a single, and so on. Last year, Texas had an above-league-average 44% here. This year? They have the lowest figure in the AL with a rate of just 36%.

Now, that's a blunt-force metric that smooths over plenty of nuance, and there are all sorts of factors that go into whether it makes sense to try for the extra base in a given situation. But it's still broadly illustrative. This is a team that's been far less aggressive on the base paths this year, generally, whether or not a steal is in play.

DREW MAGGI MAKES MAJOR LEAGUE DEBUT WITH PIRATES AFTER TOILING IN MINORS FOR 13 YEARS

After 13 years in the minor leagues, **Drew Maggi** was greeted with a standing ovation when he made his major league debut for the Pittsburgh Pirates on Wednesday night.

The 33-year-old, who played 1,154 games in the minors, pinch hit for five-time All-Star Andrew McCutchen in the eighth inning with the Pirates ahead by seven runs. Maggi saw four pitches from **Alex Vesia**, striking out on a slider, in an at-bat that included a pitch-clock violation by the rookie batter.

After making 4,494 plate appearances in the minors, Maggi was called up from Double A Altoona on Sunday when outfielder **Bryan Reynolds** was placed on the bereavement list. Manager **Derek Shelton** didn't find a spot to use Maggi during his first two games in Pittsburgh and Maggi was fearful of a repeat of 2019, when he was called up by Minnesota for a few days but did not appear in a game.

"This is it. This is the moment," Maggi remembered thinking.

He fouled a fastball deep down the left-field line and fell behind 0-2 on the clock violation as the crowd of 12,152 booed plate umpire Jeff Nelson.

After fouling another fastball to the right side, Maggi took a high-and-outside fastball before swinging over a pitch in the dirt. He ran to first, where catcher **Austin Wynn's** throw to **Freddie Freeman** easily beat him for the out. No matter what else happens in his life, he can say he played in the majors.

Maggi got his first two major league hits, three days after making his big league debut with the Pirates following 13 years in the minor leagues, and Pirates routed the Nationals, 16-1, Saturday night to complete a doubleheader sweep at Washington.

The 34-year-old lined a 2-2 splitter from **Hobie Harris** into center field for an RBI single as a pinch hitter in the seventh inning, boosting the Pirates' lead to 13-0 in the second game. Maggi stayed in the game at third base and added a double off **Lane Thomas**, an outfielder who pitched the ninth.

HOW 'BOUT THOSE RAYS?

Tampa Bay won each of its first 14 home games to begin the year, breaking a tie with the 2009 Dodgers to claim the longest season-opening streak in the AL/NL's modern era. Already, they've become the fourth team in AL/NL history to start a season by winning 13 straight, which was also the longest winning streak overall in franchise history. And they were the first team to

homer in 22 consecutive games to begin the year, a streak that finally ended with Monday's homerless performance.

The Rays are in historic company. At 20-3, they are just the seventh team in the modern era to win at least 20 of its first 23 games; only two clubs, the 1911 Tigers and 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers, have started better. Tampa Bay's plus-92 run differential is the best through 23 games in AL/NL history, surpassing the plus-88 mark of the 1902 Pirates.

The Rays have outscored their opponents, 102-34, when playing under their home dome this season. Their 14-game home winning streak is tied with the 1885 Chicago White Stockings for the longest such run in AL/NL history. The longest streak belongs to the 1880 White Stockings, at 21 games.

- Set an MLB record with a home run in each of the first 21 games.
- Set a franchise record with a 13-0 home record to start a season. (The 13 straight home wins is a franchise record at any point in a season.)
- Outscored opponents 149-61.
- Outhomered opponents 48-12. (Only the 2000 Cardinals hit more homers through 22 games.)

Let's do the math. Tampa Bay is the ninth team to start 19-3 or better in MLB history. When prorated over a 162-game schedule, those teams finished with an average of 101 wins. Only good teams start this hot.

It's a big contrast with the end of last season. The Rays hit .231 in September with a major-league-low 21 home runs. Facing Cleveland in the AL wild-card series, they went home quickly after losing two games in which they scored one run in 24 innings and hit .115. Tampa Bay hitters chased pitches out of the strike zone 40% of the time in that series. The major league average is 31%. They hit .094 when they went outside the zone against Cleveland. The team that ranked 13th out of 15 AL teams in slugging is slugging .535 and scoring 6.8 runs per game.

Speaking of hot starts, the 1955 Dodgers (14-2), '77 Dodgers (17-3), '84 Tigers (18-2) and '16 Cubs (17-5) are just a few teams that built an early lead on their way to the World Series.

Keep in mind that 18 of their first 21 games were against the Tigers, Nationals, A's, Red Sox, Reds and White Sox. Entering their current series with the Astros (which they've split one game apiece thus far), the only team they faced with a winning record was the Blue Jays, and they lost two of three. Let's circle the date of May 28 because that's when we should have a better sense of how good this team really is. The Rays' May schedule is much harder than their April slate: They'll play the Yankees seven times, the Mets three times, the Brewers three times, the Blue Jays four times and the Dodgers three times. They'll also play the Pirates (16-8) three games and the Orioles (15-8) three games.

The Rays are one of six teams to win at least 20 of their first 23 games, and the first since 1987.

Spring Heat Wave (best 23-game records, since 1901)

Dodgers 1955 21-2

Tigers 1911 21-2

Rays 2023 20-3

Brewers 1987 20-3

Athletics 1981 20-3

Red Sox 1946 20-3

(BTW, those 1981 A's played 11 home dates during that 20-3 stretch and averaged 28,600 tickets sold.

Through their first 21 games, the Pirates were 14-7, and you would think playing .667 ball for three weeks would be the sign of a pretty good team. It's not, though. Twenty teams had a stretch like that in every full season since 2019. Almost every team in baseball did it at some point in 2019, 2021, or 2022. The Pirates themselves did it in 2019, when they finished 69-93. The Angels (73-89) and Diamondbacks (74-88) did it last year. The Nationals lost 97 games in 2021 and still ripped off 14 of 21 at one point. The Marlins are the only team in MLB not to have a stretch of 14-7 or better since 2019.

Adolis García of the Rangers became the first player in American League history to hit three home runs and two doubles in one game, doing so on Saturday night as the Rangers romped to an 18-3 win over the A's. The five extra-base hits tied a big-league record, one that is shared by former Rangers outfielder **Josh Hamilton**, who hit four homers and a double against the Orioles in 2012.

García became just the fourth player in the modern era (since 1900) with 14 or more total bases, eight or more RBI, and five or more runs scored in a single regular-season game.

Masataka Yoshida of the Red Sox hit two home runs — including a grand slam — in one inning in Milwaukee on Sunday. This one wasn't *quite* as rare, but it had been nearly 10 years since a player hit a grand slam and another home run in the same inning (**Edwin Encarnación**, July 2013).

Yoshida's two-homer game happened Sunday, April 23. That's exactly 24 years after **Fernando Tatís** (Sr.) became the only player in big-league history to hit two grand slams in one inning.

Week before last the Detroit Tigers swept the Cleveland Guardians in a speedy doubleheader lasting just 4 hours and 14 minutes across both games combined. Here's what you need to know:

- The first game, a 4-3 Detroit win, lasted 2 hours and 24 minutes and the second, a 1-0 win, clocked in at 1 hour and 50 minutes.
- The Angels and White Sox played the last game in under 1 hour and 50 minutes on July 8, 2010, as Chicago won 1-0.
- During the 2022 season, there were 20 games that lasted longer than this doubleheader combined. Seventeen of those were extra-inning games, while three were nine-inning games.
- The shortest doubleheader in MLB history was recorded in 1926, with two games between the New York Yankees and St. Louis Browns lasting only 2 hours and seven minutes, according to Baseball Almanac.

Most multi-homer games in a losing effort:

- **Sammy Sosa**, 25
- **Mark McGwire and Barry Bonds**, 18
- **Alex Rodriguez**, 17
- **Jimmie Foxx and Willie Mays**, 16
- **Ernie Banks**, 15

Babe Ruth and Henry Aaron each had 12 multi-homer, losing games.

Seventy-seven years ago this month, lefthanded pitcher **Eddie Klep** made his debut for the Negro American League's Cleveland Buckeyes. What made Klep unique among Negro League players? He was white. Klep had been the only white player for the Erie Pontiacs, a team in Pennsylvania's semipro Glenwood League in 1945 when news broke that Branch Rickey had signed **Jackie Robinson**. Klep (whose name is misspelled as "Klepp" in some sources) contacted Ernest Wright, the owner of the Negro American League's Cleveland Buckeyes, and asked for a tryout.

“Seeing an opportunity for some good PR, as well as the chance to score a victory for civil rights, Wright readily agreed.

When Klep and his teammates arrived at Rickwood Field in Birmingham, for an early-season game against the Black Barons, police objected to the integrated Buckeyes taking the field. Klep was not allowed to play. He wasn’t even allowed to sit in the dugout. The cops made him go back to the team hotel, take his uniform off and watch the game from the part of the stands reserved for white fans.

Klep was released after appearing in three games for the Buckeyes and returned to playing semipro ball in Pennsylvania.

There have been six no-hitters in Mariners history and the most recent one came in Toronto, by Canadian-born lefty **James Paxton** on May 8, 2018. **Easton McGee** gave the Seattle Mariners a start to remember, but their struggling offense came up empty once again.

Daulton Varsho singled with the bases loaded in the 10th and the Toronto Blue Jays beat Seattle, 1-0, for their sixth straight victory Saturday after McGee took a no-hitter into the seventh inning of his first major league start.

McGee was brought up from Triple A Tacoma to start in place of struggling **Chris Flexen**, who was moved to the bullpen. It was the second big league outing for McGee, who made one relief appearance for Tampa Bay late last season.

Jeff Dooley has called minor league games for 25 years, in recent years with the Double A Hartford Yard Goats. He got his own long-awaited call to the big leagues last weekend when the Rockies needed an announcer to fill in for two games on their radio broadcast. Dooley, a Rhode Island native, has worked in the Hartford area for years. Minor league announcers often double as the public relations director and take on other jobs the team needs to be done.

INSIGHT FROM JOE SHEHAN’S NEWSLETTER

(you should consider subscribing – interesting stuff every day)

Last night, **Dave Roberts** penciled **Mookie Betts** into the starting lineup at shortstop for the second straight game, and the Dodgers won again. Necessity is the mother of invention, and with **Gavin Lux** and **Miguel Rojas** injured, **Chris Taylor** needed at third base to cover for **Max Muncy** (paternity leave), and **Luke Williams** not a major leaguer, Roberts has come up with a

hell of an invention. It's not likely to hold -- when Muncy returns, Taylor can be deployed at short with Betts back in right field -- but we've seen proof of concept the last two days.

So I was wondering...if you were to rank all MLB shortstops, where would you put Betts?

Offensively, of course, we know Betts is a superstar. Betts was 11th in the majors in wRC+ last year, and he's 11th since the pandemic season. No shortstops have been better at the plate. Jose Ramirez is the only throwing infielder (I need a term for "non-first basemen") who has hit better than Betts over this span. **Trea Turner and Jose Altuve** are slightly behind Betts as hitters. If it's just about hitting, Betts would be the best shortstop in baseball.

It's not, of course, and statistics over 22 innings are a poor guide as to Betts's defensive quality. I watched every play he made over the last two games, as well as any play that involved a ball up the middle. Betts looks like an athlete playing shortstop. His moves aren't smooth, and he can look awkward. He covered the bag on a bunt last night and made the ensuing force play closer than it needed to be with a wrong-foot stretch. That's entirely inexperience on a play he hadn't been asked to make in a decade. His hands are fine, and the best part of his defensive game is a right fielder's arm, which ports very well to shortstop. He hasn't been tested to his right yet, something I would have liked to see.

My guess is that over 1200 innings, Betts would be a below-average shortstop, but not an embarrassment. Per Baseball Savant, 42 shortstops qualified by playing time across 2021 and 2022 combined. **Xander Bogaerts** was 32nd defensively, costing his teams six outs compared to average, and he was signed to an 11-year contract. **Corey Seager** ranked 31st and is getting \$30 million a year. **Bo Bichette, Tim Anderson, J.P. Crawford**...these guys are all locked in at short despite middling metrics. I think Betts would be in that range, with the positional value and actual defensive performance being a wash relative to his work in right field.

Betts at shortstop would be **Derek Jeter**, a great right-handed hitter stretched at the position, but whose bat is so good you live with the glove. Who would clearly be better than him? Trea Turner for sure. Probably **Francisco Lindor**. Probably **Carlos Correa**. Would you clearly take, in real baseball for a team trying to win now, Bichette or Seager or Anderson or Bogaerts or **Dansby Swanson** over him? You might, but it's a conversation.

Mookie Betts is one of the best players of the 21st century, and within that group, one of the few who could make this kind of transition on the fly and be capable. The Dodgers won't need him to play 1200 innings at shortstop, but if they did, they'd still have one of the better shortstops in the sport.

AND FROM THE JOE POSNANSKI NEWSLETTER

(another daily source of interesting stuff you should consider subscribing to, even if he doesn't like the Yankees—I made him inscribe my copy of his last book “to a great Yankee fan”)

The Minnesota Twins beat the Yankees again on Tuesday, thus guaranteeing that they will win their first series against the Yankees since 2001.

I'm going to repeat that.

It's the first time the Twins have taken a series from the Yankees since 2001.

No, I'm going to repeat that again, because I want to be clear: I'm not saying it's the first time the Twins have SWEPT a series against the Yankees since 2001, even though that would be pretty ridiculous, too. No, it's the first time the Twins simply have taken two out of three games against the Yankees since:

- Before 9/11.
- George W. Bush was just starting in office.
- Before cellphones took photographs.
- Yahoo! was the top search engine.
- The top mail address was Hotmail, followed by AOL.
- Before Billie Eilish was born.
- Before **Jordan Walker** was born.
- Before Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat ... but also before MySpace and Friendster.

Here's how long ago it was: **David Ortiz** scored a run in the decisive game. For the Twins. El Duque took the decisive loss for the Yankees. Patrick Mahomes' godfather, **Latroy Hawkins**, got the big save for Minnesota. Mahomes was 5 years old.

Now, you ask: Hey, when was the last time the Twins actually swept a three-game series from the Yankees? So glad you asked: You have to go back to June 11-13, 1991. The Yankees' lineup that day?

1. **Roberto Kelly**, CF
2. **Steve Sax**, 2B
3. **Don Mattingly**, 1B
4. **Kevin Maas**, DH
5. **Mel Hall**, LF

6. **Jesse Barfield**, RF
7. **Matt Nokes**, C
8. **Alvaro Espinosa**, SS
9. **Pat Kelly**, 3B

Stump Merrill was the skipper. The Yankees went 71-91.

Anthony Volpe was just 12 days old on May 10, 2001, when a passed ball got by then-Yankees catcher **Joe Oliver** in the 10th inning, securing the Twins their last series win over the Yankees. The Twins were 35-75 in regular-season games against the Yankees from 2002-22 and 2-16 in the postseason

CLAYTON KERSHAW WINS 200TH GAME

Clayton Kershaw won the 200th game of his career this week. His career .694 win-loss percentage is the fifth best in major league history (min 100 decisions), and the best of anyone to debut after WWII.

Player	W-L%	W	L	From	To
Al Spalding	.794	251	65	1871	1878
Ray Brown	.721	119	46	1931	1945
Spud Chandler	.717	109	43	1937	1947
Bullet Rogan	.698	120	52	1920	1938
Clayton Kershaw	.694	200	88	2008	2023
Whitey Ford	.690	236	106	1950	1967
Dave Foutz	.690	147	66	1884	1896
Bob Caruthers	.688	218	99	1884	1893
William Bell	.687	114	52	1923	1937
Pedro Martínez	.687	219	100	1992	2009

CELEBRATING YOGI BERRA

Be on the lookout for “It Ain’t Over,” the documentary on **Yogi Berra** that will open in select theaters in New York and Los Angeles on May 12. I attended the premiere in New York on Tuesday night and was blown away.

The film succeeds at its most basic level, reminding us that Berra was a three-time MVP, 10-time World Series champion, and one of the all-time great catchers. Berra’s granddaughter, Lindsay, is the driving force behind the project and narrates a good bit of the documentary. Her goal is clear: To ensure her grandfather is remembered not just for his Yogi-isms and television commercials, but for his playing accomplishments.

Yet there is more, so much more. The acceptance by Berra of the game’s first Black players, **Jackie Robinson** in the NL and **Larry Doby** in the AL. His lifelong insistence that he tagged out Robinson on what umpire Bill Summers ruled a successful steal of home in Game 1 of the 1955 World Series. His feud with George Steinbrenner. His managerial stints with the Yankees and Mets.

Berra served in World War II, winning a Purple Heart for his role in the Navy on D-Day. He was the consummate family man, devoted to his wife Carmen and their three sons, as well as his 11 grandchildren, of whom Lindsay is the oldest. The film includes interviews with Derek Jeter, Joe Torre and other former Yankee greats, as well as Billy Crystal, Bob Costas, Vin Scully and others. The message comes shining through: **Berra was much more than a caricature. He is an American icon.**

Angels concerned about ‘enhanced-grip’ ball used at Double-A affiliate

The Rocket City Trash Pandas hitters were shell-shocked. It was Opening Day at home in Alabama. And it was their first in-game chance to see and feel the new “enhanced grip” baseball MLB implemented for use in the Southern League.

They were the guinea pigs. And it was as if they were being put through some cruel and torturous experiment. Their season started like so: strikeout, strikeout, strikeout, strikeout, strikeout, strikeout, strikeout, strikeout, strikeout, walk. That’s 11 batters before a ball was put in play. The two teams combined to punch out 42 times in one game.

That’s life in the Southern League right now. MLB is experimenting with a new baseball. And it’s wreaking havoc in so many ways. Some pitchers are striking everyone out. Others can’t throw

any strikes. And hitters are watching pitches with ridiculous movement that are harder to hit than ever.

The new baseball is coated in a sticky substance that's supposed to make it tackier, and easier for pitchers to grip. The ball is also supposed to be brighter, thus aiding hitters. MLB declined to reveal the makeup of the new substance.

The Angels are particularly concerned with this new ball, which will be used throughout the first half of the Southern League season. The team preferred to have its top prospects housed in Double-A, in part because their Triple-A affiliate is located in high altitude. Now, there's a new complicating factor in Rocket City.

Beyond concern over batters getting hurt, players and the front office alike are concerned about the impact this enhanced grip ball will have on development.

"If you look at the numbers and pitch shapes, they're out of sight," Angels manager **Phil Nevin** said. "Spin rates and vertical and horizontal numbers ... they're out of sight.

"It's testing something out, I get that. It's just the way we're implementing things. They thought Double A was the best spot, I don't know. We're still taking guys from Double A to the big leagues. That's my only concern right now. ... It's stuff that we're looking into."

Southern League batters were striking out at a 30 percent clip entering play Wednesday. That's up from 24.9 percent from all of last season and about 27.5 percent from this point last year. Walks are at a 12.5 percent rate, up 2 percent from the year prior. There are more wild pitches. Slugging percentage is down significantly, from .411 last year to .372 this year.

The Trash Pandas are striking out in exactly one-third of their plate appearances. It's a gaudy number and a reflection of just how much the new balls can impact development on both hitting and pitching.

"They're changing something we've been doing our whole lives," said one Trash Pandas pitcher, who requested anonymity in order to speak freely. "It's been a struggle to get used to them. Especially with the fastballs for me. There are some pitches where I really have no idea where the ball's going to go.

"It was a completely different ball."

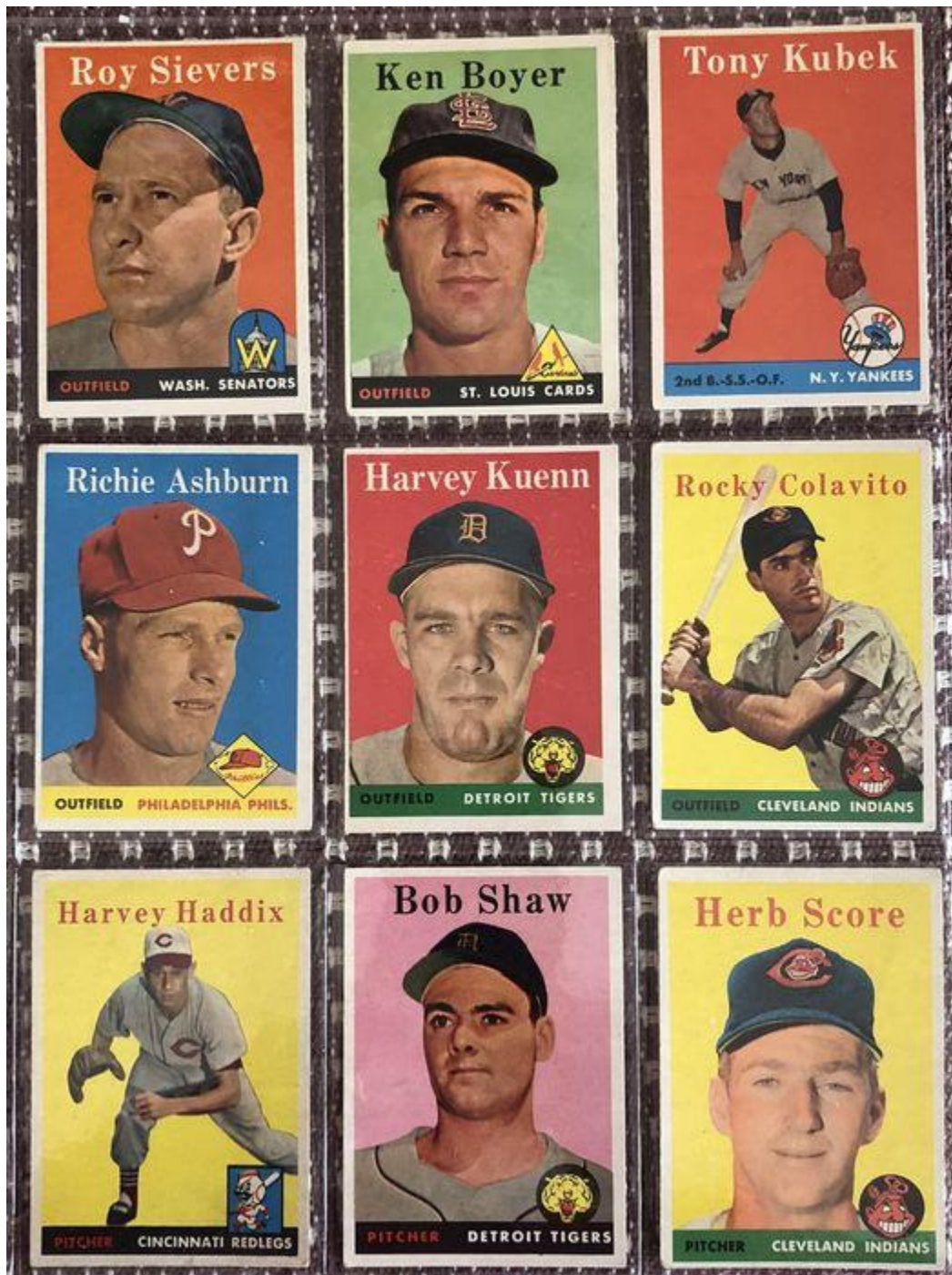
MLB is using the ball in Double A because it's technically a major-league ball, the same used in Triple A. Minor-league balls are used at lower levels, and the league doesn't want players to switch back and forth between major-league balls and minor-league balls, which are manufactured differently.

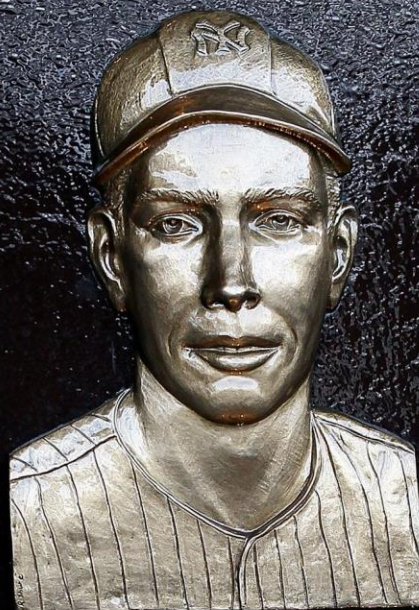
The ball itself is created like any major-league ball. Afterward, it is tacked with a substance, the contents of which MLB declined to name. Then the tacked balls are shipped to the Double-A affiliates.

The league attempted to use a different tacked ball in 2022 but discontinued it after realizing it wouldn't be a long-term solution.

This new ball was first used in the Arizona Fall League. The purpose of the experiment is to find a long-term solution to pitchers gripping baseballs that doesn't also provide those pitchers an unfair advantage. The league will survey Double-A players at a later date and doesn't have any plans to discontinue to experiment early.

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"HE HAS PASSED, BUT HE WILL NEVER LEAVE US"

DEDICATED BY
THE NEW YORK YANKEES
APRIL 25, 1999

April 25, 1999: In front of a sold-out Yankee Stadium and many of **Joe DiMaggio's** former teammates, a monument in honor of the "Yankee Clipper" was unveiled in Monument Park. **Paul Simon** performed "Mrs. Robinson" while standing in center field. DiMaggio had passed away prior to the season on March 8.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE-ANSWERS

Five pitchers have had 350+ saves since 2000. All five are right-handed

523 saves, Yankees **Mariano Rivera**

437 saves, Angels, Mets, Brewers, Orioles, Tigers **Francisco Rodriguez**

397 saves, Dodgers, Braves, Red Sox **Kenley Jansen**

396 saves, Braves, Padres, Red Sox, Cubs, White Sox, Dodgers, Phillies **Craig Kimbrel**

376 saves, Giants, Twins, Rangers, Tigers, Cubs **Joe Nathan**

Youngest Hall of Famers to make AL/NL debut

I'll spot you **Amos Rusie** -- 17 years, 344 days. pitcher and outfielder for Indianapolis in 1889.
Name the other four:

Mel Ott -- 17 years, 56 days. 1926 New York Giants. 511 career HRs.

Jimmie Foxx -- 17 years, 191 days. 1925 Philadelphia A's. 534 career HRs.

Bob Feller -- 17 years, 259 days. 1936 Cleveland Indians. 266 career wins.

Harmon Killebrew -- 17 years, 359 days. 1954 Washington Senators. 573 career HRs.

I played 17 seasons with six teams—6 seasons with the Giants and 6 with the Braves.

I played in the 1962 World Series against the Yankees.

Right-handed outfielder/first baseman, I hit .286 with 206 career HRs and 2101 hits.

I later managed two of the teams I played for—the Expos and Giants.

Who am I?

Felipe Alou

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HOUSEKEEPING

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