

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

9.3.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

Greetings from Nova Scotia. Abbreviated edition next week as I head to Cabot Links for golf with good buds—if you are a golfer enjoy some eye candy at <https://cabotcapebreton.com/golf>.

This week waivers and call ups, more Braves home runs, lots of Freddie Freeman doubles and how 'bout those Mariners?

In Longer Reads a fascinating piece lifted from Ron Neyer's book "Baseball Blunders" on Charlie Finley's insights on free agency (you will never think about free agency the same way again), a passionate appreciation of **Stephen Strasburg**, and batting gloves.

Less than 30 games to go. Grab a cup of coffee and enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

(answers at bottom)

I won 4 straight Cy Young awards, pitched in 1 World Series, retired with 303 wins.

Am I **Roger Clemens, Randy Johnson, Greg Maddux or Pedro Martinez?**

Big Home Run Seasons, Did Not Lead the League.

1927, 45 HRs

1938 AL, 50 HRs

1961, hit 54 HRs

1998, hit 66 HRs, then

1999 hit 63 HRs, then

2001 hit 64 HRs

Over the last 60 years (non-strike/non-pandemic), 10 Position player MVPs hit less than 20 Home Runs. How many can you name?

2008 AL infielder. Also 2007 Rookie of the Year, played in 2007 and 2013 World Series.

2001 AL left-handed hitting OF. Led majors in hits 7x, 2 x batting champion.

1995 NL infielder, Hall of Fame, MVP of 1990 World Series.

1985 NL switch hitting OF, won his first World Series in 1982 over the Brewers but then lost the next three he played in 1985, 1987, 1990.

1984 NL infielder. Hall of Fame, Phillies manager, hit .385 in losing NLCS cause in 1984 and 1989.

1979 NL co-winner, 1B. 11 Gold Gloves, winning World Series teams in 1982 and 1986.

1977 AL left-handed batting infielder. 7 batting titles, Hall of Fame.

1976 AL catcher. 1970 AL Rookie of the Year, played on 1977 and 1978 World Series champs.

1973 NL infielder. 17x All Star, played in 6 World Series including winners 1975-1976-1980.

1965 AL shortstop. Played on losing World Series team in 1965.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

As a reminder:

- From dawn of baseball to 1968: Two teams made the postseason.
- From 1969 to 1993: Four teams made the playoffs (with the exception of the strike year).
- From 1995 to 2011: Eight teams made the playoffs.
- From 2012 to 2021: Ten teams made the playoffs (with the exception of the COVID year).
- 2022-: Twelve teams make the playoffs.

Now its all about making the tournament, hopefully hot and healthy, and try to do what the Phillies did last year and roll from wild card to the World Series.

We won't be seeing a Game 163 between teams with identical records this year. All ties will be broken by math. The tiebreaker order is as follows:

1. Head-to-head record
2. Intradivision record (records within their division)
3. Interdivision record (record against teams outside of their division)
4. Last half of intraleague games
5. Last half of intraleague games plus one (outcome of the last game of the first half of intraleague games); this one would be repeated until the tie is resolved.

What about the Wild Card Game?

Love it or hate it, the controversial single-elimination Wild Card Game is no longer. It was replaced by a best-of-three Wild Card Series last year.

The series is scheduled over three days, hosted by the higher seed.

How are teams seeded?

- No. 1 seed: Best league record
- No. 2: Second-best division winner
- No. 3: Third-best division winner
- No. 4: Best record among wild-card teams
- No. 5: Second-best record among wild-card teams
- No. 6: Third-best record among wild-card teams

Note that it does not matter for seeding if a wild-card team has a better record than a division winner from another division — the seeding order remains as listed.

The No. 1 and 2 seeds receive first-round byes and advance directly to the Division Series. The No. 3 seed faces the No. 6 seed and the No. 4 seed faces the No. 5 seed in the Wild Card Series.

The No. 1 seed will then play the winner of the Nos. 4/5 Wild Card Series in the Division Series and the No. 2 seed will face the winner of the Nos. 3/6 series. There will be no re-seeding after each round, with the schedule following a bracket format.

Any other changes to the Division Series?

Nope. It's still best-of-five in a 2-2-1 format with the higher seed having home-field advantage.

What about the rest of the format?

Nothing new to report. The League Championship Series and World Series are still best-of-seven in a 2-3-2 format. Home-field advantage in the World Series goes to the team with the better regular-season record (regardless of their playoff seeding) — the aforementioned tiebreaker rules apply if the teams happen to have the same regular-season records.

How many games total in the MLB playoffs?

Depending on how deep each series runs, there will be between 32 and 53 games in the postseason. To recap, the breakdown is as follows:

- Wild Card Series (4) — best-of-three format
- Division Series (4) — best-of-five

- Championship Series (2) — best-of-seven
- World Series — best-of-seven

All this year's new rules will be in place for the playoffs. From a players' poll, despite positive reviews, 60.7 percent of players thought the pitch-clock rule should be different for the postseason.

Suggestions included adding five seconds, not enforcing it after the seventh inning and completely getting rid of it.

2023 MLB postseason schedule, TV channels

- Wild Card Series Game 1s: Tuesday, Oct. 3, on ABC, ESPN and ESPN2.
- Division Series Game 1s: Saturday, Oct. 7. ALDS games will air on Fox or FS1, NLDS on TBS.
- ALCS Game 1: Sunday, Oct. 15 on Fox or FS1
- NLCS Game 1: Monday, Oct. 16 on TBS.
- World Series Game 1: Friday, Oct. 27, on Fox.

A shining spot in a sad Mets season—**Francisco Lindor** has 24 HRs and 25 stolen bases.

On July 21, 1975 **Joe Torre**, then player-manager of the Mets, grounded into 4 double plays against the Astros. Only time it has happened in MLB history. **Don Kessinger** (1979 White Sox) and **Pete Rose** (1984-1985 Reds) are the only two player-managers since Torre.

Longest gap between first and last post-season HR? **Eddie Murray**—17 years 1979-1996.

The Yankees have the best bullpen ERA in baseball enroute to their worst season in over 30 years.

Clayton Kershaw now has 209 wins, matching **Don Drysdale** for the second-most in Dodgers history. **Don Sutton** holds the record with 233.

Mookie Betts continues his quest for a second MVP Award, On Tuesday he launched a 428-foot homer, his 36th of the season, surpassing his career high from last year. The Dodgers' superstar recorded two or more hits in 18 of 28 games in August. Mookie's final numbers in August:

.455/.516/.839, 10 doubles, 11 homers, 3 steals, 35 runs, 30 RBIs.

For context, here is where Betts' high August BA and OPS marks rank all-time (90 August plate appearances minimum) His .455 batting average ranks 12th all-time for the month of August, as follows:

- .509 – **Rogers Hornsby**, 1924
- .505 – **Harry Heilmann**, 1927
- .484 – **Charlie Gehringer**, 1937
- .476 – **Todd Helton**, 2000
- .468 – **Shoeless Joe Jackson**, 1911
- .463 – **Ichiro Suzuki**, 2004
- .463 – **Pat Tabler**, 1986
- .460 – **Pie Traynor**, 1928
- .459 – **Willie Davis**, 1969
- .458 – **Ernie Lombardi**, 1936
- .456 – **Joe Sewell**, 1923
- .455 – **Mookie Betts**, 2023

Betts' 1.355 OPS also ranks 12th all-time, as follows:

- 1.615 – **Barry Bonds**, 2004
- 1.581 – **Barry Bonds**, 2002
- 1.507 – **Babe Ruth**, 1921
- 1.466 – **Rogers Hornsby**, 1924
- 1.435 – **Babe Ruth**, 1923

- 1.423 – Barry Bonds, 2001
- 1.405 – **Sammy Sosa**, 2001
- 1.401 – **Harry Heilmann**, 1927
- 1.395 – **Todd Helton**, 2000
- 1.379 – **Edwin Encarnacion**, 2015
- 1.374 – **Carl Everett**, 1999
- 1.355 – Mookie Betts, 2023

Mookie created 50 runs in August, which makes it the 34th most productive month in baseball history.

BRYCE HARPER

He's 30 years old. He owns two MVP trophies. He just bashed his 300th homer. He's seven hits away from 1,500 — and could get there before the Phillies finish their next road trip. And his career OPS+ is a superstar-ish 143.

Now here's every player in history who could say all that: 300 homers ... 1,500 hits ... 143 OPS+ or better ... and at least two MVP awards ... by their age-30 season:

- **Mickey Mantle**
- **Mike Trout**
- **Albert Pujols**
- **Jimmie Foxx**
- **Miguel Cabrera**
- **Frank Robinson**
- **Alex Rodriguez**
- Bryce Harper

So that's seven players in the history of the sport — plus Harper. Three — Mantle, Foxx and Robinson — are Hall of Famers. Three more — Trout, Pujols and Miggy — are the "lockiest" of lock Hall of Famers who aren't on the ballot yet. And the seventh is A-Rod, who A-Rodded is way out of Cooperstown because it's just a gift he has.

Even the group of retired players who meet those standards but had "only" one MVP by their age-30 season is a collection of Cooperstown legends: **Willie Mays, Henry Aaron, Vlad Guerrero and Ken Griffey Jr.**

DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE

60-double seasons, AL/NL history

1. **Earl Webb**, BOS, 1931: 67
- 2-T. **Joe Medwick**, STL, 1936: 64
- 2-T. **George Burns**, CLE, 1926: 64
4. **Hank Greenberg**, DET, 1934: 63
5. **Paul Waner**, PIT, 1932: 62
6. **Charlie Gehringer**, DET, 1936: 60

Of those six players, four (Gehringer, Greenberg, Medwick, Waner) are in the Hall of Fame, and if you are really the company you keep, one active Major Leaguer could be adding another item to his already long resume.

Earl Webb had an odd season. A journeyman, his season with the Red Sox set the doubles record.

Earl Webb in 1931: 67 doubles.

Earl Webb in the 499 other games he played: 88 doubles.

Freddie Freeman hit his 50th double of the 2023 season -- this a year after he led all of baseball with 47 -- on Sunday, and given his constant presence in the Dodgers' lineup, 60 should be well within reach.

Medwick nearly made it back-to-back 60-double seasons in 1937 before ultimately ending the year with 56. **George Kell**, then with the Tigers, matched that total in 1950. After Kell's attempt, it'd be 49 years before another player hit 55 doubles in a single season, but **Craig Biggio**, who ended the drought with his 56 doubles in 1999, kicked off a new era of near-misses.

Here are those 10 close calls -- limited to seasons of 55+ doubles -- since 1999.

Nick Castellanos, 2019: 58

2019 Castellanos, better known for being one of the best Deadline acquisitions in recent memory, is also the most recent player to make a strong push for 60 doubles. Interestingly, Castellanos had never led either league in doubles before 2019 and hasn't topped 40 since.

José Ramírez, 2017: 56

The prospect of a 60-double season probably wasn't top of mind for Ramírez, or most people watching him, while he was putting together a 2017 season that included his first All-Star selection alongside the first of his top-three finishes in AL MVP voting.

Matt Carpenter, 2013: 55

Carpenter had his near-miss in his first full Major League season in which he also led MLB in hits and runs scored and finished 4th in NL MVP voting.

Brian Roberts, 2009: 56

2009 was Roberts' third and final 50-double season, making him one of just five players in the Modern Era with at least three such seasons (**Tris Speaker, Albert Pujols, Stan Musial**, Waner).

Garret Anderson, 2002: 56

Anderson, though he's one of just 64 players in AL/NL history with 500 career doubles -- and the Angels' franchise leader with 489 -- only led the league in doubles twice, and had to share the honor when he hit 56 in 2002.

Nomar Garciaparra, 2002: 56

Garciaparra, still just 28, had already led the AL in triples in 1997 and won two batting titles (1999-2000) before putting up his 56 doubles in 2002.

Lance Berkman, 2001: 55

Berkman had his 55-double season in his first full Major League season, ending the year with a frantic run of 13 doubles in his last 21 games.

Carlos Delgado, 2000: 57

Delgado's 2000 season is remembered less for his doubles output on account of his body of work -- he hit .344/.470/.664 with 41 home runs, earning his first All-Star selection and finishing 4th in AL MVP voting.

Todd Helton, 2000: 59

Of all the close calls on this list, Helton's 2000 season stands as the best -- or worst, depending on your perspective -- and was the first of two seasons (2001) in which he topped 100 extra-base hits, making him one of just 12 players to record such a season in AL/NL history.

Craig Biggio, 1999: 56

Biggio, who ranks sixth in AL/NL history with 668 career doubles, was the first player to put up a season of 55+ doubles since 1950, had already led baseball in doubles the year before (51).

The record for most career doubles--Hall of Famer Tris Speaker (792 doubles over 22 seasons).

Freeman needs 17 doubles to get the season record. Months with 17 or more doubles since 1980:

- **Carlos Delgado**, 19, July 2000
- **Mark Grace**, 19, June 1995
- **George Brett**, 18, July 1980

- **Todd Helton**, 18, August 2000
- **Frank Thomas**, Sept. 1992
- **John Olerud**, 17, June 1993
- **Mike Sweeney**, May, 2001
- **Kevin Millar**, 17, Sept/Oct. 2002
- **Jimmy Rollins**, 17, September 2005
- **Brian Roberts**, 17, June 2008
- **Joey Votto**, Sept. 2009
- **Freddie Freeman**, 17, May 2023

Then there is 60 doubles-30 Home Runs club. The Dodgers will roll into September with Freeman only nine doubles and five home runs away from 60-30. here are the closest brushes with the 60-30 Club in NL/AL history:

Most homers by a 60-double man? Hank Greenberg (26 homers, 63 doubles in 1934) is the only hitter who has even reached *20 home runs* and 60 doubles.

Most doubles by a 30-homer man? Chuck Klein (in 1930) and **Todd Helton** (2000) both made it to 59 doubles — with 40 and 42 homers, respectively. Freeman is already keeping them company, as the only players in history to reach 50 doubles and 25 homers before September.

With **Freddie Freeman** chasing **Luis Arraez** for the NL batting lead after Arraez was hitting over .400 (and leading Freeman by 85 points) as late as June 24.

We're now in Season No. 82 since **Ted Williams** hit .406 in 1941. Since then, only two men have been at .400 on June 24 or later and *not* won a batting title. And one of them had an excellent excuse!

Larry Walker, 1997: On one hand, thanks to the miracle of 1990s Coors Field, Walker was still over .400 in mid-July. On the other hand, *so was a guy named Tony Gwynn*. So that meant one of them was not going to lead the league. And that someone was Walker. Walker finished at .366, but Gwynn hit .372. No shame in that!

Tommy Holmes, 1945: Holmes kept his average over .400 for the Braves through July 18. But he wound up sliding to .352 — and ended up three points behind the Cubs' **Phil Cavarretta**.

Shohei Ohtani entered September needing only six home runs and two triples to knock on the door of the 50-10 Club (50 homers, 10 triples). Only been done twice:

Babe Ruth: 59 HR, 16 triples in 1921

Willie Mays: 51 HR, 13 triples in 1955

With a hurricane approaching Dodgers, Angels, Giants and Padres all hosted double headers. Add a single game in Oakland and 7 games in the state of California on one day set a record for most games in a state on the same day.

And in one of those doubleheaders **Nolan Schanuel** of the Angels set a record. Three months after being drafted Schanuel reached base 8 times in one day—never been done in the same season a player was drafted. The previous record was five, by **J.D. Drew** (Sept. 15, 1998) and (the other) **Dave Roberts** (Aug. 1, 1972).

There is trivia like our weekly challenge—I try to give you enough info to have a fighting chance. And then there is trivia that either you know it or you don't. **Marucs Thames** batting for the Yankees on June 10, 2002 was the most recent player to hit his first career HR off a pitcher who later made the Hall of Fame. **Randy Johnson**.

Guardians pitcher **Tanner Bibee** faced a different team in every one *of his first 19 starts*.

Tigers rookie **Parker Meadows** hit a 3 run walk-off HR for his first 3 MLB RBIs. In the 103 years since RBIs became a stat, no player had ever hit a walk-off three-run homer (or slam) for his first career RBIs.

His brother, **Austin Meadows**, has spent six seasons in the big leagues ... and even had a 33-homer season (for the 2019 Rays). Never hit a walk-off home run.

Yuli Gurriel of the Marlins hit an inside the park HR in April. Then none in MLB for three months. Then:

Aug. 14: Bobby Witt Jr. inside-the-park homer for the Royals.

Aug. 16: Luke Raley of the Rays hits one in San Francisco.

Aug. 20: Jorge Mateo of the Orioles has an inside-the-parker to end a three-month homerless drought.

Aug. 21: Bryce Harper does it in San Francisco.

Four in one week.

GOOD MONTHS

The Orioles exceeded last season's 83 wins before September 1.

The Dodgers had a 24 win August. The 24 wins in one month is the most by the Dodgers since moving to Los Angeles.

The Mariners won a franchise record 21 games in August. Most wins in a single month, better than even the 116-win 2001 team. The Mariners also won 6 straight series and 11 of 12.

What will the Mets do about **Pete Alonso**? His contract runs through next season.

Miguel Cabrera holds the record for average annual value for a first baseman at \$31 million, followed by **Freddie Freeman** (\$27 million) and **Paul Goldschmidt** (\$26 million). **Matt Olson** signed an eight-year, \$168 million deal (\$21 million AAV) after being traded to the Braves last winter, though he was two years away from free agency as opposed to Alonso, who is one. Olson was two weeks shy of his 29th birthday when he signed his extension, while Alonso turns 29 this December and will be entering his age-30 season if he reaches free agency.

Alonso's prodigious power – he has 185 home runs in 653 career games, averaging more than 40 home runs per year in his four full seasons – should line him up for a hefty payday, but is he looking for something between Olson and Freeman, or is he targeting a deal in the \$30 million-plus range, which would potentially give him the highest AAV for a first baseman in history?



There have been only six pennant-winning homers; **Chris Chambliss'** blast off the Royals' **Mark Littell** was the second (your humble editor was there), following **Bobby Thomson's** "[Shot Heard 'Round the World](#)" for the 1951 Giants. Chambliss' homer set off a wild celebration at Yankee Stadium, sending the Yankees on to the World Series against the Reds.

Baseball didn't see another pennant-winning homer until **Aaron Boone's** drive off Boston's **Tim Wakefield** in the 2003 ALCS; in subsequent seasons, **Magglio Ordonez** (2006), **Travis Ishikawa** (2014) and **Jose Altuve** (2019) would join the list.

Julio Rodríguez also extended his hit streak to 13 games dating back to Aug. 13, over which he's 32-for-62 with 13 runs scored, six doubles, five homers, 21 RBIs, four walks and eight stolen bases, good for a slash line of .516/.552/.855 (1.407 OPS). And with four hits on Monday, Rodríguez brought his season total to 153, passing Toronto's **Bo Bichette** for the AL lead. Rodríguez also has 28 hits in 10 games, the most for any player since **Kenny Lofton** in 1997.

Julio Rodríguez's home run in the fourth inning of the Mariners' win over the A's. It was his third straight game with a homer and his fifth four-hit game in his last 10.

Rodríguez's five four-hit games are the most by a player in a 10-game span since 1900, per Elias. His five four-hit games in August tied for the second-most in a calendar month since 1901, behind May 1921 **Ty Cobb's** six. Rodríguez's five four-hit games were the most in a calendar month since August 1938 **Zeke Bonura** also had five.

Jose Altuve recorded the franchise's first cycle -- a single, double, triple and home run in the same game -- in 10 years in Houston's 13-5 win over the Red Sox at Fenway Park.

Altuve doubled in his second at-bat in the third inning, singled in the fifth inning and hit a two-run triple in the sixth. After popping out in the seventh, he blasted his 10th homer of the season, sailing a pitch from **Kyle Barraclough** over the Green Monster to complete the cycle. It was Houston's first cycle since **Brandon Barnes** on July 19, 2013.

Can You name the six switch-hitting Hall of Famers (non-pitchers) who've been inducted this century-- **Ozzie Smith, Eddie Murray, Roberto Alomar, Tim Lincecum, Chipper Jones, Ted Simmons** (Murray and Smith were teammates at Locke High School in Los Angeles).

Royce Lewis became the first player in Twins history to hit grand slams in consecutive games -- a feat that actually occurred elsewhere in the Majors earlier this month by **Luis Urías** of the Red Sox.

A former No. 1 overall pick, Lewis has hit three grand slams among his first 10 career home runs, becoming the 10th player in AL/NL history to do so, and the first since **Chris Taylor** did so for the Dodgers in 2016-17. the other grand slam before that? Cleveland is all too familiar with that one, too. That was actually Lewis' first career homer, back on May 13, 2022, when he capped a nine-run fifth inning with a slam to left field off reliever **Bryan Shaw**.

Although not all of Lewis' clutch hits are quite so explosive, he does really have a knack for the moment. Monday's grand slam improved his slash line to .383/.442/.723 for a 1.165 OPS in his career with runners in scoring position, the highest in Twins history among players to take at least 50 plate appearances in such situations.

Speed vs. speed: Elly De La Cruz made a 99.7 mph throw to the plate on Sunday to thwart **Corbin Carroll's** bid at an inside-the-park home run. Carroll had elite, 30.4 ft/sec sprint speed on the play. De La Cruz's throw was the second-fastest tracked assist by an infielder tracked by Statcast (since 2015), and he has the fastest, too (7/20/23: 99.8 mph). He now has eight 95.0+ mph assists as an infielder, twice as many as anyone else in a career under Statcast (**Fernando Tatis Jr.**: 4).

FROM DAN SHAUGHNESSY IN THE BOSTON GLOBE

Sometime in September, a panel of veteran baseball writers will produce an eight-person ballot consisting of executives, managers, and umpires for consideration for the 2024 class at the Baseball Hall of Fame. Former Red Sox CEO Larry Lucchino and present Dodgers CEO/president Stan Kasten are under consideration. Both have impressive credentials.

Lucchino ran the Orioles and Padres before coming to Boston, and the Sox front office has been toothless since Lucchino was booted to the curb in 2015. Kasten ran the Atlanta Braves and Washington Nationals before taking over the Dodgers.

A common denominator for these two is architect Janet Marie Smith, who changed baseball with Lucchino when Camden Yards was built 30 years ago. Smith also renovated Fenway Park and Dodger Stadium. She deserves Hall consideration along with Lucchino and Kasten. If the ballot produces any new Hall of Famers, they will be announced at the Baseball Winter Meetings in Nashville in December.

Dwight Gooden and Darryl Strawberry will have their numbers retired by the Mets next season. Mets with their numbers already retired include **Casey Stengel, Gil Hodges, Tom Seaver, Willie Mays, Jerry Koosman, Mike Piazza, and Keith Hernandez.**

Speaking of Gooden, we learned this past week that he almost wound up throwing the final pitch of the 1986 Mets World Series win over the Red Sox. On a show with two New York Post reporters, Gooden told the hosts that if **Marty Barrett** had reached against **Jesse Orosco** with two out in the ninth of Game 7 (Mets leading, 8-5), Mets manager **Davey Johnson** planned to bring Gooden into the game to face **Jim Rice or Bill Buckner**. "I was actually warming up in the bullpen," said Gooden. Love this stuff. Thirty-seven years later we are still learning stuff about Games 6 and 7.

Kudos to Sean McDonough for calling out the Red Sox after **Mookie Betts's** Sunday homer at Fenway. McDonough told the WEEI audience: "It's a trade that can never be defended and a stain that will never be erased, the trade of Mookie Betts by the Red Sox." Like **Dennis Eckersley** and the late **Jerry Remy**, McDonough speaks the truth on broadcasts. Meanwhile, we still hear the phony narrative that Betts "was never going to stay here anyway" — a handy excuse for a big-market ball club that charges the highest prices in baseball but would not pay market value to keep its brightest star.

The Yankees have finished last in only two seasons during the Mets' entire existence (1990 and 1966). This year they both have a shot at finishing last.

On June 8 the Cubs were 10 games under .500 (26-36). They are currently number two NL wild card. How many teams have ever been 10 under .500 that late and wound up playing postseason games?

Wild-card era (1995-2023): It's just the 2022 Mariners (10 under on June 19).

Division-play era (1969-94): Only three teams make this group — Steve Balboni's 1984 Royals (10 under on July 19), **Manny Sanguillen's** 1974 Pirates (June 24) and **Rusty Staub's** 1973 Mets (Aug. 30).

World Series era (1903-1968): This was a lot harder to do when the lone "round" of the postseason was the World Series. Nevertheless, the only team to make this mad scramble back then was **Rabbit Maranville's** fabled 1914 "Miracle" Braves.

On July 19 the Mariners were 10 games out of first place. the Mariners have gone a ridiculous 29-9 since July 19. And being the positive thinkers we are around here, let's focus on them, OK?

The AL West is going to be a wild September ride. But if the Mariners can survive it and end up in first place, they would join this esteemed group of teams that trailed by 10-plus games on July 19 or later and still finished first:

Wild-card era: It's only **Jay Buhner's** 1995 Mariners (10 1/2 out on Aug. 25!) and **Michael Cuddyer's** 2006 Twins (10 1/2 out on Aug. 7).

Division-play era: There was **Bucky Bleeping Dent's** 1978 Yankees (14 behind the Red Sox on July 19!), **Rusty Staub's** double-dipping 1973 Mets again (10 1/2 out on Aug. 6) and **Cleon Jones' 1969 Mets** (10 back on Aug. 14).

World Series era: five teams are on this list before division play came along: **Bob Gibson's** 1964 Cardinals (10 behind the Phillies on Aug. 24), **Bobby Thomson's** storied 1951 Giants (13 out as late as Aug. 11), **Stan Musial's** 1942 Cardinals (10 back on Aug. 5), **Showboat Fisher's** 1930 Cardinals (11 out on Aug. 9) and those Miracle Braves again (10 behind on July 30, 1914).

But there's no precedent for a team to make the 10 Out and 10 Under clubs *in back-to-back years*. So clearly, nobody is a bigger believer in reincarnation than these Mariners.

Bobby Witt Jr. is at the forefront of the greatest era of dynamic young players the game has ever seen—just in time, as the new rules encourage athleticism and base stealing. Witt recently reached 40 homers and 40 steals through his first 260 games. That makes six active players to reach 40-40 so quickly: **Mike Trout, Ronald Acuña Jr., Fernando Tatis Jr., Jazz Chisholm Jr., Julio Rodríguez** and Witt.

That's more in the past dozen years *than in the previous 110 years* (five: **Bobby Bonds, Barry Bonds, Darryl Strawberry, Eric Davis and Kal Daniels**).

He is off to a historic start when it comes to combining power and speed. Through 279 career games, Witt has 46 home runs and 68 stolen bases. Only four other players reached those thresholds at the same point: Bobby and Barry Bonds, Davis and Trout.

With four more home runs, Witt will become the fifth-youngest 30-30 player in history. And he could join **Willie Mays** (1957) and **Jimmy Rollins** (2007) as the only 30-30 players to lead the league in triples.

Witt is one of the top six players born in 2000 or later as ranked by WAR, joining **Wander Franco, Rodríguez, Michael Harris II, Carroll and Henderson**. (Other dynamic players behind them include shortstops **De La Cruz, CJ Abrams, Anthony Volpe and Ezequiel Tovar**.)

Of the top six young stars, all but Witt and Henderson are signed to long-term deals. The price of waiting on players like this is much higher than the risk of gaining team control into what would be their free-agent years.

Best Players Born This Century

	<u>WAR</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>HR</u>	<u>SB</u>	<u>TB</u>	<u>OPS</u>	<u>Contract</u>
Franco	11.6	22.180	265	30	40	471	.795	11 years, \$182M
Rodríguez	11.2	22.241	257	51	60	510	.833	7 years, \$119.3M
Harris	7.7	22.174	229	31	39	382	.818	8 years, \$72M
Carroll	5.9	23.007	158	26	42	285	.874	8 years, \$111M
Henderson	5.4	22.060	153	26	8	255	.801	1 years, \$723,000
Witt	5.0	23.075	279	46	68	517	.768	1 years, \$746,000

In the Red Sox' 8-5 victory over Los Angeles on Saturday, **Alex Verdugo** led off with a home run. Impressive in its own right for the lefthanded hitter, considering it came against southpaw **Julio Urias**, the line drive he laced over Mookie Betts's head into the Dodgers' bullpen marked the third straight game Verdugo's led off the game with a home run. No other Red Sox player, not even Betts, has pulled off that feat.

And just two others in baseball history — **Ronald Acuna Jr. and Brady Anderson** — have managed to do it.

With Verdugo struggling entering Saturday against lefthanded pitching — zero homers, a .230 batting average and .621 OPS vs. 11 homers, .302 batting average and .859 OPS against righties — the 27-year-old checked in with Cora after Friday night's game to ask about Saturday with Urias on the mound.

BRAVES, BRAVES AND MORE BRAVES

Ronald Acuña Jr. stole two bases in Monday night's win over the Rockies, bringing his season total to 61. That makes him **the first player in six years to steal at least 60 bases in a season**— and there's still a month left to play.

The last player with 60 steals was **Dee Strange-Gordon** in 2017. **Acuña could very well finish with more than 70**, a plateau that hasn't been reached since **Jacoby Ellsbury** in '09. In fact, Acuña is on pace to finish the season with 76 steals. In the past 30 years, only two players have stolen 75 bases in a single season: **Kenny Lofton** in 1996 and **José Reyes** in 2007. No one has reached 80 since **Vince Coleman** in 1988.

Then Acuña hit his 30th home run Thursday too become the first player in MLB history to have 30 homers and 60 steals in a season (the same day he stole his 62nd base and got married).

Acuña's historic season is another example of MLB's new rules. Bigger bases and a limit on the number of times pitchers are allowed to step off the rubber were intended to make it easier for players to steal bases. And it's worked. Stolen base attempts are way up this year, from 0.68 per game per team last season to 0.88, and the stolen base success rate has risen by almost 5%. Acuña has been eager to take advantage of the new rules from the beginning. On Opening Day, he got so excited when he realized that Nationals starter **Patrick Corbin** had already used his two pickoff attempts that he stumbled when trying to take off on the next pitch.

Acuña's power-speed combo has made him a leading candidate for the NL MVP award. While there are other strong contenders (such as **Mookie Betts**, **Freddie Freeman** and Acuña's teammate **Matt Olson**, the NL's home run leader), Acuña's baserunning makes a compelling case. **He's leading the majors in steals by a wide margin**, 10 ahead of A's outfielder **Esteury Ruiz** and 21 ahead of Diamondbacks rookie **Corbin Carroll** in third place. **He also leads the majors in runs scored and on-base percentage.** Two years removed from a torn ACL, Acuña is better than ever and a huge reason why the Braves have the best record in the majors.

Before Acuña Jr. and Carroll this season the last player with at least 20 home runs and 40 stolen bases in a season--**Jonathan Villar** (24 HR, 40 SB for the Orioles in 2019).

Acuña Jr. became the 15th player in AL/NL history to record 30+ home runs and 40+ steals in a season after hitting his 30th HR of 2023. But it doesn't end there. He became the third player ever with 30+ HRs and 50+ steals in a single season, and the first player ever with 30+ HRs and 60+ steals in a season.

Player	HR	SB	Season
Ronald Acuña Jr.	30	62	2023
Mike Trout	30	49	2012
Matt Kemp	39	40	2011
Jimmy Rollins	30	41	2007
Alfonso Soriano	46	41	2006
Bobby Abreu	30	40	2004
Carlos Beltrán	38	42	2004
Vladimir Guerrero	39	40	2002
Alfonso Soriano	39	41	2002
Álex Rodríguez	42	46	1998
Barry Bonds	42	40	1996
Barry Bonds	33	52	1990
Howard Johnson	36	41	1989

Player	HR	SB	Season
José Canseco	42	40	1988
Eric Davis	37	50	1987
Bobby Bonds	31	43	1978
Bobby Bonds	37	41	1977
Bobby Bonds	39	43	1973
Bobby Bonds	32	45	1969
Willie Mays	36	40	1956

(Conseco became the first 40-40 player in 1988.)

Nobody who has hit 50 home runs has ever stolen even 25 bases — Rodriguez (54/24, 2007) and **Willie Mays** (51/24, 1955) came the closest. But **Shohei Ohtani** might have a shot this year; he's at 44 home runs and 19 stolen bases.

Before Thursday, the most homers hit in a 60-steals season was 28, by **Rickey Henderson** in 1986 (87 stolen bases) and Henderson again in 1990 (65). And the most stolen bases with at least 30 homers was 52, by **Barry Bonds** in 1990 (33 HRs).

Acuña was the first player in AL/NL history with at least 20 home runs and 50 stolen bases before August in a season.

Acuña had 41 homers and 37 stolen bases in 2019, meaning that this is his *second* 30-30 season. He's the first player with two such campaigns through his age-25 season, and he's one of 14 players with multiple such seasons. Father-son combination Bobby and Barry Bonds are tied for the most career 30-30 seasons, with five each.

He's the second Braves player with two career 30-30 seasons, and again, he's only 25 years old. He joins **Ron Gant**, who did so in 1990 and '91.

Acuña's 62 stolen bases are already the second-most by a Braves player since 1900. Setting that modern-era franchise record seems to be within reach, too. It currently belongs to **Otis Nixon**, who recorded 72 in 1991.

Acuña leads the Majors in stolen bases and is in a tight race with Los Angeles' **Freddie Freeman** and **Mookie Betts** for the most total bases in the National League. There have been just 11 instances of a player leading his league in both since 1900, accomplished by five players: **Trea Turner** (2021), **Snuffy Stirnweiss** (1945), **Chuck Klein** (1932), **Ty Cobb** (1917, '15, '11, '09 and '07) and **Honus Wagner** (1908, '07 and '04).

Acuña has scored 37 runs in the first inning this season. That's eight shy of tying the most first-inning runs since 1901, held at 45 by **Lenny Dykstra** (1993) and Henderson (1985).

Acuña has scored 120 runs this season and is on pace for 146. That would be the most runs scored out of the leadoff spot in a season since 1900 -- by one run. That record is held by **Craig Biggio** (1997) and Henderson (1985), at 145 each.

His average home run distance of 422 feet is tied with **Shohei Ohtani** for longest in MLB this season among players with at least 15. And his 108.8 mph average exit velocity on home runs is third, behind only **Giancarlo Stanton** (110.3 mph) and Ohtani (109.1 mph) among that same group this season.

Home runs by the Braves entering September: 253

Lead over the next-closest team (the Dodgers): 41

Only one team in the last 50 years has led the majors in home runs by 40 or more. That was **José Bautista's** 2010 Blue Jays (plus-46). No NL team has done it since **Henry Aaron's** 1973 Braves (plus-45).

The Braves MLB-leading 250 homers are 40-plus more than any other club. 250 is a new franchise record. They are on pace to hit 306 (306.8 to be precise) homers, which one short of the MLB record set by the 2019 Twins.

Matt Olson (43), **Marcell Ozuna** (31) and **Austin Riley** (31) and Acuña have all reached the 30-homer mark and **Ozzie Albies** (28) could soon join them. If so, the Braves would join the 2019 Twins as the only teams to have five players reach 30-plus homers in the same season.

These Braves employ the NL leader in homers (Matt Olson, with 43). But all their other mashers have made so many home run trots, they would nearly top their league in homers *even if the home run leader had zero!*

And how many teams in NL/AL history have ever pulled off that feat for a full season? I asked the awesome Kenny Jackelen of Baseball Reference. He came up with the super-fun list below.

Just one team has done it *in the last six decades*. Only three teams have done it *in the last 75 seasons*. The **Babe Ruth/Lou Gehrig** Yankees did it four times, though. So here is every team since Ruth/Gehrig.

1997 Rockies 236 65 **Larry Walker** (49)

1963 Giants 197 58 **Willie McCovey** (44)

1960 Yankees 193 43 **Mickey Mantle** (40)
 1948 Giants 164 56 **Johnny Mize** (40)
 1947 Giants 221 65 Johnny Mize (51)
 1944 Yankees 96 24 **Nick Etten** (22)
 1942 Giants 109 34 **Mel Ott** (30)

The Braves have scored a whopping 219 more runs than their opponents through Sunday. They won't take the record from the 1884 St. Louis Maroons (plus-458), but they have an outside shot at the plus-300 the Mariners put up that year they won 116, which was itself the third-best run differential in the free agency era. The Braves this season are followed by the Rays (plus-174), Rangers (plus-172) and Dodgers (plus-152).

On Thursday afternoon, **Anthony Volpe** became the first rookie in Yankees history -- and the 15th in AL/NL history -- to notch a 20-20 season (20 home runs and 20 steals) by swatting a three-run homer in New York's 4-3 loss to the Tigers in 10 innings at Comerica Park.

Volpe is the second rookie this season to hit the 20-20 mark, joining the D-backs' **Corbin Carroll**. The only other seasons in which multiple rookies reached that milestone came in 2022 (Seattle's **Julio Rodríguez** and Kansas City's **Bobby Witt Jr.**) and 1987 (Boston's **Ellis Burks** and California's **Devon White**).

Kyle Harrison Makes Giants History!

On Monday night, Giants rookie **Kyle Harrison** struck out 11 batters over 6.1 IP in his second career start. He is the youngest Giants player since **Christy Mathewson** in 1902 to strike out 11+ batters over 6.1+ shutout innings.

Rk	Player	SO	ER	IP	Date	Age ▲
1	Christy Mathewson	11	0	9.0	1902-07-24	21-346
2	Kyle Harrison	11	0	6.1	2023-08-28	22-016
3	Madison Bumgarner	11	0	8.0	2011-08-31	22-030
4	Juan Marichal	12	0	9.0	1960-07-19	22-273
5	Tim Lincecum	12	0	7.0	2007-07-01	23-016

Rk	Player	SO	ER	IP	Date	Age ▲
6	Shawn Estes	11	0	7.0	1996-07-13	23-146
7	Juan Marichal	11	0	9.0	1961-08-02	23-286
8	Steve Stone	11	0	9.0	1971-06-20 (2)	23-341

18 players have hit four home runs in a game, most recently the Dodgers' **J.D. Martinez** in 2017. **Lou Gehrig** was the only Yankees player ever to do so, on June 3, 1932 against the Athletics.

That day, Gehrig went deep in the first, fourth, fifth and seventh innings of a 20-13 Yankees victory at Philadelphia's Shibe Park.

Most grand slams in a season

Don Mattingly	6	`1987 Yankees
Travis Hafner	6	2006 Indians
Ernie Banks	5	1955 Cubs
Albert Pujols	5	2009 Cards

Week of August 14, 2002 **Bernie Williams** passed **Don Mattingly** on the team's career HR list, **Tony Lazerri** on the career hits list and **Mickey Mantle** on the career doubles list.

Williams (2336 hits) is 4th behind **Derek Jeter** (3465), **Lou Gehrig** (2721) and **Babe Ruth** (2518).

Williams (287 HRs) is 7th on the Yankees HR list behind Ruth (659 as a Yankee), Mantle (536), Gehrig (493), **Joe DiMaggio (361)**, **Yogi Berra (358)** and **Arod (351)**.

Williams (449 doubles) is 3rd behind Jeter (544) and Gehrig (534).

SO CLOSE AND YET SO FAR AWAY

When the legendary **Yogi Berra** famously quipped, "It ain't over 'til it's over," he wasn't talking specifically about no-hitters. But the sentiment fits.

For a pitcher authoring a no-hit bid, the job isn't done until the final out is recorded, and every batter presents a dangerous obstacle on the way to making history. All it takes is a well-placed blooper or a ground ball with eyes to derail that quest at the last moment.

Over the years, many pitchers have experienced the agony of losing a no-hitter on the final out. Here is a breakdown of the last 10 times a pitcher has given up his first hit with two outs in the ninth inning, plus some other notable examples from baseball history.

Aug. 29, 2023: Alex Cobb, Giants vs. Reds

*First hit: **Spencer Steer***

Cobb was oh-so-close to the first Giants no-hitter since **Chris Heston** tossed one in 2015. After walking the second batter of the ninth inning, Cobb got to an 0-1 count with two outs against Steer, who drilled an RBI double that just got over right fielder **Luis Matos**' head. To Cobb's credit -- and the Giants -- the right-hander stayed in to finish off a 131-pitch complete game. It was a dominant effort for Cobb, who rode his great splitter by throwing it a whopping 83 times, the most in a single start by a pitcher in the pitch-tracking era (since 2008). Cobb generated 18 whiffs on that splitter, tied for the second-most in that same span behind only **Kevin Gausman** (20 whiffs).

Sept. 3, 2022: Dylan Cease, White Sox vs. Twins

*First hit: **Luis Arraez***

A no-hitter would have been the cherry on top of an incredible breakout season for Cease -- it also would have given the White Sox a no-no in three straight seasons. That this performance came against a division rival in a key moment of the 2022 season was just a bonus. Cease hadn't seemed to break a sweat tearing through the Twins' lineup, sitting at 96 pitches with two outs in the ninth. Unfortunately for the right-hander, the lineup then turned over for a fourth time, giving Arraez -- whose .318 batting average had him leading the American League -- another shot to end the bid. Arraez sent a 1-1 slider over the head of second baseman **Romy Gonzalez** and into shallow right field, and Cease ended up settling for a (still very impressive) one-hit shutout.

June 14, 2022: Miles Mikolas, Cardinals vs. Pirates

*First hit: **Cal Mitchell***

For 8 2/3 innings, it appeared that Mikolas was going to spin one of baseball's best narratives. Ten years after his debut, having spent three seasons pitching in Japan in the middle of his career and dealing with a series of arm injuries that severely limited his playing time from 2020-'21, he was poised to throw a no-hitter. It would have been just as meaningful for his club -- it had been nearly 21 years since a Cardinals pitcher had achieved such a feat. Mikolas had already put in a monumental effort and was just a strike away from history when he threw his

129th pitch, a well-placed curveball, to Pirates rookie **Cal Mitchell**, who sent a line drive over the head of Gold Glove center fielder **Harrison Bader** to stop the no-no in its tracks.

July 29, 2018: Sean Newcomb, Braves vs. Dodgers

*First hit: **Chris Taylor***

The Braves southpaw had retired 26 of the first 27 Dodgers hitters he faced, permitting only a walk while carrying a bid for the franchise's 15th no-hitter right to the precipice. Newcomb's effort was monumental; the 133 pitches he had thrown marked the most hurled by anyone since **Mike Fiers** tossed 134 while completing a no-hitter in 2015. Newcomb racked up eight strikeouts while challenging the Dodgers with a fastball on 76 percent of his pitches, but Taylor was just able to turn pitch No. 134 -- another heater -- into a ground-ball single through the left side of the infield, past diving third baseman **Johan Camargo**.

Sept. 17, 2017: Matthew Boyd, Tigers vs. White Sox

*First hit: **Tim Anderson***

At the time, Boyd didn't seem like a prime candidate to nearly throw a no-hitter; he entered his start at Comerica Park with a 5.75 ERA in 114 1/3 innings. The last pitcher to post a no-hitter with an ERA higher than that was **Francisco Liriano**, with a 9.13 ERA in April 2011.

Despite barreled balls off the bats of **Jose Abreu** and **Matt Davidson** during the start, Boyd kept the White Sox out of the hit column until Anderson stepped to the plate. Boyd fell behind 2-0, then threw a slider to the outside corner that Anderson belted into the right-center gap for a double.

Aug. 25, 2016: Matt Moore, Giants at Dodgers

*First hit: **Corey Seager***

Making just his fifth start with the Giants after being acquired from the Rays at the 2016 non-waiver Trade Deadline, Moore was one batter away from no-hitting the rival Dodgers at Dodger Stadium.

Unfortunately for Moore, that batter was Seager, on his bobblehead night. Moore was also likely gassed at that point, having thrown 130 pitches. While it wasn't the prettiest hit, Seager dropped a 1-1 fastball into right field for a bloop single and the crowd went wild.

July 1, 2015: Carlos Carrasco, Indians at Rays

*First hit: **Joey Butler***

Carrasco experienced double heartbreak at the hands of Butler that night, first losing his perfect game on a walk to Butler in the seventh inning, then yielding a two-strike single to him with an out to go in the ninth.

That wasn't the only difficulty Carrasco had run into during the ninth, as he had also walked and hit a batter. Carrasco would later call Butler his teammate when the Indians picked him up on waivers the following offseason.

May 17, 2015: Shelby Miller, Braves at Marlins

*First hit: **Justin Bour***

There was a reason the D-backs paid a premium in prospects to acquire Miller from the Braves after the 2015 season, and it was on full display when Miller faced the minimum through the game's first 26 batters. A leadoff walk in the second inning had been later erased on a double play.

Miller had been so dominant, he faced Bour for the game's final out with his pitch count at only 88. Unfortunately, Bour's first-pitch swing connected for a ground-ball single up the middle to end Miller's bid. Miller ended the game five pitches later, enough to register his second Maddux in three games.

Sept. 24, 2013: Michael Wacha, Cardinals vs. Nationals

*First hit: **Ryan Zimmerman***

Wacha rose to fame with his performance as a rookie in the 2013 playoffs, but his final start of the regular season that year wasn't too shabby either.

Fifteen months after being taken 19th overall in the '12 MLB Draft, Wacha dominated the Nationals for 8 2/3 innings. He was pretty dominant against Zimmerman as well, forcing a weak chopper up the middle.

Wacha reached for the ball, but his glove barely tipped it. Shortstop **Pete Kozma** barehanded the ball and made a strong throw to first, but not in time to take away Zimmerman's infield single.

Sept. 6, 2013: Yusmeiro Petit, Giants vs. D-backs (perfect game)

*First hit: **Eric Chavez***

Petit was recalled in August to replace an injured **Matt Cain** in the Giants' rotation and he came within inches of perfection in his third start, one year after Cain had done it in June 2012.

Petit cruised against the D-backs until Chavez came to the plate. After five pitches, including a 2-2 curveball that was close enough to a strike that AT&T Park started cheering, the veteran Chavez dropped a single into right field just out of the reach of **Hunter Pence**. Petit still recorded the only shutout of his career, but just missed his shot at history.

Other famous no-hit bids lost with two outs in the ninth

June 2, 2010: Armando Galarraga, Detroit vs. Cleveland (perfect game)

*First hit: **Jason Donald***

In perhaps the most controversial call ever in the regular season, Galarraga lost his perfect game on a missed call by umpire **Jim Joyce**, who ruled Donald beat **Miguel Cabrera's** throw to first base.

Sept. 2, 2001: Mike Mussina, Yankees at Red Sox

*First hit: **Carl Everett***

Moose was one pitch away from a perfect game, against the rival Red Sox, at Fenway Park. He had retired the first 26 batters he faced, and had a 1-2 count on Everett before Everett lined a single to left field.

Sept. 27, 1998: Roy Halladay, Blue Jays vs. Tigers

*First hit: **Bobby Higginson***

This was just Halladay's second career Major League start, and he gave fans a glimpse of the dominance that was to come, no-hitting the Tigers for 8 2/3 innings before allowing a two-out home run to Higginson. Halladay would, of course, get his no-hitter -- and a perfect game -- eventually.

Aug. 4, 1989: Dave Stieb, Blue Jays vs. Yankees

*First hit: **Roberto Kelly***

Sept. 30, 1988: Stieb, Blue Jays vs. Orioles

*First hit: **Jim Traber***

Sept. 24, 1988: Stieb, Blue Jays at Indians

*First hit: **Julio Franco***

Stieb actually threw a no-hitter on Sept. 2, 1990. But before that, no one was more snake-bitten than him -- Stieb lost a perfect game with two outs in the ninth in 1989, and lost no-hitters with two outs and two strikes in the ninth *in back-to-back starts* in 1988 (he also lost another no-hit bid opening the ninth inning in 1985).

June 12, 1988: Mike Scott, Astros vs. Braves

*First hit: **Ken Oberkfell***

Scott had thrown a no-hitter to clinch the NL West two years earlier in 1986, the year he won the Cy Young, but he also lost this one with two outs in the ninth, on a broken-bat single.

Sept. 24, 1975: Tom Seaver, Mets at Cubs

*First hit: **Joe Wallis***

Seaver's more famous near-no-hitter was lost with one out in the ninth -- his perfect-game bid on July 9, 1969, broken up by **Jimmy Qualls**. But the Hall of Famer also lost a no-hitter with two outs in the ninth in 1975 -- although it was actually a scoreless game, so Seaver would've had to keep going. Either way, the Mets had to wait until **Johan Santana** to get their first no-hitter.

June 5, 1915: Grover Cleveland Alexander, Phillies at Cardinals

*First hit: **Artie Butler***

The legendary Hall of Famer won 373 games in his Major League career -- but he never threw a no-hitter. This was the closest he came, one out away, before Butler singled up the middle.

July 23, 1896: Cy Young, Cleveland Spiders vs. Phillies

*First hit: **Ed Delahanty***

As long as Major League Baseball has been played, pitchers have been losing no-hit bids in the

ninth inning. Even Cy Young himself fell victim in 1896, coming one out away from a no-hitter against the Phillies when fellow Hall of Famer Delahanty knocked a single.

Cobb lived through the heartbreak of losing a no-hitter with two outs in the ninth Tuesday. Cobb had thrown a career most 125 pitches when he gave up the hit. But manager **Gabe Kapler** left him in to finish the game. 131 pitches. Pitcher loses no-hitter in the ninth and has launched 125 pitches (or more) and is left in—only happened four times in MLB history:

Nolan Ryan — Does it shock you that half of the previous four games were Nolan Ryan games? There was an April 27, 1988 tilt against the Phillies when Ryan was allowed to stay in, by then-Astros manager **Hal Lanier**, with 131 pitches (after a **Mike Schmidt** hit) ... and an Aug. 10, 1989 game when he wasn't yanked, by Rangers manager **Bobby Valentine**, *despite 146 pitches*, after a **Dave Bergman** hit. Aw, what the heck. He's Nolan Freaking Ryan!

Andy Benes — Benes was pitching for the Diamondbacks on Sept. 13, 1998, when he lost a no-hitter on a **Sean Casey** hit on his 127th pitch. He was left in, by **Buck Showalter**, to throw 138 before the bullpen cavalry arrived.

Brandon Morrow — This was the only previous time this happened in the 21st century. Morrow also lost a no-hitter with two outs in the ninth, on his 129th pitch, on an **Evan Longoria** hit on Aug. 8, 2017. Even in a 1-0 game, Jays manager **Cito Gaston** let him finish the shutout, on 137 pitches.

At 35 years and 326 days old, Cobb became the third-oldest Giants pitcher since 1901 to allow one or no hits in a complete game. He was younger than only **Carl Hubbell** in two one-hitters, on June 5, 1943 at age 39 years and 348 days old and on May 30, 1940 at 36 years and 343 days.

FUN WITH WAIVERS

Its waiver time and as Rustin Dodd and Stephen J. Nesbitt explain in *The Athletic*, some teams are (ahem) waving the white flag.

The Angels placed nearly a fifth of their roster on waivers on Tuesday, according to *The Athletic's* Ken Rosenthal, exploiting a rule — and roster management tactic — that was once more relevant before baseball consolidated into one trade deadline. The headliners include starter **Lucas Giolito**, relievers **Matt Moore** and **Reynaldo López**, and outfielders **Hunter Renfroe** and **Randal Grichuk**.

Other players placed on waivers, according to Rosenthal, include Yankees outfielder **Harrison Bader**, Mets starter **Carlos Carrasco** and White Sox starter **Mike Clevinger**. But the Angels' maneuver — unexpected in its breadth and volume — offered plenty of intrigue as contenders across baseball pondered whether to poach the large influx of players on waivers.

The system is simple. When a player is placed on outright waivers, all 30 teams have a chance to claim him. Waiver priority runs in reverse order of record; ties are broken by last year's record. The team with the worst record that submits a claim will receive the player, add him to its 40-man roster and pay the remainder of his contract. If a player goes unclaimed, his original team continues paying his salary.

The implications, in this case, are widespread. Consider this: Prior to Tuesday's games there were 16 teams over .500 and within 2 ½ games of a playoff spot, and another (the 69-63 Red Sox) 5 ½ games out. That means a majority of the league is licking its chops to add one or more of the impact players who hit waivers Tuesday — and all it'll cost them is money.

For a player to be postseason-eligible, he must be on a roster by Sept. 1. The waiver window is open for two days. That means players will be awarded to a claiming team Aug. 31.

The old waiver trade system was scrapped in 2019, as was the stipulation that waiver order was determined by record *and* league affiliation. Before that, teams would dump almost everyone on their rosters onto revocable waivers, meaning they could be pulled back without being lost. Teams employed the tactic to disguise the players they actually wanted to trade, allowing them to see if they could sort out a deal on the other side. That's how **John Smoltz** went to Atlanta, **Jeff Bagwell** went to Houston, **Larry Walker** went to St. Louis, **Bert Blyleven** went to Minnesota and **Justin Verlander** went to Houston (the first time) all in August. Until Aug. 31, teams could trade for players on waivers and have them be eligible for postseason play, effectively creating two trade deadlines.

In a post-2019 MLB, revocable waivers no longer exist and there is only one trade deadline. Also, the waiver order is determined strictly by record. Though players can still be claimed off waivers after the trade deadline, they no longer can be traded in waiver deals. Their original team will only receive salary relief, not prospects or additional cash.

one waiver claim does not impact another, the waiver order remains intact. For example, all 30 teams could put in claims for each player, but the A's would get all of them by virtue of having the No. 1 waiver claim. The A's getting the first guy does not change their odds of getting the others.

What exactly are the Angels thinking?

They are thinking of cutting their losses. The Angels have been the worst team in baseball since the trade deadline, going 7-17, and, though not mathematically eliminated, their playoff odds

on Fangraphs are 0 percent. They are toast, and shoving a sizable portion of their roster onto waivers can save some money while they wave the proverbial white flag.

They are thinking of taxes, and specifically of avoiding them. When the Angels went all in way back in the last week of July, it pushed their team payroll into the first tier of the competitive balance tax (CBT). Shedding some salary would drop them below the \$233 million CBT threshold and avoid any associated taxes, penalties and ire from smaller-payroll owners.

And they are thinking about positioning themselves for the inevitability of Shohei Ohtani reaching free agency. If Ohtani declines the Angels' qualifying offer this fall — which he will — and they are above the first CBT threshold, the compensation pick they receive will come after the fourth round. If they drop below the threshold, however, the compensation pick would come after Comp Round B, following the second round. That is no small matter. In this year's draft, those two draft positions were between 60 and 70 picks apart.

So, for as much grief as the Angels will get for this desperation waiver dump, there are strategic decisions being made. They're just overshadowed by the sad state of the club.

There is no limit to how many claims a team can submit, so, in theory, the Athletics could use their No. 1 waiver priority to claim a quarter of the Angels roster on waivers, so long as they find the roster space to fit all of them.

The Milwaukee Brewers signed Josh Donaldson as a free agent.

The Cleveland Guardians selected Lucas Giolito off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels.

The Cincinnati Reds selected Hunter Renfroe off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels.

The Cincinnati Reds selected Harrison Bader off waivers from the New York Yankees.

The Seattle Mariners selected Dominic Leone off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels.

The Cleveland Guardians selected Reynaldo López off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels.

The Cleveland Guardians selected Matt Moore off waivers from the Los Angeles Angels.

OLD GUYS USUALLY AREN'T GOOD INVESTMENTS

A cautionary tale from Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

In his prime, **Josh Donaldson** was a ferocious hitter whose style and hitting smarts were the envy of many of his peers. From 2013 to '16, he finished in the top eight in MVP voting four straight years, winning it in '15. He inspired other hitters to seek private hitting gurus outside of the employ of the team to find ways to get the ball airborne. From '15 to '19, balls hit in the air (fly balls and line drives) increased from 54.7% to 57.1%.

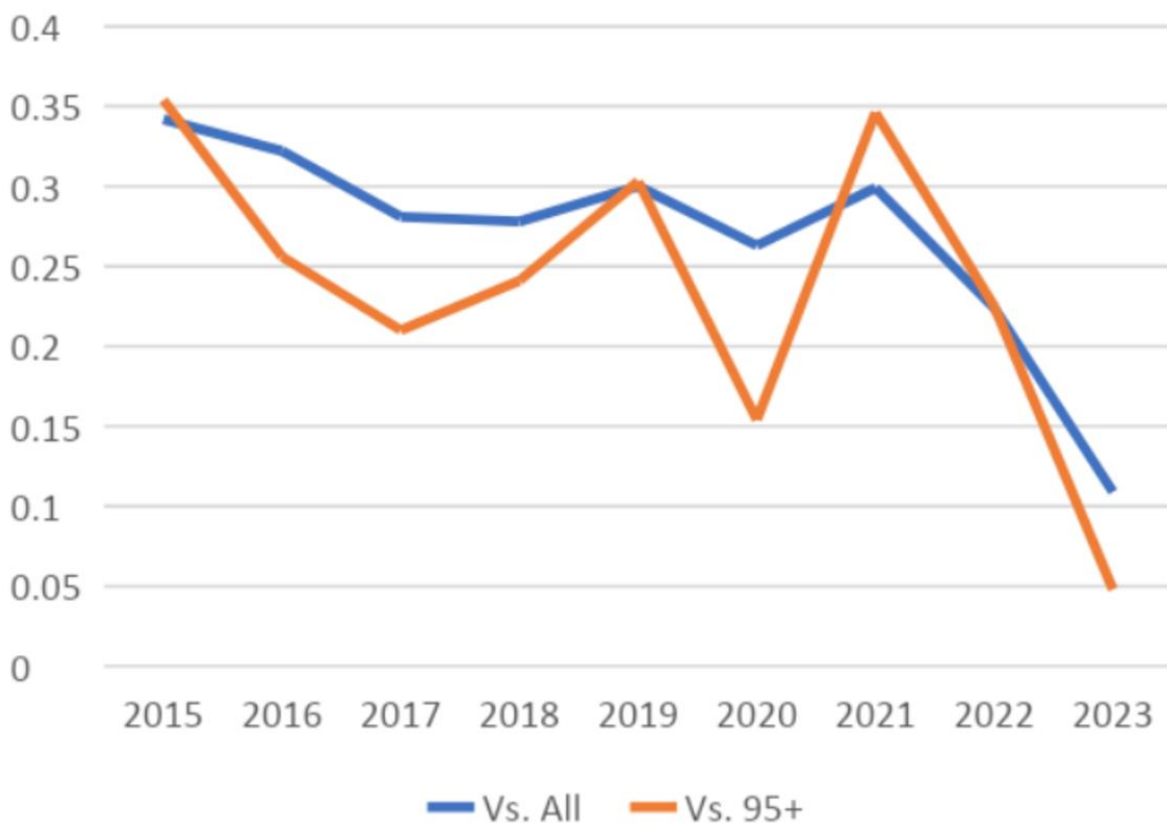
The decline came swiftly. By getting released now, Donaldson has a day or two to join another team to be postseason eligible. And the Yankees still have **Giancarlo Stanton, Anthony Rizzo**

and DJ LeMahieu to worry about. The average MLB hitter hits .241 against fastballs 95 mph and faster. Stanton (.203), Rizzo (.194) and LeMahieu (.163) all are well below average when it comes to hitting plus velocity.

Even as Donaldson struggled the past two years, the Yankees kept pointing to his exit velocity (90.7 last year and 92.8 this year), like somehow there was going to be some massive correction to his awful slash line as a Yankee (.207/.293/.385). Only **Walter Blair** (1907 to '11) and **Bill Robinson** ('67 to '69) ever hit for a lower batting average with the Yankees over at least 650 plate appearances.

Exit velocity tells you only how hard someone hits the ball *when they hit it*. **Joey Gallo** (93.3) has a far superior exit velocity this year than **Luis Arraez** (87.9, below MLB average of 89.1).

Donaldson BA vs. Fastballs



Player	Team	AVG
Taylor Walls	Rays	.168
Joey Gallo	Twins	.185
Patrick Wisdom	Cubs	.192
Max Muncy	Dodgers	.198
Josh Donaldson	Yankees	.200

Worst Fastball Hitters, 2022-23 (min. 2,500 pitches)

Could the Yankees have seen such a decline coming? Maybe not to that extent, but their bet on older players came at precisely the wrong time. The new rules reward athleticism, speed and range. New York trusted a roster with the oldest average age of position players. Absorbing the decline of Donaldson is one thing, but when you also are absorbing the declines of DJ LeMahieu, Anthony Rizzo, Giancarlo Stanton and **Aaron Hicks**, it becomes a bigger problem.

The Yankees got caught playing an outmoded game. Older players like Donaldson have never been less useful in the wild card era as they have been the past two seasons.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Rank in Full Seasons Since 1995</u>	
Hits	1,120 (prorated)	Fewest
AVG	.227	2nd-lowest
OBP	.302	2nd-lowest
Plate appearances	5,383 (prorated)	2nd-fewest
Runs	569 (prorated)	3rd-fewest
OPS	.710	6th-lowest

Age 36+ Players, 2023

In his prime, Donaldson was a ferocious hitter whose style and hitting smarts were the envy of many of his peers. From 2013 to '16, he finished in the top eight in MVP voting four straight years, winning it in '15. He inspired other hitters to seek private hitting gurus outside of the employ of the team to find ways to get the ball airborne. From '15 to '19, balls hit in the air (fly balls and line drives) increased from 54.7% to 57.1%.

The decline came swiftly. By getting released now, Donaldson has a day or two to join another team to be postseason eligible. And the Yankees still have Stanton, Rizzo and LeMahieu to worry about. The average MLB hitter hits .241 against fastballs 95 mph and faster. Stanton (.203), Rizzo (.194) and LeMahieu (.163) all are well below average when it comes to hitting plus velocity.

HISTORIAL FRANCHISE NICKNAMES

Posted by Mike Lynch on August 29, 2023

In SABR's Fall 2019 Baseball Research Journal Ed Coen produced some remarkable research on the history of franchise nicknames.

Coen wrote:

Of the major league teams that trace their history before 1960, most started out with several short-term unofficial nicknames or even no nickname at all. Although several reputable sources provide a history of these nicknames, there are numerous contradictions between the available sources, and sometimes even when these sources agree, they conflict with the original sources. In other words, they do not reflect what the team was actually known as at the time.

Coen then performed exhaustive research using local newspapers to find out what teams were actually most commonly referred to at the time in their home cities. Thanks to his research, we are now able to use the actual names these teams were mostly commonly known as locally at the time on Baseball Reference. In many cases, you'll see the teams had no nicknames at all and were just known for the city and league they played in. Below is a list of the changes we have made:

- Braves Franchise
 - - 1876: Boston Red Stocking changed to Boston Reds
 - 1877-1900: Boston Red Stockings and Beaneaters changed to Boston
 - 1901-1906: Boston Beaneaters changed to Boston Nationals
 - 1911: Boston Rustlers changed to Boston
- Cubs Franchise
 - - 1888-1889: Chicago White Stockings changed to Chicago
 - 1902: Chicago Orphans changed to Chicago
 - 1903: Chicago Cubs changed to Chicago
- Reds Franchise:
 - - 1882-1886: Cincinnati Red Stockings changed to Cincinnati
 - 1887-1889: Cincinnati Red Stockings changed to Cincinnati Reds
 - 1953: Cincinnati Reds changed to Cincinnati Redlegs
- Guardians Franchise
 -

- 1901: Cleveland Blues changed to Cleveland
- 1902: Cleveland Bronchos changed to Cleveland Blues
- 1903-1905: Cleveland Naps changed to Cleveland Napoleons
- Dodgers Franchise
 -
 - 1884: Brooklyn Atlantics changed to Brooklyn
 - 1885-1887: Brooklyn Grays changed to Brooklyn
 - 1888: Brooklyn Bridegrooms changed to Brooklyn
 - 1891-1894: Brooklyn Grooms changed to Brooklyn
 - 1896-1898: Brooklyn Bridegrooms changed to Brooklyn Grooms
 - 1913: Brooklyn Superbas changed to Brooklyn Dodgers
 - 1914-1915: Brooklyn Robins changed to Brooklyn Dodgers
- Twins Franchise
 -
 - 1905-1956: Washington Senators changed to Washington Nationals
- Phillies Franchise
 -
 - 1883-1885: Philadelphia Quakers changed to Philadelphia
 - 1886-1889: Philadelphia Quakers changed to Philadelphia Phillies
 - 1942: Philadelphia Phillies changed to Philadelphia Phils
- Pirates Franchise
 -
 - 1882-1890: Pittsburgh Alleghenys changed to Allegheny City
 - 1891-1894: Pittsburgh Pirates changed to Pittsburgh
- Giants Franchise
 -
 - 1883-1884: New York Gothams changed to New York
- Cardinals Franchise
 -
 - 1882: St. Louis Brown Stockings changed to St. Louis Browns
 - 1883: St. Louis Browns changed to St. Louis
 - 1899: St. Louis Perfectos changed to St. Louis

The Athletic polled 100 players on expansion. While they don't get a vote, their preferences:

Nashville	69%
Montreal	10%
Charlotte	5%
Austin	5%

Portland	4%
Vancouver	2%
Salt Lake City	2%
San Juan	1%
Raleigh/Durham	1%
Orlando	1%

THIS WEEK'S BIRTHDAYS

Rico Carty	84
Garry Maddox	74
Ron Guidry	73
Buddy Bell	72
Jim Thome	53
Adam Wainwright	42

LONGER READS

THE WORLD WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFERENT IF THE OWNERS LISTENED TO CHARLIE FINLEY

From "The Big Book of Baseball Blunders, A complete guide to the worst decisions and stupidest moves in baseball history".

By Rob Neyer

Editor's note—this fun book is out of print but the Damariscotta Public Library scored it for me via inter-library loan. I recommend it. From the beginning of time the Reserve Clause in the

standard player's contract bound players to the team they signed with. The owners had all control on salary, trading, demoting or releasing. Then came 1975 and Marvin Miller...

Imagine for a moment, the baseball universe reconfigured. Imagine a world where buyers, and not the sellers, dominate the annual free-agent market. A world where players traipse from door to door, baseball caps in hand, begging owners to sign them. The top salaries do rise from season to season, but quickly crash into a low ceiling. Midrange salaries plateau, or in some years even plummet. Players no longer win whopping pay hikes in arbitration, because arbitration no longer exists.

It is a world that very nearly existed.

October, 1975. The Major League Baseball Players Association, led by Marvin Miller, files a joint grievance on behalf of **Andy Messersmith** of the Los Angeles Dodgers and **Dave McNally** of the Montreal Expos. *John A. (Andy) Messersmith v. Los Angeles Dodgers* challenges baseball's reserve clause, which essentially binds a player to the major league club that currently employs him unless that club traded or released him. The clause is considered so ironclad that even after a player retires, his last employer can hold his "reserve" until his death.

Few expected Messersmith and McNally to win. The reserve system had been in place since 1876 and had been upheld by the Supreme Court on various occasions, most recently in 1972 in *Flood v. Kuhn*. Owners and players alike had come to believe that Section 10(A) of the Uniform Player Contract granted clubs the rights to a player in perpetuity.

"The owners believed the renewal applied to the entire contract including the reserve clause, so that every time they renewed a contract, they extended the option on the player. This meant that once a player signed a contract with a team he was, in effect, bound to the team for life. But I believed that the clause only granted the club an option on a player's services for one additional year. When Messersmith and McNally both played entire seasons without signing their contracts, the union took the position that their ties to the Dodgers and Expos had been severed and they were free to seek employment with any other major league teams".

After hearing arguments from both sides, veteran arbitrator and labor mediator Peter Seitz took aside John Gaherin, the representative for the owners' Players Relations Committee, and said "Look, take this case out of my hands. Negotiate with the players and settle your differences."

It was a subtle caveat. Seitz was, in effect, telling the owners that the case would go against them and they should cut the best deal they could before he rendered a decision that would give the players an overwhelming advantage at the bargaining table. The warning went unheeded. On December 23, 1975, Seitz handed Miller and Gaherin a sixty-four page document, replete with footnotes, that concluded with these devastating words:

The grievances of Mr. Messersmith and Mr. McNally are sustained. There is no contractual bond between these players and the Los Angeles and Montreal clubs, respectively.

The reserve clause was dead. All that remained was for the players and owners to agree on the logistics of a system that would allow the players to sell their services to the highest bidders.

When the two sides next met, they weren't working from the same volume, much less the same page.

"At first, the owners claimed the decision only applied to Messersmith and McNally, which was, of course, absurd", says Miller. "Once they understood we had to negotiate a modified reserve system for everyone, the central point was how much service time would be required before a player became a free agent. They wanted to restrict that right only to those players who completed ten years of service and who were earning salaries below the major league average."

The union rejected that generous offer, and Miller came back with a system that would grant players free agency after six years of major league service. It was a framework that would limit the number of free agents—thus maximizing their value, according to the principles of supply and demand in any particular season.

When the owners met to consider their response, most of them were prepared to accept something close to Miller's proposal. However, Charlie Finley, the owner of the Oakland A's, suggested a counter-proposal:

"Make them all free agents. Every one of them. Every year."

"The moment I heard Finley's proposal", says Miller, I was worried the owners would agree to it. Finley knew more about baseball than anybody in the room. He could see a player in high school or on some local team in the Dominican Republic and recognize a budding star. Few owners could do that. And he also understood economics 101. If you made all the players free agents every year, they would be competing against each other for a limited number of jobs. It would not be in the players' interest."

Finley understood that, but his colleagues did not. To them, the proposal was another madcap scheme from a rogue owner who didn't believe in pushing the envelope when you could rip it to shreds. Orange baseballs, designated runners, three ball walks, and interleague play were just some of the "outlandish" ideas this baseball innovator had proposed in the past. Not one of Baseball's Lords took his latest brainstorm seriously.

They would pay an enormous price for their shortsightedness. As Miller explains, "The owners could have pitted the players against one another. If the Yankees didn't want to pay **Reggie Jackson** what he wanted, they could turn to **Dave Parker** or **Jim Rice**. These were superstars

and would still command top dollar, of course, but not as much as they would without that competition.”

“However, the system Finley proposed would have been particularly disastrous for the average player. You would have hundreds of players competing for a finite number of positions on teams. And keep in mind that if every player became a free agent every year, you would eliminate arbitration. The owners would have been in the driver’s seat.”

So why didn’t they adopt the Finley Solution?

Miller says, “I’m guessing—I’ve never asked one of them—but I think that they couldn’t envision an environment in which they no longer controlled the players. It was not just about the money. They were so accustomed to saying ‘you must play for me or you can’t play professional baseball for anyone anywhere in the world.’ That was a tremendous power and I suspect they didn’t want to relinquish it so abruptly. What we eventually negotiated, the six years of service time, left them with some control and that’s what mattered to them. Charlie was able to take the long view and they couldn’t. It was a costly mistake. They didn’t realize Finley’s proposal would have put me in a box. I couldn’t figure out how to explain to the players that we had to reject free agency for everyone.

“And fortunately, I didn’t have to.”

Miller’s comments came from a 2005 interview with journalist Richard Lally.

STEPHEN STRASBURG, AT THE END

Michael Baumann, fangraphs

Throughout the 2019 postseason, the Washington Nationals made a habit of using their entire margin of error. They needed a three-run, last-ditch rally to get out of the Wild Card game, then another 11th-hour comeback to get past the Dodgers in Game 5 of the NLDS. **Dave Martinez** tried to shorten his pitching staff as much as possible, a desperation move that’s backfired on manager after manager as long as there have been playoffs.

By the time Game 6 of the World Series rolled around, the Nationals were facing elimination once again. They’d lost three straight to the 107-win Astros and needed to beat Justin Verlander on the road to stay alive. **Patrick Corbin** had been run ragged. **Max Scherzer**’s body had locked up to the point where he couldn’t dress himself. Martinez had already gambled with the likes of **Tanner Rainey** and **Wander Suero** more than anyone was comfortable with.

Then **Stephen Strasburg** stepped up and did something you don't see pitchers do much anymore. He handled it.

After a rocky first inning, Strasburg kept the irrepressible Astros offense off the board into the ninth. The Nats once again scored bunches of runs late, and the next evening they were hoisting the proverbial piece of metal.

Strasburg's last outing of 2019 marks the only time since 2015 that the day's starting pitcher recorded an out in the ninth inning of a World Series. It's the only instance since 2017 of a starting pitcher recording an out in the ninth inning of any playoff game. Strasburg was voted World Series MVP for his effort.

There's a pretty good case to be made that Strasburg, a pitcher whose most famous playoff starts are arguably the ones he didn't make, is the best postseason pitcher in major league history. Among pitchers with at least 50 playoff innings, Strasburg has the fifth-lowest ERA, behind **Mariano Rivera**, **Christy Mathewson**, **Sandy Koufax**, and **Eddie Plank**, all Hall of Famers. No starter in the past 50 years can match him: not **Curt Schilling** or **Madison Bumgarner**. Not even **Bob Gibson**, pitching in the second dead ball era.

The night of Game 6, I wrote about Strasburg's hero-making start as the capstone of a unique Nationals career, a poetic counterweight to the controversial innings limit that had kept him from participating in Washington's first postseason run in 2012. Strasburg had the option to become a free agent after the 2019 season, and it was far from a certainty that the Nats — who'd just let Bryce Harper walk the previous winter — would give a 31-year-old pitcher the kind of money Strasburg had so clearly earned. I was confident that this would be Strasburg's last appearance in a Nationals uniform.

I was wrong, but only technically. Strasburg duly opted out, but Washington brought him back after all, on a seven-year, \$245 million contract that runs through 2026. But Strasburg made just eight starts over three seasons before injuries erased the second half of what ought to have been a Hall of Fame career. And not normal injuries, like a torn UCL or an uncooperative rotator cuff: neuritis, and ultimately thoracic outlet syndrome, the closest thing there is to an unrecoverable pitcher injury.

Strasburg still has three years and more than \$100 million left on his contract, so he won't officially retire just yet. But last Thursday *the Washington Post* reported that Strasburg would be giving up on a comeback attempt that's looked all but hopeless for years. The official announcement will come sometime after Labor Day.

As far as I'm concerned, those last eight injury-riddled starts never happened, and our final memory of Strasburg as a player will be of him toting the Commissioner's Trophy around the

Minute Maid Park outfield in the wake of the Nationals' Game 7 win. Hirsute and broad and immutable, like a forest. Larger than life.

What a way to go out.

Whenever a player with Hall of Fame talent is forced to retire through injury, there's a sense of communal grief. People who love baseball understand that there's unfulfilled potential that's been lost, and we mourn because we're worse off for not seeing it fulfilled.

I don't think that's appropriate in Strasburg's case, because even though he lost a full season early in his career to Tommy John surgery and was basically done at age 31, I don't think there's much more he could have accomplished. He played eight full seasons in the majors, and parts of 13. He was the most important player on a championship team and won an Olympic bronze medal. He never won a Cy Young — never even finished second — but he made three All-Star teams. When he was healthy, Strasburg was among the best pitchers in baseball. Oh, and by the time he collects his last check from the Nationals, he'll have made the best part of \$400 million. It's not **Roger Clemens** without the PEDs, which was the hype when Strasburg was coming out of San Diego State, but it's a hard career to complain about.

But while Strasburg's retirement doesn't leave behind the same whiff of disappointment as **Matt Harvey or Mark Prior**, it hurts to know his career is officially over.

Strasburg has always been one of my favorite players to write about — a former editor of mine once joked that Strasburg was my "muse" — and I doubt I'm alone. As much as I could go on about his physicality, his fastball, his scythe of a curveball, and how they affected the game empirically, the two things that made Strasburg into a legendary figure are completely ineffable.

The first was his ability to inspire wonder. If you can recall the hype around Strasburg as a college player, you don't need to be reminded. But it's a bit bracing to look back 15 years later and think about the mythical prospect status Strasburg carried in that now-primitive media environment.

In 2008, there was no multifaceted public-facing prospect coverage, little or no streaming media, and only a rudimentary network of blogs and social media to cover the minutiae of baseball. If you wanted to know about college baseball, you either had to subscribe to *Baseball America*, go and watch it in person, or wait until the College World Series was on cable.

Despite all that, Strasburg was a household name, a Tony Gwynn protégé with a triple-digit fastball and a breaking ball that was close to literally unhittable. As a college sophomore, he not only made an Olympic team full of upper-minors prospects, but was selected to start the tournament semifinal. In the years since, a more rabid and better-informed baseball-watching public has seen **Carlos Rodón or Kumar Rocker or Paul Skenes** mow down hapless

undergraduates, and we've gasped in the collective realization that this is what *it* looks like, only more so.

That, ramped up to an intensity unseen in the pre-**Shohei Ohtani** era, was Strasburg. His major league debut was a national TV event, the most important thing that had happened to a D.C.-based baseball team in decades. Strasburg obliged the audience by punching out 14 Pirates. Plenty of rookies have built up national hype over time, but almost none were as highly anticipated as Strasburg. Follow baseball long enough and events will start to blur together, but I not only remember where I was for Strasburg's debut, but where I was when I found out he'd torn his UCL three months later.

That air of specialness never really went away, even to the end of his prime. And even when Strasburg turned out to merely be *one of* the best pitchers in the sport and not *the* best pitcher in the sport, that sparkle didn't fade. In fact, it almost made Strasburg more fascinating. Every time you went to the park or turned on the TV for his night on the mound, the possibility remained that you'd see something special. But it never got so routine, as it did with **Clayton Kershaw**, that we took it for granted. The precarity that came with Strasburg's perceived fragility made him all the more precious.

Strasburg's first great gift compounded with his second: History kept happening to him.

That's different from a flair for the dramatic. Strasburg, great as he was in big games, was stone faced on the mound and fairly laconic off it. No great celebrations or memorable quotes spring to mind. Just among his Nationals teammates, Scherzer, Harper, and **Juan Soto** have all shown themselves to be aware when the lights are brightest, and seem to amp themselves up for the occasion. They thrive under pressure. Other players wilt under it. Strasburg seemed unaware of it, pitching in the World Series with all the adrenaline and ceremony that comes with mowing your lawn.

It's also distinct from popping up around big moments, like Strasburg's former manager **Dusty Baker**. Baker was in the on-deck circle for **Hank Aaron's** 715th home run. He was party to the invention of the high five. He was in the dugout for **Barry Bonds** and Steve Bartman. He bumps into historic occasions like Forrest Gump.

Strasburg seemed to pull history toward himself, like a planet attracting a wandering comet. In 2012, he found himself at the center of a watershed moment in the debate over pitching workloads, a controversy that's conditioned the development of every young pitcher who's come along since and is still probably the most important moment of Strasburg's career.

Five years later, after taking a no-hitter into the sixth inning of Game 1 of the NLDS, Strasburg fell ill the day of his next scheduled start, touching off one of the last great salvos of performative machismo in sports. When Strasburg came back, he shut the Cubs down for seven innings in damp, misty conditions at Wrigley Field, answering for good any questions about his toughness or will.

In less than six years since, the way we talk about athletes' physical and mental health has changed so much as to render previous norms unrecognizable.

And then there's Strasburg's 2019 playoff run, which capped off that aforementioned legacy of playoff excellence.

With his metronomic consistency, Strasburg put a 106-win Dodgers team off the rails, then did the same to the Astros. Remember, that series was supposed to be the cherry on the top of a historic season by Houston's front-of-the-rotation duo of **Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole**. But Strasburg held back the tide, leaving the cameras to fade out on an aggrieved and befuddled Astros team that, just a month later, would find itself embroiled in a generational scandal.

I'll miss watching and writing about Strasburg because he was great, yes. Because he was exciting. But most of all because he was important. Baseball's familiar abundance can make living with the sport a bit monotonous, as it's difficult to find a reason to get up for a September game between third- and fourth-place teams with nothing on the line.

There was always something on the line with Strasburg. Every pitch he threw mattered. Sometimes because the fate of the World Series or the course of player development obviously hung in the balance. Sometimes, you couldn't exactly name a reason. But you could always feel it.

WEAR ALL YOU WANT, THEY'LL MAKE MORE

Few items of sporting equipment are as disposable as batting gloves. But don't mistake their impermanence for a lack of importance.

Zach Buchanan, The New York Times

One day this month, **Jake McCarthy**, an outfielder for the Arizona Diamondbacks, slid open a large drawer inside his locker and attempted a quick accounting of its contents. Inside, piled haphazardly on top of one another, were several boxes of Franklin batting gloves.

"I get eight boxes of batting gloves" to start the season, McCarthy said, and each contains six pairs of gloves. That's 48 sets of gloves for a campaign that lasts roughly 27 weeks. What remains in that drawer represents the final third of his supply, and by the end of this season, they'll most likely all be gone. Under normal circumstances, one pair of gloves can last McCarthy around 10 games.

Swapping them out is easy. After all, since making the majors two years ago, he has not had to pay for a single pair.

McCarthy is hardly a star — in fact, the Diamondbacks recently optioned him to the minor leagues — but he's accustomed to the good life of the majors. When it comes to batting gloves, the big leagues are the land of plenty. Almost every big-league hitter has an endorsement deal with a glove manufacturer that provides them with more free gloves than they can shake a 34-ounce bat at.

That's good because, boy, do they go through them. Other than the ball, which no player really owns, no piece of baseball equipment is as fungible as a pair of batting gloves. Many hitters go through them like Tic Tacs, in no small part because the supply is inexhaustible. The instant a pair shows any sign of imperfection — a loosening grip, a minor tear or, heaven forbid, a cold streak at the plate — they're gone in favor of a crisp replacement.

"We're so spoiled," McCarthy said. "You go 0 for 5 or something and you're like: 'It's not me. It's the batting gloves.'"

Among major-league hitters, batting glove peccadilloes run the gamut. McCarthy can't stand when his start to feel sweaty, while **James Outman**, a rookie outfielder for the Los Angeles Dodgers, is bothered when the palms of his gloves begin to stretch. For **Juan Soto**, a star outfielder for the San Diego Padres, it's often about wrist tightness. "You start feeling the strap is getting longer and longer," Soto said, leading to frequent between-pitch adjustments. And for just about every hitter, a hard slide into a base often means a ripped pair of gloves.

Perhaps no player changes his gloves as often as **Garrett Cooper**, a first baseman acquired by San Diego at the trading deadline. On average, he goes through a pair every two days. His issue isn't grip loss or stretching but crunchiness. He covers his hands with sticky spray before stuffing them into his gloves, and it isn't long before they have stiffened like a metal gauntlet. When the leather begins to crack, he calls Franklin to re-up.

"They probably hate when I ask for another order," he said, "because it seems like they send me one out every few weeks."

Glove manufacturers don't really mind. It's good business to keep even the most persnickety of big-league batters flush with supply. That has been the case for 40 years, ever since the introduction of Franklin's first glove built specifically for gripping a bat. That glove, Franklin's Pro Classic, was designed in 1983 in consultation with the Hall of Famer **Mike Schmidt**. Hitters had tried wearing gloves before — **Ken Harrelson** is often credited with starting the practice in the 1960s by using a golf glove, although there are earlier instances of gloved experimentation — but soon after the Pro Classic's introduction, nearly every hitter was wearing Franklin gloves.

Franklin has been the official batting glove of Major League Baseball since 1988 and still has a stranglehold on the big-league market. Of the roughly 400 hitters on opening day rosters this year, Franklin's president, Adam Franklin, says that 250 wear his company's gloves. Franklin has deals with another 450 players who began the year in the minors. And while the company

offers a variety of models, some costing \$40 or more for retail shoppers, many players are wearing gloves that are functionally identical to the pair Schmidt introduced.

Other companies have gotten into the game over the years. The biggest sporting goods companies — Nike, Adidas, Under Armour — make batting gloves and have a presence in the majors. So do boutique outfits like Lizard Skins and Bruce Bolt, the latter started in 2017 by a then-16-year-old Texas high schooler. Some players have hopped on board with those newer gloves, but many prefer to stick with what has become familiar. **Kiké Hernández**, the versatile utility player, is an example. He spent a year being paid well to endorse Lizard Skins before switching back to his trusty old Franklins.

“I decided that I wasn’t going to switch brands for money,” Hernández said. “I’d rather make the money on the field.”

Hernández spoke a week after being traded back to the Dodgers following more than two years with the Boston Red Sox, a change that meant he needed a resupply of Dodgers-colored batting gloves. And if anything has changed over the four decades that batting gloves have ruled the sport, it is the advent of the batting glove as a fashion statement. An initial offering of just a few colors has blossomed to every shade on the spectrum.

There are color schemes for every team’s uniform set. Bright neon colors are all the rage, a trend that Adam Franklin traces back to the Red Sox slugger **David Ortiz** wearing gloves with bright yellow piping during the 2013 World Series — though **Rickey Henderson**, way ahead of his time on so many things, wore neon green Mizuno gloves while leading the Oakland Athletics to the 1989 World Series. There are also pink gloves for Mother’s Day and powder blue ones for Father’s Day, as well as special sets for Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, **Jackie Robinson** Day and **Roberto Clemente** Day. Most of those are worn for one game only, although they may make nongame appearances.

“You’ll see me with some exotic batting gloves on in batting practice,” McCarthy said, “not necessarily for the swag purposes.”

The supply of gloves may be abundant — “If there was an issue,” McCarthy said, “I feel like there would be a new box in my locker within 48 hours” — but players actually do try to make them last. Many of them have a pair for batting practice and a pair for the game, a rotation necessary to keep both pairs fresh and dry. **Luis Gonzalez**, whose single won the 2001 World Series for Arizona, would hang his gloves in front of a dugout fan between at-bats. Other hitters take preventive measures. San Francisco’s **Robby Thompson** and **Will Clark** would hermetically seal their gloves in freezer bags between games to prevent degradation.

“They’d pull them out the next day,” said **Matt Williams**, a former Giants infielder and current Padres coach, “and they were still soft.”

Most hitters have no qualms about ditching a pair of gloves the second they lose a step, but a few remain who ride with a pair until the treads are bald. Breaking in a new pair means blisters to **Corbin Carroll**, a rookie sensation for the Diamondbacks, so he goes through a season wearing only three or four pairs, which means using them until they're threadbare. "I get crap about it all the time," he said. Superstition leads others to hold on to theirs. There are grip and fit, and then there are results.

"If I like the pair and the pair is getting hits," Hernández said, "the pair is going to be worn for a while."

But one tear, Hernández says, and even the most productive pair of gloves lands in the trash can, a fate that highlights the essential paradox of a good batting glove. It must grip well and be durable, but it also must be light and offer what Franklin calls the feel of a "second skin." (There are still a few gloveless players, like **Matt Carpenter** of the San Diego Padres, who prefer the first skin, their own, but they are vanishingly few.) Good gloves also must move as the hand does while remaining tight around it.

There have been technological advancements since the Pro Classic. Bruce Bolt hypes the unique stitching it uses around the wrist, as well their gloves' long and compression wrap-like wrist straps, a feature Franklin has also recently incorporated. Later this year, Franklin will introduce gloves with built-in guards for the back of the hand, and Adam Franklin says 2024 will bring "some more unique designs happening with wrist compression and fit and feel."

Players will always seek any slight performance edge they can gain, but it's unlikely that any innovation will significantly reduce churn. If pitchers know they've reached the show when every baseball is a flawless white pearl, and learn to blithely toss it aside at the appearance of any minor scuff, then hitters have the same realization when it comes to their batting gloves. As unpaid amateurs and poorly paid farmhands, they had to make them last. But when you can routinely stuff a new pair in your pockets without the money for them coming out, you know you've made it.

"When you're the big-leaguer making all the money," Gonzalez said, "that's when you get all the free stuff."



Elly De La Cruz of the Reds



Pete Alonso of the Mets

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

I won 4 straight Cy Young awards, pitched in 1 world series, retired with 303 wins.

Am I Roger Clemens, Randy Johnson, Greg Maddux or Pedro Martinez?

RANDY JOHNSON

Johnson won 303 games, won 4 straight Cy Youngs 1999-2000-2001-2002 with Arizona
3-0 in 2001 World Series against Yankees, won Series MVP.

Clemens won 354 games, won 7 Cy Youngs but never more than two in a row, pitched in 6
World Series.

Maddux won 355 games, did win 4 Cy Youngs in a row 1992 Cubs, 1993-1994-1995 Braves,
pitched in 3 World Series.

Martinez won 219 games, won 3 Cy Youngs (two in a row), pitched in 2 World Series.

Big Home Run Seasons, Did Not Lead the League.

1927, 45 HRs

LOU GEHRIG, TRAILED BABE RUTH 60

1938 AL, 50 HRs

JIMMIE FOXX TRAILED HANK GREENBERG 58

1961, hit 54 HRs

MICKY MANTLE – TRAILED ROGER MARIS 61

1998, hit 66 HRs

1999 hit 63 HRs

2001 hit 64 HRs

SAMMY SOSA, TRAILED MARK MCGWIRE 70 IN 1998.

SOSA TRAILED MCGWIRE 65 IN 1999.

SOSA TRAILED BARRY BONDS 73 IN 2001.

Over the last 60 years (non-strike/non-pandemic), 10 Position player MVPs hit less than 20 Home Runs. How many can you name?

2008 AL infielder. Also 2007 Rookie of the Year, played in 2007 and 2013 World Series.

Dustin Pedroia, 17 HRs.

2001 AL left-handed hitting OF. Led majors in hits 7x, 2 x batting champion.

Ichiro Suzuki, 8 HRs

1995 NL infielder, Hall of Fame, MVP of 1990 World Series.

Barry Larkin, 15 HRs

1985 NL switch hitting OF, won his first World Series in 1982 over the Brewers but then lost the next three he played in 1985, 1987, 1990.

Willie McGee, 10 HRs, McGee was on 1985 Cards lost to Royals, 1987 Cards lost to Twins, 1990 A's lost to the Reds.

1984 NL infielder. Hall of Fame, Phillies manager, hit .385 in losing NLCS game in 1984 and 1989.

Ryne Sandberg, 19 HRs, Cubs lost NLCS to Padres in 1984 and Giants in 1989.

1979 NL co-winner, 1B. 11 Gold Gloves, winning World Series teams in 1982 and 1986.

Keith Hernandez, 11 HRs (tied for MVP with Willie Stargell), won World Series with Cards over Brewers in 1982, with Mets over Red Sox in 1986.

1977 AL left-handed batting infielder. 7 batting titles, Hall of Fame.

Rod Carew, 14 HRs

1976 AL catcher. 1970 AL Rookie of the Year, played on 1977 and 1978 World Series champs.

Thurman Munson, 17 HRs

1973 NL infielder. 17x All Star, played in 6 World Series including winners 1975-1976-1980.

Pete Rose, 5 HRs, was MVP in 1975 World Series win Reds over Red Sox, also won with Reds over Yankees in 1976 and with Phillies over the Ryals in 1980.

1965 AL shortstop. Played on losing World Series team in 1965.

Zoilo Versalles, 19 HRs Twins lost to the Dodgers in 7 games.

A reminder to check out 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

Sunday Baseball Tidbits is distributed every Sunday morning. The goal is to provide “2 Cups of Coffee worth of baseball news, analysis, history and trivia” from a range of sources. All content belongs to its respective copyright holders. This newsletter is provided for the non-commercial enjoyment of our subscribers. Please email nhsuperseven@yahoo.com for a free subscription. We will never share your email address. Questions, comments, ideas, corrections and pointers to content you think subscribers would enjoy are encouraged and appreciated.

Our sources include:

The Athletic	Baseball-almanac.com
Baseballroundtable.com	Bleacher Report
Boston Globe	Mlb.com
The New York Times	Joe Posnanski newsletter
SABR.org	Sports Illustrated
Joe Sheehan newsletter	Baseballreference.com
ESPN.com	New York Post

SBNation	mbltraderumors.com
baseballsavant.mlb.com	thebaseballcube.com
baseballthinkfactory.org	historicbaseball.com
ViSN (Vegas information and sports network)	
Atlas Obscura	statmuse.com
Fangraphs.com	atlas obscura
Baseball's Best and Worst	Thedrummeyangle.com
Sports Business Journal	thisdayinbaseball.com
horsehidetrivia.blogspot.com	sportsskeeda.com

Please check them out and support them.