

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

7.30.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

Two days away from the trade deadline. The Mets just paid over \$35 million for Max Scherzer to go away—think about that.

In this edition more Amazing **Shohei Ohtani** facts, Hall of Fame notes, a 200 game schedule?

In Longer Reads a fun challenge from the Joe Posnanski newsletter—pick four teams by uniform number (1-9), (10-18), (19-27), (28-36). Fill every position, use each number once.

Plus a profile of baseball writer Peter Gammons and Strange Trades.

Grab a coffee and enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Which franchise has had the most pitchers (5) with 300-K seasons in the Modern Era?

Right-hander 1978 and 1979

Right-hander 1986, won Cy Young

Left-hander 1998, won a bunch of Cy Youngs but this year was not one of them

Right-hander 2019

Right-hander 2019, won Cy Young

TEN EXPANSION TEAMS

- 1961 AL expansion team, another city with 2 franchises
- 1961 AL expansion team, replaced franchise that moved to Minnesota
- 1962 NL expansion team, historically bad
- 1962 NL expansion team, the name wouldn't last but the team did
- 1969 NL expansion team, outside the USA
- 1969 AL expansion team, lasted on season before re-locating
- 1969 AL expansion team, replaced franchise that moved in 1967.
- 1969 NL expansion team, lost World Series in 1984 and 1998
- 1977 AL expansion team, has never reached World Series
- 1977 AL expansion team, won back-to-back World Series 1992-1993.

Who am I?

I played 1785 games for one team from 1982 to 1995.

I won 9 Gold Gloves as an infielder.

A left-handed batter, I led the majors in hits in 1986, won a batting title in 1984.

I won an MVP, 3x Silver Slugger, 6x All-Star.

The World Series alluded me as a player and a manager.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

In a 7-1 loss to the Red Sox in Tuesday's series opener at Fenway Park, the Braves turned the first triple play in the Majors this season, and the club's first since a May 6, 2004, contest against San Diego.

With men on first and second in the bottom of the third, **Michael Harris II** caught a fly out from **Triston Casas**, which looked deceptively well hit off the end of the bat but registered at a 76-mph exit velocity, per Statcast.

Harris fired the ball to **Matt Olson** at first base, where **Adam Duvall** was thrown out after a misread of Casas' swing put him too far in between first and second. Without hesitation, Olson threw the ball across the diamond, where **Austin Riley** nabbed **Masataka Yoshida** at third to complete the triple play. It was the first triple play Boston has hit into since May 2, 2017, against Baltimore.

it marked just the fifth triple play since 2000 that was started by a center fielder, and the first 8-3-5 triple play since the Boston Beaneaters turned one against the Providence Grays on June 7, 1884, according to SABR's Triple Plays Database.

The Rangers are all in and the Mets waived the white flag. The Rangers received cash towards **Max Scherzer's** contract, along with Mad Max himself, and the Mets received Luisangel Acuna. Yes, that is the little brother of **Ronald Acuna, Jr.**

Scherzer is also willing to opt-in for 2024, so he'll get \$22.5 million from the Rangers and the Mets were paying about \$35 million of the remaining \$58 million on the right-hander's contract.

Entering play on Saturday, the Rangers were 25th in starter ERA (5.28) over the last 30 days with the 28th-ranked FIP (5.43) and the 19th-most innings pitched (119.1), so Scherzer would help their rotation a ton, even in his current state with a 4.01 ERA and a 4.73 FIP after throwing seven innings of one-run ball on Friday against Washington.

The Rangers are tied with the Rays at +850 as the AL favorites to win the World Series behind the Braves (+330) and Dodgers (+500) and are -135 to win the AL West.

Scherzer was +600 to go to the Rangers as of Friday. Its another big "ex-Met bet" for the Rangers—Jacob deGrom is out for the year with Tommy John surgery.

Even though he hit a whopping 762 career home runs, **Barry Bonds** led the National League in homers only twice. He hit 46 in 1993 (tied with **Juan González** for the most in the majors that year) and, of course, 73 in 2001.

On the surface, it's surprising Bonds won only two home run crowns. But if you look at his numbers more closely, it's obvious why. Teams were petrified of pitching to Bonds. **He led the league in walks 12 times and in intentional walks 10 times.** After he set the single-season home run record in 2001, teams pitched around him to an absurd degree. In '04, Bonds hit 45

home runs, three fewer than MLB leader **Adrián Beltré**. But Bonds was walked intentionally a stunning 120 times that season. Bonds had only 373 official at bats that year and hit a homer once every 8.29 at bats. If he'd had as many at bats as Beltré (598), he would have been on pace for 72 homers.

Red Sox notes:

They are 25-19 against the 12 teams holding playoffs spots, but 30-28 against everybody else.

They are one of six teams averaging at least five runs a game. But they also lead the majors in errors. They're over the league average in stolen bases and under in home runs.

The starting pitchers have the fifth-worst ERA in the majors; the relievers have the fourth best.

Their highest-paid player (**Chris Sale**) has appeared in only 11 games and their second-highest paid player (**Trevor Story**) hasn't played at all.

They also ran into a triple play on Tuesday on a routine fly ball to center field with runners on first and second. The 8-3-5 triple play was only the second in major league history.

The Sox have won nine straight games while wearing their yellow jerseys. They're 21-4 overall in the City Connect uniforms, including a perfect 6-0 in 2023

Reminder that it is a marathon, not a sprint-- The Rays started 30-9 and are 32-34 since, 6-16 in July after giving up 17 runs to Houston on Saturday and have been caught by the Orioles. The Rangers are 25-23 since June 1 and have been caught by the Astros.

Buried in the notes about the **Lance Lynn** trade from the White Sox to the Dodgers-- he's already allowed 28 home runs, more than any other season of his career even though there's still a couple of months left.

20.6% of the fly balls Lynn has allowed have gone over the fence, highest in the majors.

SHOHEI OHTANI NOTE OF THE WEEK

Here's how his Thursday went:

In the first game of a doubleheader against the Tigers, he threw a one-hitter for **the first shutout of his career**. In the second game — and again, this is *after* throwing 111 pitches — **he went 2-for-3 with two home runs**.

Ohtani is the first player all-time with a home run in one end of a doubleheader and a shutout in the other, according to the Elias Sports Bureau -- because of course he is. The only other time since 1900 that a pitcher threw a shutout in one game of a doubleheader and even *started* as a non-pitcher in the other, in either order, was **Babe Ruth** on July 17, 1918.

Ohtani is the second player to throw a shutout allowing one or no hits and homer twice on the same day, joining **Rick Wise** in his June 23, 1971, no-hitter,

Ohtani is one of five players to throw a shutout, allowing any quantity of hits, and homer twice on the same day – with the other four all doing so in one game. He joins **Sonny Siebert** (9/2/1971), Wise, **Pedro Ramos** (5/30/1962) and **Milt Pappas** (8/27/1961). That's right, four times between 1961-71, and never before or since ... until now.

Ohtani is the first player to throw a shutout and hit even one homer on the same day since **Noah Syndergaard** on May 2, 2019, when he became the first since **Bob Welch** in 1983 to homer in his own 1-0 shutout. And Ohtani is the first player to throw a one-hit shutout (or no-hit) and hit at least one homer on the same day since **Floyd Youmans** on June 8, 1986

It was Ohtani's first career MLB shutout. He has 38 home runs so far in 2023, giving him by far the most homers hit in a season by a player to throw at least one shutout that year. Next on that list is 1918 Babe Ruth (11 homers) and 1931 **Wes Ferrell** (nine).

His second homer had a 116.9 mph exit velocity, his 10th career home run with at least a 116 mph exit velocity. The only player with more such homers since 2018 began is **Giancarlo Stanton**, with 17.

Ohtani currently leads MLB in OPS, slugging percentage, homers, opponents' batting average and is tied for the lead in triples. He's the first player to have a share of the MLB lead in homers hit and batting average allowed (min 70 IP) at the end of any given day since 1900.

Compared to the rest of MLB:

As a hitter, he would ...

Lead all 29 in Wins Above Replacement

Lead all 29 teams in slugging

Lead all 29 in OPS

Lead all 29 in homers

Lead all 29 in extra-base hits

Lead all 29 in total bases

Lead 28 in triples — and be tied for the lead on the 29th (Diamondbacks)

Lead 27 in RBIs – and be tied for the lead on the 28th (Braves)

Lead 26 in intentional walks, but would be tied for the lead on two others (Marlins, Padres)

Lead 26 in runs scored

Lead 25 in walks

Lead 23 in OBP

Lead 20 in batting average

Meanwhile, as a pitcher, he would ...

Lead all 29 in lowest opponent batting average

Lead 26 in strikeouts.

Lead 27 in strikeout ratio

Lead 22 in WHIP

Lead 27 in fewest singles allowed (by a qualifying starter)

Lead 26 in fewest doubles allowed (by a qualifying starter)

Lead all 29 (or be tied for the lead) in fewest triples allowed (as in zero)

He'd also be leading every team in ...

Weighted Runs Created Plus ... Weighted On Base Average ... Weighted Runs Above Average ... Barrels ... Barrel percentage ... Hard Hit percentage.

Sal Frelick, the pride of Lexington (Mass.) H.S. and Boston College, played his first MLB game for the Brewers this week.

Single in the second inning.

Single in the fourth inning.

Single to tie the game in the sixth inning.

Sac fly to drive in the winning run in the eighth inning.

Active players who have never had a game like that: at least three at-bats ... a hit in every official at-bat ... a game-tying RBI in the sixth or later ... a go-ahead RBI in the eighth or later-- **Rhys Hoskins, Zach Remillard and Connor Wong** are the only ones, and Frelick did it in his first game.

Ichiro. He arrived in the big leagues in 2001. His first walk-off hit arrived *on July 28, 2009*. (One walk-off *walk* not included.) That was his 1,372nd game and 5,860th plate appearance — and he was a .333 hitter. Incredible.

14 teams in the division-play era (1969) have had an 8 game (or more) post All-Star game losing streak and made the playoffs. The last two were the 2017 Dodgers and 2011 Phillies, 100-win teams.

On May 28, 1983, a future Hall of Famer, **Mike Schmidt**, went K-K-K-K-Walk-off HR. It was the first K-K-K-K-HR game of the modern era.

Yan Gomes is a 36-year-old catcher for the Cubs. He ranks 379th in the big leagues in average “sprint” speed. And yet, he really did bop two triples in one game last Thursday. He was the oldest catcher to hit two triples in a game in 95 years. Before this game, Gomes had two triples in his previous 633 games and 2,304 plate appearances. And then ... *he hit triples in two plate appearances in a row.*

Guardians first 9 batters made outs against the Pirates in a game this week. Cleveland then scored in each of the next 6 innings of an 11-0 win. Not been done since 1920.

Baseball adopted a 154 game schedule in 1904. It went bigger during the expansion round of 1961-1962, boosting the standard to 162 games.

Some owners would have preferred to go even higher. They briefly got their way in August 1946, when both leagues voted to inflate the schedule by nine percent from 154 to 168 games. The proposal was voted down.

But this sudden reversal didn't deter some of the minor leagues. The Pacific Coast League notably expanded its schedule in 1950 to 200 games. Oakland won the league's 1950 title with a record of 118-82. But total attendance actually dropped 15 percent, despite the bloated supply of 100 home games per team. The PCL hastily trimmed its 1951 schedule by 16 percent.

Taunt Him at Your Peril

Elly De La Cruz. Here's what flashed on the Milwaukee jumbotron when he came up to bat in the third inning, after **Joey Wiemer** robbed the rookie sensation of a homer in the first:

After Joey Wiener robbed De La Cruz of a leadoff home run Monday, the American Family Field scoreboard operators decided to have some fun at the Reds rookie sensation's expense.

When he came up to hit two innings later, the scoreboard displayed some tongue-in-cheek trivia about him. It read, "ALMOST HIT A HOME RUN IN THE FIRST INNING ... BUT DIDN'T."



De La Cruz didn't have much time to look up at the scoreboard during that plate appearance. He crushed a Statcast-projected 456-foot, two-run homer off the first pitch from **Colin Rea**, a blast that flew 113.7 mph over the white Toyota Sequoia in right-center field.

Shohei Ohtani's 46 home runs in 2021 are the single-season record by an Angels left-handed hitter. He passed **Reggie Jackson** (39 homers in 1982).

Four Angels players to hit 40 or more home runs in a season--**Troy Glaus** (2000, '01), **Albert Pujols** (2015), Shohei Ohtani (2021) and **Mike Trout** (2015, '19, '22)

The only player to play for the Braves in Boston, Milwaukee and Atlanta--Hall of Famer **Eddie Mathews**.

Trea Turner, who signed an 11-year, \$300-million contract with the Phillies off of three straight top-11 MVP finishes, is hitting .247/.300/.387, all career lows by far. On the plus side he is 21 for 21 in stolen bases, chasing (sorry) **Chase Utley's** record 23 for 23.

Before joining the Celtics in 1981 (after a court battle, the Celtics had to pay the Blue Jays \$800,000 to get him out of his hardball pact), **Danny Ainge** played three seasons for the Blue Jays, making the majors at the age of 20 in 1979. He hit .220 with 2 homers and 37 RBIs in 211 big league games.

Ainge is now CEO of Basketball Operations for the Utah Jazz.

Dusty Baker was the first player to be named League Championship Series Most Valuable Player, he co-invented of the High-Five with **Glenn Burke** and on 9/26/1981 he was the last batter of **Nolan Ryan's** fifth no-hitter.

Bullet Rogan went 15-2 with a 1.74 ERA for the Negro National League's Kansas City Monarchs in 1925. He also slashed .360/.424/.592 in 139 plate appearances.

While there are always high expectations for the guys taken at the top of the Draft, we all know that big leaguers, even the elite-level ones, don't always come from the early rounds.

Just look at this year's All-Star starting lineups as a small snapshot as proof. On the American League side, there was **Austin Hays** (third round), **Jonah Heim** (fourth) and **Marcus Semien** (sixth). The NL had **Nolan Arenado** (second), **Sean Murphy** (third), **Mookie Betts** (fifth) and **J.D. Martinez** (20th).

Bad news can come in threes – even if you're a Hall of Famer

Bad news can find you on July 28 – again, even if you're a Hall of Famer like **Stan Musial** or **Brooks Robinson**. That date marks two unlikely outcomes – the only time that Musial struck out three times in a game and the only time Robinson made three errors in a contest. I've touched on these instances in the past.

Sixty year ago Musial recorded *the only three-strikeout game of his career*. In his 22 MLB seasons, Musial fanned only 696 times. It came in the career .331 hitter's final season – and in his 2,980th MLB game. Further, the strikeouts came in three consecutive plate appearances (Musial's only trips to the batter's box in the game).

The three-strikeout game came in the first game of a Cardinals/Cubs doubleheader at Wrigley Field. Twenty-three-year-old southpaw **Dick Ellsworth** (on his way to a 22-10, 2.11 season for the Cubs) started for Chicago. Musial started in LF, batting sixth. Here's how it went:

In the second inning, with the score tied 0-0, Ellsworth fanned Musial with no one on base and one out.

In the fourth inning, with the score tied 1-1, a runner on second and no outs, Ellsworth again fanned Musial.

In the sixth inning, with the Cardinals trailing 2-1, a runner on second and two out, Ellsworth whiffed Musial to end the frame.

In the bottom of the sixth, Cardinals' starting RF **Charlie James** moved to LF, **Gary Koth** came into to play RF and Musial went to the bench.

The Cubs, by the way, won 5-1 and Ellsworth pitched a complete-game, seven-hitter, with one walk and ten strikeouts.

How unexpected was Musial's three-whiff game? Well, Musial fanned just 696 times in 3,026 games (12,721 plate appearances). Put away your calculators, I'll do the math – that translates to one strikeout every 4.3 games or every 18.3 plate appearances.

Ellsworth, by the way, faced Musial in a total of 12 games and – in 32 plate appearances – Musial hit just .219 against him, with ten strikeouts (more than five times Musial's career strikeout rate). To be fair, all those plate appearances came in Musial's final four MLB seasons – his age 39-42 campaigns.

Musial was an All Star in 20 seasons (24 selections), a three-time Most Valuable Player (finishing in the top two in MVP balloting seven times) and a seven-time batting champion. He finished with a .331 average (3,630 hits), 475 home runs, 1,951 RBI and 1,949 runs scored. He led the NL in hits six times, doubles eight times and triples five times, total bases six times, on-base percentage six times, slugging percentage six times and intentional walks five times.

Sixteen-time Gold Glove Brooks Robinson made just 263 errors in his 23 MLB seasons. However, on July 28, 1971 (eight years, to-the-day after Stan Musial's only three-strikeout game), Robinson had the only three-error game of his career. Even more surprising, all three errors came in the same inning, in a span of two batters.

It all came down with the A's batting against Robinson's Orioles in the top of the fifth inning of a scoreless game.

It started out harmlessly enough, with Orioles' starter **Mike Cueller** getting the first two A's batters (the number seven and eight hitters). Cueller then walked A's pitcher **Blue Moon Odom**. Speedy SS CF **Bert Campaneris** bunted for a base hit, but (attempting to make the play) Robinson threw the ball past first baseman **Boog Powell** for an error that let Odom go to third and Campaneris to second. Next up was CF **George Hendricks**, who grounded to third. Robinson fumbled the grounder (error number two) and then threw wildly to first (error number three). Odom and Campaneris both scored and Hendrick ended up on second base. Cueller then RF fanned **Reggie Jackson** to end the inning.

The score stayed 2-0 until the bottom of the ninth when Frank Robinson bailed out Brooks by rapping a three-run, walk-off home run off A's closer **Rollie Fingers**.

In Brooks Robinson's only career three-error day, he also accounted for five outs in three trips to the plate (that number three again). He popped out to the catcher leading off the bottom of the second; hit into a 6-4-3 double play to end the fourth; and hit into a 6-4-3 double play in the seventh.

How unexpected was Robinson's three-error day (inning)? Again, Robinson was a 16-time Gold Glove, who made just one error each 10.9 games over his career. (It's also one error every 34.8 chances – .971 fielding percentage). He committed more than one error in just 14 games (once in every 205 contests). In 1971, he would win the twelfth of his sixteen consecutive Gold Gloves and make just sixteen errors in 156 games.

Robinson was the 1964 AL Most Valuable Player and an All Star in 15 seasons. He finished with a .267-268-1,357 career stat line. He is the all-time leader at third base in games played, putouts, assists and double plays. He led AL third sackers in fielding percentage 11 times, putouts four times, assists nine times and double plays four times.

Ronald Acuña Jr. sparked yet another first-inning eruption and took another step toward a potential 40-40 season as the Braves rolled to an 11-5 win over the Brewers. The All-Star outfielder highlighted a three-hit night with a homer, tallied his 50th stolen base and neared the franchise record for first-inning runs. He is the first MLB player to reach 50 steals since 2017. He's also the first player to ever tally 20-plus homers and 50-plus steals before Aug. 1. Acuña has scored an MLB-best 32 runs in the first inning. He needs just two more to break the single-season franchise record Chipper Jones set in 1999. The Braves have score 5 or more first inning runs 6 times—no other team has done that more than twice.

VEGAS ODDS

To win the World Series:

Angels -250

Dodgers +950

Orioles +1000

Giants +1100

Yankees +1200

Field +1300

Rays +1800

Phillies +2500

Braves +2500

Mets +2800

Red Sox +2800

Blue Jays +3000

Lucas Giolito was +1800 to remain with the White Sox – behind 10 contending teams. The Dodgers were the favorites at +200.

Jordan Montgomery is +900 to remain on the Cardinals – behind 4 teams with the Dodgers again the favorites at +450.

Marcus Stroman is +380 to go to the Astros vs. +435 to remain on the Cubs.

First Inning Scoring

A popular betting proposition is whether either team will score in the first inning. The average first-inning scoring rate across MLB this season is 29.5%, up slightly from 27.8% last season.

“Like most things in baseball, betting the YRFI and NRFI everyday is a grind. The process begins the night before where I manually log the odds and results of each game. This helps me build a database that contains every starting pitcher's NRFI record dating to 2019. This also helps me keep a daily check of how each offense is performing both at home and on the road. From there it's a pretty simple equation. Multiply the scoring rate of each team with the NRFI rate of each starting pitcher and you can estimate what the expected NRFI rate should be in any particular game. Then you can compare that to the odds being offered and hopefully find some value to extract from either side. Obviously situational factors are also part of the equation, like if a star hitter is out of the lineup (**Aaron Judge**), or if the game is being played at altitude (Coors Field). All of those things will impact the full game total, which in turn affects the YRFI and NRFI price.

“I use a mix of analytical and situational handicapping with my daily betting process. On the data side, Fangraphs is the site I use the most. I'm particularly fond of their "xFIP" metric, which is a statistic that measures a pitcher's run prevention independent of the performance of their defense. It includes plays such as strikeouts, walks, hit by pitches, and home runs allowed. It's not a complete accounting of their performance but I think it is slightly more efficient than ERA in depicting how successful a pitcher is at preventing runs. I will always try to target the YRFI in games where both starting pitchers have an xFIP above 5.00. I also target the NRFI in games

where both starters have an xFIP below 4.00. The average first-inning scoring rate across MLB this season is 29.5%, up slightly from 27.8% last season. The goal everyday is to target the YRFI in games where both lineups have a rate higher than 30% and the NRFI in games where they are below that mark.

“The hardest thing to overcome with these bets is managing the volume and having the mentality of running a marathon. Staying consistent with my process and not chasing or risking too much on one wager is key. These bets are among the most random in sports and are a true coinflip most days. I've both won and lost on the first pitch of the game, which can be humbling. Bankroll management has also been a struggle this season due to the volatile pricing structure and wide splits associated with this market. The NRFI is the vastly more popular side among recreational bettors, which can open up value on the YRFI some days. However as the season has moved forward and the rule changes have led to higher scoring rates around the league, I've noticed a sharp uptick in YRFI prices as well. The moral of the story here is I do not believe a "sharper" side exists in this market. Each situation and starting pitcher calls for a different approach and I feel it's best to treat each day and game as its own separate entity.”

Major League Baseball amended its gambling policy.

The Globe obtained a copy. Rule 21 (the one **Pete Rose** broke) remains in effect. Gambling on the game is prohibited in any form, as is gambling on events within games and even the Home Run Derby.

Players also cannot play fantasy baseball for money or assist anyone who does. FanDuel and DraftKings are specifically mentioned.

Players are allowed to place legal bets on other sports or play fantasy basketball, football, etc. for money.

Giving out information about injuries, lineups, or transactions to a person “who desires to exploit such information” is prohibited.

What’s interesting about that rule is that many MLB teams issue media passes or on-field passes to people who work in the gambling industry. There also are members of the Baseball Writers’ Association of America who provide readers with gambling advice.

The BBWAA is forming a committee to examine how to proceed with gambling issues. MLB also is formulating a policy on credentialing.

Players are allowed to endorse any form of legalized gambling, including casinos. But they cannot recommend how to bet on any baseball game. In essence, a player can get paid to say, "Bet on the World Series," but not to say, "Take the Rays to win the World Series."

Players are obligated to report any violation of the policy to the commissioner's office.

"Please be aware that violations of Major League Rule 21 or this policy may result in discipline up to and including permanent ineligibility from Major League and Minor League Baseball," the league communicated to players.

Alex Rodriguez played more games at short (1,272) than at third base (1,194)

Despite having the second highest payroll and a roster packed with a dozen All-Stars, the Yankees can't hit. You know that if you have seen New York stumble these past two months while Aaron Judge is on the injured list. This is the feeblest Yankees offense (4.35 runs per game) since the 1991 team lost 91 games. It has the franchise's fourth lowest batting average (.230), its worst since the mound was lowered in 1969.

The decline of fastballs and the increase in spin is a familiar trend in the analytics era. The Yankees are getting exposed by that trend this year. The Yankees are the worst team in baseball slugging against spin (.328), well below the next worst teams against spin, the Cubs (.337) and Pirates (.338). Their batting average against breaking pitches is .194. Only Seattle is worse (.192).

The book on how to throttle them was obvious on their six-game trip to start the second half. The Rockies and Angels threw them 40% breaking pitches! The major league average is 31.2%. The Yankees went 1-5 on the trip while hitting .198 against spin, 22 points below major league average.

The Yankees have been so bad against spin you have to wonder if the same group can produce better results over the season's final 65 games. Every regular except Jose Trevino (.241) is hitting below MLB average against spin: **Anthony Volpe (.147), Josh Donaldson (.147), Giancarlo Stanton (.170), Anthony Rizzo (.174), Harrison Bader (.203), D.J. LeMahieu (.204), Judge (.206) and Gleyber Torres (.215).**

The Yankees hit much better against spin last year (.224 average; .401 slug). But their three best hitters against spin last season are not in the lineup now: **Matt Carpenter**, **Andrew Benintendi** and Judge, who has been out since June 3 but had regressed against spin before his toe injury.

The strongest trends in the game are leaving the Yankees behind: more spin on the mound and more youthfulness, athleticism and speed from positional players to leverage the new rules. New York has the fourth oldest group of positional players. The Yankees rank in the bottom third of major league teams in taking the extra base, stolen bases, stolen base percentage, scoring from second on a single, going first to third on a single and hitting with runners in scoring position.

Now you understand why the Yankees have their worst offense since **Horace Clarke** was playing second base. Their roster looks too old, too righthanded and, mostly, too vulnerable to spin.

The Yankees have a long and somewhat mixed history of adding lefthanded bats (including switch-hitters) at the deadline, an homage to the philosophy of the late **Gene Michael** that you need lefthanded hitting to win at Yankee Stadium. In the past 20 years they have added **Bobby Abreu (2006)**, **Wilson Betemit (2007)**, **Lance Berkman (2010)**, **Ichiro Suzuki (2012)**, **Chase Headley and Stephen Drew (2014)**, **Dustin Ackley (2015)**, **Joey Gallo (2021)** and Benintendi (2022).

Spencer Strider, 24-year-old Atlanta Braves hurler with the high-octane heater and eye-popping 39.7% strikeout rate. In two and a half seasons Strider is 23-8 with a 3.20 ERA, a 2.88 FIP, and 391 strikeouts in 250-and-two-thirds innings. He's surrendered just 180 hits.

Strider has already become the fastest player (by innings) in AL/NL history to reach 200 career strikeouts. Through 20 starts this season, Strider comfortably leads MLB with 189 strikeouts in 116 2/3 innings, also leading qualified pitchers with 14.6 K/9 IP and 9.5 strikeouts per start. He has not yet missed a start this year, meaning he is on pace to make 33 starts. If we operate under the assumption that he does, it would mean he is on pace to throw 192 1/3 innings and have a staggering 311 strikeouts.

There have been 38 instances in the Modern Era (since 1900) of a pitcher having at least 300 strikeouts in a season, including only five in the past 20 years (most recently **Gerrit Cole and Justin Verlander** in 2019). In an era of extreme pitcher conservation, it might have seemed preposterous to think that anybody would join that list in 2023. After all, in the 20th century, every 162-game season saw at least 40 MLB pitchers throw at least 200 innings, whereas there

hasn't been a season to feature more than 15 such pitchers since 2015. (Only nine pitchers are on pace to do so in 2023, via FanGraphs – and Strider is not among them.)

While 300-K seasons were slightly more common in the 20th century -- **Nolan Ryan** and **Randy Johnson** each retired with six apiece -- it's become rarer in the current age. Strider would join the aforementioned Cole and Verlander, plus **Clayton Kershaw** (2015), **Chris Sale** (2017) and **Max Scherzer** (2018), as the only ones to hit the threshold in the past 20 years. Strider (who turns 25 in October) would also become the fifth-youngest player in the Modern Era to have 300 strikeouts in a season, and the youngest in almost 60 years.

Youngest pitchers with a 300-K season in Modern Era

(By seasonal age, i.e. age as of July 1)

1. **Vida Blue**, 1971 A's (21 years, 11 months, 3 days)
2. **Walter Johnson**, 1910 Senators (22 years, 7 months, 25 days)
3. **Sam McDowell**, 1965 Cleveland (22 years, 9 months, 10 days)
4. **Walter Johnson**, 1912 Senators (24 years, 7 months, 25 days)
5. **Nolan Ryan**, 1972 Angels (25 years, 5 months, 1 day)

Strider's current pace puts him at 311 strikeouts in 192 1/3 innings. If he does this, he would shatter the all-time record for fewest innings pitched in a 300-K season. That mark currently belongs to Gerrit Cole (212 1/3 IP in 2019), who surpassed **Pedro Martinez's** 1999 record by a single inning. Not surprisingly, 300-K seasons have followed baseball's overall trend of lower innings totals but higher K-rates, as the averages below show.

1900-1939: Four 300-K seasons (averaged 361.6 IP and 7.9 K/9)

1940-1969: Five 300-K seasons (322.8 IP, 9.4 K/9)

1970-1989: 13 300-K seasons (303.7 IP, 9.6 K/9)

1990-2009: 11 300-K seasons (251.5 IP, 11.7 K/9)

2010-2022: Five 300-K seasons (220.6 IP, 12.5 K/9)

The New York Yankees (27) and St. Louis Cardinals (11) are the franchises with the most World Series titles. Tied for third the Boston Red Sox and Oakland Athletics with nine championships each. The A's had five of their titles while the franchise was based in Philadelphia, and have added four since moving to the Bay Area.

Through their first 81 MLB games, **Masataka Yoshida** was 100-for-315 for a .317 batting average, while **Ted Williams** was 101-for-319 for a .317 average.

The caveat: Williams had a 1.002 OPS and was 20 years old. Yoshida has an .883 OPS and turned 30 a week ago Saturday.

Carlos Santana had two homers and four runs batted in in the Pirates win over the Padres this week. Only **Willie Stargell** has had a 2+ HR, 4+ RBI game for the Pirates at an older age than Santana. (Stargell did it twice). Then Santana was traded to the Brewers.

Investing approximately \$445 million, including tax penalties, buys talent and earns the title of all-time highest payroll, but guarantees nothing—just ask the Mets.

In 2011, pitching for the Brewers, **Zack Greinke**'s 10.5379 K per 9 innings pitched was the best in baseball, breaking a 3-year hold on that title by **Tim Lincecum**. He was the only Milwaukee Brewers pitcher to lead the majors in strikeouts per nine innings for the first half century of the Brewers' franchise's existence.

Other Greinke highlights—he hit 9 career HRs, won 2009 Cy Young with Royals, led the majors with a 1.66 ERA in 2015 with the Dodgers, won 224 games, 1.80 ERA in 3 World Series starts.

Notes from the HOF inductions:

Pretty good company for Scott Rolen—most seasons with a Gold Glove and 120 OPS+ AT 3B

Mike Schmidt — 10

Scott Rolen — 8

Nolan Arenado — 6

Fred McGriff hit 493 home runs, had five top-10 MVP finishes and was a middle-of-the-order force for five playoff teams in a 19-year career. McGriff had 30-homer seasons 14 years apart (1988, 2002). He had .900-OPS seasons 13 years apart (1988, 2001). He was hitting cleanup in Toronto when he was 25 and hitting cleanup for the Cubs when he was 38.

Other honorees.

Longtime Cubs radio voice Pat Hughes was presented with the Ford Frick Award, which is essentially the broadcasters' wing of the Hall.

John Lowe, who covered the Tigers for 28 years for the Detroit Free Press, received the BBWAA Career Excellence Award and will be honored in the baseball writers' wing.

And the last of the fabled Boys of Summer in Brooklyn, pitcher **Carl Erskine**, received the **Buck O'Neill** Lifetime Achievement Award.

Hughes followed in the footsteps of Cubs broadcasters Bob Elson, Jack Brickhouse and Harry Caray as a Frick winner. Lowe became the fourth BBWAA honoree to spend the bulk of his career in Detroit, joining H.G. Salsinger, Joe Falls and his longtime contemporary Tom Gage.

Lowe covered baseball from 1979-2014, with the last 29 of those seasons spent as the Tigers beat reporter for the Detroit Free Press. He also covered the Angels, Dodgers and Phillies, and it was during the latter stint that he made the advance for which he is best known. Lowe created the quality start statistic, seeking to quantify how often a pitcher "did his job, which is to give his team a decent chance to win the game."

Fred McGriff had 2,490 hits, 4,458 TB, a 134 wRC+, and 56.9 WAR.

Dwight Evans had 2,446 hits, 4,230 TB, a 129 wRC+, and 65.1 WAR.

Scott Rolen had 2,077 hits, 3,628 TB, a 122 wRC+, and 69.9 WAR.

Lou Whitaker had 2,369 hits, 3,651 TB, a 118 wRC+, and 68.1 WAR.

2024 HOF Candidates

Hoping for More Votes

Todd Helton Rockies' great slugging first baseman, who had 369 home runs and 2,519 hits and was a .316 lifetime hitter and the 2000 MLB batting champion. 73% fell 11 votes short.

Billy Wagner, one of the dominant closers of his era with 422 saves, a 2.31 ERA and 11.9 strikeouts per nine innings, will be in his ninth year on the ballot next year, got 68% this year.

Andruw Jones, who hit 434 home runs and was one of the greatest defensive center fielders in MLB history, will be in his seventh year on the ballot got 58%.

Carlos Beltrán has a strong Hall of Fame resume -- nine All-Star seasons, a World Series ring, 435 home runs, 2,725 hits and 70.1 WAR as one of the best switch-hitters ever -- but he fell well short in his first year on the ballot, getting 46.5% of the vote.

New to the Ballot

The big newcomer to the ballot is **Andre Beltré**, who's a surefire Hall of Famer. He had 3,166 hits, 477 home runs and 93.5 Wins Above Replacement, third-most among third basemen behind only **Mike Schmidt and Eddie Mathews**. The only question is, will Beltré get in on the first ballot? He'd become the fifth Dominican-born Hall of Famer, along **with Juan Marichal (1983), Pedro Martínez (2015), Vladimir Guerrero (2018) and David Ortiz (2022)**.

Joe Mauer's five-year run with the Twins from 2006-10 is one of the best by any catcher ever -- it included three batting titles, three Gold Gloves, four Silver Sluggers, four All-Star seasons and the 2009 AL MVP Award. Mauer was also a .306 career hitter, and his 55.2 career WAR ranks seventh among catchers. Every other catcher in the top 10 is in the Hall of Fame.

Chase Utley led all second basemen in WAR in four of the five seasons 2005-2009, including a career year for the 2008 World Series champs. Utley's 1,885 hits and 259 homers might seem a little low, but his 64.5 career WAR is close to the average for a Hall of Fame second baseman, and his peak WAR is above-average.

David Wright a seven-time All-Star, two-time Gold Glover and two-time Silver Slugger who hit .296 with 242 home runs and led the Mets to the 2015 NL pennant.

Matt Holliday was a seven-time All-Star for the Rockies and Cardinals, a World Series champion with St. Louis in 2011 and a batting champion for the 2007 Rockies. He finished his career with a .299 batting average, 316 home runs and 2,096 hits.

Some other possible names who will be Hall of Fame-eligible for the first time: two-time MLB home run king **José Bautista** (344 homers), five-time All-Star catcher **Victor Martinez** (.295 batting average), five-time All-Star first baseman **Adrián González** (2,050 hits) and three-time stolen base champion **José Reyes** (517 steals).

Bartolo Colon might not have quite enough Hall of Fame credentials, but he pitched until he was 45, and he's beloved by baseball fans everywhere. And hey, he does have 247 career wins, 2,535 strikeouts and a Cy Young Award to his name. And one home run, of course.

Gary Sheffield is entering his 10th and final season of Hall of Fame ballot eligibility in 2024. He crushed 509 home runs in his career, but he'll be a long shot to make it to Cooperstown on the writers' ballot. He reached his highest share of the vote ever in 2023, increasing from 40.6% in '22 to 55% in '23

A few follow-ups to last week's nicknames list:

Enos "Country" Slaughter

Richie "Whitey" Ashburn

Willie "Puddinhead" Jones

Steve "Lefty" Carlton

THIS WEEK'S BIRTHDAYS

Dan Driessen 72

Clint Hurdle 66

Barry Bonds 59

Billy Wagner 52

Max Scherzer 39

LONGER READS

FOUR ALL-TIME TEAMS BY UNIFORM NUMBER

Four teams using 36 uniform numbers from the Joe Posnanski newsletter.

NUMBERS 1-9

No. 1: Shortstop Ozzie Smith

I had to decide which double-play combination I wanted more — No. 1 **Lou Whitaker** and No. 2 **Derek Jeter** or No. 1 Ozzie Smith and No. 2 **Charlie Gehringer**. It really is too close to call, but in all such situations where it's too close to call, I have to choose the non-Jeter option, no? I mean, isn't that our whole thing? Plus, you gotta want the Wizard out there.

No. 2: Second baseman Charlie Gehringer

The Mechanical Man hit .320/.404/.480 for his career — and basically did that exact thing every single year.

No. 3: Pitcher Babe Ruth

I went back and forth and back and forth and back and forth on this ... and finally decided that this would be more fun (and much harder) if I didn't have a DH. In that spirit, the Babe has to be my pitcher — there is a real dearth of single-digit pitching options.

*Fun fact: Remember when **Ken Griffey Jr.** wore No. 3 for the Reds? He switched from his father's No. 30 to No. 3 in honor of his three kids.*

No. 4: First baseman Lou Gehrig

There was another scenario I seriously considered: putting third baseman Paul Molitor here. In that scenario, I had No. 1 **Sadaharu Oh** at first base, No. 8 **Cal Ripken Jr.** at shortstop, and No. 5 **Johnny Bench** at catcher. In the end, tough as it is, I decided this team is better. That would have been a very cool team, too, but I think this one is slightly better.

No. 5: Third baseman George Brett

Whew, this was a tough one — Johnny Bench, **Joe DiMaggio**, **Brooks Robinson**, **Albert Pujols**, **Hank Greenberg**, etc. But it works out pretty well with George at third.

Fun fact: George Brett chose No. 5 in honor of his third base hero, Brooks Robinson. And I seem to recall (though this might be my memory failing me) that Robinson chose No. 5 for Joe DiMaggio. And Joe DiMaggio wore No. 5 after his rookie season; he wore No. 9 that first year because he was just a rookie and that was the lowest number the team was willing to give a rookie. It's not true, as some have written, that he wore No. 9 because that was his spot in the batting order. DiMaggio never once started a game in the No. 9 spot, which is pretty obvious if you think about it.

No. 6: Rightfielder Stan Musial

Stan the Man played more than 750 games in rightfield, leftfield, and at first base.

No. 7: Centerfielder Mickey Mantle

Mantle was still a .302 hitter going into his final season in 1968. We don't care as much about batting average these days, no, but it's still a bummer that he hit .237 that last year and his career average dropped to .298.

No. 8: Catcher Yogi Berra

This is still one of my favorite exchanges:

Yogi: "Stop swinging at those bad pitches."

Derek Jeter: "Why? You did."

Yogi: "I hit 'em!"

No. 9: Leftfielder Ted Williams

I think Ted Williams would have won every home run derby he entered.

NUMBERS 10-18

No. 10: Third baseman Chipper Jones

Hit .303 as a left-handed batter, and hit .304 as a right-handed batter. Love that.

No. 11: Shortstop Barry Larkin

The big No. 11 is Rogers Hornsby, who could have been on this team, hit .400 and been a jerk to everybody. But I think this team is better.

No. 12: Second baseman Roberto Alomar

I tried hard to be super-strict with myself on the rules. For example, I could have had a team with Hornsby at second base and then put No. 12 Pudge Rodriguez behind the plate and No. 13 Álex Rodriguez at shortstop. But I thought that was cheating. While I-Rod did wear No. 12 for a couple of teams, that wasn't really his number. And while A-Rod was a fantastic shortstop, he wasn't while wearing No. 13 for the Yankees. Anyway, I'm totally good with an Alomar-Larkin double-play combo.

No. 13: Catcher Salvador Perez

In the end, I booted that sourpuss Rogers Hornsby and put in the delightful Salvy, and I have absolutely no regrets.

No. 14: Leftfielder Pete Rose

When putting a team together like this, you appreciate the versatility of Pete Rose. He really could play anywhere.

No. 15: Centerfielder Carlos Beltrán

I get the cheating scandal and all, but I really do hope that Beltrán ends up in the Hall of Fame; he belongs there.

No. 16: Rightfielder Reggie Sanders

Reggie hit 305 homers and stole 304 bases in his career, making him just one of eight players to hit 300 homers and steal 300 bases. Beltrán is one of the eight also.

No. 17: Pitcher Shohei Ohtani

Yes, I built this entire team around getting Ohtani on it. I had better pitching options, probably — **Lefty Grove** wore No. 10, for example — but there was no way I was leaving out Shohei.

No. 18: First baseman Ted Kluszewski

In 1953, Big Klu hit 40 homers and struck out 34 times.

In 1954, Big Klu hit 49 homers and struck out 35 times.

In 1955, Big Klu hit 47 homers and struck out 40 times.

In 1956, Big Klu hit 34 homers and struck out 31 times.

NUMBERS 19-27

I'm going to tell you right up front: I'm STUPEFIED how good this team is. I figured nobody was touching 1-9, but ...

No. 19: Shortstop Robin Yount

To give you a little preview of this team — eight of the nine players won MVP awards. Yount, of course, won two of them.

No. 20: Third baseman Mike Schmidt

I did try a team with **Frank Robinson** taking up uniform No. 20, but it just didn't work, because this group is crazy loaded with outfielders — so crazy loaded, in fact, that as you will see, I didn't have room for at least THREE of the greatest outfielders in baseball history.

No. 21: Rightfielder Roberto Clemente

Hard not to choose **Roger Clemens or Warren Spahn** to start this game ... but I don't want a team without Clemente in rightfield. Anyway ...

No. 22: Pitcher Clayton Kershaw

... I'm pretty happy with Kersh starting.

No. 23: Second baseman Ryne Sandberg

Ryno loved hitting off Bruce Sutter. He faced Sutter 22 times in his career and hit .400 while slugging 1.100.

*Fun fact: In 1992, **Ryne Sandberg** wore No. 23 for the Chicago Cubs, **Robin Ventura** wore No. 23 for the Chicago White Sox, Michael Jordan obviously wore No. 23 for the Chicago Bulls, Pro Bowl strong safety Shaun Gayle wore No. 23 for the Chicago Bears and Stu Grimson ("The Grim Reaper!") wore No. 23 for the Chicago Blackhawks. I mean, those were good times.*

No. 24: Centerfielder Willie Mays

Sorry, Junior, MannyBManny, Miggy, Dewey ...

No. 25: Leftfielder Barry Bonds

I'm not going to lie here ... I did try, try, try to get **Jim Thome** in here, for three reasons. One, Jim's my pal. Two, I don't want to inspire more "Barry Bonds cheated! Are you aware he took performance-enhancing drugs?" emails. And, three, I really wanted to get **Mike Trout** on this team, and he has played some leftfield.

But it didn't quite work. So I guess I'll just stick with the most amazing offensive force the game has ever seen (and the best defensive leftfielder of all time).

No. 26: First baseman Boog Powell

I thought hard about putting the marvelous **Billy Williams** here, but he played only 96 games at first base. Anyway, Boog is wonderful in all ways.

No. 27: Catcher Carlton Fisk

Heartbreaking not to have Mike Trout on the team, but we need a catcher, and Fisk was a great one.

NUMBERS 28-36

No. 28: Third baseman Nolan Arenado

OK, I'm going to tell you up front — this team is patched together. It's a very good team, but it's patched together because there are A LOT of great pitchers in this number range, and not as many great position players.

No. 29: Second baseman Rod Carew

Rod Carew faced pitchers **Tom Hilgendorf, Mike Brown and Glen Cook** 14 times in his career. He went 14 for 14.

No. 30: Shortstop Maury Wills

Also Tim Lincecum's number, Ken Griffey Sr.'s number; lots of speed at 30.

No. 31: Catcher Mike Piazza

Broke my heart not to have **Greg Maddux**, but the team needs a catcher and Piazza is by far the best choice.

No. 32: Pitcher Sandy Koufax

I mean, it's not bad to have Sandy on the mound.

No. 33: First baseman Eddie Murray

Steady Eddie's five full seasons from 1980 to '85 are just ridiculous:

1980: .300, 32 homers, 116 RBIs

1982: .316, 32 homers, 110 RBIs

1983: .305, 33 homers, 111 RBIs

1984: .306, 29 homers, 110 RBIs

1985: .297, 31 homers, 124 RBIs

And the 1981 strike season? Murray was on pace to hit .294, 32 homers, 111 RBIs.

Fun fact: The longest game in professional baseball history is, yes, 33 innings, between the Rochester Red Wings and Pawtucket Red Sox in 1981. If you have not yet read it, you will certainly want to read [Dan Barry's Bottom of the 33rd.](#)

No. 34: Centerfielder Kirby Puckett

Could not quite figure out how to get Big Papi on this team, but I do want to mention my thoughts when watching him chomping on popcorn and goofing off on Tuesday night as he sat between **Alex Rodriguez and Derek Jeter** for the All-Star Game. That thought was: Those other two guys might have been better overall players, but Papi won the game of life.

No. 35: Leftfielder Rickey Henderson

This feels A LITTLE bit like a cheat because I've always associated Rickey with No. 24 ... but honestly, he wore 35 in his younger A's days, and that's good enough for me. We gotta have some Rickey.

No. 36: Rightfielder Gary Matthews

And we end it with Sarge, perhaps not the best player on the list, but 36 is really a pitcher's number — **Gaylord Perry, Robin Roberts, Jerry Koosman, Jim Kaat**, etc. Anyway, Sarge was a really good offensive player who hit with doubles and home run power, stole some bases, drew some walks, etc.

THE 10 STRANGEST TRADES IN MLB HISTORY

Anthony Castrovince, MLB.com

We've seen all kinds of strange trades in baseball.

We've seen teams (Detroit and Cleveland) swap managers (**Joe Gordon and Jimmy Dykes**). We've seen a broadcaster (Ernie Harwell) traded for a player (**Cliff Dapper**). We've seen two guys (**Max Flack and Cliff Heathcote**) dealt for each other between games of a doubleheader. We've seen the likes of **John McDonald, Dickie Noles and Harry Chiti** traded for... themselves (they turned out to be the "player to be named" in deals that had briefly shipped them elsewhere).

And if you want to get literal in the strange trades discussion, we've seen **Lou Frazier** traded for ... **Doug Strange**.

The strangest trades, though, are when human players are dealt for animals, food or inanimate objects. With that as the theme, here are 10 of the strangest trades the sport has ever seen.

1. Lefty Grove for a fence

Grove pitched six games for the Martinsburg Mountaineers of the Blue Ridge League in 1920. He was sold to the Baltimore Orioles of the International League in June of that season for the sum of \$3,500 -- the cost to replace Martinsburg's outfield fence, which had been leveled by a storm.

The Orioles had Grove until selling him to the Philadelphia A's in 1925 for \$100,600 (or \$600 more than the Yankees paid for **Babe Ruth**). He went on to win 300 games and nine ERA titles. No word on how the fence held up.

2. Dave Winfield for dinner

The 1994 players' strike wiped out the end of the season and World Series, and it also brought us one of the oddest transactions in MLB history.

The strike began in mid-August, but the season was not canceled until mid-September. Until that happened, teams could still operate as if play would continue, and Cleveland -- still holding out hope for a postseason run -- swung a trade for Winfield just before the now defunct waiver trade deadline on Aug. 31. The club was supposed to get a player to be named from Minnesota, but because of the strike, that never happened. To settle things, Cleveland executives took Twins executives out for a nice dinner. If the steak was anywhere near as good as Winfield, it must have been a heck of a meal.

3. Tris Speaker for rent

The Boston Americans signed Speaker out of the Texas League in 1907, but he hit just .158 in seven games with Boston. With the organization rather uninterested in him at that point, Speaker had to pay his own way to the team's Little Rock, Ark., training camp in '08. And at the end of Spring Training, the Americans -- who changed their name to the Red Sox -- gave his contract to Little Rock's Southern Association team as payment for use of the field.

The only stipulation was that if Speaker developed, Boston had the right to repurchase him for \$500. Well, he developed all right. Into a future Hall of Famer. The Red Sox got him back later in the year, and he wound up leading them to two World Series titles.

4. Johnny Jones for a live turkey

Jones never made it to the big leagues, but his name lives on in infamy as the player that Joe Engel, "The Barnum of the Bushes," traded for a turkey.

Johns was a light-hitting shortstop for the Chattanooga Lookouts, and he had drawn the ire of the local press. So in 1930, Engel sent him to the Charlotte Hornets of the Piedmont League in exchange for a 25-pound turkey that Engel declared was "having a better year." Engel had the bird cooked up for the Southern Baseball Writers' Association Dinner. Alas, the meat turned out to be a little tough, so it was decided that the Hornets had gotten the better end of that deal.

5. Kerry Ligtenberg for bats and balls

Undrafted out of college, Ligtenberg landed with the Minneapolis Loons of the independent Prairie League, pitching for \$650 a month. In 1996, he was one class away from graduating from the University of Minnesota with an engineering degree and likely leaving baseball behind. But the Braves took an interest in him at the urging of Loons manager Greg Olson.

The Braves signed Ligtenberg, and assistant general manager Dean Taylor offered to compensate Olson for the find. Olson was practical enough to ask for what his club really needed -- 12 dozen baseballs and two dozen bats. A steal of a deal for the Braves, for whom Ligtenberg went on to make 254 appearances over five seasons.

6. Keith Comstock for \$100 and a bag of baseballs

This one is a step beyond the previous trade, because the left-handed Comstock actually had to deliver the baseballs himself.

Comstock had been toiling away in the Minors for quite a while and was with the A's when, in the spring of 1983, the Tigers showed interest in him. Detroit offered \$100. When that didn't work, the Tigers sweetened the deal by throwing in the baseballs. Comstock wound up making it to the Majors in '84 and is now known not so much for getting traded for a bag of baseballs but for hilariously posing with one.

7. Joe Martina for oysters

Martina pitched just one season for the Washington Senators in 1924. But his name was not

lost to history because of the '21 swap in which Dallas sent him to New Orleans for two barrels of oysters.

Because of that deal, Martina was forever known as “Oyster Joe.”

8. Len Dondero for donuts... almost

Dondero was an infielder with San Antonio in the Texas League in 1930. When Dallas owners George and Julius Schepps, who also owned a bakery, offered San Antonio owner Homer Hammonds a dozen donuts for Dondero, Hammonds bit. Literally. The owners from the two teams wound up sharing the donuts, and the deal was disallowed.

9. Cy Young for a suit

The Cleveland Spiders needed an arm, and owner Frank Robison decided to take a chance on Denton Young, who had put together a solid season with the Canton Nadjys (that’s a type of horse, for the record) of the Tri-State League.

Young would inspire not only a great nickname (“Cy” for “Cyclone,” a nod to the tenacity of his pitches) but also the game’s most prestigious pitching award, named in his honor. And all it cost Robison to acquire him was about \$250 or \$300 (accounts vary) and a new suit for Canton’s skipper.

10. Mike Cisco for ... nothing

No word on whether George Costanza pitched this trade, but it happened during Spring Training 2013. At the time, Cisco, a 36th-round Draft pick in 2008 out of the University of South Carolina, was going nowhere in the Phillies’ system, despite some solid numbers as a reliever in Double-A and Triple-A the previous year. The Angels needed organizational help, and the Phillies let them have Cisco as a goodwill gesture.

Every so often, you’ll hear about a guy being dealt for a dollar just so that something is entered into the transaction system. But “no compensation” is a rarer return. Cisco never reached the big leagues, but he put up a 3.99 ERA in Double-A in his lone year with the Angels, which is ... better than nothing?

PETER GAMMONS: DIAMOND VISION

Legendary scribe Peter Gammons’ life is defined by the team he loves, the sport he can’t live without and the others he’s guided along the way. And his personal miracle.

By Tom Friend_Sports Business Journal

She fell from heaven and landed in Mashpee. That's where this starts, and exactly where it ends, in a wind-whipped, low-fog Cape Cod village where a retired nurse parked in front of a Stop N' Shop ATM and noticed a pair of spindly legs dangling from the backseat of a four-door Lexus.

Good thing she was nosy, because it could've been another stinking drunk sleeping off the whiskey, bourbon and wine. Summer in the Cape attracts all kinds — grunge bands, neophyte ballplayers and weary baseball scouts, to name three — but if someone's white patchy legs are strewn out of an open car at around 7 a.m., nine times out of 10 there's booze on their breath from a dive bar the night before.

But the 76-year-old nurse took a peek anyway because that's what her servant's heart told her to do, and as she approached the Lexus she saw the shock of white hair, a look of unconsciousness and a driver's license left strategically on the stricken man's chest.

She took his pulse like she'd done a trillion times — locating a faint beat — and dutifully dialed 911, knowing the Mashpee fire department was a convenient two blocks away. She waited there gritting her teeth, monitoring his vital signs, and took a closer, squinted glance at the driver's license.

She had no idea who this was. This man named Peter Gammons.



If only she could've asked **Roger Maris**. That would've shed some light. Long before this Peter Gammons was the greatest baseball writer who ever lived — indirectly responsible for the Red Sox's first World Series win in 86 years, for the Cubs' first World Series win in 108 years and for furthering the careers of ballplayers, singers, executives and journalists all over the planet — he was just a 15-year-old boy with a frayed autograph book trying not to stare into Maris' baby blue eyes.

It was summer of '61, the summer of the Maris-Mantle home-run chase, and he and his parents — Ned and Betty — had driven the 45 miles from their home in Groton, Mass., to Boston for the Red Sox-Yankees series. They were making a long cultural July weekend out of it, spending Thursday night at the theater, Friday night at Fenway Park, Saturday and Sunday afternoon again at Fenway and Saturday night at a concert. Of course, a concert. Ned Gammons was the music teacher at the prestigious Groton School and had passed his sense of rhythm down to his second son, Peter.

Not that Peter was in love with classical music. Rather, he was an aspiring Chuck Berry who could pick a guitar and capably sing the blues or rock 'n' roll. In later years he and his high school buds started a band called The Fabulous Penetrations — "We almost didn't graduate because of that," he jokes — but he had reverence for his father and dutifully sat through the night at the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

There was a beyond-his-years duality to Peter. If his father hadn't taught at the elitist Groton School — a blue-blood Harvard and Yale pipeline in a quaint town of just 4,000 people — the family never could've afforded to send him there, and, for that reason, Peter related to both the preppies and townies. He played Little League baseball with Bill Shaughnessy, who attended the peasant-like public school and whose prodigious younger brother Dan Shaughnessy was a sports encyclopedia. Dan will say the difference between public school and Groton School was that if a Groton player hit a foul ball into the woods, they'd simply grab a new ball. "We'd want to hop over to get 'em," Dan says.

Peter took the sophistication of Groton and the humanistic spirit of Ned and melded them together. Refined, yet self-aware. Add in his affinity for baseball — which he inherited from his mother, Betty, who suffered through every Red Sox game on the radio — and he was ready to politely ask any Red Sox or Yankee for an autograph that July '61 weekend.

During Friday night's series opener, Maris hit his 36th home run, and Mantle smashed his 37th. A magical Fenway evening. The next morning, the Gammons casually ate breakfast at their hotel, the extravagant Park Plaza where the Yankees also happened to be staying. Minutes into the meal, Betty noticed Maris eating alone at an adjacent table and urged Peter to request his signature. Peter had his autograph book ready, but, on second thought, told Betty he'd rather not bother Maris while he was dining.

Later, as the Gammons were exiting, Peter heard someone from behind say, "Son ..." It was Maris, with a gleam in his eye.

"I heard what you said," Maris told Peter. "And I appreciate that you respected my privacy. Would you like me to sign something?"

Maris autographed Peter's book, then asked when he was leaving for Fenway that day. "About 11," Peter said. Sure enough, at the stroke of 11, Maris was waiting for 15-year-old Peter in the lobby.

"Here son," Maris said, handing him a signed piece of paper. It was Mantle's autograph. Chills shot down Peter's spine, a wave of sensibility gushed to his head.

Roger Maris had become the first Major League player, not the last, to be enthralled by Peter Gammons.

If only she could've asked Dean Smith. In the mid-1960s, Peter enrolled at the University of North Carolina and became a curious reporter for the campus's Daily Tar Heel. Taught by Ned Gammons to be inclusive, Peter was especially drawn to the burgeoning head basketball coach Smith, who was about to make Charlie Scott the first Black athlete at the university. On the infamous 1965 day, Smith was hung in effigy after a brutal loss to Wake Forest, Peter was sitting near Smith on the team bus and couldn't believe how stoic the coach remained. Peter

had already befriended several players, particularly future All-America forward Larry Miller, who told him how altruistic Smith was. Peter was fascinated.

Smith, sharp as a tack, noticed how the players related to Peter and occasionally let Peter watch his sacred closed practices. “He just took a liking to me,” Peter says. “Dean reminded me a lot of my father. I always thought he was a schoolteacher who was a basketball coach. And sometimes, I think because my father was a schoolteacher, that enabled the relationship to go farther.”

It went so far that Smith gave Peter this firm career advice: “You’re a good listener. You could write for a living.” Not long after — perhaps on a day Peter’s college band, “Little Gam and the Athletes” had just finished a jam session — Peter received an urgent message at his frat house to see Smith. “Figured I’d written something he’s really pissed about,” Peter says. Instead, Smith told him Sports Illustrated’s vaunted storyteller Frank Deford was arriving to do a profile on him, that Peter should observe “how a giant in the industry” conducts an interview. So Peter sat in, riveted and now certain of his calling.

Dean Smith — perhaps because his servant heart told him to — had turned Peter into a sportswriter.



If only she could’ve asked **Bill Lee**. On June 10, 1968, just days after RFK’s assassination, senior-to-be Peter started a summer internship at the Boston Globe sports department. On that first day, he and another intern — a garrulous Boston College grad named Bob Ryan — were assigned to chronicle how MLB was planning to honor Kennedy. Peter called each American League team, while Ryan dialed every National League club. Their dual byline ran on 1A of the stocks edition that afternoon, and buddies already, they went to Boston’s Eire Pub to grab a beer and dream about careers as “ink-stained wretches.” Peter was hooked.

Peter impressed Globe editors with his whimsical writing style. At Carolina, his Journalism 41 teacher once passed out a cookie-cutter exam saying, “If you all write the same lead, I’ll be successful as a teacher.” Peter, trying not to be “a smart ass,” raised his hand to say, “That’s not going to work, sir.” Peter felt badly, but also felt journalism should be about “your curiosity,” how you “related” to your subject matter. “I didn’t want to be the byline,” he says, “I wanted to be the story.”

The irreverent Globe was on the same page as Peter. “Forget the five W’s of journalism: who, what, when, where, why,” Ryan says. “The Globe let us run wild.” So the winter following Peter’s internship, in February 1969, they contacted him during midterms to say, “Can you come to Boston next Monday and start full time?” He dropped out to drive north.

That summer he first laid eyes on Red Sox rookie pitcher Bill “Spaceman” Lee, a mercurial lefty out of USC who had the guts to throw a slow, rainbow Eephus pitch — or “Space Ball” — to big-

league hitters. Peter loved it. As legend has it, Peter once threw an Eephus pitch himself at Groton School to a stud hitter from Boston Latin named **Bobby Guindon**. Guindon, who wound up playing five games for the Red Sox in '64, smashed it 300-some feet into an art department window.

Either way, Spaceman and Gam (Peter's nickname) had a pitch in common, and they became fast friends the same way Peter had buddied up to Larry Miller at Carolina. With his floppy head of hair, walrus mustache, windbreakers and sandals, Peter was becoming a welcome sight at Fenway, or the Fens, as he called it. By the summer of '71, Peter was a backup Red Sox writer doing sidebars and asked morning sports editor Fran Rosa if he could pen a weekly column about the Red Sox farm system. He'd model it slightly after Dick Young's three-dot column in the New York Daily News and call it "Majoring in the Minors." Baseball's first notes column was born.

The Globe's Will McDonough was already writing notes on the NFL, and Ryan the same for the NBA. But what Peter began churning out every Sunday — especially once he took over the Red Sox beat full time in '72 — became baseball gospel. He was majoring in the majors now. These were nuanced, 2,000-word joyrides through the game. "He was like a gonzo journalist in sports and baseball," says Dan Shaughnessy, who'd eventually join the Globe.

Peter's single-minded routine made it possible. He'd wake up as early as 5 a.m. to exercise and read the papers. Then, he'd phone as many scouts, agents and GMs as he could conjure up. He'd get to Fenway, or wherever the Red Sox were, as early as noon to watch early BP or, better yet, shag fly balls himself.

That's where the real intel came from. By '75, bench coach **Johnny Pesky** was hitting him pregame fungos, or **Carl Yastrzemski** was purposely smacking BP line drives to Peter in the gap. Through it all, he'd pick up nuggets and backstories. He'd then shower, visit the opposing manager and produce original copy full of trade chatter, clubhouse mischief and future stars. "I don't know anybody who loves anything as much as Peter Gammons loves baseball," Ryan says.

That Sunday notes column was so rich, Globe sports editor Vince Doria says editors from other cities had him airmail it to them every Monday. GMs would pick Peter's brain as much as he'd pick theirs. One year, he campaigned in print for the Red Sox to hire Orioles manager Earl Weaver. When Weaver got inundated with phone calls, he said, "What did that [bleeping] Gammons write this time?" Someone answered, "That the Red Sox need you and even if it's \$1 million a year, they gotta pay it." Weaver responded, "I've always liked that Gammons.

Peter's music references made the column hip. In season previews, he'd give every MLB franchise a team song (Baltimore's being "Duke of Earl"), and, inspired by the Warren Zevon tune, he'd allude to Lee in print as "Excitable Boy." John Curtis and the 300,000 college students in Boston applauded Peter. He brought his guitar on the road, taught Globe writer Lesley Visser

about a blues singer named Bonnie Raitt. “Peter was talking about Bonnie Raitt before anybody else was talking about Bonnie Raitt,” Shaughnessy says.

His copy was littered with music, sarcasm and New England nuance, and Doria’s philosophy was he wouldn’t edit Peter if one out of five readers “got it.” To describe a disjointed Red Sox team, Peter wrote: “25 guys, 25 cabs.” When the Red Sox blew a key game on network TV in August of ’74, Peter wrote: “Like Richard Nixon, the Red Sox went on national television to announce their resignations from the race.”

But his game stories showcased his lyrical genius most of all, and nothing put him on the map more than the 1975 World Series between the Reds and Red Sox. As the baseball world descended on Boston for Game 6 — the Sox trailing three games to two — Peter ended up producing arguably the greatest game story ever written on deadline, a piece crafted on a typewriter in 55 minutes that stands the test of time for every New Englander with a pulse.

At first, it was a blah game. The Sox looked dead in the eighth inning until Bernie Carbo hit a missile three-run home run — “There was this whoosh,” Peter remembers — to tie it up at 6. Peter was taking copious notes in the press box and prioritizing all the signature moments of the game. Dwight Evans’ circus catch in the 11th. Third base coach **Don Zimmer** saying “No, no, no” to baserunner **Denny Doyle** in the ninth, and Doyle thinking Zimmer said “Go, go, go” before being nailed at the plate. But in the 12th inning, **Carlton Fisk** trumped it all with a drifting game-winning homer down the left-field line that he waved fair with hands extended wildly over his head. Peter’s first three paragraphs were silk:

And all of a sudden the ball was there, like the Mystic River Bridge, suspended out in the black of the morning.

When it finally crashed off the mesh attached to the left field foul pole, one step after another the reaction unfolded: from Carlton Fisk’s convulsive leap to John Kiley’s booming of the ‘Hallelujah Chorus’ to the wearing off of the numbness to the outcry that echoed across the cold New England morning.

At 12:34 a.m., in the 12th inning, Fisk’s histrionic home run brought a 7-6 end to a game that will be the pride of historians in the year 2525, a game won and lost what seemed like a dozen times, and a game that brings back summertime one more day. For the seventh game of the World Series.

Ever since that night, Bostonians young and old have treated Peter’s Game 6 lead as local legend. “Like the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere,” says former Globe and Herald sportswriter Jeff Horrigan. If Peter and Lee went out anywhere in Boston — from Faneuil Hall to Southie to Cambridge — locals would first say hello to Spaceman and then recite the Game 6 lead out loud to Peter’s face.

“Hey Petuh! ... And all of a sudden the ball was there, like the Mystic River Bridge, suspended out in the black of the morning. ... You’re a wicked pisser, Petuh!”

What he’d told his Carolina journalism professor had finally come true. Peter Gammons was the story.



If only she could’ve asked **Ted Williams**. Peter’s star shined so bright that even the Splendid Splitter, chronically annoyed at ink-stained wretches, would wave Peter over to tell stories over a bourbon and tonic. Did you know in 1941 Ted used to get updates on **Joe DiMaggio**’s 56-game hitting streak from a Fenway scoreboard operator in left field and shout them over to **Dom DiMaggio**, Joe’s brother, in center? Peter knew. But then, suddenly, baseball was over for Gam. Done.

He’d become too prolific for his own good. Sports Illustrated — Frank Deford’s Sports Illustrated! — offered him its NHL job in 1976, and Peter took it thinking he’d eventually scoot over to baseball. He knew hockey well enough and bonded with Bruins Hall of Famer Bobby Orr. But SI made him move to New York, and Peter says he pined for “the frenetic fandom of New England” and the scent of tobacco chew. While in Toronto for a Maple Leafs story, he moseyed over to the first-ever Blue Jays game. He showed up out of the blue at **Brooks Robinson** Night in Baltimore. He lasted two years on hockey.

Back to the Globe he went, and with new perspective on life, he began to pay sportswriting forward. He was his father’s son; Dean Smith’s protégé. He’d help the next person in line. He told his homie Dan Shaughnessy the Orioles beat job was open at the Baltimore Evening Sun; shared his Sunday notes with the Philadelphia’s Inquirer’s Jayson Stark; got 23-year-old John Lowe an interview with the Chicago Tribune.

Probably 100 writers had similar tales. When **Dale Murphy** shooed the Globe’s Lesley Visser from the Braves’ clubhouse, Peter waited outside with her. When Rangers beat writer Tim Kurkjian sensed the team was making a trade, he called Peter, who told him, “Yeah, you guys are dealing for **Cliff Johnson**.” He kindly alerted Baltimore Sun beat writer Richard Justice that the Orioles were signing **Don Aase and Fred Lynn**. Justice dialed Orioles exec Larry Lucchino, who said, “Where’d you hear that?” Gammons, Justice said. “Well,” Lucchino said, “Gammons isn’t wrong very often.”

An entire generation of baseball writers wanted to be him. Justice wore the same New Balance sneakers Peter wore; bought the same brand steno pad. Peter was the envy of them all. Baltimore all-star **Eddie Murray** famously spurned the media, but Gammons would still waltz up to Murray’s locker to chat him up. When Justice later told Murray, “Hey, I thought you aren’t speaking to the press,” Murray blurted, “That ain’t the press, that’s Gammons.”

Fenway was Peter's second home, and he and his wife, Gloria — whom he'd met teaching Sunday school at church — bought a house at 46 Glen Road in Brookline, just 1.1 miles away from the Fens. Peter wanted to walk to games. His new next-door neighbors, the Kennedys, had an admiring young son named Sam who watched Peter leave for night games at 10 or 11 a.m. — "I borderline stalked him," Sam says — and overheard Peter's top-secret chats with GMs across a backyard screen. Peter's access to powerbrokers was unprecedented, and trade deadlines were his personal Christmas Day. He had a pulse on every impending trade, and GMs had the good sense to take his calls. "He was really a special assistant to about 30 teams," says A's GM Billy Beane, soon to be a Gammons confidant.

By then, Tigers pitcher **Jack Morris** had nicknamed him "The Commissioner," and Peter says three or four MLB teams offered him front office jobs. Legend has it Peter once laid out a three-way trade proposal to Red Sox GM Lou Gorman, who responded, "I haven't thought of anything like that." To which Peter said, "Well, by God, you better start thinking of things like that."

But the epitome of his bandwidth came during the '85 World Series. It was Game 7, Cardinals-Royals, and tense St. Louis manager **Whitey Herzog** had locked himself in his clubhouse office beforehand. Ah, but Peter knew Whitey's secret code. So he knocked, paused, knock-knocked, paused again and knock-knock-knocked. Whitey let him in.

Peter was too big now to stay local, and SI — Frank Deford's SI — came calling again in '86, this time with the baseball beat. Managing Editor Mark Mulvoy promised Peter he could still live in Brookline or his other home on the Cape and urged him to buy Red Sox season tickets so he wouldn't have pangs for Fenway. Peter found a pair of seats just seven rows behind home plate, next to the scouts, and accepted the SI job. He would write an "Inside Baseball" column and dive into the human interest stories he craved. He visited Yankee **Don Mattingly's** hometown of Evansville, Ind., and discovered Donnie Baseball learned to hit the ball the other way because the whiffle ball field in his yard had a massive tree blocking fly balls to right.

Mattingly respected Peter — just like an earlier Yankee great, Maris — and agreed to do a three-sided chat about hitting with Ted Williams and **Wade Boggs**. Peter chronicled it all. When Williams hosted a fundraiser for the Jimmy Fund in Boston, which included Joe DiMaggio, Peter asked Ted if he could write about the Williams-DiMaggio relationship for SI. Ted said sure. But when DiMaggio arrived, Joe said, "I don't talk to Sports Illustrated."

Williams bared his teeth at DiMaggio and then growled what needed to be growled, the ultimate tribute to Peter Gammons:

"This is my event, this is my city, and it's my f***** friend," Ted Williams said. "And you're going to talk to him."

So Joe DiMaggio talked.

If only she could've asked Theo Epstein. Theo happened to play Little League and then high school ball in Brookline with a certain Sam Kennedy, Peter's industrious next-door neighbor. But under the instructions of Sam's father Tom, a minister who had grown close to Peter, Sam had to be wary of inviting over friends who might eavesdrop on Gam's backyard GM calls.

So as the years passed, Theo Epstein was someone Peter knew in name only. Sam would tell him Theo is at Yale. Sam would tell him Theo is an intern for the Orioles. "I'd always say, 'Keep an eye on this guy,'" Sam says. Peter would file it away in that baseball brain of his.

Sam wanted a baseball internship himself and asked Peter for advice. Peter urged him to write to every big league club, and, in the spring of '93, Sam finally heard back from a team: Mattingly's Yankees. The Yanks asked Sam to provide three references. "My first was Peter Gammons," Sam says. "So that was pretty good."

If SI made Gammons a literary star, ESPN made him a national sensation. The network, under the wise leadership of John Walsh, had entered the information age. No more tractor-pull shows or fluff. Walsh wanted to put sportswriters on SportsCenter, no matter how they looked or dressed, and if Peter was the spitting image of 19th century president Andrew Jackson, the cover of the \$20 bill, so be it. Walsh hired him away from SI in 1990, the first sportswriter ESPN ever put on-air.

At first, Peter's peers guffawed, considering Gam himself used to call local TV guys "barking dogs and frauds." But he was paving the way for them all. That is, unless he flopped. The genius of Walsh was he understood Peter was a man of the people. So, at Peter's first ESPN spring training, Walsh had him filmed interacting with fans. "Hey, Petuh! How the Sox gonna be, you wicked pisser?" Peter would charm them all. Once back at ESPN, Walsh shoved in a tape of the fan exchanges and told Peter, "See, that's your job. It's no different from people coming up and talking to you. Only now you just look in the camera and do it."

That was the breakthrough, and in Peter's ESPN years, he had exclusives with problem players (**A-Rod and Albert Belle**), elegant players (**Bernie Williams and Derek Jeter**) and rock stars (Johnny Ramone and Huey Lewis). President George W. Bush called him "Petey." He went to Cuba with his trusty producer Julie Chrisco Andrews, saw teenagers **Kendrys Morales and Yuli Gurriel** and decided they were future big leaguers. Filed it away in his baseball brain.

His scout friend Billy Beane had just become the A's GM in '98, and Peter suggested he select lefty pitcher **Mark Mulder** with the second overall pick. "The first guy who told me about Mulder was Peter Gammons," says Beane, who ended up drafting the kid. Fact is, Peter spent parts of every summer at the Cape Cod League and had seen Mulder pitch for the Bourne Braves in 1997. Peter was royalty at the Cape, from his home in Cataumet to his favorite gym in Mashpee, and his baseball brain had catalogued every prospect up there.

His ESPN duties included "SportsCenter," "Baseball Tonight" and Diamond Notes for ESPN.com. "He was a volume guy, and ESPN and SportsCenter was a volume place," Walsh says. But Peter

eventually needed help, and channeling his father and Dean Smith, Peter told Walsh, “Get Tim Kurkjian.” Later he said, “Get Jayson Stark.” Later he said, “There’s this young guy who just went to the New York Times, Buster Olney.”

At around the same time, Peter set his sights on none other than Theo Epstein, who had ascended to director of player development for the Padres. During Game 3 of the '98 Yankees-Padres World Series, Theo was in his usual post behind home plate, using a speed gun to input the velocity and pitch type up on the scoreboard. When suddenly, he says, Peter “appeared out of the ether.”

Every other writer was in the press box, but Peter was behind the batter’s box, picking Theo’s brain. He’d earlier filed Epstein’s name away in his baseball mind, and now they were finally meeting. Throughout the game, Theo was uncannily predicting which pitches Padre pitchers would throw and their locations. He saw **Trevor Hoffman** warm up for a save opportunity and told Peter, just from watching Hoffman’s arm speed, that Trevor was going to struggle. Sure enough, Hoffman blew the game.

From that day on, Peter kept writing about the savant Theo Epstein. Peter felt the same about Beane, whose “Moneyball” theorem was revolutionizing the sport. When the Red Sox offered Beane \$12.5 million to become their GM in 2002, Beane drove to the Cape with his daughter Casey to consult with Peter. It was a brilliant, no-fog day in Cataumet, and Beane decided he could get used to New England. It’s the scene that didn’t make the “Moneyball” movie — Billy and Peter roaming the Cape, riffing on **Jason Varitek**. “Peter may be responsible a little bit for my flirtation with the Boston Red Sox,” Beane admits. “The whole ordeal: my going, not going. Peter very much was a confidant for me. He wasn’t a writer, a journalist. He was a friend.”

When Beane turned the job down for family reasons, Epstein ultimately got it, buoyed by Peter’s endless endorsements. “Peter became a huge advocate for me in the way he’s done for countless others,” Theo says. “I’m sure that he made my path smoother when I got to Boston, both as assistant GM and when I got the GM job.”

When the Red Sox broke the 86-year Curse of the Bambino in 2004, Peter probably deserved a ring. He helped create Theo. Actually, Peter was creating a lot of things, including music. Along with Horrigan in 2000, he had started the antithesis of a charity golf event — a charity rock ‘n’ roll concert called “Hot Stove Cool Music” that initially featured two bands named “**Thurman Munson**” and “Carlton Fisk.” Through the years, Peter brought in Paul Barrere from his favorite band Little Feat, Kay Hanley from Letters to Cleo and Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam. “How could that be?” Kurkjian laughs. “He covered Eddie Murray and played with Eddie Vedder.”

Pitcher **Bronson Arroyo** made his musical debut for Peter. Bernie Williams, Peter and Buddy Guy jammed on-stage together. Before long, Theo and his twin brother Paul merged their charity, “The Foundation To Be Named Later” with Hot Stove Cool Music, raising thousands to send kids to college through a platform they dubbed “Peter Gammons Scholars.”

A force of nature, Peter — who'd named his dog after Bonnie Raitt — was not only writing original music, he was releasing an album in the summer of 2006 called "Never Slow Down, Never Grow Old." The album was legit and included self-deprecating songs such as "Bad Teeth" and "NyQuil Blues." But the song that perhaps resonated most was a ditty about a girl who's raised to be perfect and learns a little imperfection can go a long way.

The title: "She Fell From Heaven and Landed on Her Face."



Days before the album's release, on June 26, 2006, that retired 76-year-old nurse Agnes Rockett-Bolduc landed from heaven, all right. Not on her face, but in the Mashpee parking lot alongside a dying stranger named —what did the driver's license say? — Peter Gammons.

Just back from a weekend White Sox-Astros series in Chicago, he had driven solo to his favorite gym early that morning to speedread four different sports pages on the StairMaster. But, along the way, his head began to throb and pulsate in a way that disarmed him. This was beyond a headache. While he could still see straight, he pulled erratically into that Stop N' Shop lot, parked crooked across two spaces and staggered to his backseat to lay down —never closing the door. Somehow, he thought to lay his driver's license on his sternum. "I remember nothing about that," Peter says. "It was just one of those inexplicable things that humans do."

The closest hospital was 11 miles away in Falmouth. But once the EMTs realized in the ambulance this was a brain aneurysm, not a heart attack, an order went out for Peter to be airlifted to Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital. Then the fates got involved again.

Dr. Arthur Day, chief of medicine at the hospital, was supposed to be playing golf that day, but was conveniently accessible because his golfing partner never showed. An utterly confident brain surgeon, Dr. Day explained to Gloria the aneurysm was a "two-percenter," meaning Peter had a 2% chance of a clean, good-as-new recovery. The Red Sox once had a zero percent chance of ever winning a World Series before Theo arrived — so she took the 2%.

Because doctors don't do post-surgery interviews, what happened next is chatter among Peter's close friends such as his ESPN producer Andrews and Cape Cod buddies Keith Carroll and John Keenan. But apparently the minute Dr. Day opened Peter's skull, the aneurysm burst. If Nurse Agnes had never fallen from heaven, if the doctor had played 18 holes, if Falmouth Hospital had not rushed an airlift, the best baseball writer of a generation would've been gone.

Dr. Day finished the repair, but word was it was touch and go. Doria, who was now an executive at ESPN, called Kurkjian that night to say in a hushed voice, "Tim, I need you to write Peter's obit. Just in case." Kurkjian, who worked at ESPN all because of Peter, fell apart. "I wrote Peter Gammons' obituary in full tears," Kurkjian says. "I mean, I was weeping as I was writing. Hardest story I've ever written in my life."

Peter wasn't allowed any visitors at first. Bobby Orr showed up and was turned away. No one could tell Peter it was the trade deadline, for fear he'd get overexcited. Soon, Theo arrived with Sam Kennedy — who would eventually become Red Sox president — and the visit shook both of them up. Peter would talk about baseball from the '40s, the '90s, the '70s, incongruent stories that made it seem the catalog in his baseball brain had been tipped over.

"Peter wasn't Peter for those few days," Sam says. "The file cabinets in his brain, I think, were shuffled a bit. I remember Theo and I walked back up Brookline Avenue to Fenway from Brigham and Women's Hospital and talked about 'Oh my God, Peter might never be the same.'"

One day, a FedEx package arrived. From Don Mattingly. Gloria opened it to find a gaudy, gargantuan rapper's-style cross. Peter smiled, slipped it around his neck.

He wouldn't take it off.



Three months later, Peter was back. It's miracle material, but Andrews knew he was cogent when he was recovering at Mashpee's Rehabilitation Hospital of the Cape and Islands and spied a baseball game on the TV. "Wait a minute," Peter asked, "when did **Austin Kearns** become a National?"

Andrews had to spill the beans then: "Peter, you missed the trade deadline. That's when the Reds sent Kearns to Washington." Ah, he said. The card catalog in his brain was firing on all cylinders. Dr. Day urged him to drive alone to Fenway for a September Red Sox-White Sox game to prove to himself he was healed. He could visit Chicago manager **Ozzie Guillen**, chat up Theo and Sam.

Peter was sketchy about it, but he handled the Route 128 traffic and glided into the Fens. He sat in his seats seven rows behind home plate. The Commissioner was back. In the weeks and months that followed, he returned to ESPN, ran a 5K and walked five miles a day all over the Cape wearing headphones, talking to Beane and other GMs.

Kurkjian finally confided, "You know, Peter, I wrote your obituary," and Gam answered, "Yeah, I should read that sometime, I guess." Eventually, he left ESPN for MLB Network because, according to Doria, Peter felt ESPN was prioritizing football. "He wasn't incorrect in that assessment," Doria says.

MLB Network was a more natural fit and built a studio for him on the second floor of his Cape home, overlooking the choppy water. They sent him to the 2016 World Series to see the Cubs — and new GM Theo — win their first title in 108 years. Peter's Theo.

If Peter was upbeat before the aneurysm, he had even more of a servant's heart now. He and Gloria never had children, but "sons" of Peter were scattered through baseball. For instance, his friend Scott Bradley, a fellow Tar Heel and the head coach at Princeton, asked him to help his former player **Mike Hazen** find a job. Peter had Hazen scout the Cape Cod League, and Hazen's reports were so detailed Peter disseminated them across MLB. Cleveland hired Hazen on the spot, then Theo scooped him up in Boston. Now Hazen's GM of the Diamondbacks.

"Peter lives his life with this incredible sense of justice," Theo says. And does so even though there's new injustice in his. For the past three years, Peter's been stricken with multiple myeloma — a blood and bone disease — and needs a periodic form of chemo. "I tell people I'm like a 1995 Volvo with 160,000 miles," Peter says. "I have to be maintained the rest of my life."

But he still does essays for MLB Network, still writes for The Athletic, still has half a million followers on Twitter. He still thinks about returning to Carolina at age 78 to finish his journalism degree. He still defends **Bill Buckner**, still wears Mattingly's cross, still is close with today's players such as **Bo Bichette**, still sings Pearl Jam, still signs autographs on Andrew Jackson \$20 bills, still hears, "And all of a sudden the ball was there, like the Mystic River Bridge, suspended out in the black of the morning. Petuh, you're a wicked pisser!"

Eventually, the nurse who fell from heaven, Agnes Rockett-Bolduc, figured it out. Not from Roger Maris or Dean Smith or Bill Lee or Ted Williams or Theo. She figured it out from her husband a few months after the aneurysm. He had been chiding her for walking up to a mysterious man in an empty low-fog parking lot when the guy could've been a mugger.

And just as he was saying this, Peter's picture flashed onto their TV.

"That's him," said Nurse Agnes.

"Peter Gammons!" her husband howled. "Thank God you stopped!"

Others on Gammons

Globe columnist Dan Shaughnessy: "A game didn't happen until you read Gammons' account of it."

Former Globe Sports Editor Vince Doria: "Peter created this whole sensibility about the Calvinist winds of doubt that swept through New England about the Red Sox, sort of married the Red Sox to the roots of New England."

The Globe's Bob Ryan on Gammons: "He knew the quirks and oddities of the game. He found out Carney Lansford was a direct descendant of Sir Francis Drake."

The Athletic's Jayson Stark: "I went to a Cape League game with him, and it must have been what walking through Independence Hall with Benjamin Franklin was like in like 1784. And the giveaway item of the night was a Peter Gammons baseball."

Stark on the best baseball writer ever: "Grantland Rice is on that wall, Ring Lardner is on the wall and Red Smith is on that wall. But Peter stands up above everyone. Everyone."

Former ESPN executive editor John Walsh: "Peter's the bard of baseball. Boz [Thomas Boswell] the poet. Murray [Chass] the treasurer. Peter, the muse."

Billy Beane, A's executive: "He's one of those guys who are sort of the center of the spoke for baseball. Certainly, in my lifetime, he's maybe the greatest ambassador the game has had."

Red Sox President Sam Kennedy: "Everybody says his passion is baseball, and that's true. But when I think of Peter, his true passion is people."

Former Globe writer Lesley Visser: "If you got to be around Peter, it was like landing in Oz and it all turns color."

Former Red Sox pitcher Bronson Arroyo: "You hear the stories about Salvador Dalí walking into a party in New York City and the music stops. In a lot of ways, Peter has become that guy."

Gammons on Gammons

Favorite song lyric: "I wish I was the pedal brake that you depended on" — from Pearl Jam's "Wishlist"

One of his least favorite Red Sox trades: Jeff Bagwell to Houston for Larry Anderson. He pulled over to the side of the road and cried.

One of his least favorite Fenway traditions: Neal Diamond's "Sweet Caroline."

Best auctioned item at a Hot Stove Cool Music charity event: Theo Epstein's gorilla suit for \$13,000.

Gammons on covering the Red Sox for the Boston Globe in 1970s and '80s: "It's almost like you're writing a letter to someone every day in a town like that where people really care."

Gammons on writing game stories: "In my brain, it was a long song. It was like Bob Dylan writing like a nine-minute song. Because it was easier to write in rhythm."

Gammons on his famous MLB notes column: "I still get people who stop me and say 'I love your Sunday column.' I haven't written a Sunday column since 1985. But it's all right because I'm so flattered by that."

Gammons on writers who've gone to TV: "[Tom] Verducci's a terrific kid. I think of all the guys that have gone through the newspaper business into TV, I really think he's pretty close to being the best, if not definitively the best."

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Which franchise has had the most pitchers with 300-K seasons in the Modern Era?

Right-hander 1978 and 1979

Right-hander 1986, won Cy Young

Left-hander 1998, won a bunch of Cy Youngs but this year was not one of them

Right-hander 2019

Right-hander 2019, won Cy Young

The Astros. **J.R. Richard** (1978 & '79), **Mike Scott** (1986), **Gerrit Cole** (2019), **Justin Verlander** (2019), plus **Randy Johnson** (1998, though he began the season with the Mariners). No other team has more than two.

TEN EXPANSION TEAMS

1961 AL expansion team, another city with 2 franchises

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

1961 AL expansion team, replaced franchise that moved to Minnesota

WASHINGTON SENATORS

1962 NL expansion team, historically bad

NEW YORK METS

1962 NL expansion team, the name wouldn't last but the team did

HOUSTON COLT .45'S, later the HOUSTON ASTROS

1969 NL expansion team, outside the USA

MONTREAL EXPOS

1969 AL expansion team, lasted on season before re-locating

SEATTLE PILOTS, became MILWAUKEE BREWERS

1969 AL expansion team, replaced franchise that moved in 1967.

KANSAS CITY ROYALS, replaced KC/OAKLAND A's

1969 NL expansion team, lost World Series in 1984 and 1998

SAN DIEGO PADRES, lost to Tigers and Yankees.

1977 AL expansion team, has never reached World Series

SEATTLE MARINERS

1977 AL expansion team, won back-to-back World Series 1992-1993.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

I played 1785 games for one team from 1982 to 1995.

I won 9 Gold Gloves as an infielder.

A left-handed batter, I led the majors in hits in 1986, won a batting title in 1984.

I won an MVP, 3x Silver Slugger, 6x All-Star.

The World Series alluded me as a player and a manager.

Who am I?

DON MATTINGLY.

A reminder to checkout sundaybaseballtidbits.com. Thanks to the efforts of subscriber (and Wesleyan baseball Wall of Famer) Todd Mogren, all back issues of the newsletter are archived and accessible. At the request of another subscriber there is a tab for all our trivia questions and a separate tab for questions with answers. No scrolling through the archives—easy access to all the trivia.

Please remember to check out

SUNDAYBASEBALLTIDBITS.COM

Over 5,000 pages of our back issues, trivia questions & answers, subscriber recommendations for best baseball books and websites. Special thanks to **Todd Mogren** for web support.

HOUSEKEEPING

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