

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

11.19.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

Busy week as managers come and go. Also in this edition Awards Week, a great explanation of how StatCast works, RIP Padres owner Peter Seidler, rules changes from this season and those under consideration, and how much does **Gerrit Cole** get paid per pitch.

In Longer Reads: How pitchers keep getting better and better through analytics, Free Agency Risks, and a \$10 million baseball card?

Got an idea to improve Sunday Baseball Tidbits? The off season is the time to try new stuff so please pass along your suggestions. One request already received—rules quizzes/you be the ump. I'm searching for the best source.

Meanwhile, here's a couple of cups of coffee worth of interesting stuff—enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Can you name the MLB players who were the Rookie of the Year and are in the Hall of Fame?

1947 Dodgers

1951 Giants

1956 White Sox

1956 Reds

1967 Mets

1968 Reds

1972 Red Sox

1977 Orioles

1977 Expos

1982 Orioles

1991 Astros

1993 Dodgers

1996 Yankees

Three players drafted first-overall have been elected to the Hall of Fame. Who are they?

14 of his 21 seasons were with the White Sox, 6x All-Star, this outfielder/DH made his only World Series appearance in 1990 with the A's (against the Reds).

13 of his 22 seasons were with the Mariners, AL MVP in 1997.

Played all of his 19 seasons with 1 team, won NL MVP in 1999, won NL batting title in 2008 when he hit .365

There are 41 players who've played 2,000 games at one position for a single team, led by **Brooks Robinson** (2,870 games at third base for the Orioles). All but eight of those players are enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

Mike Schmidt (2,212 games at third base for the Phillies) counts, even though he played other positions besides third base for the Phillies. And **Eddie Mathews** (2,129 games at third base for the Braves) counts, even though he played third base for teams other than the Braves.

If you are guessing along with your faithful editor, Bernie Williams (played 2076 games for the Yankees but 1856 in CF) and Don Mattingly (played 1785 games for the Yankees, 1634 at 1B) did not make the 2,000 games cut.

2,306 games at 2B for the Tigers

2,184 games at catcher for the Cards

2,178 games at 1B for the Rockies

2,177 games at SS for the Reds

2,153 games at 2B for the Royals

2,079 games in RF for the Red Sox

2,058 games at SS for the Phillies

2,026 games at 1B for the Senators 1915-1932.

18 Pitchers - Unanimous Cy Young winners. Name them.

1963, 1965, 1966 Dodgers

1968 Tigers

1968 Cards

1972 Phillies

1978 Yankees

1984 Cubs

1985 Mets

1988 Dodgers

1998 Blue Jays

1999, 200 Red Sox

2002 Diamondbacks

2004, 2006 Twins

2007 Padres

2010 Phillies

2014 Dodgers

2020 Indians

2022 Astros

2022 Marlins

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Don Mattingly's son Preston was promoted to assistant GM of the Phillies.

Ty Cobb hit at least one home run in each of his 24 seasons (1905-1928). The record was broken by **Rickey Henderson** who homered in 25 straight (1979-2003).

Cobb led the AL in RBIs 4 X and in batting avg. 12 X, including 9 a row. He only led the league in HR 1 X -- 1909. His 9 HR that year were enough to top the leader board and when added to his 107 RBI & .377 BA, he won the triple crown.

Despite having the highest average ticket prices in baseball, the Red Sox' estimated taxed payroll, according to Spotrac, is \$148.9 million, some \$88 million less than the competitive tax threshold of \$237 million. In recent years, the Sox more often than not have been around \$20 million above or below the CBT.

An interesting note buried in the discussion of the A's abandoning Oakland (6th largest media market) for Las Vegas (40th largest) -- Since 2000 the Oakland A's made the playoffs 11 times. More than the Mets and Giants, same number of times as the Red Sox

The Angels have played 486 games over the last three seasons, **Mike Trout** has played in 237 of them.

You Don't Know What You've Got 'til it's Gone

November 19, 1993 the Dodgers traded **Pedro Martinez** to the Expos for **Delino DeShields**.

November 18, 1997 the Expos traded Martinez to the Red Sox for **Carl Pavano and Tony Armas**.

May 25, 1989 the Expos traded **Randy Johnson** to the Mariners for **Mark Langston and Mike Campbell**.

July 31, 1998 the Mariners traded Johnson to the Astros for **Freddie Garcia, Carlos Guillen and John Halama**.

Rules Review Continues

A new wrinkle to the pitch clock could be coming to MLB for the 2024 season and beyond.

According to ESPN's Jeff Passan, MLB's competition committee is "weighing a proposal that would reduce the pitch clock with runners on base from 20 seconds to 18 next season." The clock would remain at 15 seconds between pitches with the bases empty.

The competition committee is also reportedly considering a proposal to reduce mound visits from five per game to four. The committee consists of six members representing teams, four players and one umpire.

Passan added that the reduced clock would be "aiming to reverse a late-season trend that saw the average time of game increase by seven minutes."

The committee's other proposals include:

- Batter timeouts. The home-plate umpire would signal for the re-start of the 15- or 18-second between-pitch timer after granting the batter's request for time.

The league said two issues emerged with timeouts last season. Hitters took advantage because there was no time limit, and pitchers sometimes held the ball for prolonged periods because the clock did not reset until the batter returned to the box. The average duration of a timeout increased by two seconds from April to September.

One potential problem with the proposed change is that it would not necessarily achieve its desired goal. Hitters could wait as long as possible to call a timeout, then delay their entrance into the box until the last possible instant.

- Pitchers must work exclusively from the stretch with runners on base. The committee wants to adopt this rule because of a recent trend in which pitchers have adopted "hybrid" deliveries that incorporate elements of the stretch and windup, creating confusion, particularly with runners on third base.

Some pitchers don't like the idea of the league dictating their style of delivery.

“You can’t tell me how I want to throw,” one veteran said. “I have to be able to use any tactic to get a hitter out.”

- Mound visits. The committee, saying “mound visits rank among fans’ least favorite events in baseball,” wants to reduce the number from five to four. A team still would get an extra visit in the ninth inning if it exhausts its allotment.
- Pitching changes. The timer would reset to two minutes rather than 2:15 when the new pitcher steps on the warning track.
- Circumvention. Pitchers no longer would be permitted to delay the start of the clock by walking around the edge of the mound after a ball is out of play.
- The requirement that a pitcher who warms up must face at least one hitter. This change would eliminate the ability for the defense to wait for the first hitter of the inning to be announced and then make a pitching change.

The committee cited 23 instances last season where the pitcher that warmed up between innings was replaced before throwing a pitch, adding approximately three minutes of dead time in each instance.

The proposed rule changes also include two unrelated to pitching or the time of game.

The first, raised by umpire **Bill Miller**, suggests a widening of the runners’ lane to include the dirt path on the fair side of the foul line. The second, raised by free-agent infielder **Whit Merrifield**, concerns the blocking of bases and the home-plate collision rule.

The joint committee said, “Players have provided feedback saying that it has become common for infielders to drop knees and lower legs in front of a base to prevent the baserunner from reaching the bag ahead of the tag. As long as the umpire deems the fielder is in the act of fielding a throw, this behavior is not against existing rules.”

The committee cited player safety as one concern, the complexity of the home-plate collision rule as another. The new “blocking base rule” would be applicable at all bases. Fielders could not block the direct pathway of runners and impede them from reaching a base even in the act of fielding a throw or while possessing the ball. Runners could not initiate avoidable contact.

The only exceptions would be when the runners are out by enough that blocking does not impact the play, or when defenders are in the act of fielding batted balls. Umpires would be directed to target egregious violations, and their judgments would not be subject to replay reviews.

Barry Bonds in 2001, when he hit 73 home runs, was not the unanimous MVP. Sammy Sosa, who led the league in runs and RBIs, got two first-place votes.

Cincinnati Reds pinch-hitters had nine home runs and a 138 wRC+ in 146 plate appearances this year. Cleveland Guardians pinch-hitters had no home runs and a 15 wRC+ in 92 plate appearances.

1998 World Series. A Yankees team that went 114-48 in the regular season, swept the Padres in 4 games to win the World Series. World Series MVP Yankee third baseman **Scott Brosius**. The veteran batted .471 (8-for-17) with two home runs and six RBIs in the Yankees' four-game sweep of the Padres.

Philadelphia's **Kyle Schwarber** came to the plate 720 times this year and batted .197 with 47 home runs, 108 runs scored, 104 RBIs, 126 walks, 215 strikeouts, and a 119 wRC+.

In 1956, Phillies outfielder **Richie Ashburn** came to the plate 719 times and batted .303 with three home runs, 94 runs scored, 50 RBIs, 79 walks, 45 strikeouts, and a 115 wRC+.

Norm Cash had 41 home runs and 19 intentional walks in 1961. **Roger Maris** had 61 home runs and no intentional walks.

Ted Lyons threw a complete game in all 20 starts he made in 1942. The 41-year-old Chicago White Sox right-hander went 14-6 with a 2.05 ERA.

Pat Hentgen was named American League Cy Young Award winner in 1996. The Toronto Blue Jays right-hander finished 20-10 with a 3.22 ERA and led the junior circuit in innings pitched (265-and-two-thirds), complete games (10), and shutouts (3).

First player to represent both Canadian teams in All Star play? **Ron Fairly**. Fairly played 21 seasons in the bigs, his first 12 with the Dodgers at 1B and right field. In 1973 he made the All-Star team with the Expos, then in 1977 he represented the Blue Jays. Those were his only two All Star nods.

Garry Templeton. Shortstop for Cards traded to San Diego for **Ozzie Smith** in 1982.

The Padres weren't crazy. Templeton came with some great stats.

Templeton led NL in triples 3 straight seasons—1977-79.

Templeton had 200 hits and just 13 walks in 1977, he did it again in 1979 (just 4 other players in history had a season with 200 hits and 20 or fewer walks—**Steve Brodie and Hughie Jennings** in the 1880's, **Frank McCormick and Woody Jensen** in the 1930's).

Templeton played 2079 games in the majors, had 2096 hits and batted .271. He won 3 Gold Gloves and 2 Silver Slugger awards.

Then again, Smith did ok with St. Louis...

Bartolo Colon. Colon logged 247 wins, 2,535 strikeouts, made four All-Star teams, and won a Cy Young Award.

Bruce Bochy has managed 26 MLB seasons. None of his teams have won 100 or more games in a single season, nor have they lost 100 or more games.

Connie Mack managed five teams that won 100 or more games. He managed 10 teams that lost 100 or more games.

Boog Powell won two World Series playing with the Baltimore Orioles. The slugging first baseman went 16-for-45 (.356) with four home runs and 12 RBIs over 12 postseason games while doing so.

Aaron Sele made seven postseason starts, one in which he allowed one run over seven-and-a-third innings and got a no-decision. The right-hander was tagged with a loss in all six of his other starts.

Rangers 1B **Nathaniel Lowe**. 2022 dead last in defensive runs prevented.

Over the winter he worked out with **Francisco Lindor**.

Boom. 2023 gold glove.

WHERE DID MY TV REVENUE GO?

TV rights continue to be an ugly situation for much of MLB. Bally Sports and the broadcast rights for 11 teams, roughly one-third of the league, still have their TV rights deals wrapped up in a bankruptcy case. Last season Bally defaulted on payments for a few teams this year, resulting in MLB taking over the Padres and Diamondbacks broadcasts.

Eleven teams are still broadcast by Bally for the time being, which means their 2024 television rightsholder is tied up in a bankruptcy case. The Twins' deal with Bally expired after the 2023 season.

As of now, Diamond Sports Group (which owns Bally Sports) says it plans to inform MLB by the end of December which teams it intends to keep broadcasting and which it plans to drop. MLB predictably doesn't like that deadline — teams need to know what their 2024 operating budgets will be as they navigate free agency.

"In practical terms, while the 2023 regular baseball season has ended, MLB and the Clubs are fully engaged in preparing for the 2024 season," MLB argued in a court filing. "Further extending exclusivity would force MLB and the Clubs to assume additional, and unnecessary, risk and cost."

Diamond argues that the urgency is lessened because it has developed a plan that would keep it broadcasting at least some MLB teams through 2024.

Diamond wrote in a filing Wednesday that it has "already communicated to MLB which Clubs' games they intend to continue broadcasting for the 2024 season and which other agreements may be rejected or terminated in advance of the 2024 season."

Diamond said too that it intends to tell MLB which teams it would drop by the end of December, which Diamond characterized as “materially before the start of the 2024 MLB season.” MLB doesn’t think that’s soon enough, though.

“We need to know who they want to continue to broadcast, and who they don’t want to continue to broadcast, so that we can make plans in order to deliver games to our fans,” commissioner Rob Manfred said during the World Series. “Until we have a feel for that, it’s very difficult to give the teams a realistic view of what the economics are going to be.

What do **Derek Jeter, Tony Gwynn, Ozzie Smith, Al Kaline, Eddie Murray, Mike Piazza, Nolan Arenado, Manny Machado, Juan Soto** have in common? None of them won a league MVP.

The Astros introduced bench coach **Joe Espada** as their next manager during a press conference Monday morning at Minute Maid Park.

Espada, who spent the last six years as bench coach, will replace **Dusty Baker**, who retired last month following the Astros’ loss to the Rangers in the American League Championship Series.

Espada, 48, came to the Astros from the Yankees prior to the 2018 season to replace bench coach Alex Cora, who was hired to manage the Red Sox. Espada’s previous managerial experience includes the Puerto Rican Winter League. The lack of names tied to the Astros’ job opening indicates Espada was probably the team’s first choice all along.

Espada has worked under a pair of managers who have won World Series titles in Houston -- **A.J. Hinch** and Baker -- and he’ll be tasked with keeping the Astros’ place among the AL heavyweights. Houston has played in seven consecutive ALCS and won six straight full-season division titles, though they had to watch division rival Texas win the World Series this year.

Espada, a native of Puerto Rico, played for 10 seasons in the Minor Leagues and independent ball (1996-2005) after being selected in the second round of the MLB Draft in 1996 by the A’s out of the University of Mobile. He spent time in the Oakland, Florida, Colorado, Kansas City, St. Louis, Texas and Tampa Bay organizations as a player, reaching Triple-A.

After retiring from playing, he coached in the Marlins' system from 2006-13, joining the Major League club as third-base coach in 2010. He spent four seasons ('14-17) with the Yankees as a

scout and third-base coach ('15-17) before the Astros hired him days after they won the '17 World Series.

Espada will be the club's 20th full-time field manager and first Latin American manager since **Preston Gomez** (1974-75).

Jackie Robinson got the press but **Larry Doby** was a pioneer as well. First black man to play in the American League. He was the first player to go directly from the Negro Leagues (Newark Eagles) to the majors, Bill Veeck's Cleveland Indians in 1947.

Doby played pro basketball in the ABL (predecessor to the NBA). Hall of Famer Doby played 13 seasons in the majors. He had 1515 hits and batted .283.

1984. **Larry Walker** decided his hopes of making the NHL as a goaltender weren't going to happen so he signed with the Montreal Expos for \$1500. After 6 so-so seasons in Montreal he signed with Colorado as a free agent in 1995. 1997 MVP Award, three batting titles, five All-Star Game berths and seven Gold Gloves, Hall of Fame.

From 2001-2005 **Ken Harvey** played 251 games for the Royals in a short, unremarkable career of just under 1,000 at bats. But in 2002 Harvey batted .479 in the Arizona Fall League for the Scottsdale Scorpions, a record that has not been broken. While at Nebraska Harvey, as an All-American 1B in 1999, led the nation batting .478 with 23 HRs and 86 RBI.

RIP PETER SEIDLER

Padres owner Peter Seidler died this week. He was 63. He will be remembered as an owner who indeed treated the Padres as a social institution, who lifted the franchise to unprecedented prominence, and who set himself apart until the end.

In an industry known for its pursuit of cold, hard profit, Seidler was a beloved figure, even as he helped turn Petco Park into one of baseball's most popular destinations. Several years ago, he emerged further emboldened after a second bout with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

The Padres subsequently signed **Eric Hosmer** to the franchise's first nine-figure contract. They signed **Manny Machado** to San Diego's first \$300 million deal — briefly the largest pact in North American sports history — and later retained Machado with a \$350 million contract.

They demonstrated Seidler's desire to win, over and over, with similarly lucrative commitments to **Fernando Tatis Jr., Joe Musgrove, Yu Darvish and Xander Bogaerts**. They fielded the franchise's first nine-figure payrolls, including a \$249 million sum this past Opening Day. (As recently as 2012, months before Seidler and Fowler bought the team, the Padres had a \$55 million payroll.)

Seidler's big swings led to high-profile misfires in 2019, 2021 and 2023, but his determination remained intact throughout. His escalating financial expenditures proved that.

"He wanted to win because he was a great sportsman, and great sportsmen want to win," said former Padres president and CEO Larry Lucchino, himself a non-Hodgkin's lymphoma survivor. "But he wanted to do something for the city, unquestionably.

"He was a remarkable baseball man and a more remarkable human being, and I'm pissed off that he's taken from us so early in age."

Peter Seidler never got to experience what he so desperately wanted: San Diego's first major sports championship.

He was the grandson of Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley and the nephew of O'Malley's son and successor, Peter.

Seidler's 2023 Padres were a disappointment on the field. But the same could not be said at the gate, where they drew a franchise-record 3.27 million fans to Petco. It was the second-highest attendance in MLB.

Josh Hader, ace southpaw reliever who pitched for San Diego this year is a free agent. Hader hasn't thrown a regular-season pitch before the ninth inning since 2021.

We're now up to 23 years since any team won two World Series in a row. That's the longest stretch without a repeat champion in the history of the four major North American sports. So how hard is it? That hard.

And even more challenging for the 2024 Phillies is this little tidbit: Since the dawn of division play in 1969, only one team — the 2004-05 Cardinals — has done what the Phillies will attempt to do:

Lose one World Series ... make it back to the next LCS and fall short again ... then grind through a third season and, finally, win it all.

Aaron Nola has thrown more than 22,000 pitches in his nine-year career, every one of them for the Phillies. He is looking to cash in big as he enters free agency at age 30.

Since 2014, four pitchers have signed deals for exactly seven guaranteed years and at least \$200 million. See how you think Nola compares:

Stephen Strasburg (2020-26): seven years, \$245 million (\$35M AAV)

David Price (2016-22): seven years, \$217 million (\$31M AAV)

Clayton Kershaw* (2014-20): seven years, \$215 million (\$30.7M AAV)

Max Scherzer (2015-21): seven years, \$210 million (\$30M AAV)

*(*extension)*

Three of those pitchers — Scherzer, Kershaw and Price — had Cy Young Award trophies on their shelves. Strasburg had just won a World Series MVP Award. Nola, as dependably excellent as he has been for a long time, possesses none of the above.

Nola *does* rank second to only **Gerrit Cole** in innings pitched over the past seven seasons. And Nola is one of just five starters who has been worth at least 30 WAR over those seven seasons, according to Baseball Reference. The others: Scherzer, Cole, **Jacob deGrom** and **Justin Verlander**.

This year the Marlins went 33-14 in one run games. They started the season 12-0 in one run games, an MLB record.

WANT TO BUY A MINOR LEAGUE TEAM?

Michael Silverman, Boston Globe

After being open-minded about selling the Worcester Red Sox or his share of the team last year, chairman and principal owner Larry Lucchino is now actively trying to sell the team and then retire.

“I’m now 78, I’ve been at this for over 40 years, so it’s time to sell this team and move on to blissful retirement,” Lucchino said to former Boston TV sports anchors Bob Lobel and Mike Lynch on their “UnAnchored Boston” podcast this week. “We’ve been talking to various people for many months trying to find a local owner who would step up.

An industry source suggested Friday that the WooSox could sell for close to \$70 million, perhaps even slightly more. A sale of the team, which is regarded highly within the industry for its business acumen, was a topic of discussion at Major League Baseball's fall business meetings in Las Vegas this week.

The WooSox debuted at their \$159 million Polar Park in 2021.

Lucchino is the lead owner among 10 partners who bought the Red Sox' Triple A franchise formerly based in Pawtucket, R.I., for approximately \$25 million in 2015.

Lucchino's preference might be for a local owner, but ownership transactions since MLB took over Minor League Baseball in 2021 are trending toward teams being bought by multi-team conglomerates.

Diamond Baseball Holdings, which already owns the Red Sox' Single A Salem team and Double A Portland Sea Dogs, made a bid for the WooSox in the fall of 2021 believed to be approximately \$50 million.

That bid was rejected by the WooSox ownership group.

Fenway Sports Group, the owner of the Red Sox, is one of the WooSox partners.

Lucchino is an FSG partner who helped form the ownership group headed by John Henry and Tom Werner that bought the Red Sox in 2002. Henry also owns the Globe.

Lucchino served as president of the Red Sox from 2002-15. Prior to that, he was president and CEO of the San Diego Padres and president of the Baltimore Orioles.

Editor's note—in 2015 buy for \$25 million. 2024 sell for \$70 million. Not bad ROI (depending on how much ownership had to shell out towards the new stadium).

HOW STATCAST WORKS, AND HAS BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE GAME

Emma Baccellieri, Sports Illustrated

The lifespan of a major league pitch is less than half a second. If that's difficult to conceptualize, think the most basic, reductive metaphor for something that happens fast. Then go check the Harvard Database of Useful Biological Numbers, and see that, yes, a major league fastball really does go from hand to home plate in the blink of an eye.

How does one accurately capture that?

MLB's answer is a system of 12 cameras positioned around each ballpark, the source of the data that makes up StatCast. (The optical tracking system is the product of the sports tech company Hawk-Eye, best known for making line calls in tennis.)

For the last few years, there were five cameras responsible for tracking pitches at 100 frames per second and seven responsible for tracking players and batted balls at a comparatively languid 50 frames per second. But this season brought an upgrade.

It turned out that 100 frames a second wasn't quite enough for gathering all the information MLB desired from StatCast. It wanted more data, faster.

So this season introduced new pitch-tracking cameras that instead capture 300 frames per second. (There are two cameras behind home plate, one by first base, one by third base and one in center field.) These create a veritable biography for each pitch, capturing its velocity, spin rate, seam orientation, horizontal and vertical break and more, all in that half second of life.

The results can be easy to take for granted. They're ingrained in the game at this point: A pitch is thrown, and seemingly immediately "92 mph curveball" or "101 mph fastball" will flash on the scoreboard and TV broadcast. But the process of gathering that information is remarkably complex-and getting more so each year.

Take the camera upgrade this season. The old hardware offered plenty of detail. But there was one area where MLB felt the results were lacking. What about the exact moment the pitch crossed the plate and connected (or didn't) with the bat? To capture 100 frames a second means losing just milliseconds between snapshots. Yet those milliseconds can be the difference between a hit and a whiff, between making good, hard contact and rolling over on a pitch. Hence the need to up the speed.

"At 100 frames per second, even, the bat moves so much between frames that you can't get a good read on how fast the bat has moved and exactly where it is," says Ben Jediovec, senior director of baseball platform product for MLB. "You have to go to that extra level of granularity, with three times the frame rate, to be able to see where the bat is and be able to measure how fast it's moving. When and where, and really understand that bat-and-ball collision-or lack of collision."

This level of detail is astounding compared to what StatCast provided even just a few years ago. When the first version of the system was rolled out in 2015, it could not provide the specific release point of a pitch, it simply assumed it based on a change of velocity (StatCast originally used a combination of radar and cameras, none of which operated at the current speed.)

But the current system takes out the need for that kind of guesswork. It provides the exact release point. It gives the spin rate and the spin axis. It even captures the orientation of the seams.

Of the hundreds of thousands of pitches thrown each season, StatCast now misses “only a handful,” Jedlovec says. The errors have gotten smaller over the past few years—mistakes of an inch or two at the plate are now less than a quarter of an inch. (It bears noting that if MLB opts to go to robo umps, it will use HawkEye to make the calls.) The league works with Sports Science Lab at Washington State to conduct ground-truth testing at every ballpark to ensure the system is as accurate as possible.

The resulting data has changed the game in the most literal sense. In some cases, it’s provided a new language for age-old ideas. (Think of how any discussion of lifting the ball now involves the term “launch angle”. In others, it’s birthed entirely new concepts, with the data responsible for advancements in pitch design and defensive alignment.

“We thought about data as a way to evaluate players,” Jedlovec says of the early days of Statcast. “We didn’t necessarily anticipate—or at least I didn’t anticipate—the way that it would ultimately shift the game.”

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of how Statcast tracks a pitch is that the data is transmitted even faster than the pitch itself. The bulk of the information is communicated and stored as the three-dimensional coordinates of the ball in every frame from every camera. (“We run a pretty high Google Cloud bill every year,” says Jedlovec.) But MLB requests a few specific pieces of data instantaneously. One of those is the speed of the ball as it leaves the pitcher’s hand. “It’s automated to the degree that in 250 milliseconds after that pitch is released, when it’s on its way to the plate, we know how fast that was and we can send it to the scoreboard,” he says.

Or put more simply? “It’s like magic.”

Bye-Bye Oakland

Owners voted 30-0 this week to approve the move of the A’s from Oakland to Las Vegas.

The latest collective bargaining agreement helped to spur the vote outcome over the long-debated move to Las Vegas, the 40th-largest TV market, by allowing Oakland full revenue sharing status if a binding deal for a new stadium can be locked up by Jan. 15.

While there are still unanswered questions in Las Vegas about the design and funding for a new stadium, the **John Fisher**-owned team likely will be receiving revenue sharing cash from teams like the Red Sox while they play out the string somewhere in the Bay Area before the move in 2028.

The owners also waived the A’s from having to pay a relocation fee based on the expenses the team incurred trying to hammer out a deal for a new stadium in Oakland, commissioner **Rob Manfred** said.

Owners are still discussing an automated balls and strikes system that includes up to three challenges per team per game. Implementation by next season sounds unlikely.

ABS uses the same Hawk-Eye technology from tennis. If a batter or team believes a pitch has nicked or missed a 3-D strike zone that's created specifically for each batter's stance and the situation calls for it, batters/teams can challenge and should be able to see the result quickly on the scoreboard.

More from the owners' meetings—Commissioner Manfred announced Atlanta would be the site of the 2025 All-Star Game after MLB took away the 2021 Mid-Summer Classic because of enacted Georgia voting laws.

The 2024 All-Star Game will be played in Arlington, Texas, the home of the World Series champion Rangers.

The Associated Press reported being told by two people familiar with the decision that MLB canceled plans to play regular-season games in Paris in 2025 after failing to find a promoter.

From the 'Records that will Never Be broken' file, I have mentioned **Tris Speaker's** 448 outfield assists (**Ty Cobb** is second with 275). Speaker also was involved in 143 double plays from the outfield (Cobb is second with 105, **Willie Mays** is tied for 16th with 60). 6 of those DPs were unassisted—also a record.

Speaker played from 1907 to 1928. The Hall of Famer had 3514 hits, his 792 doubles are also an all-time record. His .345 career batting average is 9th all-time. He was the 1912 AL MVP, won the batting title (.386) and led the league in hits 211 and OBP .470 in 1916.

Impact of the Pitch Clock

Games of 2 hours, 15 minutes or shorter — In 2022, there were 13 nine-inning games that short all season. In 2023? That number went up slightly ... *to 170*. In other words, there used to be one game that quick every two weeks. This year, there was, essentially, one every night.

Games of 2:30 or shorter — But let's keep going. In 2022, there were 84 nine-inning games all season that lasted 2 1/2 hours or less. In 2023, *there were 678*.

Games of 3:30 or longer — How routine did the 3 1/2-hour game used to be? So routine that in 2022, there were 232 nine-inning games that lasted at least 3:30. This year, *there were nine* — four of them in September, after rosters expanded. And in seven of those nine, at least 16 runs were scored. So at least there was a good excuse.

How many nine-inning games lasted four hours or longer in 2023? That answer is ... zero. That's down from 39 two years ago and 19 in 2022. But even if you include extra-inning games, there were only six four-hour games over this entire season — and every one of them lasted 12 innings or longer.

REFLECTING ON RULE CHANGES 2023

Jayson Stark, The Athletic

Pitch Clock

About two of every three games were played without a single violation.

After July, only two games featured more than *two* violations, by both teams combined.

And how little impact did those violations have on late-game drama? From Opening Day through July 17, there were 14 pitch-clock violations that resulted in either an automatic walk or an automatic strikeout in the ninth inning or later. But after that, there was just one, by all 30 teams combined

There were 40 games played in this postseason. The only one that lasted four hours or longer was an 11-inning classic, in Game 1 of the World Series. Which means there wasn't a single *nine-inning game* of four hours or more in the entire postseason — for only the third time in the last 30 postseasons. Total number of four-hour nine-inning games over the previous four postseasons: 26. This year: zero.

Just one game in this postseason dragged past midnight EDT — and that was that same 11-inning World Series game. Over the previous three postseasons, there were 17 games that reached the other side of midnight in the East. For a sport trying to fit its showcase events into a vital TV window, that was a huge development.

Remember when the 3 1/2-hour October baseball game was almost routine? Not anymore. Even counting extra-inning games, only three games went 3:30 or more in the whole

postseason — tied (with 2005) for the fewest in any postseason since 1991. Over the previous five postseasons, there were 108 games that went 3:30-plus.

During the World Series, Fox never popped the ticking pitch clock onto its screen. Not for one pitch. Did anyone even notice? In a possibly related development, there wasn't a single violation during the World Series. There were only seven violations in the postseason. And of the 23 postseason games NL teams took part in, there was just one violation.

Shift Ban

In related rule change updates—there were just 4 shift ban violations all season.

Reduce Pickoff Throws, Bigger Bases

The stolen-base success rate (80.2 percent) was the highest ever.

The rate of stolen-base attempts (1.8 per game) was the highest since 2012.

Five teams stole at least 150 bases. Only three teams stole that many in the previous 10 seasons combined. It was the first season in the 21st century featuring five teams with 150 or more.

There were 21 teams that swiped at least 100 bases. Two years ago, there were five. As recently as 2022, there were only eight.

Ronald Acuña Jr. stole 73 — the most since 2007, when **Jose Reyes** stole 78.

Six players stole 40 or more — for the first time in a decade.

And 51 players stole 20 or more — the most since 1989.

Baseball in 2023 was a significantly more entertaining mix of the two qualities every sport aspires to:

More action. ... Less dead time.

How much more action was there? We're talking about ...

- Over 1,600 more runs than the year before.
- Nearly 1,300 more stolen bases.
- More than 1,100 more hits.

- Nearly 1,500 more baserunners (a formula based on hits plus walks, minus homers).
- But there wasn't nearly as much waiting around for all that action to unfold. The average time between balls in play dropped by nearly 30 seconds — from 3 minutes, 42 seconds last year to 3:13 this year. That's a level baseball hasn't seen since 2009, according to Baseball Reference.

Let's use the example of one of baseball's most fun plays to watch: When a great athlete leads off first base ... and a single rockets through the right side of the infield ... and that runner fires up the jets to round second and burn for third base ... while the right fielder, the dude with the best arm of any position player on the diamond, charges that single and tries to throw him out.

That's this sport at its essence. And Rule Change Baseball brought back the old-fashioned first-to-third at a level we haven't seen in decades.

- With a runner on first base — meaning the first baseman almost always had to hold that runner on — the batting average of left-handed hitters was up 45 points on pulled ground balls, according to Statcast.
- And the upshot of that was that runners went first to third on 31.8 percent of all singles hit this season, according to Baseball Reference.
- So what's the big deal about that? According to Baseball Reference's Katie Sharp, that's the highest rate of first-to-thirds on singles in nearly 30 years, since a 31.9 percent rate in 1995.

More great athletes running around those bases. And a half-hour a night that you no longer had to spend watching those great athletes wait for the entire chorus of their walkup tune to fade away, fiddle with their batting gloves, then tap the plate five times before every pitch.

Was there really a down side to that, aside from how it cut into beer-guzzling time?

You know who was all in — based on attendance data, local TV ratings and the significant increase in people watching entire games on their favorite mobile devices? **The customers.**

"Is it perfect?" mused Theo Epstein. "Are we at our absolute best and most entertaining version of baseball yet? Probably not. But I think the rule changes were really successful, and taking a very meaningful step in the right direction. And I think everyone in the game is happy with how things went — most importantly, the fans."

NPB stars **Yoshinobu Yamamoto** (5 feet 10 inches) and **Shota Imanaga** (5-10), AL Cy Young runner-up **Sonny Gray** (5-10), and two-time All-Star **Marcus Stroman** (5-7) are positioned to

cash in on the open market. All come as reminders that starting pitching excellence can come in a variety of shapes and forms—**Pedro Martinez** was 5'11", **Tim Lincecum**, **Fernando Valenzuela**, **Ron Guidry**, **Billy Wagner**, **Whitey Ford** and **Bartolo Colon** were all under six feet tall.

Big studs remain popular-- Ten years ago, pitchers listed as sub-6-footers made 288 starts and logged 3,288 innings. This past season, pitchers of such stature combined for 161 starts (not including openers) — a 44 percent drop — and 2,084 innings, a 37 percent decrease. The average height of big-league pitchers has remained remarkably stable this century — ranging between 6-2 and 6-3.

Of the 64 pitchers who touched 100 m.p.h. at least once in the big leagues in 2023, just one — **Daniel Palencia** of the Cubs — had a listed height under 6 feet. Of the 100 pitchers with the highest average fastball velocity this past season, three — Palencia (25th), **Jonathan Loáisiga** of the Yankees (41st), and **Prelander Berroa** of the Mariners (87th) — were shorter than 6 feet.

AWARDS

ROOKIES OF THE YEAR

A highly expected result became a reality on Monday as Baltimore Orioles star **Gunnar Henderson** and Arizona Diamondbacks star **Corbin Carroll** were named American and National League Rookies of the Year.

Henderson and Carroll dominated the voting ballots, with both of them being unanimously selected for their respective awards. It's just the fifth time in MLB history that both Rookies of the Year were unanimous selections.

2017: **Cody Bellinger/Aaron Judge** 1997: **Scott Rolen/Nomar Garciaparra** 1993: **Mike Piazza/Tim Salmon** 1987: **Benito Santiago/Mark McGwire**

Henderson, who beat out Boston Red Sox first baseman **Triston Casas** and Cleveland Guardians pitcher **Tanner Bibee** for the award, established himself as one of the faces of an Orioles team that finished with the best record in the AL at 101-61. He led all rookies with 28 home runs and 66 extra-base hits while adding 82 RBI and ranking first on the Orioles with 100 runs scored.

The No. 1 prospect entering the season, Henderson was also outstanding in the field, ranking third among AL shortstops with 10 defensive runs saved despite making just 64 starts at the position. He made 68 starts at third base and also saw time as designated hitter, earning the AL Silver Slugger Award for utility players. He's the first Orioles player to be named Rookie of the Year since **Gregg Olson** in 1989.

Carroll also seemed like a no-brainer to take home some hardware after a magical rookie campaign that included Arizona's first playoff appearance since 2017 and a trip to the 2023 World Series. He beat out New York Mets pitcher **Kodai Senga** and Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder **James Outman** to become the first player in Diamondbacks franchise history to win the NL award.

Carroll recorded 25 home runs and 54 stolen bases this season, becoming the first rookie in MLB history to put together a 25-50 campaign. He led the D-Backs with 161 hits and a .285 batting average while also adding 76 RBI. He brought excitement to the Diamondbacks with his blazing baserunning and versatility on defense while playing multiple outfield positions.

The Diamondbacks knew what they had in Carroll early, signing the 23-year-old to an eight-year, \$111 million contract extension in March.

Their connection goes back a ways. It was the American team at the 2018 Under Armour All-America Game at Wrigley Field. And as it turns out, it was a preview of the 2023 **Jackie Robinson** Rookie of the Year class in MLB.

The leadoff man and center fielder was a Seattle speedster named Corbin Carroll. The third baseman was a tall, athletic kid from small-town Alabama named Gunnar Henderson.

Fewest games played by a rookie of the year. **Willie McCovey**. *.354 BA, .656 SLG, 13 HR in 52 G.* He delivered an extra base hit every 7 at bats.

A Lookback at Some Great Rookie of the Year Seasons

Jackie Robinson 1947 *.297 BA, 29 SB, 31 2B*

Dick Allen 1964. *.939 OPS (162 OPS+), 13 3B, 125 R. Led NL in runs, triples, extra-base hits and total bases.*

Tony Oliva 1964. *.323 BA, 43 2B, 374 total bases.* Oliva's .323 average made him the first rookie in modern history to win a batting title, and he also paced the AL in hits, runs and doubles. His 374 total bases led the Majors and is tied with **Hal Trotsky** (1934) for the most by any first-year player.

Tom Seaver 1967. *16 wins, 2.76 ERA (122 ERA+), 18 CG. That was 16 wins for a Mets team that lost 101 games.*

Johnny Bench 1968. 244 total bases, 40 2B, 82 RBI. First rookie catcher to win a Gold Glove. First catcher to win rookie of the year.

Mark Fidrych 1976. 19 wins, 2.34 ERA (159 ERA+), 24 complete games. His 24 complete games, unlikely to be matched again, are the most of any post-World War II rookie.

Fred Lynn 1977 .331 BA, .967 OPS (162 OPS+), 47 doubles. The other rookie to claim a league MVP alongside Ichiro, Lynn helped elevate the Red Sox to pennant winners with his dazzling all-around game. The 23-year-old paced the AL with a .566 slugging percentage, 47 doubles and 103 runs scored and finished second to **Rod Carew** in the batting race, while also displaying some of the best center-field defense ever played at Fenway Park.

Fernando Valenzuela 1981. 8 shutouts, 180 strikeouts, 2.48 ERA. 20-year-old from Mexico rode his screwball and an MLB-most eight shutouts to become the first to win both a Rookie of the Year and Cy Young Award in the same season.

Albert Pujols 1984. .329 BA, 37 HR, 130 RBI, 1.013 OPS (157 OPS+). 130 RBI is all time rookie record.

Dwight Gooden 1984. 7 wins, 2.60 ERA (137 ERA+), 276 SO. His 276 strikeouts shattered **Herb Score's** previous rookie record of 245. As a 19 year old rookie Gooden paced the Majors in FIP (1.69), WHIP (1.07) and hits per nine innings (6.6).

Jose Canseco 1986. 33 HR, 117 RBI, 15 SB. First (and still only) rookie in modern history to hit 30 homers, drive in 100 runs and steal 15 bases.

Mark McGwire 1987. 49 HR, 118 RBI, .618 SLG, .987 OPS (164 OPS+). His .618 slugging percentage led the Majors, and his 344 total bases were second-most in the AL behind **George Bell**.

Mike Piazza 1993. 35 HR, 307 total bases, .932 OPS (153 OPS+). Tied **Rudy York's** 56-year-old record for homers by a first-year backstop, 112 RBIs set a NL rookie record.

Nomar Garciaparra 1997. 30 HR, 209 H, 11 3B. His 30 homers and .534 slugging percentage in '97 remain the standard for rookies at the position.

Ichiro Suzuki 2001 .350 BA, 242 H, 56 SB. Ichiro's 242 hits as a rookie still stand as the 10th-highest single-season total in history, and his .350 average is the highest by any post-Integration rookie. MVP as a rookie.

Craig Kimbrell 2011 46 SV, 2.10 ERA, 14.8 K/9. Kimbrell set an MLB rookie record for saves. Kimbrell reached 100 career strikeouts in just 59 1/3 innings and strung together a 38 1/3 scoreless innings streak from mid-June through early September.

Mike Trout 2012. 30 HR, 49 SB, .963 OPS (168 OPS+)

Aaron Judge 2017. 52 HR, 127 BB, 128 runs, 1.049 OPS (171 OPS+). Rookie home run record. Led league in runs and walks. Judge shattered **Joe DiMaggio's** homer record for Yankees freshmen.

Cody Bellinger 2017. 39 HR, 97 RBI, .581 SLG. Bellinger became the first rookie to hit 10 homers in a 10-game span, hit for the cycle on July 15 and broke the NL rookie record with his 39th long ball on Sept. 22. He also showed versatility by manning both first base and the outfield.

Pete Alonso 2019. 53 HR, 120 RBI, .583 SLG, .941 OPS (148 OPS+). The first baseman broke **Aaron Judge's** rookie home run record while also becoming the first freshman to win the Majors' homer crown outright.

Bryce Harper 2021. 22 HR, 26 2B, 98 R. Harper's 57 extra-base hits and 254 total bases each set records for any player before his age-20 season.

Yankees who won Rookie of the Year

Aaron Judge, 2017 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: 52 HR, 127 BB, 128 runs, 1.049 OPS (171 OPS+)

Derek Jeter, 1996 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: .314 BA, 41 extra-base hits, 14 SB

Dave Righetti, 1981 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: 2.05 ERA (174 ERA+), 1 HR allowed in 105 1/3 IP

Thurman Munson, 1970 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: .302 BA, .801 OPS (126 OPS+), 33 caught stealing throws

Stan Bahnsen, 1968 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: 2.05 ERA (140 ERA+), 17 wins, 10 CG

Tom Tresh, 1962 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: .286 BA, 20 HR, 26 2B

Tony Kubek, 1957 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: .297 BA, 21 2B, .335 OBP

Bob Grim, 1954 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: 20 wins, 3.26 ERA (107 ERA+), eight CG

Gil McDougald, 1951 AL (Yankees)

Key stats: .306 BA, 41 extra-base hits, .884 OPS (142 OPS+)

CY YOUNG AWARDS

Matt Snell and Gerrit Cole won the Cy Young awards.

Snell, 31 next month, has now earned a Cy Young award for the second time in his career. The first trophy was in the American League, with Snell winning as a member of the Rays in 2018. He is just the seventh pitcher to win the award in both leagues, joining **Roger Clemens, Randy Johnson, Pedro Martínez, Max Scherzer, Gaylord Perry** and **Roy Halladay**.

Logan Webb of the Giants finished second in the voting while **Zac Gallen** of the Diamondbacks finished third.

Snell's voting wasn't quite unanimous but he got 28 of the 30 first-place votes. He got to 180 innings pitched in both his award-winning campaigns but hasn't reached 130 in any other season. He also hasn't posted an ERA lower than 3.24 in any of them.

Snell allowed 19 runs in his last 23 starts. That's the fewest in any span of that length within a single season in the past 100 years.

Only two Cy Young-winning starting pitchers, **Justin Verlander** in 2022 and **Corbin Burnes** in '21, threw fewer innings than Snell did the two times he won the award.

The Braves **Spencer Strider**, led the league in wins, strikeouts and certain advanced metrics, but tied for 12th with a 3.86 ERA.

The more innings a starting pitcher work, the more valuable he is to his team, saving his bullpen, making an impact beyond the day he throws. So it is worth noting Snell's 180 innings were 36 fewer than Webb's, 30 fewer than Gallen's and 6 2/3 fewer than Strider's. Webb and Gallen effectively threw the equivalent of five or six starts more than Snell. But again, Snell's dominance was undeniable, even mitigating his walk rate. Of the 99 batters Snell walked, only 12.1 percent scored, according to STATS Perform. The major-league rate of baserunners who scored after a walk was 24.5 percent.

Though Snell led the Majors in walks with 99 -- he's only the second pitcher to do so and also win a Cy Young, after **Early Wynn** in 1959 -- he also led in opponents' batting average (.181),

hits per nine innings (5.8) and ERA+ (182) in his 180 innings of work. His 234 strikeouts were second in the NL.

Snell had ups and downs—he gave up the fewest hits per nine, had the highest walk percentage of any pitcher this century, had the second-most strikeouts and second-most wild pitches. He has never thrown a complete game,

New York Yankees ace Gerrit Cole won the first Cy Young of his career on Wednesday night, and it was unanimous. Cole had 15 wins on the season, as well as a 2.63 ERA and .98 WHIP. The 33-year-old Cole went 15-4 with a 2.63 ERA and 222 strikeouts in 33 starts in 2023. His ERA was the lowest in the AL and the second lowest in the Majors, trailing only Snell.

Cole will have the chance to opt out after next season. If he continues to pitch like this, he could reset the market for starters and perhaps be the class of free agency. If Cole opts in to the rest of his deal, he'll be paid \$36 million AAV through the 2028 campaign. If he opts out, the options are endless, including a potential return to New York for even more money. The Yankees were able to keep **Aaron Judge** in Pinstripes last offseason. Come 2024, they could be facing a similar challenge with Cole.

Cole became the 25th pitcher to win the Cy unanimously and the 11th in the AL (Justin Verlander did it last year). The Twins' **Sonny Gray** finished second and the Blue Jays' **Kevin Gausman** third.

The only active pitcher without a Cy Young who has more career bWAR than Cole (40.7) is Boston's **Chris Sale** (47.3), whose litany of injuries the last five seasons has left him out of the running. Cole, meanwhile, has been durable and dependably one of the best pitchers in baseball dating back to 2018, his first season with the Astros. Add in his transcendent 2015 with the Pirates club that had drafted him first overall in 2011, and Cole has had seven seasons in which he has received Cy support, including the second-place finishes in 2019 (to then-teammate Verlander, who finished just 12 voting points ahead of him) and in 2021 (to **Robbie Ray**, then the ace of the Blue Jays).

Cole was runner-up to **Justin Verlander** in 2019 and to **Robbie Ray** in 2021, he led the AL this year in ERA (2.63), innings (209), and WHIP (0.981) while going 15-4 with 222 strikeouts. Only one AL player — the two-way star **Shohei Ohtani** — had more bWAR than Cole, and no full-time pitcher was close. Cole is the first to win the award after finishing in second place on multiple occasions (2019, 2021).

Cole reduced his home runs allowed to 20, down from a league-leading 33 in 2022.

Cole left no doubt about his Cy standing. He was the runaway favorite for the honor at year's end after leading the AL in ERA (2.63), ERA+ (165), innings pitched (209) and opponents' batting

average (.206) while pacing the Majors in WHIP (0.98). Cole allowed just four earned runs over his final five starts, spanning 35 innings, capping his Cy case with a two-hit shutout in Toronto.

Cole is paid \$36 million per season. A subscriber speculated on his per pitch compensation. Back of my napkin:

He started 33 games – that's \$1,090,909 per start.

He threw 209 innings – that's \$172,248 per inning.

He struck out 222 batters -- \$162,162 per whiff.

The Google didn't find me an exact pitch count. But if we assume he averages 100 pitches per start and he averages 6.3 innings per start (222 innings/33 starts) then Cole threw about 16 pitches per inning.

So, for each pitch, ball or strike, Cole was paid \$10,765.50. Yes, that is per pitch. Not a bad gig.

John Denny, Rick Porcello, Steve Stone won the Cy Young, never were top ten before or after.

Tommy John, Jimmy Key, Curt Schilling, Adam Wainwright and Yu Darvish are the only starters to never win a Cy Young Award despite finishing second in the voting at least twice.

Five pitchers with multiple postseason MVP awards never did capture a Cy: **Josh Beckett, Madison Bumgarner, Cole Hamels, Curt Schilling and Dave Stewart.**

Some others who came close but didn't win:

Bert Blyleven

Top finish: 3rd (AL, 1984 and 1985)

Jim Bunning

Top finish: 2nd (NL, 1967)

Jim Kaat

Top finish: 4th (AL, 1975)

Juan Marichal

Top finish: 8th (NL, 1971) Marichal had more wins than any other pitcher from 1963 through 1969, but **Sandy Koufax, Bob Gibson, Tom Seaver, Dean Chance and Mike McCormick** took the honors instead.

Jack Morris

Top finish: 3rd (AL, 1981 and 1983)

Mike Mussina

Top finish: 2nd (AL, 1999)

Phil Niekro

Top finish: 2nd (NL, 1969)

Nolan Ryan

Top finish: 2nd (AL, 1973)

Don Sutton

Top finish: 3rd (NL, 1976)

in 1980, Sutton didn't appear on a single Cy Young ballot despite a strikingly similar performance to Gerrit Cole's this year:

Sutton 1980: 13-5, 2.20 ERA, 212 1/3 IP, 163 hits, 0.989 WHIP, 20 HR allowed, 833 batters faced, 161 ERA+

Gerrit Cole 2023: 15-4, 2.63 ERA, 209 IP, 157 hits, 0.981 WHIP, 20 HR allowed, 821 batters faced, 165 ERA+

Which team has had the most Cy Young winners? **Dodgers** pitchers have won the award 12 times, five more than any other team. The winners:

- **Don Newcombe** (1956)
- **Don Drysdale** (1962)
- **Sandy Koufax** (1963, '65 and '66)
- **Mike Marshall** (1974)
- **Fernando Valenzuela** (1981)
- **Orel Hershiser** (1988)
- **Éric Gagné** (2003)
- **Clayton Kershaw** (2011, '13, '14)

The Braves, Phillies, Red Sox and Mets are tied for second with seven Cy Young winners each.

Gerrit Cole is the sixth Yankee to win the award, and Blake Snell is the fifth Padre.

Cole is the sixth Yankee to win a Cy Young Award, joining **Bob Turley** (1958), **Whitey Ford** ('61), **Sparky Lyle** ('77), **Ron Guidry** ('78) and **Roger Clemens** (2001). Of that group, only Cole and Guidry won unanimously.

MVP

For the first time in a voting process dating back to 1931, both MVP honors announced by the Baseball Writers' Association of America on MLB Network on Thursday night were unanimous. **Shohei Ohtani** captured his second AL MVP in the last three seasons and became the first player ever to be chosen unanimously twice, while **Ronald Acuña Jr.** won his first NL MVP.

This was just the 20th unanimous MVP vote since the award was established in 1931.

Corey Seager was second with 24 second--place votes and 264 points, and Texas teammate **Marcus Semien** was third with five second-place votes and 216 points.

Acuña.:

(1) Historic, 40-homer, 70-stolen base season captured imaginations

(2) He led the league in batting average, on-base percentage, slugging percentage, hits, stolen-bases, total bases and runs, and he drove in 106 runs from the leadoff spot (one behind Mookie Betts)

(3) Acuña was a monster in September, hitting .340/.408/.708 and dominating the Braves-Dodgers series

Acuña Jr. got all 30 first-place votes, and **Mookie Betts** got all 30 second-place votes, and just two guys — **Freddie Freeman and Matt Olson** — split all 60 third- and fourth-place votes. Top four spots, four guys.

Ohtani became the 29th player to win multiple MVPs since BBWAA began voting in 1931. The only thing that stood in the way of him winning three straight MVPs was a little thing called **Aaron Judge** breaking the AL single-season home run record last year.

Acuña and Ohtani garnered all 30 first-place votes. The Dodgers' Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman finished second and third, respectively, in the NL; the World Series champion Rangers' Corey Seager and Marcus Semien finished second and third, respectively, in the AL.

- Ohtani claimed his second MVP award after winning one in 2021. He hit .304 with 44 home runs in 2023 and went 10-5 on the mound with a 3.14 ERA.
- Ohtani had elbow surgery in September and is expected to recover in time to hit in 2024 and pitch in 2025. Despite his limitations, the 29-year-old is the top free agent this winter and is projected to sign a massive deal wherever he lands.
- Acuña led MLB in runs (149), hits (217), and on-base percentage (.416) in 2023. The 25-year-old powered the Braves to a 104-58 record, the best in the majors.

To put it simply, Acuña had one of the greatest seasons by any hitter in major-league history. He hit .337 with 41 home runs, 106 RBIs, a majors-leading 73 stolen bases and an NL-leading 1.012 OPS, becoming just the third player since 1947 to lead his respective league in stolen bases and OPS. He joined Hall of Famers **Willie Mays**, who did it twice in 1957-1958, and **Rickey Henderson** in 1990 on that list. Around baseball, there is a widening popular opinion that Acuña is the most dynamic leadoff hitter since Henderson.

It would be underselling Acuña's 2023 performance to point out that he became the fifth member of baseball's hallowed 40-40 club, players who recorded at least 40 homers and 40 stolen bases in a season. Before it was over, Acuña had become the sole member of the 40-50, 40-60 and 40-70 clubs. No one else in the 40-40 club had more than 46 steals.

Acuña was the NL Player of the Month in April after hitting .352 with four homers, 13 stolen bases and a .986 OPS while playing every inning of all 27 Braves games. He never cooled off for any significant stretch after that blistering first month, winning NL Player of the Month two more times and finishing the season with career bests in most major categories including OBP,

runs, hits (217), doubles (35), walks (80) and games played (159), in addition to average, OPS, RBIs and steals. Meanwhile, his 84 strikeouts were far and away his fewest in a full season.

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Miami's **Skip Schumaker** and Baltimore's **Brandon Hyde** were rewarded with the National League and American League Manager of the Year Awards

In just his first year as a big-league manager, Schumaker led the Marlins to a 15-win improvement and their first postseason appearance in a full season since 2003. Schumaker is the eighth skipper to win the honor in his first year with a club -- and the first since **Rocco Baldelli** (2019 Twins).

Miami was not expected to contend in 2023, but managed to stay in the Wild Card race despite losing reigning Cy Young award winner **Sandy Alcantara** to injury late in the season. The Marlins played with energy and enthusiasm throughout the season. Schumaker is the fourth Marlins manager to win this award, joining **Jack McKeon** (2003), **Joe Girardi** (2006) and **Don Mattingly** (2020).

As for Hyde's first year as Baltimore's manager, he went just 54-108 in 2019. He endured a .341 winning percentage (131-253) from 2019-21 before leading the O's to a 31-win improvement from 2021-22. Under his leadership, Baltimore never lost more than four consecutive games during the regular season.

The Orioles made another 18-win jump in 2023, finishing 101-61 to win their first AL East title since 2014 -- and just their second in the past 26 seasons.

Hyde received 27 of 30 first-place votes to beat out fellow AL finalists **Bruce Bochy** (Rangers) and **Kevin Cash** (Rays). On the NL side, Schumaker narrowly edged out **Craig Counsell** (Brewers) and **Brian Snitker** (Braves) in a race that featured six skippers receiving at least one first-place vote.

Hyde, who was the runner-up to **Terry Francona** in 2022, is the ninth MLB Manager of the Year Award winner who did not play in the major leagues.

Schumaker, who won a World Series ring with the Cardinals in 2011 as a player, spent the first eight seasons of his 11-year big league career in St. Louis. The first seven of those years came under Hall of Fame manager **Tony La Russa**, a four-time Manager of the Year Award winner.

After wrapping up his playing days with stints with the Dodgers and Reds, Schumaker began his coaching career as the Padres' first-base coach in 2018 before being promoted to associate manager in '20. He spent one season as the Cardinals' bench coach in 2022 before replacing Don Mattingly – who won the 2020 NL Manager of the Year Award – as the Marlins' skipper.

The Marlins also gave Hyde his start in professional coaching. Hyde managed in the Marlins' organization from 2005-09, leading the Single-A Greensboro Grasshoppers (2005-06), Double-A Carolina Mudcats ('07), High-A Jupiter Hammerheads ('08) and Double-A Jacksonville Suns ('09).

Schumaker becomes the ninth manager to win the award in his first year (comments from Joe Posnanski). The other eight are:

Hal Lanier, 1986. The Astros went 96-66, went to the playoffs, and lost to the New York Mets in a classic NLCS. After two tempestuous and relatively unsuccessful seasons — following one sluggish performance, Lanier called his team back on the field for postgame batting practice — he was fired.

Dusty Baker, 1993. The beginning of a Hall of Fame career, Dusty (and some guy named **Barry Bonds**) led the Giants to a 103-win season (though the Braves beat them out for the division title). He managed the Giants for nine more seasons, taking them to the playoffs three times and winning a pennant, before a power struggle led to him leaving for Chicago.

Joe Girardi, 2006. One of the weirdest award winners ever, Girardi's Marlins finished 78-84 with an almost-unbelievable \$15 million payroll. He was fired before he was named Manager of the Year, at least in part because he told owner Jeffrey Loria to shut up when he was berating the home plate umpire during a game. He went to the Yankees in 2008 and led them to a World Series win in 2009, for which he finished third in the Manager of the Year balloting.

Matt Williams, 2014. Led the Nationals to a 96-66 record. This is exhibit A for how little it means to be Manager of the Year, because Williams' 2015 season might have been the worst managerial performance of the 21st century. He completely lost the team, he looked utterly

panicked on the bench, the Nationals flopped in October despite an impossibly loaded roster led by MVP **Bryce Harper**. Williams was promptly fired and has not been hired again since.

Jeff Banister, 2015. Led the Rangers to an 88-win season one year after they had collapsed under Ron Washington. A year later, Texas won 95, but was swept in the playoffs. After a losing year and most of another, Banister was canned with 10 games left in the 2018 season.

Dave Roberts, 2016. Led the Dodgers to a 91-win season one year after they had won 92. Roberts' teams have won 100-plus games five different times in his eight seasons, but he's never won Manager of the Year in any of them.

Torey Lovullo, 2017. Turned the Diamondbacks' record inside out — 93 losses in 2016 under **Chip Hale**, 93 wins in 2017 under Lovullo. He has managed the Diamondbacks ever since, mixing spectacularly terrible regular seasons (110 losses in 2021) with moderately successful ones. The Diamondbacks' playoff run in 2023 left everybody very happy.

Rocco Baldelli, 2019. He did exactly what you would expect a Manager of the Year to do — he took over a 78-84 team, and, under Baldelli, they won 101 games. Interestingly, despite the vivid Manager of the Year credentials, Baldelli only BARELY won the award; he received the same number of first-place votes as the Yankees' **Aaron Boone**. Baldelli has been the Twins manager since, despite three straight losing seasons after that. He received some down-ballot Manager of the Year support this year after the Twins won 87 games.

This list does not include **Tony Peña**, who won Manager of the Year in 2003, his first FULL season as a manager. He was hired by the Royals in the middle of the 2002 season, after **Tony Muser** was fired, and in 2003, he somehow led the Kansas City Royals to a winning season (83-79) where they were in relative contention going into September. He followed this up with a 104-loss season and then by quitting after 33 games in 2005 for various on-and-off-the-field disasters.

LONGER READS

MLB PITCHERS ARE GETTING TOUGHER TO HIT

Even with the advent of the pitch timer and shift bans, hitting has never been more difficult than it is today thanks to pitchers making key adjustments.

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

Way back when, pitchers threw mostly fastballs, especially down and away. They didn't like pounding the zone with first pitches. They didn't dare throw non-fastballs at the top of the zone. They took as much time as they wanted between pitches and they threw to catchers who set targets with a squatting position that had not changed much since **Gabby "Old Tomato Face" Hartnett** was behind the dish 100 years ago.

Way back ... when? That was only 2015.

The point is baseball changes faster than ever. Its fluidity is accelerated by the growing amount of information available and how quickly it is evaluated and shared.

Pitching changes faster than hitting. That's because pitching, like hitting a golf ball, *initiates* action. It happens in its own vacuum. Hitting *reacts* to the variables pitching sets into motion.

Pitching in 2023 was vastly different than it was in '15, the start of the Statcast era, when advanced pitch-tracking data became mainstream. And it's not just because of the pitch timer.

Advances in technology (Trackman, Rapsodo, etc.), training (weighted balls) and baseball ops ("run prevention" specialists to assist coaching staffs) have created unparalleled pitching depth when it comes to throwing harder *and smarter*.

For example, the number of pitchers who can throw 100 mph has gone up 31% since 2015. But you're talking only 64 elite arms, or about two per team. The greater impact comes from how information is applied by all teams and all pitchers. Put another way: Better training is leading to more velocity. But better technology is leading to better pitch shapes and sequencing.

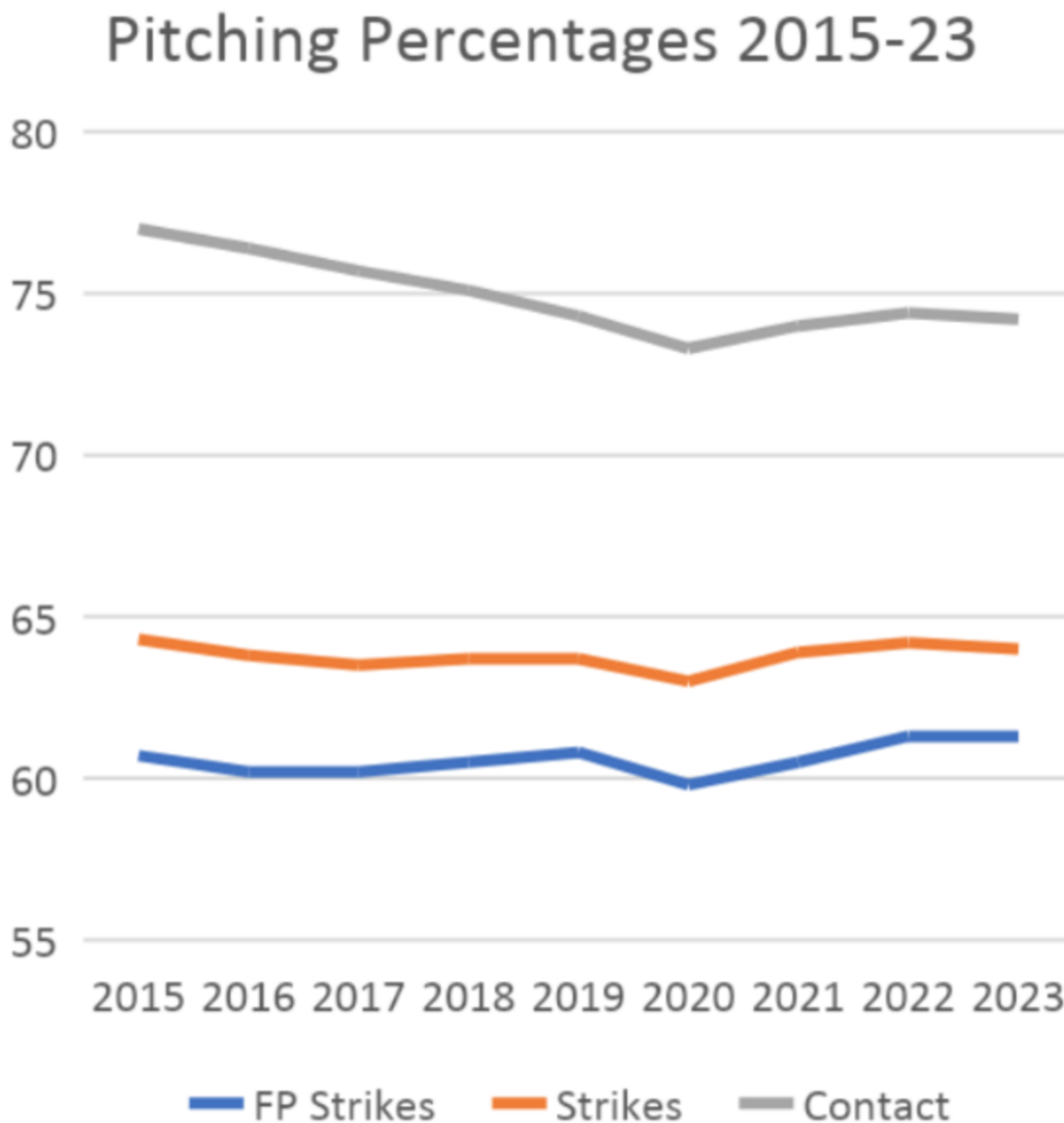
The game is played much differently today than even a few years ago. Sometimes it happens so fast you barely notice. With 2023 behind us, it's time now to take a snapshot. Here are the six biggest pitching trends of the past year.

1. Pitching is better than ever.

Bold statement, I know. Nobody throws complete games, guys get hurt all the time, the average team burns through 29 pitchers every year, the Oakland A's, blah, blah, blah.

But if you're talking about only the pure quality of the stuff—how difficult it is to hit—I believe it to be true.

Below are the major rate trends of the past eight years: first-pitch strike percentage, strike percentage and contact percentage. (You can see the blip the 60-game season of 2020 caused). Generally, pitchers are attacking the zone more and *allowing much less contact*.



2.

Pitchers are throwing the most first-pitch strikes in recorded history.

Pitchers threw as few as 55.6% first-pitch strikes in 1991. For the past two seasons, that rate has been 61.3%, the highest since pitch tracking data began in '88.

It wasn't until 2013 that first-pitch strike percentage consistently exceeded 60%, and it's been creeping up since.

Why the new emphasis on first-pitch strikes? I'll go back to a conversation I had with Rays pitching coach **Kyle Snyder** this summer. The key to pitching is count leverage. And the key to count leverage is to get ahead in the zone so you can expand out of the zone for your outs. And because pitchers have such good stuff now, they can be more confident about pounding the zone with first-pitch strikes.

Take an old-school guy like **Max Scherzer** as an example. When Scherzer won his first Cy Young Award in 2014, he threw 63.2% first-pitch strikes. This year, at age 39, he led the majors with 71.4% first-pitch strikes.

To reinforce pounding the zone with a first pitch, Snyder provides this statistical nugget to his pitchers: If you throw a first pitch in the zone, *94% of the outcomes are positive* for the pitcher (a strike or an out). I used that on air one night and immediately got texts from people who swore they must have heard me wrong.

Ninety-four percent? Yes, really. Check it out:

2023 First Pitch Strike Outcomes

Outcome	Rate
Called strike	50%
Foul	18%
Swing and miss	14%
Out	12%
Hit	6%

3. Pitchers are throwing more spin and fewer fastballs.

You might have been aware of this in recent years, but what's new is that the more-spin/fewer-heaters model has boomed over just the past two seasons.

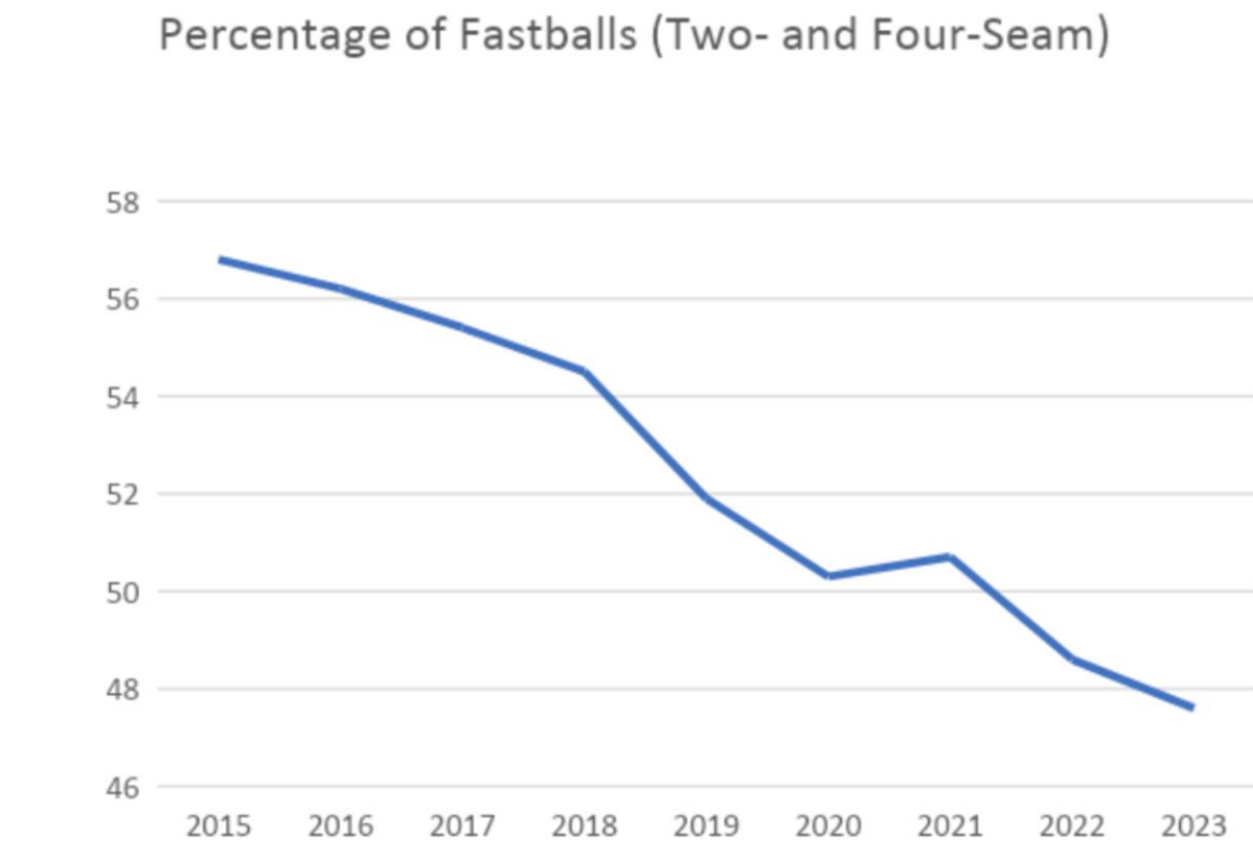
As an example, Texas reliever **Josh Sborz** throws his fastball at 97 mph with elite spin properties. But he changed from a guy in 2022 who threw 52% four-seamers and 48% breaking pitches to a 36%/64% mix in '23. Why? "Major league hitters can time a bullet," he told me.

It's happening all over baseball. Fastballs have become secondary pitches. The quick explanation is that hitters bat .268 and slug .446 off fastballs and bat .231 and slug .385 against everything else.

In 2023, the sweeper became the Pitch of the Year. It's essentially a slider with more horizontal break to it, but pitch metrics have become so specific that pitchers regard it as a unique pitch,

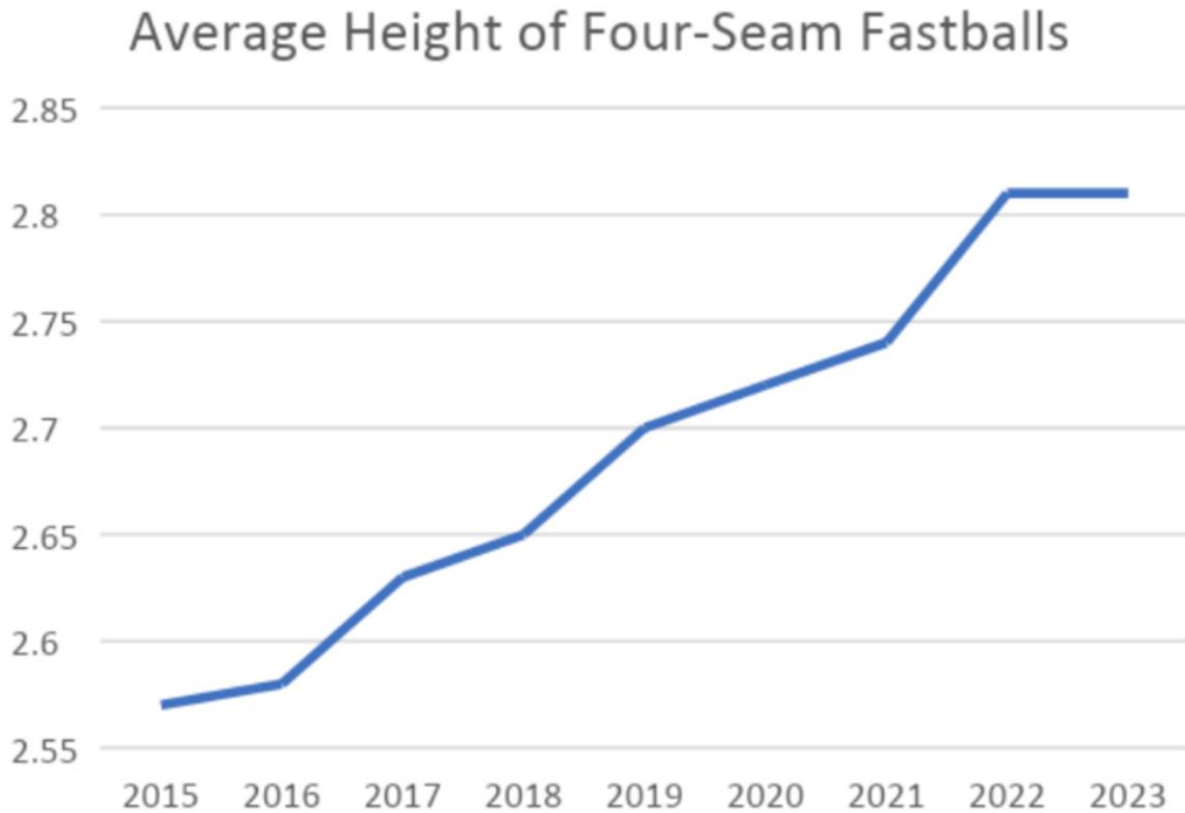
not just nomenclature. Pitchers rushed to the pitch to fill that gap between a true slider and curveball, adding to the decline of fastballs.

Don't tell your favorite hitter that in the past eight years, 56,998 fastballs have disappeared from the game—replaced by pitches with movement and spin. They already know how tough it is to hit. Those numbers, and this chart, only highlight the pain.



4. Four-seam fastballs are getting higher.

The average height of a four-seam fastball climbed every year for seven straight years before leveling off this year. Pitchers have been working fastballs higher and higher in the zone as new measurements such as induced vertical break and vertical attack angle give specs to what had been oral traditions such as “ride” and “hop.”



What do those numbers mean in real terms? Here's an example. First up is **Freddie Freeman** hitting a home run in 2016 on a four-seamer at average height that year (2.58 feet off the ground). On the left, note the catcher's target—and his old-school squatting position. On the right see how the pitch is on target and about low thigh-high. It's also crushed by Freeman.





Now here is Freeman swinging through a four-seam fastball in 2023 at average height this year (2.81 feet). On the top, note how the catcher's target has moved higher and how the now-standard one-knee position has replaced the squat. On the bottom, note how the pitch is at the top of the thigh, and Freeman's barrel passes under it.





Doesn't seem like much, right? The difference in height is only about three inches. But those three inches mean a *23-point difference in batting average and a 62-point difference in slugging*.

2023 Hitting vs. Four-Seam Fastballs by Height

Feet Off Ground	AVG	SLG
2.5–2.6 (2016 average)	.295	.531
2.8–2.9 (2023 average)	.272	.469

5. Hitters are adjusting to high heat.

A bit of good news for hitters. The more hitters see high fastballs, the more they learn to adjust their swings to hit them.

Guys are hitting off high-velocity machines, \$500,000 pitching machines with a video image of that night's starting pitcher and laser-guided release points for all of his pitches and machines that spit out foam balls to simulate fastballs with extreme induced vertical break, as the Rangers did to adjust to **Cristian Javier and Paul Sewald** in the postseason.

Repeated exposure to such pitches is beginning to show some benefits:

Hitters vs. Elevated Four-Seam Fastballs (3' and Higher)

Year	AVG	SLG
2021	.188	.340
2022	.193	.333
2023	.195 (highest since 2017)	.349

But let's be honest: those are incremental gains. Hitters have not made enough adjustments to force pitchers to go away from elevated four-seamers. In the past two years, pitchers have thrown more elevated fastballs than in the previous 12 years.

6. Pitchers have created a new weapon: the high breaking ball.

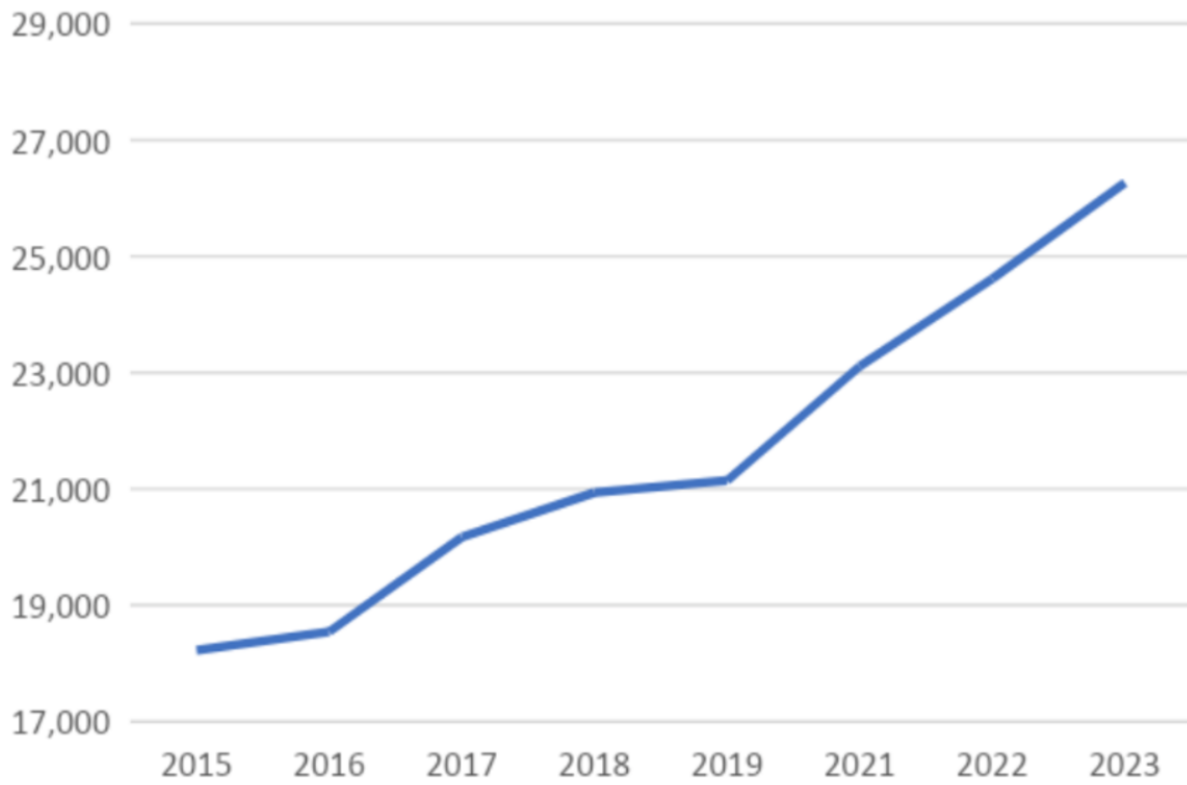
Breaking balls at the top of the zone get hit, right? That was the conventional wisdom, anyway—sort of like the (since disproven) adage about not throwing right-on-right changeups.

Just one problem: It's not true.

With more fastballs being elevated, pitchers increasingly are tunneling off those elevated heaters with elevated cutters and breaking pitches, especially sliders.

Cutters and breaking pitches in the top third of the strike zone have *increased 44%* since 2015, including a 24% leap in just the past three seasons. Leaving out the shortened season of '20 below, this is a serious trend, folks:

Elevated Cutters & Breaking Pitches in Zone



The foremost practitioners of this trend are **Graham Ashcraft** of the Reds (cutters and sliders), **Rich Hill** of the Padres (curveballs and cutters), **Clarke Schmidt** of the Yankees (cutters and sweepers), **Corbin Burnes** of the Brewers (cutters), **Aaron Civale** of the Rays (cutters) and **Mitch Keller** of the Pirates (cutters and sweepers).

This year hitters got a deserved break with the ban on shifts. Batting average did go up slightly, from .243 to .248. But that's a rare bit of good news for hitters.

The MLB batting average remained below .250 for a fourth straight year, the longest such stretch since the mound was lowered in 1969. Until 2017, there had never been a season in which games averaged fewer than 50 balls in play; it has now happened seven years in a row.

Make no mistake: We remain in an era dominated by pitching.

JOE SHEEHAN ON FREE AGENCY RISKS

(editor's note—this is from the excellent Joe Sheehan newsletter. This level of analysis every day—worth a subscription).

The Joe Sheehan Newsletter: **The Market**

Vol. 15, No. 136

November 13, 2023

As we gear up for the 2023-24 free agent season, I have been thinking a lot about last year's version, one in which nine players signed contracts for at least \$100 million. How many of those deals hold up, a year from now? How many would the team, given a chance, use an NBA-style amnesty to get out of today?

-- **Edwin Diaz** suffered a knee injury in a freak accident celebrating a WBC victory. It's unfair to use him as a data point. Still, that was 70 high-quality innings, and \$20 million, the Mets didn't have.

-- **Jacob deGrom** made six starts in 2023 and will likely make 10-12 starts in 2024, with Tommy John surgery in between. deGrom was excellent when he pitched, and you can make an argument that his 30 innings was the difference to a Rangers team that made the playoffs by just two games. Still, \$74 million for 15-20 starts is a very steep price.

-- **Carlos Correa** had, by far, the worst year of his career, losing ground at the plate and in the field. Worse, he came down with plantar fasciitis, an injury that has altered and even wrecked careers. The Twins are on the line for \$130 million over the next five years.

-- **Carlos Rodon** made 14 starts with a 6.85 ERA, battling a forearm strain and a hamstring strain in a lost year. Never a durable pitcher, Rodon enters 2024 at 31, owed \$135 million over the next five years, and has still never thrown 180 innings in a season.

-- **Aaron Judge** was one of the best hitters in baseball with a .267/.406/.613 line. He played in just 106 games, some of that missed time due to an unlucky encounter with the Dodger Stadium fence. He'll be 32 in April and, as I have written many times, is trying to beat the odds for tall hitters in their thirties. He's owed \$320 million over the next eight years.

-- **Brandon Nimmo** is trying to take the Paul Molitor career path, going from fragile in his twenties to durable in his thirties. He played in 150 games for the second straight season and was worth four wins -- more depending on what you think of his defense. The Mets' eight-year commitment to Nimmo was a shock, but this may be the best contract signed last winter.

-- **Dansby Swanson**, as expected, returned to being a league-average hitter. His defense was so good, though, that he was once again a five-win player, and he was a big part of the Cubs' push

towards a playoff berth. Counting on a shortstop to remain a plus-plus defender in his thirties -- Swanson is signed to age 35 -- is a risk, of course.

-- **Trea Turner** and **Xander Bogaerts** had seasons in line with their career performance, though on the low end. Turner famously saved his year with a monster second half, and Bogaerts's season had a similar shape. Both, at 30, seem to be losing a step at shortstop, and both are signed for ten more years.

So that's four pretty rough deals, two successes, and three somewhere in between. The cases of Judge, Turner, and Bogaerts do underline the value of signing six-win players. Their off years look like four- and five-win campaigns. Sign a three-win player who goes sideways, and he's actively hurting you.

What I think about in a recap like this is the arc of a player's career. Take Judge, for instance. The Yankees desperately needed Judge's bat in their lineup for 2023, and the price for having that was a nine-year, \$360-million contract. The Yankees knew they bought a declining player, and they hoped that the decline would be slow and they can leverage the early years by winning with Judge. If it's a nine-year contract on the page, you're hoping for five good seasons before time comes for Judge. If it's an 11-year contract for Turner or Bogaerts, you're betting the player will hold form and that you can win in those early years. You can't get superstars on three- and four-year deals, so you sign them for two and three times that long and hope. The value of the contract to the player may be linear, but the value of the contract to the team is front-loaded.

The Rangers won the World Series, so maybe they have no regrets. The Phillies got to the NLCS, which means they had a successful season even if it doesn't feel that way. For all of these teams, though, the best projected year of those contracts is now behind them. They all have less projected excess value today than they did a year ago.

This is on my mind today because the new free-agent class is nothing like the last one. **Shohei Ohtani** will probably sign the largest contract in baseball history, then there is a massive fall-off. The second-best free agent is probably NPB starter Yoshinobu Yamamoto, in the midst of a **Pedro Martinez** peak in Japan. The best MLB free agent might be **Cody Bellinger**, who was nearly unplayable for two years before a bounce back in 2023. Bellinger changed so much as a hitter that it's hard to project him; he could be a star, he could be **Gary Matthews Jr.** **Aaron Nola**, **Blake Snell**, and **Jordan Montgomery** all come onto the market as pitchers below the level of deGrom, for sure, and arguably below the level of Rodon as he was perceived a year ago.

The new standard line is that teams should shut up and spend. I've written in this space that the money doesn't matter, that there is so much of it in the game and so few ways to spend it that opportunity cost is no longer a concern the way it was in the 1980s and 1990s. That's still mostly true, but the player matters, and if a class that looked as promising as the 2023 class can

produce contracts as bad as Correa's and Rodon's and deGrom's, what's to say the 2024 class won't blow up as well?

I'm struggling to fit two ideas together. I think Mike Elias and Nick Krall should take advantage of their talented core and near-zero future payroll commitments to make the Orioles and Reds better using only money. I also think Nola, Snell, and Bellinger carry so much performance risk that a top-of-market commitment to any of them makes me queasy. I am absolutely certain Snell and Bellinger will come down from their 2023 peaks, each of which was fluky in its own way. Nola has been durable, but with ERAs of 4.63 and 4.46 in two of the last three years, he projects as a #2 for me, with considerable downside risk.

This is all an effect of MLB's broken compensation structure in which service time, rather than performance, is centered. The six-year barrier to free agency makes it virtually impossible to buy upside at the top of baseball's free market, so teams compete to limit their downside and hope that when they're ready to buy, the right talent is available. Last year, that was a Cy Young, an MVP, four great shortstops and one of the best leadoff hitters in the sport. This year, it's the pitcher who posted the highest walk rate of any starter this century and an outfielder who was non-tendered a year ago.

So I struggle to push the idea that teams should fight to sign these players. I'm not sure, Ohtani aside, there is a free agent in this market who I'd bet on for a four-win season in 2024, or to be worth 15 wins over the life of whatever contract he signs. Bellinger is at least a strong defensive player and has shown a willingness to adapt. Yamamoto's NPB stats page is incredible, and the track record of top NPB starters in MLB is good. I can't break out my keyboard, though, and press the case for signing them the way I did for Correa and Turner a year ago. All I see are land mines.

Now, the money still doesn't matter. But for the first time in decades there's at least some reason to consider not spending it. The local broadcasting model is wobbling, and many teams are facing being paid not based on the number of cable and satellite homes in their market (itself an emerging issue), but based on how many people want to buy their product. The eight-figure guarantees for many teams could be a thing of the past, and while MLB backstopped local cable revenue in 2023 for the Padres and Diamondbacks, it's not clear whether MLB can or will continue to do that. Any team partnered with Diamond Sports Group or AT&T SportsNet is at risk of having a hole blown in its budget for years to come.

My guess is this will be used as an excuse by the usual suspects, but it's a real factor. The Padres were bringing in \$50 million a year, the Diamondbacks \$75 million per. The Reds get \$48 million a year; if DSG walks away it's about 15-20% of the team's overall revenue gone. Same for the Rays. In general, we should be skeptical when a baseball owner complains about his lot in life. In this very specific case, though, we can see the money disappearing in front of our eyes. It's a real concern that could affect decision-making for two-thirds of the league.

Mostly, though, I just don't think this is a very good crop of free agents. Ohtani can name his price, and even he comes with health caveats. I'd sign Yamamoto to the Carlos Rodon deal, more or less, and be happy about it. For everyone else in that top tier, though, there is far more performance risk than there is certainty. It may be that not signing big-name free agents this year isn't a sign of being cheap, it's a sign of being sane.

To subscribe to the Joe Sheehan newsletter:

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THIS BASEBALL CARD COULD BE WORTH \$10 MILLION

A well-preserved Babe Ruth rookie card from 1914 hits the auction market. Could it top a record-setting \$12.6 million Mickey Mantle?

At first glance, it looked like an ordinary, unexceptional, very old baseball card.

It was not. It was a missing link.

Jason Gay, Wall Street Journal

This was him, alright. The Babe. The most famous player baseball has ever produced, captured here before the legend, the pinstripes, the 714 home runs, the seven World Championships, the single MVP award (you could only win one in those days), the cigars, the celebrity, the cartoon-like heroics in the Bronx, and that 86-year, since-broken curse which tormented the foolish club that unloaded him, the Red Sox.

In the card, he looked young. He was young—19 years old. The card is from 1914, when **Babe Ruth** wasn't far removed from his time at St. Mary's Industrial School for Boys. He's a rookie for his hometown Baltimore Orioles, then a minor league outfit with the International League. Everyone knows The Babe began as a pitcher, but it's right there on the card, in all caps: RUTH PITCHER.

He's svelte! I should clarify: svelte-*ish*. Babe's a big person, clearly, even under his ball cap and coat.

Confession: I'm not a big baseball card guy. I bought some as a kid, but I was equally interested in that brittle slice of gum that came with every pack, and lost its flavor within two seconds. My eyes glaze over when people start to talk about their card collections, even though my mother

tells me she's held on to a few shoeboxes of mine in the attic. I would almost rather hear someone talk about their NFL fantasy team.

Settle down. I said *almost*.

But even I knew this Ruth card was valuable, extraordinary, worth a visit. If I wanted confirmation, I needed only to look at the armed guard sitting on a stool next to its display case. Other guards lurked around, I was told. This card was precious cargo, protected like a Picasso, making a brief pit stop at its former home, the Babe Ruth Birthplace and Museum, before being auctioned off and sold to the highest bidder.

The auction began Wednesday. Within hours, bidding for the Babe rookie had hit \$5.25 million. The sale, which is being run by Robert Edward Auctions and lasts through Dec. 3, has lofty expectations. That \$5.25 million bid may be a speed bump on the way to eight figures.

Ten million? It's possible.

Could this Ruth rookie top the all-time amount paid for a baseball card, which was the \$12.6 million last year for a close-to-flawless 1952 **Mickey Mantle** card?

"We think the record is within striking distance," Brian Dwyer, the president of Robert Edward Auctions, told me at the Ruth Museum.

Phew. Here's why the Ruth card—held for generations by its original owners, a Baltimore family, until it was sold privately in 2021 to an unknown buyer for an undisclosed amount—is such a big deal:

One, it's the first known card depicting the towering lefty slugger. The card, which was part of a promotion by a local newspaper, the Baltimore News, is extremely scarce: There are only 10 of them known, and one hasn't hit the market in more than a decade. This one is in good shape: it's been given a grade of VG 3, the VG "very good," from the grading agency SGC.

But also: It's the Babe! This is a charismatic cultural figure with a reach far beyond sports; who once justified making a salary higher than President Hoover by saying, "Why not? I had a better year."

"It's the dawn of the Great Bambino," said Dwyer.

"When I hold that card, I think of Babe Ruth looking back at me as a 19-year-old," he continued. "Being exposed to the world—not just baseball—for the first time. Babe Ruth goes beyond card collecting. He's gigantic."

A major Ruth sale would place this card in a collectible trinity with the '52 Mantle and another iconic card: the "T-206" **Honus Wagner**, which pops up for sale now and again. In 2011, a group

of Baltimore-area nuns auctioned off a T-206 they'd received from the donation of an estate; that card sold for \$262,000. More recently, a T-206 Wagner sold for \$7.25 million.

Why are prices soaring? "This is an opportunity to park money away in something that historically has shown it's not going to go down in value," said Dwyer.

Rare cards are far from alone in their skyrocketing values; Dwyer pointed to a recent Sotheby's sale of a 1962 250 GTO Ferrari for \$51.7 million.

"I think there is a class of high net-worth individuals [who] recognize that these statement pieces—these incredibly rare high-quality assets—will perform well and store value for them," he said.

I am not one of these high net-worth individuals. But the next time I am back at my mother's, I am going to dig into those old shoeboxes and figure out if I have enough cards to buy myself a superyacht. Or at least lunch at Chipotle.

I'm not saying there's a Babe Ruth. There definitely isn't. But if anyone wants to give me \$10 million for a uncared-for, corners-bent **Rickey Henderson**, bubble gum stain on the back, I will listen to all serious bidders. Even if you want to talk about your NFL fantasy team.





THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Can you name the MLB players who were the Rookie of the Year and are in the Hall of Fame?

1947 Dodgers

JACKIE ROBINSON

1951 Giants

WILLIE MAYS

1956 White Sox

LUIS APARICIO

1956 Reds

FRANK ROBINSON

1967 Mets

TOM SEAVER

1968 Reds

JOHNNY BENCH

1972 Red Sox

CARLTON FISK

1977 Orioles

EDDIE MURRAY

1977 Expos

ANDRE DAWSON

1982 Orioles

CAL RIPKEN JR.

1991 Astros

JEFF BAGWELL

1993 Dodgers

MIKE PIAZZA

1996 Yankees

DEREK JETER

Three players drafted first-overall have been elected to the Hall of Fame. Who are they?

14 of his 21 seasons were with the White Sox, 6x All-Star, this outfielder/DH made his only World Series appearance in 1990 with the A's (against the Reds).

HAROLD BAINES

13 of his 22 seasons were with the Mariners, AL MVP in 1997.

KEN GRIFFEY JR.

Played all of his 19 seasons with 1 team, won NL MVP in 1999, won NL batting title in 2008 when he hit .365

CHIPPER JONES

There are 41 players who've played 2,000 games at one position for a single team, led by **Brooks Robinson** (2,870 games at third base for the Orioles). All but eight of those players are enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

Mike Schmidt (2,212 games at third base for the Phillies) counts, even though he played other positions besides third base for the Phillies. And **Eddie Mathews** (2,129 games at third base for the Braves) counts, even though he played third base for teams other than the Braves.

If you are guessing along with your faithful editor, Bernie Williams (played 2076 games for the Yankees but 1856 in CF) and Don Mattingly (played 1785 games for the Yankees, 1634 at 1B) did not make the cut.

2,306 games at 2B for the Tigers

LOU WHITAKER

2,184 games at catcher for the Cards

YADIER MOLINA

2,178 games at 1B for the Rockies

TODD HELTON

2,177 games at SS for the Reds

DAVE CONCEPCION

2,153 games at 2B for the Royals

FRANK WHITE

2,079 games in RF for the Red Sox

DWIGHT EVANS

2,058 games at SS for the Phillies

JIMMY ROLLINS

2,026 games at 1B for the Senators 1915-1932.

JOE JUDGE

18 Pitchers - Unanimous Cy Young winners

1963, 1965, 1966 Dodgers

SANDY KOUFAX

1968 Tigers

DENNY MCLAIN

1968 Cards

BOB GIBSON

1972 Phillies

STEVE CARLTON

1978 Yankees

RON GUIDRY

1984 Cubs

RICK SUTCLIFFE

1985 Mets

DWIGHT GOODEN

1988 Dodgers

OREL HERSHISER

1998 Blue Jays

ROGER CLEMENS

1999, 200 Red Sox

PEDRO MARTINEZ

2002 Diamondbacks

RANDY JOHNSON

2004, 2006 Twins

JOHAN SANTANA

2007 Padres

JAKE PEAVY

2010 Phillies

ROY HALIDAY

2014 Dodgers

CLAYTON KERSHAW

2020 Indians

SHANE BIEBER

2022 Astros

JUSTIN VERLANDER

2022 Marlins

SANDY ALCANTARA

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