

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

5.28.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

This week **Ronald Acuna Jr.**'s great start, how bad are the A's?, blown save of the week in which **Kenley Jansen** walked a batter on three pitches and one was a strike.

And longer pieces on Starting pitching's downward spiral, Active players headed to Cooperstown, Best forgotten seasons.

Kick back and enjoy.

Next week's edition will be from my west coast Yankees adventure—delivery timing tbd.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Name the first DH to bat for the following teams (they are all in the Hall of Fame):

Dodgers, 6/12/1997. Righthanded catcher.

Padres, 6/12/1997. Better known as a base stealer, batted righthanded, threw lefthanded

Twins, 4/6/1973. Lefty swinging outfielder.

Red Sox, 4/6/1973. Righthanded 1B, played just 1 of his 17 seasons with Boston.

I was the first player to make the big leagues who was born in Nicaragua.

Righthanded pitcher who debuted with the Orioles in 1976.

Played 23 seasons – 11 with Baltimore, 8 with Montreal along with shorter stops in Cleveland, Seattle and Atlanta.

I won 245 games, pitched 4,000 innings, struck out 2149.

I pitched in the 1979 World Series. The same year I led the AL in innings pitched (292) and complete games (18).

In 1991 with the Expos I went 14-10 and led MLB with a 2.39 ERA.

Who am I?

4/23/2000

Switch hitting teammates both hit HRs from both sides of the plate.

One is a catcher. One a centerfielder.

Only time it has been done.

American League.

They played in the World Series that year.

Name them.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Fun fact in advance of my visit this week-- Did you know that T-Mobile Park, where the Mariners play, is the toughest park in baseball on hits? Balls in play lose around five feet, on average, to the cold, sea-level surroundings.

Reminder this week in the Boston Globe—**Mike Trout** will be a unanimous Hall of Famer. 3 MVPs. 4 times runner up. 10 time All Star. 9 Silver Slugger awards. He has led the majors in runs scored 3 times, on base % 3 times, Rookie of the Year and at age 31 he has 361 HRs and a lifetime .302 average. Trout hit home run No. 362 on Wednesday to pass **Joe DiMaggio** on the all-time list. Mike Trout's career rate of homering every 17.59 plate appearances is the best among center fielders who hit at least 350 home runs. Second is **Ken Griffey Jr.** (1 HR every 17.94 plate appearances).

Until this season, no team had stolen seven or more bases in a game without being caught since 2017. The Rays have now done it twice in the last week and a half.

Freddie Freeman has a 16 game hitting streak. He's hitting .444 (28 for 63) with 18 RBIs during his streak.

When the Triple A Louisville Bats beat the Syracuse Chiefs, 5-3, on Thursday, they went over .500 (24-23) for the first time since July 27, 2016. Louisville is the Reds AAA team.

Mariners exciting rookie starting pitcher **Bryce Miller**, 24, and fellow right-handers **Logan Gilbert**, 26, and **George Kirby**, 25, have a combined 2.85 ERA in 135 2/3 innings, along with 132 strikeouts and 17 walks. As if that's not impressive enough, two other promising righties, **Bryan Woo** and **Emerson Hancock**, could make their Seattle debuts this season.

The Mariners, under amateur scouting director Scott Hunter, drafted each out of college and didn't miss:

- Gilbert, 14th overall, 2018
- Kirby, 20th overall, 2019
- Hancock, sixth overall, 2020
- Miller, fourth round, 2021
- Woo, sixth round, 2021

"It is really hard to develop one All-Star level starting pitcher on your own, have it come through the draft and development," Mariners general manager Justin Hollander said.

"For us to have three in the big leagues now that we think are that quality with more guys behind them is insane."

Yankees decided to give up on **Aaron Hicks** after 8 seasons. They eat almost \$30 million. Through 28 games this season, Hicks was hitting .188/.263/.261 with a 49 wRC+.

The Yankees traded for **Greg Allen**, who was with the team in 2021, on Friday night. To make room for Allen on the roster, the Yankees designated Hicks for assignment. After **Andrew Benintendi** signed with the White Sox and **Joey Gallo** was dumped the Yankees great left fielder search continues—Hicks, **Franchy Cordero**, **Isiah Kiner-Falefa**, **Jake Bauers**, **Oswaldo Cabrera** have not proved to be the answer.

Allen was 23-for-23 in stolen base chances in Triple A this season and can play every position in the outfield at a high level; he has just 17 errors in nearly 1,000 professional games.

Attention now shifts to another under-performing big contract and whether **Josh Donaldson** will receive the same fate. Donaldson's offensive skill set dramatically decreased from 2021 to

2022. In 2021, he finished in the 99th percentile in average exit velocity at 94.1 mph. That dropped to 90.7 mph in 2022. His barrel percentage also dropped from 17.4 percent to 9.8 percent last season. He also showed an inability to hit breaking balls and off-speed pitches while struggling to keep up with high-velocity pitchers. In the playoffs, Donaldson was a zero at the plate, finishing 5-for-29 with 16 strikeouts. The Yankees owe Donaldson \$27 million. His 3B defense is still strong but **DJ LeMahieu** has been solid.

Five of the 12 managers in Japan's Nippon Professional Baseball have M.L.B. experience. All of them played for the Mets. The rookie managers **Masato Yoshii** of the Chiba Lotte Marines and **Kazuo Matsui** of the Seibu Lions, along with **Tsuyoshi Shinjo**, the second-year manager of the Nippon-Ham Fighters, all made their major league debuts with the Mets. **Shingo Takatsu** of the Yakult Swallows and **Kazuhisa Ishii** of the Rakuten Golden Eagles played in Queens after starting elsewhere.

Matsui had 949 plate appearances for the Mets between 2004 and 2006.

Takatsu, a right-handed reliever made only nine appearances for the team in 2005.

Xander Bogaerts went 0-for-11 against the Red Sox over the weekend. And he had a 31 game on-base streak broken when he got a hit but teammate **Juan Soto** thought the ball had been caught so he retreated into an inning ending out.

The Rays and the Rangers have outscored opponents by more than 100 runs.

Craig Kimbrel became the eighth pitcher in MLB history to record 400 saves when he pitched a scoreless ninth inning in the Phillies' 6-4 victory over the Braves on Friday night at Truist Park. Kimbrel joined **Mariano Rivera** (652 saves), **Trevor Hoffman** (601), **Lee Smith** (478), **Francisco Rodriguez** (437), **John Franco** (424), **Billy Wagner** (422) and **Kenley Jansen** (401) as the only pitchers in the 400-save club.

Kimbrel reached the mark in his 730th career appearance. Only Rivera (697) and Hoffman (706) got there in fewer games.

Kimbrel reached the milestone in Atlanta, where he began his career. He made his first career appearance for the Braves on May 7, 2010, against the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park. He recorded his first 186 saves with the Braves from 2010-14. He recorded his 200th career save against the Braves at Turner Field in 2015, when he pitched for the Padres. Then, No. 400 in Atlanta.

Kimbrel turned 35 this week. He had a 2.44 ERA and 108 saves in 119 chances for the Red Sox from 2016-18 and appeared in 13 postseason games. Kimbrel has played for the Cubs, White Sox, Dodgers, and Phillies in the five seasons since leaving the Sox and has a 3.94 ERA with 66 saves.

We may not see another pitcher reach 400 saves for a while. **Aroldis Chapman** is next on the active saves list with 317. Behind him is **Mark Melancon** (262), **Edwin Díaz** (205), **David Robertson** (165) and **Raisel Iglesias** (161).

OPS+ takes a player's on-base plus slugging percentage and normalizes the number across the entire league. It accounts for external factors like ballparks. It then adjusts so a score of 100 is league average, and 150 is 50 percent better than the league average.

Top 10 OPS+ in MLB history:

1. **Babe Ruth**, 206
2. **Ted Williams**, 191
3. **Barry Bonds**, 182
4. **Lou Gehrig**, 179
5. **Rogers Hornsby**, 175
5. **Mike Trout**, 175
7. **Mickey Mantle**, 172
8. **Shoeless Joe Jackson**, 170
9. **Ty Cobb**, 168
10. **Aaron Judge**, 164

Yankees ace **Gerrit Cole** recorded his 2,000th career strikeout Tuesday against the Orioles. Here's what you need to know:

Strikeout No. 2,000 came in the second inning against Baltimore shortstop Jorge Mateo, who struck out on a foul tip with a 2-2 count.

Cole becomes the third-fastest pitcher to reach the milestone in terms of games played (278) and innings pitched (1,714 $\frac{2}{3}$).

The 32-year-old right-hander is the 87th pitcher in MLB history to hit the 2,000-strikeout mark and the eighth to do so with the Yankees.

Cole went five innings in his start Tuesday, allowing five earned runs on six hits, three walks and two strikeouts. His two strikeouts are tied for the fewest in any start he has made as a Yankee.

Randy Johnson (262) and **Clayton Kershaw** (277) are the only two pitchers to reach 2,000 career strikeouts in fewer games played than Cole, while **Chris Sale** (1,626) and Pedro Martinez (1,711 $\frac{1}{3}$) did it in fewer innings.

Cole joins **CC Sabathia**, **Andy Pettitte**, **Mike Mussina**, **David Cone**, **Dwight Gooden**, **Catfish Hunter** and **Bobo Newsom** as the eighth pitcher to complete the feat in pinstripes.

Christopher Morel of the Cubs is making the most of his first 15 days of his call up to the majors. Morel now shares the Cubs record with home runs in 5 straight games. Three players -- two of them Hall of Famers -- previously accomplished the feat, **Sammy Sosa** (1998), **Ryne Sandberg** (1989) and **Hack Wilson** (1928)

Since 1900, only one player has hit more homers than Morel in their first dozen games of a campaign: **Mike Schmidt** (11) in 1976.

Along with Morel, **Luis Gonzalez** (2001, D-backs) and **Larry Walker** (1997, Rockies) hit nine homers through 12 games.

Morel has tallied at least one hit in all 12 games he's played this season. That ties the Cubs' franchise record to begin a season, set by **Hank Sauer** in 1954.

Morel has scored at least one run in all 12 of his games this season. That's the second longest streak in franchise history, behind Sauer's (13) in '54.

Morel is the first player in MLB history -- yes, history -- to have a hit and a run in the first 12 games he's played in a season.

King Charles was crowned last week. The KC Royals have been around for 55 seasons. But Queen Elizabeth II still beat them to the coronation starting line by 16 years. Which means ... the Royals got to play 8,540 regular-season baseball games before the first British Coronation Day in their history.

Bonus Coronation Day note: This isn't relevant to much of anything above. But you know what happened on Queen Elizabeth's Coronation Day (June 2, 1953)? **Satchel Paige** collected the last win of his career, for the St. Louis Browns ... at age 46. And even though he later started another game *at age 58*, little did he know he would have had to live until 116 to outlast Her Royal Majesty, who stole the headlines from him that day!

You can't make this stuff up—the Long Island Ducks signed RHP **Kevin Quackenbush** last week.

Coming from a back and forth with a subscriber on the history of Yankee broadcasters, he came up with this: Name the five-man starting rotation you could create with pitchers who've been part of the Yankees play-by-play team:

- 1) **Whitey Ford**
- 2) **Dizzy Dean**
- 3) **Tom Seaver**
- 4) **David Cone**
- 5) **Jim Kaat**

Al Leiter, Tommy John and Jeff Nelson in the bullpen

And if you wanted to fill out the rest of the positions:

C: **Tim McCarver**
1B: **Bill White**
2B: **Jerry Coleman**
SS: **Phil Rizzuto**
3B: **Tony Kubek** (he was a utility guy early in his career)

RF: **Paul O'Neill**
CF: **Joe DiMaggio**
LF: **Mickey Mantle**

DH: **Bobby Murcer / Lou Piniella**

Bench:

Way too many backup outfielders: **David Justice, Ken Singleton, Carlos Beltran and Cameron Maybin.**

And way too many backup catchers: **John Flaherty, Fran Healy, Rick Cerone and Joe Garagiola**

This originated with his question—what announcers had the most seasons behind the mike for the Yankees? I got Rizzuto (40) and John Sterling (35). Michael Kay (32) is third ahead of Mel Allen (30)

Post-Season Droughts

Two teams ended theirs last season:

The Phillies, who had gone more than 10 years since losing to the Cardinals in the 2011 NLDS, returned to the postseason, got revenge on St. Louis and went on a roll that lasted all the way to the World Series.

The Mariners, who hadn't made the postseason since their glorious 2001 season. They won a playoff series themselves, before **Yordan Alvarez** and the eventual World Series champion Astros got them in the ALDS.

Teams with a shot at making it this season (are you placing bets on any of them?):

Rangers

Last appearance: 2016 ALDS (Lost to TOR)

Orioles

Last appearance: 2016 Wild Card Game (Lost to TOR)

Angels

Last appearance: 2014 ALDS (Lost to KC)

Pirates

Last appearance: 2015 NL Wild Card Game (Lost to CHC)

On Friday night in Seattle **Andrew McCutchen, Carlos Santana, Jack Suwinski** -- twice -- **Ke'Bryan Hayes, Tucupita Marcano and Bryan Reynolds** all homered for the Pirates. It was the third time since 1901 that the Pirates have hit seven home runs in a single game, the other occasions being Aug. 20, 2003, and Aug. 16, 1947, both coming against the Cardinals. Per team historian Jim Trdinich, the Pirates also had seven home runs on June 6, 1894, against Boston.

Don Baylor has the record for HBP in a season for the Yankees. He was hit by pitches 33 times during the 1985 season -- though that wasn't even his career high; he'd get drilled 35 times the next year as a member of the Red Sox.

Baylor led the Majors in hit-by-pitches eight times during his 19-year career, tallying a bruising 267 hit-by-pitches in all, which ranks fourth all-time behind **Hughie Jennings** (287), **Craig Biggio** (285) and **Tommy Tucker** (272).

Four teams made in-season changes last season, all between June 3 and August 17:

The Phillies' firing of **Joe Girardi** at 22-29 was an unqualified success; the team went 65-45 under **Rob Thomson** the rest of the way and advanced to the World Series.

The Blue Jays' removal of **Charlie Montoyo** for **John Schneider** at 46-42 also produced a positive result, with the team finishing 46-28 and advancing to the postseason before losing in the wild-card round to the Mariners.

On the other hand, the Angels and Rangers demonstrated anew that changing managers often accomplishes little for teams with major flaws. The Angels' 46-60 record under **Phil Nevin** was worse than their 27-29 mark under **Joe Maddon**, and the Rangers' 17-31 record under **Tony Beasley** was worse than their 51-63 mark under **Chris Woodward**.

Thomson, Schneider and Nevin all returned this season, shedding their interim statuses. Four other clubs, the Marlins, White Sox, Royals and Rangers, hired new managers during the offseason.

Keep an eye on these managers who don't have contracts beyond this season—**Dusty Baker** – Astros, Phil Nevin – Angels, **Craig Counsel** – Brewers, **Davey Martinez** – Nationals, **David Bell** – Reds, and **Tony Lovullo** – D'backs.

Would owners with big payrolls and big expectations make changes if they don't see the results they want? **Buck Showalter** – Mets? **Bob Melvin** – Padres? **Alex Cora** – Red Sox? **Aaron Boone** – Yankees?

Think back to this week in 1991-- **Don Zimmer** of the Cubs, **John Wathan** of the Royals and **Frank Robinson** of the Orioles fired on consecutive days.

May 25, 2011: Mariano Rivera made his 1,000th career appearance in a 7-3 Yankees win over the Blue Jays, becoming the first pitcher in Major League history to reach the 1,000-game plateau with a single team.

Encouraging news for you Mets fans-- In 2005, the year that **Justin Verlander** broke into the Majors, there were 602 instances of a starting pitcher throwing at least eight innings. It happened across MLB, on average, about three times per night.

This year, entering Sunday's play, there were only 25 such outings across MLB. Oftentimes, days pass without a single one, which is what makes Verlander so unique. Even at age 40, he can go deep. He can pitch fast. He can throw with pace and attack a team susceptible to it, as he did Sunday night in a 2-1 win over the Guardians.

Verlander and **Max Scherzer** combined to allow one run over 14 innings in the two halves of a doubleheader at Citi Field, with Scherzer taking a no-decision in the Mets' 5-4 matinee win.

It was the fifth straight game the Mets have won by one run, matching a franchise record set in 1984. They've also come from behind in each of their last eight victories dating to May 6. Verlander and Guardians starter **Shane Bieber** combined to be the first starters go at least eight innings in the same game this season.

The AL East has a +218 combined run differential. The AL Central clocks in at -170. As of Thursday The AL East is a combined 150-101. The Central is 105-143. The first place Twins had the same record 26-24 as the last place Blue Jays.

Most career shutouts in Astros franchise history--**Larry Dierker** (25). The top ten all time are:

Walter Johnson	110
Grover Cleveland Alexander	90
Christy Mathewson	79
Cy Young	76
Eddie Plank	69
Warren Spahn	63
Nolan Ryan	61
Tom Seaver	61
Bert Blyleven	60
Don Sutton	58

(in 2022 there were 9 shutouts thrown in all MLB).

A week ago the Rays visited Yankee Stadium and hit grand slams in back-to-back games--**Yandy Díaz** on Saturday, then **Taylor Walls** on Sunday. The Rays just became the first visiting team in history to launch slams at any Yankee Stadium on back-to-back days.

Two visiting teams have hit two slams in Yankee Stadium *in the same game*. The 1960 Orioles (**Albie Pearson/Billy Klaus**) on April 24. And the 1995 Red Sox (**John Valentin/Mo Vaughn**) on May 2. But no team had ever done it two days in a row.

Bolstering the argument that the 1998 Yankees were best team since integration-- The Yanks posted 114 wins in 1998, outscoring their opponents by 1.91 runs per game. No other club in the 15 seasons from 1986 to 2000 registered more than 108 victories or outpaced their opponents by more than 1.62 runs per game. The 1998 Yankees possessed a remarkable array of weapons. Center fielder **Bernie Williams** (.339 batting average), shortstop **Derek Jeter** (.324, 30 stolen bases), and first baseman **Tino Martinez** (28 homers, 123 runs batted in) powered the attack. **David Wells** (18-4 win-loss record) and **David Cone** (20-7) anchored the rotation. Closer **Mariano Rivera** locked down 36 saves.

Bottom line: The title never seemed in doubt. The Yankees outpaced the runners-up in the American League East, the Boston Red Sox, by 22 games. New York then breezed through the postseason with an 11-2 record, culminating in a World Series sweep of the San Diego Padres.

Less than three weeks ago, the Cardinals were buried in last place after 34 games and inelegantly scapegoating their catcher. Now, they look like the best team in the NL Central, a reasonable facsimile of the 2005 Astros and '19 Nationals, teams that seemed hopelessly under .500 almost two months into a season who then rallied to win a pennant.

Then they outscored teams 61–24 in six starts. After a 10–24 start when their actions the Cardinals went 12–4 (including 4–0 after a loss) and have slugged better than every team in baseball (.507).

The Braves have the largest division lead yet Staff ace **Max Fried and Kyle Wright**, MLB's only 20-game winner last season, made only five starts apiece and both are expected to be on the IL until after the All-Star break.

Jose Altuve missed 43 games, **Luis Garcia and José Urquidy** made six starts apiece before getting injured, and José Abreu's production is still nowhere to be found. The Astros absorbed it all and managed to stay above .500.

Bryce Miller of the Mariners Miller carved through Oakland for six scoreless innings, surrendering just two hits and one walk while striking out six. He is the 1st pitcher since at least 1901 to go 6+ IP and allow 4 hits or fewer in each of his first 5 career appearances.

Minnesota reliever **Jhoan Duran** just popped the first 104 mph of the season on the radar gun.

The flame-throwing reliever threw three pitches 104 mph or faster in the Twins' 7-1 win over the Giants on Wednesday afternoon -- including a high of 104.6 mph and a game-ending strikeout of Casey Schmitt at 104.0 mph.

Duran's 104+ mph pitches are the fastest pitches in MLB this season. The previous high was 103.8 mph, reached by **Jordan Hicks** on March 30 and **Aroldis Chapman** on May 16.

They're also a career best for Duran, whose previous max velo was 103.8 mph, which he reached last Sept. 27.

Pitchers to reach 104+ mph, pitch-tracking era

Aroldis Chapman (67x)

Jordan Hicks (12x)

Jhoan Duran (3x)

Ryan Helsley (2x)

Mauricio Cabrera

Camilo Doval

Tayron Guerrero

Neftalí Feliz

Duran, Chapman and Hicks are the only pitchers to hit 104 mph multiple times in a single game, and Duran, Chapman, Hicks and Cabrera are the only ones to record a strikeout at 104+ mph.

You might recall the market for free agent shortstops last winter. Four players signed for \$957 million.

The Philadelphia Phillies, San Diego Padres, Minnesota Twins and Chicago Cubs set the bar high with the contracts they issued to **Trea Turner** (11 years, \$300 million), **Xander Bogaerts** (11 years, \$280 million), **Carlos Correa** (6 years, \$200 million) and **Dansby Swanson** (7 years, \$177 million). They had combined nine All-Star selections, six Silver Sluggers, two Gold Gloves and five World Series rings.

Bogaerts, meanwhile, is dealing with a 51-point drop in slugging, not to mention a 53-point drop in batting average and a 30-point drop in on-base percentage.

After slamming 52 home runs across 2021 and 2022, the 29-year-old Swanson only has five long balls in 2023. His slugging percentage is down 29 points from '22 to '23.

Correa is MLB's fifth-biggest loser in average and eighth-biggest loser in OBP from 2022 to 2023. He is paid 22% of Minnesota's total payroll but has delivered 1% of the team's WAR

Turner's slugging pct. Is down 83 points.

It is still (sort of) early but when you get the big bucks you are expected to make big contributions. Perhaps the Giants and Mets are pleased their Correa deals fell through?

This week's birthdays

Tommy John	80
Darrell Evans	76
Kent Hrbek	63
Jeff Bagwell	55
Frank Thomas	55
Bartolo Colon	50
Miguel Tejada	49
Josh Hamilton	42
Jordan Zimmerman	37

Thomas and Bagwell are the only pair of Hall of Famers born on the same day—May 27, 1968.

The 30 cities in the two AAA leagues — International and Pacific Coast—2022 Attendance

- 1. Charlotte Knights (Attendance: 531,465) White Sox
- 2. Albuquerque Isotopes (Attendance: 515,498) Rockies
- 3. Las Vegas Aviators (Attendance: 518,221) A's
- 4. Indianapolis Indians (Attendance: 534,610) Pirates
- 5. Lehigh Valley IronPigs (Attendance: 544,220) Phillies
- 6. Worcester Red Sox (Attendance: 532,152) Red Sox
- 7. Louisville Bats (Attendance: 424,035) Reds
- 8. Rochester Red Wings (Attendance: 432,580) Nationals
- 9. Iowa Cubs (Attendance: 437,543) Cubs
- 10. St. Paul Saints (Attendance: 473,911) Twins
- 11. Columbus Clippers (Attendance: 534,393) Guardians

- 12. Salt Lake Bees (Attendance: 434,616) Angels
- 13. Nashville Sounds (Attendance: 555,576) Brewers
- 14. Buffalo Bisons (Attendance: 451,859) Blue Jays
- 15. El Paso Chihuahuas (Attendance: 496,805) Padres
- 16. Sacramento River Cats (Attendance: 372,769) Giants
- 17. Durham Bulls (Attendance: 472,090) Rays
- 18. Syracuse Mets (Attendance: 335,490) Mets
- 19. Round Rock Express (Attendance: 412,988) Rangers
- 20. Tacoma Rainiers (Attendance: 366,469) Mariners
- 21. Norfolk Tides (Attendance: 365,292) Orioles
- 22. Toledo Mud Hens (Attendance: 426,499) Tigers
- 23. Oklahoma City Dodgers (Attendance: 410,730) Dodgers
- 24. Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp (Attendance: 358,094) Marlins
- 25. Omaha Storm Chasers (Attendance: 294,511) Royals
- 26. Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders (Attendance: 331,286) Yankees
- 27. Reno Aces (Attendance: 336,079) D'backs
- 28. Sugar Land Space Cowboys (Attendance: 285,827) Astros
- 29. Memphis Redbirds (Attendance: 239,605) Cardinals
- 30. Gwinnett Stripers (Attendance: 216,177) Braves

DOESN'T THIS GUY SOUND LIKE QUITE THE CHARACTER?

Enigmatic pitcher **Cletus "Boots" Poffenberger** was suspended by the Dodgers after failing to show up for a game this week in 1939.

Poffenberger's SABR biography doesn't explain how he got the nickname but does note that he never went by his given name. His full name was Cletus Elwood Poffenberger, which teammates with the Tigers decided sounded awfully regal, so they sometimes called him by another nickname: "The Baron."

Poffenberger made his major league debut with Detroit in 1937. He was an average pitcher in his two seasons for the Tigers but became a favorite subject of Detroit sportswriters due to his personality. His penchant for spending late nights out drinking led the Tigers to dump him before the '39 season (after he showed up to spring training overweight, which he said was the

team's fault for making him get up so early that he couldn't sleep through breakfast). He was sold to the Dodgers and pitched in three games before he failed to show up for a May 23 game in Cincinnati. Brooklyn manager **Leo Durocher** suspended him indefinitely, and, after he failed to report to the Dodgers' farm team in Montreal, he was placed on the commissioner's list of banned players.

But Poffenberger's talent was undeniable. Even if the Dodgers didn't want him around any longer, maybe they could still extract some value from him. So the team asked commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis to reinstate him, and he was sold to the Nashville Volunteers of the Southern Association. He won 26 games as Nashville won the 1940 pennant, but he didn't last much longer with the team. On June 24, 1941, Poffenberger took the mound drunk, stumbling and dropping the ball. He was ejected for using profanity and reacted by throwing the ball at the umpire, resulting in an automatic 90-day suspension from organized baseball.

Two weeks later, in an interview with *The Tennessean*, Poffenberger admitted he'd been drinking before his start—and others that season.

"I have been drinking too much all year," he said. "I knew it, but I'd done pretty good in my last three starts. Nobody knew I was drinking when I pitched those games. I'd had a few Tom Collins before I went out and they seemed to help me. I thought I'd do the same thing this time. I don't know what happened but they just 'snuck' up on me. I didn't think anybody'd know it the way I carry on foolishness out there on the mound. But instead of wearing off, as they had always had before, they just knocked the daylights out of me this time."

Poffenberger, who along with **Boots Day** and **Boots McClain** is one of three players in MLB history to go by that nickname, pitched five more seasons in the minors, sandwiched around a stint in the Marines during World War II. He died in 1999 at age 84.

NOT A BAD START FOR RONALD ACUNA JR.

The Braves right fielder, fully operational again nearly two years after a horrific knee injury, is authoring the sort of monster season that not only wins you an MVP Award but etches your name in history. We've only recently passed the quarter mark, but here are the categories in which Acuña has at least a share of the NL or MLB lead:

- 43 runs (1st in MLB)
- 61 hits (1st in MLB)
- 18 steals (1st in NL)
- 1.042 OPS (1st in NL)
- 179 OPS+ (1st in NL)
- 107 total bases (1st in MLB)

- 3.1 WAR (1st in MLB, per Baseball Reference)

The only two players to lead their league (AL or NL) in both stolen bases and OPS in the same season, since integration (1947), per the Elias Sports Bureau:

- **Rickey Henderson (A's):** Led 1990 AL with 65 SB, 1.016 OPS
- **Willie Mays (Giants):** Led 1958 NL with 31 SB, 1.002 OPS
- **Willie Mays (Giants):** Led 1957 NL with 38 SB, 1.034 OPS

Two other players managed to lead their league in that pair of stats since the start of the Live Ball Era in 1920. But in addition to taking place before integration, both have notable caveats attached. **Snuffy Stirnweiss** of the 1945 Yankees played in a league that had lost a number of players to World War II military service, including three of the top 10 AL OPS finishers from 1944. And **Chuck Klein** of the 1932 Phillies played in the absurdly hitter-friendly environs of the Baker Bowl, where he batted .423/.464/.799. (His NL-leading SB total was also a mere 20).

So Henderson and Mays are the closest parallels to what Acuña is doing.

How about stolen bases and total bases? **Trea Turner** did it just two years ago for the Nationals and Dodgers, when he paced the NL with 319 total bases and 32 steals (the lowest AL- or NL-leading SB total in a full season since 1962). Turner also won the batting title that year (.328) and popped a career-high 28 homers. But before that, nobody had managed that feat since integration, with Stirnweiss and Klein again the only other Live Ball Era examples, per Elias. Once more, Acuña could find himself in rare air.

How about home runs and stolen bases? Acuña is in hot pursuit of the first 40-homer, 40-steal campaign since **Alfonso Soriano** did it in 2006. He just missed back in 2019 (41 homers, 37 steals). If Acuna can win the home run title (and players like **Pete Alonso** stand in his way) while maintaining his lead in steals it would be more rare than if he reaches 40-40. Nobody has done it since Klein in 1932, and as noted, that came with just 20 steals and a homer title aided significantly by his home environment.

Before that, you have to go all the way back to the Dead Ball Era, when **Ty Cobb** pulled it off in 1909 without hitting a single ball over the fence. (All nine of his homers were of the inside-the-park variety).

BLOWN SAVE OF THE WEEK — Jayson Stark noted there must be a thousand ways to blow a save. Then along came **Kenley Jansen**, Saturday for the Red Sox against the Cardinals, pitch clock ticking, **Willson Contreras** up to no good.

You very well might think you know what happened. It sure generated a bunch of memes and headlines. But here's what the Strange But True department thought about that you probably didn't:

This whole blown save revolved around a walk *on three pitches! And one of them was a strike!*

We'll explain how historic that was. But just to do a quick recap ...

The Red Sox rolled into the ninth inning leading 3-1. The Cardinals had only three hits all night. So here came Jansen, Mr. 400 Save Club himself.

He walked **Paul Goldschmidt** to open the ninth. On four pitches. Then up stepped Contreras, who was clearly messing with Kenley. Kind of in the box. Kind of not. Kind of eyeballing Kenley. Kind of not.

So then came those three pitches. Jansen got a quick-pitch warning on one of them. There was a strike. There was a clock/quick-pitch violation for ball one. Then came actual balls on the next two pitches. Then came another timer/quick-pitch glitch, for another violation and a walk. And it all led to the Strangest But Truest blown save of 2023.

All right, let's do that math again for you, in case you stopped adding along at home. This man just walked Willson Contreras on three pitches, which is supposed to be hard. *And one of them was a strike!*

So I asked legendary researcher Kenny Jackelen of Baseball Reference to look into whether this was the first blown save ever to include a three-pitch unintentional walk. Here's what he told us ...

It turns out that **Emmanuel Clase** of the Guardians blew a save on April 3 against Oakland and had a three-pitch walk in the inning. But he'd already blown the save at the time he did that. So it's not quite the same thing.

But here's the most important part: This was the 16th three-pitch unintentional walk of 2023, thanks to the pitch clock. So what made this one the Strange But True Blown Save Hall of Fame entry it became?

It was the first three-pitch non-intentional walk in history that also included a strike!

That was not the only Cardinals odd event last week. A wild (and also weird) thing happened to Cardinals catcher **Andrew Knizner** on Monday. He was sitting on the bench, loving life, when he was sent in to pinch run for **Paul Goldschmidt**. It was the eighth inning of a game the Cardinals were leading 9-1. So why the heck not?

But it definitely wasn't a catcher pinch running that turned this into Weird and Wild material. It was this way more weird/wild development that erupted later in the inning:

So ... what just happened? That was A Man With No Position hitting a grand slam homer. And it's stuff like this that keeps this column in business. Because ...

Since 1959, only two other players have done that! One of them (**Gene Stephens**, for Boston) did it after pinch running *for* **Ted Williams** on July 13, 1959. The other (**Rajai Davis**, for Oakland) did it after pinch running for **Jack Cust** on Sept. 5, 2008. (h/t: the Elias Sports Bureau.)

He gave us a Strange But True Box Score Line for the Ages! Here it comes:

1 Plate Appearance

2 Runs Scored

1 Hit

4 RBIs

And that's a sight that has been seen only three other times since 1901, according to Baseball Reference. Rajai Davis was one of those. The other two: **Darrin Jackson**, for the Brewers on July 28, 1998 (pinch ran for **Dave Nilsson**) ... and **Jolbert Cabrera**, for the Reds on Sept. 6, 2008 (pinch ran for **Edwin Encarnación**).

But Weirdest and Wildest of all ... Knizner hit this grand slam off Brewers infielder **Mike Brousseau**. Which means ... a guy with no position crushed a grand slam *off a position player!*

CHANGE TO MAJOR LEAGUE PLAYER IDENTIFICATION

Posted by Mike Lynch on May 19, 2023 on Sports reference

Thanks to some superb sleuthing by the SABR Biographical Research Committee we have moved eight plate appearances (as well as the associated fielding statistics) with the 1882 Philadelphia Athletics from one John Farrell to another (sort of).

Here's the explanation from SABR's Bill Carle:

Our Find of the Month concerns a couple of guys named Farrell who played back in the 1870s and 1880s. I had listed **John Farrell** (known as Hartford Jack) playing in 1874 with Hartford. There was also a player listed as John Farrell (sometimes known as Bill) who played in the American Association with Philadelphia in 1882 and Baltimore in 1883. Justin McKinney did some research on these players and concluded that the 1882 Philadelphia AA record should belong to Hartford Jack.

Notes from 1879 and 1880 show that the Hartford man was playing shortstop and catcher for Sacramento and San Francisco. When Farrell signed with Philadelphia in 1882, a note in the Philadelphia City Item said that Philadelphia had signed John Farrell of San Francisco as change catcher. It seems reasonable to assume that this is the same man who had previously played in Hartford.

That leaves the Farrell who played for Baltimore in 1883. The Baltimore paper just identified him as Farrell of Philadelphia, the new man. There was nothing to really identify him. He could also be Hartford Jack, but there is nothing to really prove that. So we will list him as Farrell, first name unknown, until we can get further clarification as to his identity.

So our page for Hartford Jack Farrell now includes the 1882 Philadelphia stat line. The other John Farrell (whom we listed as Bill Farrell) keeps his line with Baltimore in 1883, but is now listed with no first name until one can be determined. The 1882 Athletics page now links to the correct Farrell, as well.

MAKING DRAFT SELECTIONS – ROLL THE DICE ON PREP PITCHERS

From a piece on the draft by Jonathan Mayo in mlb pipeline. This is where the risk-reward balance comes into play, because high school pitching is seen as the riskiest demographic in any Draft class.

It can work out spectacularly well. There are five pitchers in the top 10 active MLB players ranked by bWAR. Three were first-rounders taken out of high school: **Clayton Kershaw** (No. 7 overall, 2006), **Zack Greinke** (No. 6 overall, 2002) and **Cole Hamels** (No. 17 overall, 2002). **Adam Wainwright** and **Madison Bumgarner** are two other prep arms in the top 50. If you want to dig deeper into history, **Roy Halladay**, **CC Sabathia** and **Dwight Gooden** are among the first-round success stories.

It can also go wrong, as in never getting to the big leagues kind of wrong. Former No. 1 overall pick Brady Aiken might be Exhibit A these days (technically, Aiken was out of high school, but at IMG Academy, when he was re-drafted No. 17 overall in 2015 after not signing with the Astros as the top pick of the Draft in '14, but you get the point), and he's also proof that going with a lefty prepster is no guarantee. Tyler Kolek, Trey Ball, Matt Hobgood, Chris Gruler, Clint Everts and Colt Griffin are all high school pitchers taken and signed in the top 10 since 2001 who never pitched a big-league inning.

HOW BAD ARE THE OAKLAND A'S?

Jayson Stark of The Athletic offered some observations:

A's are an incomprehensible 10-35. They have the worst run differential (minus-161) after 45 games of any team *in the history of the American League*.

They're making the '62 Mets look like the '86 Mets! Choo-Choo Coleman's 1962 Mets are the modern standard for Worst Freaking Team Ever. They went 40-120. They finished 60.5 games out of first place. They had a minus-331 run differential. And yet ...

Those Mets were a spectacular 12-33 after 45 games. That's two games better than these A's. Those Mets had *only* a minus-92 run differential at this stage. The A's have that spread beat *by almost 70 runs*. Of course, at the 45-game milepost, those Mets were also in the middle of losing 17 games in a row, but we digress.

At least the '62 Mets had already rolled up four two-game winning streaks and one three-game winning streak. These A's, on the other hand, have no two-game winning streaks against teams not named the Royals.

Is it possible the A's are even worse than those 1899 Spiders? OK, let's be honest. Over the long haul? No way the 2023 A's are going to wind up worse than a Spiders team that went 20-134, including a sensational 1-40 down the stretch. That can't be done.

But through these teams' first 45 games? It's closer than you could even fathom. Two weeks ago, the Spiders actually had a better record (7-25) than these A's (6-26). One week ago, they were still dead even, at 8-31 apiece. Now, the A's have opened up a two-game lead. Can't beat that for drama.

LAST TWO TEAMS WITH AT LEAST A MINUS-161 RUN DIFFERENTIAL

(After 45 games)

2023 A's — minus-161

1899 Spiders — minus-192

The A's still haven't had a one-game losing streak! I'm not kidding. The one thing they seem to be especially adept at is: When they start losing, they keep losing.

It's a weird (and also wild) niche, but it's a niche all the same. They've ripped off losing streaks of 3-6-7-2-5-3-5-3 (not counting their loss Wednesday that started a new streak, still in progress).

only one team in modern history has ever done what these A's have done:

- Not just no one-game losing streaks. But also ...

- Only won two in a row once!

1932 Red Sox, who started 9-32 on their way to 43-111 91 years ago. How 'bout that for dazzling company!

The A's have trailed, at some point, in every game but two! So as we've mentioned, the A's have won 10 games.

- In eight of them, they didn't take a lead for good (or at all) until the eighth inning or later.
- In six of them, they had a lead of anywhere between one run and six runs, blew that whole lead but then pulled off a late-inning magic trick to win anyway.
- In the weirdest tidbit of all, the 10-win A's somehow have more walk-off wins (four) than a Rays team that has won 32 games (but has just three walk-offs).
- But getting back to the No. 4 not-so-fun fact, only twice all season have the A's made it through an entire game without trailing at some point. The first was April 12, when they blew a 3-0 lead against Baltimore but never fell behind. The other was May 5, in Kansas City, when they jumped out to a 9-2 lead ... turned that into a 9-8 lead but hung on to win, 12-8.

So think about how hard that is — to be 45 games into a season and have found yourself trailing in 43 of them. Last team to do that? Right you are. Those '62 Mets (also 43 of 45).

They have an 8.73 ERA on the road! Look, this is a team with a 7.13 ERA, period. So it's not as if they're the 1995 Braves at home, either. But when they leave home? Hoo, boy.

Essentially, when these A's work their magic on the road, they're turning every hitter in baseball into 2013 David Ortiz.

2023 hitters vs. road A's — .300/.395/.572

2013 Big Papi vs. the world — .309/.395/.564

And there's no need to ask if that 8.73 road ERA would be a record. It wouldn't merely break the current record (since earned runs became an official stat in both leagues in 1913). It would obliterate it *by more than two runs a game!* (1996 A's with a road ERA of 6.55).

Their rotation has a 7.54 ERA! A's starters are averaging a little over four and two-thirds innings a start. I'm not sure if that's good news or bad news.

A's hitters have scored 173 runs this year. Opposing hitters have put up 191 runs *just against the Oakland rotation.*

It's a good thing the Royals showed up on their schedule — because before that, the A's had played 32 games this year without a starting pitcher winning any of them. And yep, that would be a record. Against teams not known as the Royals, Oakland starters are 0-22 with a 7.97 ERA.

they're also in a commanding lead in the race for highest starting pitching ERA since 1913. Felipe Lira's 1996 Tigers are the reigning record holders (at 6.64).

They've given up at least 10 runs 15 times already (in 45 games)! Here's some upbeat news. It's not as if no team has ever done that. Katie Sharp did find one team since 1901. And that group did it a mere 100 years ago.

That was Lefty Weinert's 1923 Phillies, who actually coughed up double figures 16 times in their first 45 games, on the way to doing it 34 times all year. But the A's have set the modern AL record, which used to be held by those 1996 Tigers, with 14.

8. It took them just 37 games to fall 10-plus games out of next-to-last place! It's hard enough to drop 10 games out of *first* place in a month and a half. Think how hard it is to plummet 10 games out of *next-to-last place*.

It took those Cleveland Spiders 68 games to pull that off. It took the '62 Mets 96 games to do it. So who knows where this is leading. But let's just throw this out there. The Spiders wound up 35 games out of next-to-last. Can the A's beat that?

When the other team hits a ball that lands in fair territory, its batting average is .376! Its OPS is 1.034! Stan Musial hit .376 in 1948. And the A's are transforming the entire league into Stan Musial.

8 A's pitchers have a negative Wins Above Replacement — and two more are at zero WAR on the nose. ... Or that the Rays just gave up their 150th run of the season this week. Whereas the A's gave up their 150th run *on April 19*. ... Or that A's hitters barely have more hits (347) than A's pitchers have runs allowed (334). ... Or that on those rare occasions when this team takes a lead, opposing hitters turn into 2015 Miguel Cabrera (.339/.432/.658). ... Or that, as Joe Sheehan wrote in his newsletter this week, the A's are 7-7 in one-run games — which means that in all other games, *they're 3-28*.

(Fewest wins by at least two runs, 1893-2022, full seasons only)

Spiders	1899	12
Browns	1897	15
Phillies	1942	19
Phillies	1939	20
Mets	1962	21

The A's are on pace for ten of these wins
(Worst 50-game starts, 1901-2022)

Senators 1904 9-41
Red Sox 1932 10-40
Orioles 1988 11-39
Padres 1987 11-39
Phillies 1945 11-39
Tigers 1953 11-39

No team has started 10-40 or worse in more than 90 years, since the Depression Era Red Sox. The A's, unless they can pick off the Mariners in Seattle on one of the next two nights, will be the third to ever do so. (Those 1899 Cleveland Spiders, just outside the window here, started 9-41.)

Most losses, all time)

	W	L
Spiders 1899	22	134
Mets 1962	42	120
Tigers 2003	43	119
Athletics 1916	36	117
Orioles 2018	47	115

The special circumstances of the 1899 Spiders, a team that would cease to exist at the end of the season, generally put them in their own category. The 1962 Mets are the standard for baseball failure. The A's, starting today, need to play .289 ball (33-81) to avoid 120 losses.

The Athletics are averaging 8,695 fans at home and are on pace to lose 130 games. On the plus side, they're allowing people to bring their dogs to all Tuesday home games. Or is that animal cruelty?

STARTING PITCHING'S DOWNWARD SPIRAL SHOWS NO SIGN OF SLOWING

Don't blame PitchCom or the pitch timer. The value of starters has been declining for the last decade, and pitch counts and six-man rotations are partially to blame.

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

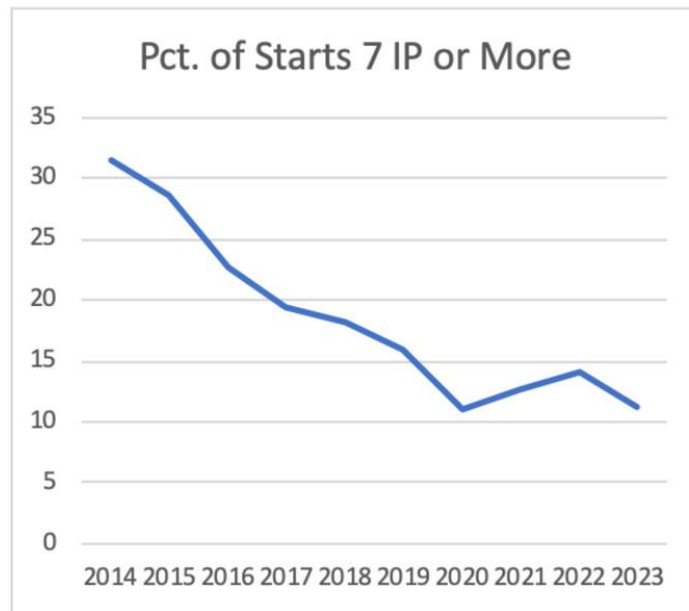
Now, a word about the state of starting pitching: abysmal.

Injuries, six-man rotations and the curtailing of workloads are continuing a decade-long trend of sapping the glamour out of the role, not to mention the effectiveness.

As former GM and pitcher **Ed Lynch** likes to say, pitcher is the only position in sports for which we build a literal pedestal. For many years the biggest draw to sell tickets was simply the starting pitching matchup. Now, starting pitching is increasingly a losing proposition. A starting pitcher's main job in today's game is to navigate twice through the lineup and not blow up the game, or as starting pitchers love to say, "Give my team a chance to win." The bar keeps getting lower.

Here is the state of starting pitching:

- Starting pitchers this year have posted the fourth-worst winning percentage since 1901 (.476). With a 4.45 ERA, only twice before in the past 123 years have starters had such a high ERA and such a low win percentage (2019 and '20).
- Starters account for only 59% of wins, down from 70% in 2014. Fewer innings mean fewer wins.
- From 2014 to this year, the percentage of quality starts (at least six innings with no more than three earned runs) has dropped from 54% to 35%.
- The average starting pitcher faces 22.2 batters. Twenty years ago, it was 25.4. Thirty years ago, it was 26.2.
- In the first 1,406 starts this year (29% of the season), no pitcher threw more than 115 pitches in a game. In 2016 there were 26 starts through the same date with more than 115 pitches.
- From 2015 to '22, starts lasting at least seven innings were cut in half. The percentage of such starts is down again this year:



- Teams have used 232 starters already this season—more than any full season from 1901 through '74. From 2014 to '21, qualified pitchers (at least one inning for every team game, or 162 innings for a full season) fell 56% to an all-time low of 39.
- In just the past decade, clubs have made a significant reduction in how often they use starters. Only 29.7% of starts are made with four days of rest. Ten years ago, it was 49.4%. Get used to it: Five days is normal rest, not four. Teams prefer to scramble to find a sixth starter (most have trouble finding a fifth) rather than pitch someone on the fifth day. Teams with the fewest starts on four days' rest are the Brewers (10), Angels (11), Mets and Padres (13), and Guardians and Mariners (15).
- As workload drops, injuries mount. Teams have placed 98 starting pitchers on the IL this year at a sunk cost of \$110 million (and on pace for a record \$381 million), according to Spotrac data. That's more starting pitchers already on the IL this year than over the entire 2016 season (95).
- The odds of a starting pitcher going on the IL are nearly the same as a flip of the coin:

Starting Pitchers

Year IL ALL Pct.

2023	98	232	42.2%
2022	167	367	45.5%
2021	175	396	44.2%
2020	88	294	30%
2019	115	368	31.3%
2018	117	343	34.1%

Year IL ALL Pct.

2017 106 315 33.7%

2016 95 310 30.6%

2015 72 313 23.0%

The Dodgers, Rockies, Royals and Tigers all have five starting pitchers on the IL. Among the top starters on the IL are **Jacob deGrom, Julio Urías, Carlos Rodón, Max Fried, Brandon Woodruff, Robbie Ray, Walker Buehler and Hyun Jin Ryu.**

Baseball is very different from what it was in, say, the 1970s and '80s. There is more size, power, training, technology, knowledge and inventory with pitching to sensibly move away from the days of starters throwing complete games and 250 innings a year. The point here is that baseball has moved so fast in just the past 10 seasons as to redefine starting pitching. We're talking just within the career of someone like deGrom. Here is what massive change looks like:

Starting Pitching Comparison

Year	Win Pct.	ERA	Pct of Ws	QS	7+IP Starts	Pitches/GS
2014	.498	3.82	70.2%	54%	31.4%	96
2023	.476	4.45	59.0%	35%	11.2%	87

The change has happened fast. Starting pitchers pitch less often, throw fewer pitches when they do, make fewer quality starts and win less often—by a lot.

Why is that? It's a host of factors. Once science equated fatigue with injury risk, teams went overboard with governors on their pitchers, especially in how they train pitchers before they get to the majors. Urías, for instance, has thrown only four 100-pitch games in his first 111 starts—and never more than 101. At the same juncture, **Gerrit Cole** had thrown 100 pitches 54 times. Urías has never recorded an out after the seventh inning, yet will strike it rich as a free agent this winter.

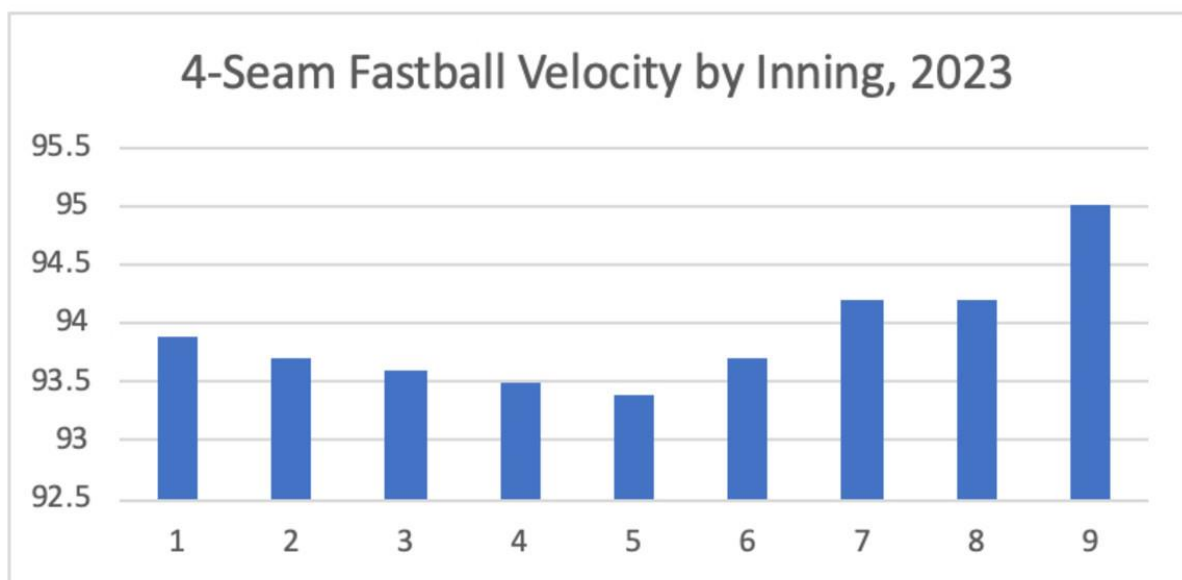
The dialing back on workload was accelerated by the pandemic year and made possible by the growing inventory of hard throwers—not necessarily pitchers—who work just fine in short exposure out of the bullpen.

The further defining of risk-reward by analytics also accelerated the decline of starting pitchers. The “third time around” effect is real; a fresh reliever is almost always better than a starter facing the same hitters a third time in a game. And risk-reward as it relates to game leverage also plays a role.

On Saturday, for instance, **Zach Eflin** of the Rays was so sharp against Milwaukee that he threw only 21 balls to 24 batters and needed just 85 pitches to cover seven innings. But when Tampa Bay boosted its lead from 6–3 to 8–3 with two runs in the bottom of the seventh, Rays manager **Kevin Cash** saw no need to have one of his best starters keep pitching with a five-run lead and six outs to go. Those are low-leverage outs. Cash has not permitted any of his starters this year to throw more than 102 pitches.

Moreover, with less length expected from them, starting pitchers have adopted the approach of relievers: Max out on velocity and chase swing and miss right from the start, even if it means walking hitters with spin when behind in the count. (Walks and strikeouts are both up this year—by 3.8% combined.)

Here is a good visual of what pitching is today:



A starter comes out throwing as hard as he can, his velocity drops with each inning, then when relievers take over in the sixth inning velocity cranks back up and hits its highest levels.

There is a tendency this year to rush to blame the new rules, especially the pitch timer, for any trend. “Pitch timer” is to baseball what “supply chain” has been to economics. Let’s wait for more than 29% of the season to make firm conclusions. And remember, across more than 7,000 minor league games where the pitch timer was tested, injuries went *down*.

What is true anecdotally is players are still adjusting to the pitch timer. Long innings are more wearisome without the physical and mental breaks of walking off the back of the mound and slowing down the game. Hitters get a timeout each plate appearance; pitchers do not (though

many have figured out the way to buy more time is to request a new baseball, which must be honored by the umpire and resets the timer).

Pitchers who don't use the PitchCom device to call their own pitches have little time to shake through signs. Cardinals manager **Oliver Marmol** says part of his pitchers' early-season troubles, especially with two strikes, was related to the condensed time in what for them was a new world of sign-shaking. Nobody, he says, shook **Yadi Molina**.

But something much bigger is going on here than the pitch timer. It has been a decade-long decline in the value of starting pitching. The trend shows no signs of slowing.

AN INNOVATIVE TRAINING TECHNIQUE GETS RED SOX MINOR LEAGUERS TO SPEED UP THEIR BATS

Chris Speier, Boston Globe

Ted Williams's "Science of Hitting" landed in Jason Ochart's hands in high school as a Christmas gift. The seminal tome, co-written with John Underwood and first published in 1970, shaped how Ochart thought about a craft with which he would become obsessed.

In many ways, the book set Ochart on a path that has him guiding how the Red Sox develop their hitters. He was hired this offseason, after four years as the Phillies hitting coordinator, as minor league director of hitting and program design.

"Williams's understanding of the swing, mechanics, bat path, the lower half, and swing decisions was so ahead of his time and so miraculous," said Ochart. "It lit a spark when I was a kid. I still have a copy on my desk."

Williams outlined three fundamental tenets: get a good pitch to hit, do your homework to understand a pitcher's plan of attack, and be quick with the bat. In 2023, all of those principles are part of how the Sox are trying to train hitters. But they have taken a new approach to the third element, training hitters to swing faster with weighted bats.

Ochart, who in 2016 founded the hitting program at Driveline Baseball — the sport's most prominent data-driven development facility — was hired as part of an effort by the Red Sox to take a more systematic and data-driven approach to player development. They want to implement programs across the farm system whose effectiveness could be tested and measured.

A weighted-bat program — implemented for what Ochart estimates as slightly more than half of the system's hitters — is the most widely introduced of the new undertakings.

In batting cage work, players swing three different bats — two “overload” bats that weigh roughly 20 percent more than a hitter’s game bat, with one adding weight in the handle and another at the top of the bat, and an “underload” bat that weighs roughly 20 percent less than a game bat.

“[Weighted bats] make your movement throughout a swing more efficient,” explained Double A Portland second baseman Nick Yorke. “Once you get to your regular bat, you have more efficient moves, quicker moves, which correlate to the bat speed going up, which correlates to hitting the ball harder and hitting even farther.”

The average big leaguer has a maximum exit velocity of 111 miles per hour, according to Ochart. For minor leaguers who are short of that, the Sox have made bat speed a focus.

For instance, during the Rookie Development Program in January, speedster **David Hamilton** was introduced to weighted bats.

“He’s a perfect example of a guy that needed bat speed training just because he had really every other skill that you need to be a successful hitter,” said Ochart. “He made a lot of contact. He hits the ball on a line and in the air at a really high clip and his swing decisions are good.”

The Sox sent Hamilton home from the program with weighted bats. Since reporting to spring training, he has been a different hitter.

Hamilton, 25, is hitting .268/.346/.537 with 11 homers through 41 games for Triple A Worcester — one long ball shy of his 119-game total in Double A in 2022. His top-end exit velocities have reached 111-112 (up from 107) and his hard-hit rate has nearly doubled. His quality of contact has gone from well below big league average to that of a solid big leaguer.

“It’s a huge jump, especially for someone his age,” said Ochart.

Ochart identified several other players who have shown large jumps. Yorke is among them.

“I think my max exit velo this year is already 2 or 3 m.p.h. harder than it was last year,” said the 21-year-old. “The only thing really different I’ve done is the bat speed training with the weighted bat.”

Top prospect **Marcelo Mayer** was given a goal of hitting a ball 110 m.p.h. this year, up from a previous high of 108. He surpassed that in the first week of the season, hitting a ball at 112.

In Single A Salem, outfielder Roman Anthony and middle infielder **Luis Ravelo** have shown major jumps in how hard they’re hitting the ball. Same in Greenville with **Bryan Gonzalez**, a 21-year-old whose top-end exit velocities rank among the highest in the minors. In the upper levels, **Phillip Sikes** (Double A) and **Nick Sogard** (Triple A) are taking steps to emerge as big-league depth options with increased bat speed.

Some bat-speed improvement undoubtedly is just a natural outgrowth of physical maturation. But in the same way that pitching has been transformed by velocity development, the Sox believe they're employing proven processes that will impact the future.

"We're seeing improvements across the board," said Ochart. "That's where you really start to get the buy-in. [Players are] seeing improvements, not only in their training, but they're seeing it in the game."

Increased bat speed isn't the be-all, end-all of hitter development. But in an era when hitters need to handle 95+ fastballs to compete, the ability to swing faster — if complemented by sound swing decisions and mechanics — offers a better chance to compete at the highest level.

"You're going to hit the ball farther and more productively," said farm director Brian Abraham. "It's something that our entire department, players, and staff are pretty locked in on and realize that it's something that big leaguers do really well."

HALL OF FAME TIERS: WHICH ACTIVE PLAYERS ARE ON TRACK FOR COOPERSTOWN?

Jayson Stark in The Athletic

Is it me, or has it felt like Milestone Month in baseball's never-ending history class?

There was **Freddie Freeman's** 300th homer ... launched even as his 2,000th career hit was roaring right at us.

There was **Nolan Arenado's** 1,000th career RBI ... compiled in a little over 10 full seasons.

There was **Gerrit Cole's** 2,000th strikeout ... piled up in 150 fewer innings than **Nolan Ryan**.

There was **Kenley Jansen's** 400th save ... racked up just days ahead of **Craig Kimbrel** (who's currently sitting at 399).

Those are big round numbers, compiled by big-name players. But they're more than mere moments for the trophy case. They're also moments that make us think.

Are all of those players heading for a Baseball Hall of Fame induction weekend to call their own? What a fun question, right? So I dug into that topic last Friday on MLB Network.

Which active players are going to wind up in the Hall of Fame? I tried my best to answer that. The reactions have been streaming in ever since. Thanks for all your help!

But on live TV, there's never enough time to explain all the thinking that goes into these lists. So this is my chance to explain it in enough depth that once America is finished reading, I'm confident there will be unanimous agreement, *on everyone and everything*, because that's always how this works. Or not.

I divided this list into tiers. So here's the list. Then we'll dig in on how all these names got there.

IN RIGHT NOW

Mike Trout
Justin Verlander
Clayton Kershaw
Max Scherzer
Miguel Cabrera
Zack Greinke
Joey Votto

IN THE RED ZONE

Freddie Freeman
Paul Goldschmidt
Bryce Harper
Nolan Arenado
Mookie Betts
Manny Machado

ON A PATH

Shohei Ohtani
Aaron Judge
Jose Altuve
Gerrit Cole
Juan Soto
Ronald Acuña Jr.

I WISH THERE WAS A PATH

Jacob deGrom
Adam Wainwright

GET BACK TO ME IN FIVE YEARS

Vladimir Guerrero Jr.
Wander Franco

USED TO BE IN THE RED ZONE

Craig Kimbrel
Kenley Jansen
Andrew McCutchen
Chris Sale
Evan Longoria

CASE NOT CLOSED

José Ramírez
J.T. Realmuto
Carlos Correa

Now let's sink our teeth into how these names wound up on those lists.

The 'In Right Now' Club

VERLANDER, KERSHAW, SCHERZER — Anybody see a need to spend even 30 seconds "debating" these guys? They're all three-time Cy Young Award winners. And every winner of at least three Cys who ever lived has a plaque in Cooperstown ... except for **Roger Clemens** ... because, well, you know.

MIGGY — I think we can spend even less time on this one. Miguel Cabrera is one of the 10 greatest right-handed hitters ever — and no right-handed hitter in the 500-Homer/3,000-Hit Club has a slash line as good as this guy (.307/.383/.521). Got it? OK, next!

TROUT — He's only 31, but this case is already closed. Trout whooshed past Joe DiMaggio in career homers this week (to 362). He just passed **Ken Griffey Jr.** in career Wins Above Replacement (to 83.9, according to Baseball Reference). He has already won more MVP awards (three) than Willie Mays (two) — and has nine top-five MVP finishes and more MVP Shares (based on his cumulative votes) *than all but three players in history* (**Barry Bonds, Stan Musial and Albert Pujols** — all of whom played twice as many seasons as him).

So Trout could retire on Memorial Day and still start writing his speech. I hope he doesn't!

GREINKE — It's amazing to me how shocked so many people were to learn Greinke is already a lock to get a plaque chiseled. But let's keep this simple:

He's one of the 20 best starting pitchers of the live-ball era. And basically, everyone who has had his career is in — except for Clemens and **Curt Schilling** (who both, in an alternate universe, would be no-doubt Hall of Famers). If you're still a skeptic, here come Greinke's Hall credentials:

Won one Cy Young Award (in 2009) ... and had another season (2015) with a 1.66 ERA in which he somehow didn't win a second Cy Young ... two-time ERA champ ... eight seasons on the Pitcher WAR top-10 leaderboard ... 11 seasons on the strikeout/walk top-10 leaderboard ... closing in on 225 wins and 3,000 strikeouts, with a 1.17 WHIP (10th in the live-ball era among pitchers who faced as many batters as him). So I'm not sure what some of you are missing out there. That's a Hall of Famer!

VOTTO — If you were shocked to learn Greinke is a sure Cooperstown, I'm guessing you were equally shocked to see Joey Votto on the same list. But it's the same principle:

Just like Greinke, everybody in history who has had Votto's career is a Hall of Famer, unless ... A) they're a "performance enhancing drugs guy" ... or B) they're **Todd Helton** (who *will* be a Hall of Famer any election now). Let's lay out the case for Votto:

First off, we're talking about a *seven-time league leader in on-base percentage*. Only five other hitters in history can say that. Four of them are **Ted Williams, Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb and Rogers Hornsby**. The fifth is Barry Bonds. Is there a reason we celebrate batting average champs but not on-base champs? If there is, let's mention something: It's not 1963 anymore.

But let's also measure the totality of Votto's career. Behold the .297/.412/.513/.926 slash line, with 2,093 hits and 342 homers. Every modern player who has put up those numbers is in the Hall, with three exceptions: Helton (see above) and Barry Bonds/**Manny Ramirez** (see the "PED guy" note above). So let's stop focusing on all the wrong stuff! Joey Votto: Hall of Famer. Already.

The 'Red Zone' Club

Two of these names were not like the others. Let's discuss.

FREEMAN — Is Freddie Freeman already in? You could talk me into that. I had him on that "already in" list at one point, then talked myself out of it. He ended up on the "red zone" list. But don't "at" me. I recognize how close he is. If he's in the red zone, he's at the 1-yard line.

An MVP award plus 10 straight seasons with a 130 OPS+ almost sealed the deal. That 2,000 Hit Club will just about finish the discussion. Every first baseman with his slash line, 300 homers and 2,000 hits is either in or will be in. So it doesn't matter which side of the goal line Freeman is on. He just needs to keep doing what he's doing. But isn't that what he always does, every darned year?

GOLDSCHMIDT — Paul Goldschmidt is another name I placed in the "already in" column at one point. Then I decided he still had ground to cover — *but not much*.

He has already passed the 60-win threshold on the Baseball Reference WAR list. And among all first basemen who have ever played, that's a list full of Hall of Famers and mortal-lock Hall of Famers, with one exception: **Mark McGwire**.

Goldschmidt also has an MVP, three more top-three MVP finishes, four Gold Gloves and a spectacular history of durability and dependability. He just has work to do. He's only at 1,806 career hits. And there's no such thing as a 1,800-hit Hall of Fame first baseman — at least not among men whose careers started in the last 75 years.

So get back to me in 2025. We know where this is leading.

HARPER AND MOOKIE — *Of course they'll be Hall of Famers*. Harper owns two MVP awards, a Rookie of the Year trophy and a home run title. Mookie has one MVP award, two MVP runner-up finishes, six Gold Gloves and an ability to impact a game with his bat, glove, legs, arm or baseball IQ. And both of these dudes are just 30, with many years to go.

But neither even has 1,400 hits yet. So they've arrived in the red zone. They just have to finish this drive.

ARENADO AND MACHADO — **Scott Rolen** just became a Hall of Fame third baseman. **Adrián Beltré** is coming right up. But before Nolan Arenado and Manny Machado are through, they're in position to have better careers than either of them.

Arenado already has 10 Gold Gloves, three home run titles, four top-five MVP finishes and 52.9 career WAR. Machado also has four MVP top-fives, multiple Gold Gloves and 52.0 WAR. But 1,500 hits don't get you onto the podium in Cooperstown. So they, too, just have to keep pushing across that goal line.

The 'On a Path' Club

OHTANI — It's year six in MLB for the Greatest Shoh on Earth. So the rules don't allow us to say Shohei Ohtani is a Hall of Famer ... yet. But if something weird happens and he somehow doesn't qualify for this Hall of Fame, can we just build an Ohtani Hall of Fame right next door? I'd visit it. He's going down as the greatest something or other in baseball history. We just might have to invent a new word for it.

JUDGE — He got a late start (debuting at age 24). So he's 31 and still hasn't reached 250 homers. (Henry Aaron was closing in on 400 at age 31.) And that means Judge needs to sustain this level of thunder for a long time. But he's the (literally) larger-than-life captain of the Yankees. So what if he has three or four more 50-homer seasons in him? Will Hall voters even care if he stalls out at, say, 465 home runs? I'll guess no on that!

ALTUVE — Is this guy's case complicated, or what? Not so long ago, he wasn't just on a path to Cooperstown. He was on a path to being **Derek Jeter** Lite. Now Altuve is in his age-33 season,

with a .307 career average, three batting titles and more than 1,900 hits — with a legit shot at 3,000. But ...

He's also an Astro. And will any 2017 Astros hitter ever earn the trust (and votes) of 75 percent of this electorate — even a fellow who reportedly wasn't into trash-can pounding? Who the heck knows anymore.

COLE — I understand that he has a lot of trips to the mound ahead before we can get serious about this. But did you know Gerrit Cole already has had five seasons with an ERA+ of 133 or better? That's one more than **Steve Carlton or Bob Gibson**.

Did you know that, through his age-32 season, only one other pitcher in history had as many strikeouts (2,000), as good a winning percentage (.655), as good a WHIP (1.10) and a strikeout rate even remotely in the range of what Cole has now (10.5 per nine innings)? That pitcher: Pedro Martinez.

On the other hand, no pitcher with 135 career wins can say he's an obvious Hall of Famer ... yet. But if Cole maintains anywhere near this level of dominance for a few more years, the road to Cooperstown sits right there in front of him.

SOTO AND ACUÑA — Look, they're both so young, I know this is ridiculous. Soto is 24. Acuña is 25. Neither has even made it into the 700 Hit Club yet. So they're both many hundreds of hits away from any serious deliberations about their Hall worthiness. Nevertheless ...

Acuña's No. 1 most similar player on Baseball Reference is Soto. Soto's No. 1 most similar player is Acuña. So we have every reason to place them as a tag team on this list.

Acuña might be the closest approximation to **Rickey Henderson** we've ever seen. Soto might be doing the best impression of a young Ted Williams we've ever seen. I'll concede that they've both veered off that track from time to time. But when you're this good this young, history says you're a Hall of Famer waiting to happen. Now it's up to both of them to make it happen.

The 'I Wish There Was a Path' Club

At times I wonder how Jacob deGrom and Adam Wainwright could possibly have missed out on any of these lists. So let's dive in on that.

DEGROM — It isn't humanly possible for any pitcher to be more dominant than the past five years of Jacob deGrom. A 191 ERA+? ... A 0.86 WHIP? ... Seven times as many strikeouts as walks? ... Twice as many strikeouts as hits? ... Who does that? Who has ever done that?

So I'd like to spin that into a case for this guy. Except ... what do we do about *the 60 missed starts* in that span? What do we do about the part where he's going to turn 35 next month ... and still owns "only" 84 career wins? I know wins ain't what they used to be. But where's his

path even to **Sandy Koufax's** career won-lost record (165-87)? So, sorry. Barring something shocking in his late 30s, deGrom's road to Cooperstown looks closed.

WAINWRIGHT — I wish there was some way to make a compelling case for Adam Wainwright, if only because he's awesome and because of all he has represented for the Cardinals over these last 19 seasons. He does have two second-place Cy Young Award finishes and two thirds. So maybe, if he was a multi-time Cy Young winner, this would be easier.

But Hall expert Jay Jaffe ranks him as only the 125th-greatest starting pitcher of all time, according to his starter-JAWS computations. Right below Wainwright are **Jamie Moyer** and **Carlos Zambrano**. Not far ahead of him are **Cliff Lee** and **David Wells**.

All four of those guys had their moments — just not enough of them to find their way to that podium in Cooperstown. And I think that sums up Adam Wainwright's case.

The 'Get Back to me in Five Years' Club

I might have gotten more blowback on these next two names than any others. So let's explain.

VLADDY — He's just entering his age-24 season, and here is Vlad Guerrero Jr.'s career slash line: .285/.358/.503/.861. Let's say he hits 30 homers again this season. (He has eight now.)

Eight retired players in history had that slash line (or better) and that many home runs (or more) through their age-24 season. One is Albert Pujols, who is already ticketed for Cooperstown. One is **Alex Rodriguez**, whose case is a bad novel I have no interest in writing. The others are **Mickey Mantle**, **Joe DiMaggio**, **Frank Robinson**, **Ken Griffey Jr.**, **Mel Ott** and **Jimmie Foxx**.

Moral of the story: When you're this good this young, there's already a spot on the wall in Cooperstown where your plaque should hang ... unless you mess it up. So how did Vladdy end up on this list? That's how!

WANDER — Is it a stretch to put Wander Franco in this group? Of course. But bear with me. He's just starting his age-22 season. His career slash line should also get your attention: .284/.342/.451/.793. If he just stays healthy, he'll be somewhere in the neighborhood of 30-plus homers and 110 extra-base hits before he even turns 23.

Now here are all the retired middle infielders who did all that through their age-22 season: Cal Ripken Jr. ... and A-Rod ... and that's it. Let's say this again: When anyone is this good and this productive this young, he's already plaque-gallery material. Will that be true five years from now? That's why this list exists. We'll get back to you on that.

The 'Used to be in the Red Zone' Club

They were on the move ... until they weren't. They were in prime position ... until they weren't. Not so long ago, we thought all of these men were bound for upstate New York. Now they look like they'll wind up on the not-quite-a-HOF end of Hall of Fame voting.

A reminder: It's no insult to say anyone was not quite a Hall of Famer. This list comes with profound respect for their careers and everything about them.

JANSEN AND KIMBREL — I got lots of complaints about my assessment of these two, too. I get it. I agonized quite a bit. I vote for **Billy Wagner**. Kenley Jansen and Craig Kimbrel are incredibly comparable to Wagner, although neither has done it quite as long as him.

But there was no drop-off in Wagner's level of dominance, from the start of his career to the finish, when he had a 1.43 ERA in his final big-league season. That hasn't been true with Kimbrel and Jansen, although they're both pitching well at the moment.

There's one more issue, however: Kimbrel's Red Sox won the 2018 World Series. They didn't trust him enough to pitch in the World Series clincher. Jansen's Dodgers won the 2020 World Series. He, too, wasn't asked to pitch in the game that wrapped up that World Series.

All right, I know Wagner wasn't Mariano Jr. in the postseason in his day, either. But those memories of Kimbrel and Jansen have stuck with me. I can't get past them. I reserve the right to change my mind. Their stories are still being written. I promise to pay attention.

McCUTCHEN AND LONGORIA — In the new Bill James Handbook from Sports Info Solutions, James rolls out a new metric called the Hall of Fame Value Standard. Its goal is to measure the impact of every season of a player's career, then add them all together to assess his Hall credentials.

James set a 500 score as the "target" for anyone aspiring to the Hall. Then he ranked virtually all veteran players, grouping them by age. Atop the age-36 list: Evan Longoria, with 483.1. Atop the age-35 list: Andrew McCutchen, at 499.2. (Longoria and McCutchen are now 37 and 36, respectively.)

To be clear, James wasn't arguing that anyone who made it beyond 500 was a certain Hall of Famer, only that it means they have a case worth considering. So what about McCutchen and Longoria? I considered them long and hard.

For the first half of their careers, they were easily among the best players in the sport at their positions. But over the second half, they've both been barely above league-average hitters, with declining defensive value. Add it all up, and I think they, too, are in that not-quite-a-HOF group. I admire them both. I just don't see myself voting for them.

SALE — Chris Sale in his 20s: 103-62, with a 144 ERA+ and 1.03 WHIP. He was in the conversation for best pitcher in history who never won a Cy Young Award. And he was bound for Cooperstown, until ...

These past five seasons happened. Here's Sale since he threw the final pitch of the 2018 World Series (aka., in his 30s): 15-15, a 112 ERA+, a 1.15 WHIP and 70 missed starts. So basically, he was in the Red Zone ... and then took four straight sacks.

The 'Case not Closed' Club

Finally, here come three players who, frankly, intrigue me. I don't think they fit in any of these other groups. But they belong in this discussion somewhere. I could expand this club to a much larger list of players. I just didn't want to conclude this column without mentioning ...

JOSÉ RAMÍREZ — He's 30 years old. He's the centerpiece of his franchise in Cleveland. And while I didn't think it was accurate to say he's on a Hall of Fame "path," he's also impossible to ignore.

Since 2016, Ramírez has spun off five seasons worth 4.8 WAR or more. That's as many as Trout, Arenado, Goldschmidt, Mookie, Judge and **Francisco Lindor**. Nobody in the sport has more. So if Ramírez keeps this up for a few more years, he's in lofty company.

J.T. REALMUTO — I came really close to including Realmuto in the "On a Path" Club. I couldn't quite get there. On one hand, he's 32 and still has accumulated "only" 31.0 WAR. On the other hand, that feels too low.

How long has he been in the Best All-Around Catcher in Baseball debate? Five years? Eight years? There's not much argument that he has been the best defensive catcher in the sport for most of those years. He's also among the best offensive catchers in the sport. And he goes to the post so much, no other catcher is within 100 games caught of him over those last eight seasons.

I'm not sure why WAR has always been an imperfect way to measure catchers. But that feels especially true in his case. What **Adley Rutschman** aspires to be, Realmuto already is.

CARLOS CORREA — I could have included just about any of the marquee shortstops in this group: Lindor ... **Trea Turner** ... **Corey Seager** ... **Xander Bogaerts**. But Correa is still just 28. And once upon a time, his production through age 22 was in the same neighborhood as Wander Franco's.

So he's young enough and talented enough to craft a Hall of Fame career. And he has it in him. Then again, even if that happens, you think it'll come up that he was an Astro when those trash can lids were clanging? It was all complicated enough that I bumped him off the "On a Path" list.

But don't forget about him. Only eight shortstops in history accumulated 40 WAR by age 28. (Correa is at 39.7.) You know who wasn't one of them? Some guy named Derek Jeter.

(from a blog I recently discovered—thedrummyangle.com)

THE BEST FORGOTTEN SEASONS OF GREATNESS IN MLB HISTORY

Baseball is a game that has been around for over 100 years and has had many seasons of pure dominance. From the .400 season of **Ted Williams** to the unbelievable **Pedro Martinez** 2000 season there are many years that will not be forgotten in the history books. However, there are a lot of seasons that have been forgotten by history mainly due to the players who had them. Today I will be going into a couple of the many seasons that have been forgotten across history by some players whose names might not be as big. A couple of parameters for this are that I will try to not use any big names or players and also no big single seasons in which players used steroids or were suspected of for their one big season; for example **Brady Anderson** in 1996 or **Ken Caminiti** also in 1996.

George Foster-1977

When you think of 1970s Reds players the first ones that usually come to mind are legends **Pete Rose, Johnny Bench, Joe Morgan**, or even **Tony Perez**. However, none of these guys hit more home runs in a season than George Foster did in 1977. In fact, Foster was the only player in the 1970s to hit over 50 home runs in a season, and this is coming from a guy most people have never heard of. Foster came up in 1969 with the Giants and was traded to the Reds in 1971. From 1969 to 1975 Foster was a solid OF as he posted a 112 OPS+ and 7.6 bWAR which is respectable but by no means is it elite or where he would end up. He hit just 50 home runs across these 6 seasons and over 1500 PA. However in 1976, Foster found his power stroke as he hit a new career-high 29 HRs and a .894 OPS as well. This season started a 10-year run in which he hit over 20 home runs every season and had a 133 OPS+. During this run of consistently he put together arguably the best offensive seasons of the 1970s.

George Foster 1977

BA	HRs	ISO	K%	OBP	OPS	OPS+	PA	RBI	SLG	bWAR
0.320	52	0.311	15.5	0.382	1.013	165	689	149	0.631	8.4

RED = led the National League

This is an incredible season as he led the NL in Runs, Home Runs, RBIs, TB, SLG, and OPS. This season is largely forgotten largely due to the fact that George Foster never really repeated this

and he was never a true superstar of the era like Bench, **Mike Schmidt**, or even **Willie Stargel**. This season is incredible because as mentioned earlier, it was the only 50 HR season in the 1970s. On top of this, his K% at only 15.5% is very impressive for his HR total and especially rare given today's game. After Foster's dominant '77 season, he continued to be a legit HR bat. From '78 to '85, he hit 203 HRs and had a 124 OPS+. Foster retired after the '86 season as one of the best power bats of the 70s with his 1977 season being his greatest accomplishment. This truly is one of the best seasons of the 1970s and it has been forgotten across history. Safe to say this might be the most forgotten 50 HR season ever.

George Bell-1987

After George Foster put together an elite season in 1977, another George put together another forgotten season 10 years later in 1987. Bell came up in 1981 for the Blue Jays but did not get a full season of ABs until 1984. That started a four-year run of an amazing power and contact combo that resulted in the '87 season that led to his MVP season. Even though this '87 season was by far his best of the four-year run, the previous three were still extremely dominant. From 1984-1986 he hit 85 HRs with a .838 OPS, 123 OPS+, and 11 bWAR. All of this accumulated in the 1987 season.

George Bell 1987										
BA	HRs	K%	OBP	OPS	OPS+	PA	RBI	SLG	bWAR	BABIP
0.308	47	11.2	0.352	0.957	146	667	134	0.605	5.0	0.284

RED = Career High

Bell's '87 season was everything from his previous years coming together. This was his career high in OBP, SLG, OPS, OPS+, HRs, RBIs, Runs, and bWAR. Similar to Foster, he was able to put together these great power numbers while maintaining a low K% which is something that has been forgotten in today's game. The most impressive part of Bell's season was his low BABIP of just .284 which is below average. A typical average BABIP is .300 and Bell's being below average like that shows that he was unlucky to some extent. With just a little more luck, Bell could have easily put together a .315 BA at least and an OPS getting a lot closer to 1.000. After his MVP season in '87, he never returned to those numbers but remained solid. From '88 to '92 he hit 113 HRs with a 109 OPS+; he never eclipsed 30 HRs again and retired after the '93 season. Bell finished with a solid career but without a doubt, his '87 season was best. This season, Bell ranks 3rd in Blue Jays history for Home Runs, 4th in SLG, 9th in OPS, and 3rd in RBIs. George Bell's 1987 is one of the most forgotten MVP seasons of the 80s and overall in baseball history.

Brad Penny-2007

Moving onto the first pitcher on the list, Brad Penny put together a top 3 Cy Young Season in the middle of a relatively mediocre career. Penny was called up in 2000 as just a 22-year-old with the Marlins. Through the first seven years of his career, Penny was a decent back of the rotation arm. From 2000-2006, he threw over 140 innings in all but one year and had an ERA of 4.06 with a 104 ERA+. Penny was very average through these first seven years and by 2007 when he had made his way to the Dodgers, he was expected to do much of the same. However, Penny came out of nowhere to produce one of the most surprising and forgotten seasons in the 2000s.

Brad Penny 2007 (16-4 W/L record)

IPs	ERA	FIP	ERA+	bWAR	BB/9	HR/9	K/9
208	3.03	3.63	147.0	5.9	3.2	0.4	5.8

.4 HR/9 = lowest by Dodgers starter in live ball era

This season came out of nowhere as this was his career low in ERA, HR/9, ERA+, bWAR, and wins and it is his second-lowest FIP in a season. So what changed for Penny this season to lead to this? His HR/9 fell off a table. He was always solid at controlling the HR ball, but in 2007, it became elite. This is the lowest HR/9 in a season from a Dodgers starter in the live ball era, better than anything that **Clayton Kershaw**, **Sandy Koufax**, or any other great Dodgers pitcher did. This decrease in HR/9 came from a decrease in FB% and LD% which leads to fewer home runs. The fact that he was only able to do this for one season in the middle of his career is probably a product of some luck, but it is still insanely impressive that Brad Penny was able to do something that many Dodgers legends could not accomplish. After the '07 season, Penny fell off quickly as he played just 5 more seasons and put together a 5.16 ERA across those seasons. He retired after the 2014 season having had a long 14-season career, but nothing ever came close to his dominant yet forgotten '07 season.

Anibal Sanchez-2013

When people talk about the early 2010s Tigers pitchers the first names brought up usually are **Justin Verlander**, **Max Scherzer**, or even **David Price**. However, during this time, longtime workhorse Anibal Sanchez put together one of the most forgotten seasons of the 2010s. He came up in 2006 with the Marlins and became an immediate impact as he finished 9th in ROTY voting. Sanchez stayed with the Marlins until he was traded to the Tigers during the 2012

season. During this first seven-season stretch he tossed 869 innings with a 3.75 ERA and 111 ERA+. He never placed in the CY voting or made an all-star team but was always a reliable arm for the Marlins. In 2013 he was expected to provide depth behind Scherzer, Verlander, and **Doug Fister** however he ended up outperforming them all.

Anibal Sanchez 2013 (14-8 W/L record)

IPs	ERA	FIP	WHIP	ERA+	bWAR	BB/9	HR/9	K/9
182	2.57	2.39	1.2	162.0	6.1	2.7	0.4	10.0

ORANGE = led the American League

BLACK = Career High

This season by Sanchez came out of nowhere and is largely forgotten. He led the AL in ERA, FIP, and HR/9 this season. Similarly to Penny above, Sanchez's HR/9 was elite and one of the best in franchise history. However, unlike Penny, Sanchez was able to back this up with an elite K/9 as well. This season produced a career-best for Sanchez in the following stats: ERA, FIP, HR/9, K/9, H/9, bWAR, and ERA+. Sanchez was able to put together a very solid season in the middle of a much more average but good career. Like Penny, Sanchez likely benefited from some batted ball luck, but still, putting together these elite numbers is not easy. Sanchez finished the season 3rd in Cy Young voting and got robbed of an all-star nomination. After his '13 season, he put together a long career and ended up winning a World Series in 2019. From 2014 to 2022 Sanchez went back to being a solid back-of-the-rotation guy putting together a 4.62 ERA and 91 ERA+. Overall it was an amazing season for Sanchez and one that has been forgotten among the great pitching seasons of the 2010s.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Name the first DH to bat for the following teams (they are all in the Hall of Fame):

Dodgers, 6/12/1997. Righthanded catcher. **MIKE PIAZZA**

Padres, 6/12/1997. Better known as a base stealer, batted righthanded, threw lefthanded. **RICKY HENDERSON**

Twins, 4/6/1973. Lefty swinging outfielder. **TONY OLIVA**

Red Sox, 4/6/1973. Righthanded 1B, played just 1 of his 17 seasons with Boston. **ORLANDO CEPEDA**

I was the first player to make the big leagues who was born in Nicaragua.

Righthanded pitcher who debuted with the Orioles in 1976.

Played 23 seasons – 11 with Baltimore, 8 with Montreal along with shorter stops in Cleveland, Seattle and Atlanta.

I won 245 games, pitched 4,000 innings, struck out 2149.

I pitched in the 1979 World Series. The same year I led the AL in innings pitched (292) and complete games (18).

In 1991 with the Expos I went 14-10 and led MLB with a 2.39 ERA.

Who am I?

DENNIS MARTINEZ

4/23/2000.

Switch hitting teammates both hit HRs from both sides of the plate.

One is a catcher. One a centerfielder.

Only time it has been done.

American League.

They played in the World Series that year.

Name them.

JORGE POSADA, BERNIE WILLIAMS

From the good folks at baseballalmanac.com

The Major League record for career home runs from each side of the plate is fourteen, held by **Mark Teixeira**, who had twelve in the American League (AL) and two in the National League (NL). **Nick Swisher** tied Teixeira in 2015, when he hit one in the NL, to go with his AL record thirteen instances. **Ken Caminiti** holds the NL record with ten.

Postseason stats are NEVER included in a player's career statistics, so instances where a player went deep from each side of the plate in the same postseason game (Division Series, League Championship Series & World Series) are included on the chart below:

Homers From Both Sides of Plate in a Playoff Game

Name	Team	Date Box	Type
Bernie Williams	New York	10-06-1995	ALDS Game 3
Bernie Williams	New York	10-05-1996	ALDS Game 4
Chipper Jones	Atlanta	10-04-2003	NLDS Game 4
Milton Bradley	Oakland	10-11-2006	ALCS Game 2

The single season record for hitting home runs from each side of the plate in the American League **was** three set by Tony Clark (1998), Nick Swisher (2007, 2009), and Mark Teixeira (2009). In 2022, **Anthony Santander** broke the tie and is the player in American League history with four switch-hit home run games in the same season! In the National League it's also four, set by Ken Caminiti in 1996.

The record for youngest player in baseball history to ever switch homer in a game belongs to **Jose Reyes** who was 20 years, 78 days old when he did it on August 28, 2003, in the National League. The youngest to do it in an American League game was **Ruben Sierra**, at 20 years, 342 days old, on September 13, 1986.

The record for oldest player in baseball history to ever switch homer in a game belongs to **Victor Martinez** who was 39 years, 250 days old when he did it on August 30, 2018. The oldest to do it in a National League game was **Tony Clark**, at 36 years, 295 days old, on April 6, 2009.

Carlos Beltran and Nick Swisher have each accomplished the feat with a Major League record five different teams! Beltran: Mets (5x), Cardinals (3x), Royals (2x), Astros (1x), Yankees (1x). Swisher: Athletics (5x), Yankees (5x), White Sox (2x), Indians (1x), Braves (1x).

There have been only three instances in Major League history where players — **Carlos Baerga** of the Cleveland Indians on April 8, 1993 (7th Inning / versus **Steve Howe & Steve Farr**), **Mark Bellhorn** of the Chicago Cubs on August 29, 2002 (4th Inning / versus **Andrew Lorraine & Jose Cabrera**) and **Kendrys Morales** of the Los Angeles Angels on July 30, 2012 (6th Inning / versus **Roy Oswalt & Robbie Ross**) — hit home runs from both sides of the plate during the same inning?

Please remember to check out

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