

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

9.17.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

We are just a couple of weeks away from the playoffs. You could throw a blanket over the Giants, Reds, D'backs and Marlins. The AL west has been back and forth, and we don't know who from the Astros, Rangers, Mariners and Blue Jays will be going home.

In this week's issue—bouncing a home run over the fence, history of the mlb.com domain, blunders, two **Albert Belle** sightings, and reviewing some **Rickey Henderson** career highlights.

In Longer Reads the epic failure of the 2023 Padres, a Red Smith column and remembrance.

Grab yourself a Sunday morning coffee and enjoy.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

(answers at bottom)

Name the four players since 2000 to homer on their 40th (or older) birthdays:

2011 Indians DH, lefty swinger, Hall of Famer, began that season with the Twins.

2012 National League Hall of Famer made his 8th and last All Star team this season, switch hitting infielder.

2015 American League infielder. He has 3rd most career home runs of players not in the Hall of Fame.

2023 lefty hitter, won NL MVP in 2010 with the only team he has played for.

16 hitters have Led league in hits 3 or more seasons. 7 did it at least 3 years in a row. I will spot you **Ginger Beaumont** of the 1902-1904 Pirates. How many of the other six 3 straight seasons hits leaders can you name?

AL 2014-2017 infielder, bats right-handed, 3 batting titles, 2017 MVP

AL 2006-2010 outfielder, bats left-handed, 2001 MVP

AL 1987-1989 (and 1992), outfielder, bats right-handed, 1988 batting champ, led majors in hits 3x, Hall of Fame.

AL 1964-1966 (and 1969-1970) outfielder, bats left-handed, Hall of Fame, 3x AL batting champion, 1964 Rookie of the Year.

NL 1920-1922. Infielder, right-handed, 2x MVP, 7x NL batting champ, Hall of Fame

AL 1907-1909 (and 1911, 1912, 1917, 1919).

I was 1997 AL Rookie of the Year. It was a huge rookie season--hit 30 home runs among 209 base hits, and drove in 98 runs, setting a new MLB record for RBIs by a leadoff hitter and most homers by a rookie shortstop. I also batted .306, and his 30-game hitting streak set an A.L. rookie record, also stole 22 bases, and 11 triples led the league

1998 I was AL MVP runner-up to **Juan Gonzalez**.

I won the AL batting title in 1999 and 2000.

I was a 5 time All Star at shortstop.

I played 10 seasons in the American League, 5 seasons in the National League.

In 2004 I was traded to the Cubs.

In 2006 I signed a free agent deal with the Dodgers.

I played in the post-season in 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006 and 2008 but never reached the World Series.

Highest single-season batting average by a right-handed batter in the post-war era, batting .372 in 2000

One of 13 players in Major League history to hit two grand slams during a single game, and the only player to achieve the feat at his home stadium.

In 1,434 games over 14 seasons, posted a .313 batting average (1,747-for-5,586) with 927 runs, 370 doubles, 52 triples, 229 home runs, 936 RBI, 95 stolen bases, 403 bases on balls, .361 on-base percentage, and .521 slugging percentage. Finished my career with an overall .975 fielding percentage. In 32 postseason games batted .321 (36-for-112) with seven home runs and 24 RBI.

Who am I?

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

The Braves clinched the NL East on Wednesday, marking their sixth consecutive division title. The team has won 23 division titles overall, three more than any other franchise since divisions were established in 1969. Next on that list are the Yankees and Dodgers with 20 each, though the latter will likely clinch their 21st soon.

Matt Olson set a Braves single season HR record when he hit his 52nd yesterday, passing **Andruw Jones** for the franchise record. He became the 48th player to hit 50 or more HRs in a season. Olson is one of five Braves with 30-plus homers this season after **Ozzie Albies** cranked home run No. 30 in the top of the first inning on Saturday. Atlanta has made much homer history this year, and Albies' homer helped the Braves tie the 2019 Twins for the most players with 30 home runs in a season.

Those five Braves -- Olson (52), **Ronald Acuña Jr.** (37), **Austin Riley** (36), **Marcell Ozuna** (34) and Albies (30) -- have more home runs combined (189) than 17 teams.

The big moments always seem to find **Royce Lewis**. The slugging rookie infielder belted his fourth grand slam of the season in the Twins' 10-2 victory over the White Sox at Guaranteed Rate Field on Friday evening. 4 grand slams in an 18 game span is the shortest in MLB history.

With the bases loaded and two outs in the second inning, Lewis worked a 3-1 count against White Sox starter **Jesse Scholtens**. He then took a fastball down the middle and blasted it to deep left field for his fourth grand slam of the season and fifth of his career. Over his short 66-game career, the grand slam on Friday gave him his 16th career homer, which makes him the first player in MLB history to hit five grand slams in his first 16 home runs. Lewis is 6 for 11 with the bases loaded.

Lewis passed **Don Mattingly** (39 games) in 1987, **Travis Hafner** (44 games) in 2006, **Jim Northrup** (45 games) in 1968, and **Ralph Kiner** (48 games) in 1949-50 for the shortest span to hit four grand slams.

With his 1-for-2 day with four RBIs and three walks, the rookie is slashing an absurd .302/.365/.545 with 14 homers and 50 RBIs in 54 games in the Majors this season. Lewis has been red-hot at the plate recently, entering the day with a .323 average and .943 OPS in his previous 45 games. The rookie also leads the Majors in RBIs since Aug. 23 (33) and has belted 10 homers over those 22 games, including three in the past five contests.

The Reds have had 16 players make their MLB-debut this season.

Great Starts and Great Finishes

Red Sox 2B **Trevor Story** homered in his first 4 major league games with the Rockies in 2016. Story hit a total of 6 home runs in his first 4 games. He added a 7th homer in his 6th game for one of the best career starts ever.

In 2016 **David Ortiz** set the record for most HRs in a final season with 38. He broke **Dave Kingman's** 35 hit for the A's in final year in 1984.

I would not have guessed that **Carlos Santana** of the Brewers has 299 career HRs and 1,000 RBIs.

Chris Sale, who turns 35 in March, has a 4.34 earned run average and only 54 starts over the last five seasons for which the Red Sox have paid him \$153 million. Ouch.

Aaron Hicks has played in 30 postseason games during his 11 seasons in the majors, 10 more than all of his Baltimore teammates put together. He gets to the post-season while the Yankees pay his salary and go home.

In 1976, 51 pitchers threw more than 200 innings. **Randy Jones** led the majors with 315 IP for the Padres.

This season we may have six – **Logan Webb** (Giants), **Zac Gallen** (D'backs), **Gerrit Cole** (Yankees), **Sandy Alcantara** (Marlins), **Corbin Burnes** (Brewers) are all within 20 innings with potentially 3 more starts.

What helps when battling for playoff position? The Rays' bullpen went on a run, not allowing an earned run in 34 consecutive innings.

The last MLB home run to bounce in the field of play before going over the wall occurred Sept. 1930. The final bounce homer was a three-run shot by Dodgers catcher **Al López** in the fourth inning of a win over the Reds.

The bounce homer is exactly what it sounds like. Until 1929, the rules of the game stated that a ball that landed in play and then bounced over the fence was a home run. The American League did away with the rule after the '29 season, ruling that instead such hits would be declared automatic doubles. The rule remained in place in the NL for the '30 season but was changed after the season to mirror the AL rule. Thus, López's hit was the last of its kind.

It's honestly surprising that the bounce homer lasted as long as it did, and it inevitably raises questions about stats from that era. But according to MLB historian John Thorn, all of **Babe Ruth's** 714 home runs actually went over the fence on the fly.

Speaking of Ruth, Progression of the all-time strikeout record.

Babe Ruth retired with 1,330 whiffs.

Mickey Mantle passed him in 1964, retired with 1,710.

Willie Stargell passed Mantle in 1978, retired with 1,936.

Reggie Jackson passed Stargell in 1982, retired with the record 2,597.

September 24, 1940. **Ted Williams** launches his 52nd career HR., 6th inning in Philadelphia. Next batter up was **Jimmie Foxx** who homered for his 500th career HR. Next batter up, another Hall of Famer, **Joe Cronin**, also homered.

Julio Rodriguez of the Mariners became the 44th player to reach 30 HRs/30 Stolen Bases in a season. And by hitting his ninth home run in his past 14 games, Rodríguez became the fourth player to have a 30-30 season at age 22 or younger, joining **Ronald Acuña Jr.** (2019), **Mike Trout** (2012) and **Alex Rodriguez** (1998). Trout is the youngest ever, age 20. **Jose Canseco** and **Bobby Bonds** did it at age 23.

Aaron Boone became the eighth manager in Yankees history to reach 500 wins. He joined **Joe McCarthy** (1,460), **Joe Torre** (1,173), **Casey Stengel** (1,149), **Miller Huggins** (1,067), **Ralph Houk** (944), **Joe Girardi** (910) and **Billy Martin** (556).

2001. **Adam Dunn**, Cincinnati Reds. He hit 12 HRs in August to set the MLB record for homers in a month (broken in August 2019 by **Aristides Aquino** of the Reds). Dunn is also tied with Hall of Famers **Frank Robinson** and **Ken Griffey Jr.** with 8 Opening Day home runs.

The Rangers may want to stop acquiring former Cy Young winners. They signed **Jacob deGrom** to a five-year, \$185 million contract then lost him to Tommy John surgery after six starts. Then they traded one of their top prospects, outfielder **Luisangel Acuña**, for **Max Scherzer**. He lasted eight starts before he strained a muscle in his shoulder and was deemed out for the rest of the regular season and likely any postseason games

MOST EXTRA BASE HITS IN A SEASON

100 extra base hits in a season-- 14 times by 11 players:

Babe Ruth	119	1921
Lou Gehrig	117	1927
Barry Bonds	107	2001
Chuck Klein	107	1930
Todd Helton	105	2001
Albert Belle	103	1995
Hank Greenberg	103	1937
Todd Helton	103	2000
Chuck Klein	103	1932
Stan Musial	103	1948
Sammy Sosa	103	2001
Rogers Hornsby	102	1922
Jimmie Foxx	100	1932
Lou Gehrig	100	1930

Ruth had 99 twice. Albert Belle and Hank Greenberg each had a 99 extra base hit season.

Leaders for the last five full seasons:

2023	Freddie Freeman	83
2022	Aaron Judge	90
2021	Marcus Semien	86
2019	Rafael Devers	90
2018	Trevor Sory	85

The Orioles have now gone 86 straight series without being swept, entering the weekend. That's the third-most consecutive series of multiple games without being swept, per Elias. They trail only the 1942-44 Cardinals (125) and 1903-05 Giants (106).

Corey Seager of the Rangers has missed a lot of action due to injuries. But in the 103 games he has played he's hitting .344, slugging .663. He has 40 doubles and 31 home runs.

Exit Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom from the Red Sox. In the post-Theo Epstein era, unlike predecessors Ben Cherington (2011–15) and Dave Dombrowski (2015–19), Bloom didn't win a championship during his run to offset the team's disappointing seasons. On his watch, the Red Sox went just 267–262 from the start of the pandemic-shortened 2020 season to the point of his dismissal, becoming more notable for their belt-tightening than for their on-field success. They made the playoffs only in 2021, when they went 92–70, finishing second in the AL East, then beating the Yankees in the Wild Card Game and the Rays in the Division Series before losing to the Astros in the ALCS. They finished last in the division in both 2020 (24–36) and '22 (78–84) and fired Bloom while tied for fourth with the Yankees at 73–72.

The Boston press has hammered the Red Sox, that they act like a mid-market team rather than the third most valuable franchise in baseball with the highest average ticket prices. That's on ownership, not the front office. Owner John Henry and Bloom own the legacy of shamefully dumping **Mookie Betts** to save money. How's that working out?

Eight Yankees pitchers have had multiple seasons of at least 20 saves, paced by **Mariano Rivera**, who did it 16 times. **Dave Righetti** is second on that list. "Rags" had seven seasons of 20 or more saves. He's joined on that list by **Aroldis Chapman** (5), **Goose Gossage** (5), **Sparky Lyle** (4), **Steve Farr** (3) and **John Wetteland** (2). **Clay Holmes** needs one more save to become the ninth such pitcher in franchise history.

How many of the top ten Indians/Guardians career HR hitters can you name?

The franchise started in 1901 so I was surprised that 242 HRs is the second most after 122 years.

Jim Thome	337
Albert Belle	242
Manny Ramirez	236
Earl Averill	226
Carlos Santana	216
Hal Trosky	216
Jose Ramirez	215
Larry Doby	215
Andre Thornton	214
Travis Hafner	200

Most 450-plus-foot home runs this season (season home run total in parentheses):

8: **Ronald Acuña Jr.** (37)

6: **Shohei Ohtani** (44) and **Austin Riley** (35)

5: **Matt Olson** (52) and (Rockies rookie) **Nolan Jones** (16)



(with comments from Joe Posnanski) Braves manager **Brian Snitker** was a coach and manager in the Braves organization for 34 years before he got promoted to interim manager in the bigs at age 61 in 2017. Over six seasons, the Braves have played .594 baseball, they've won a World Series, they're surely the favorites to win another one this year, and they have all of their young players signed for seemingly decades and should be big-time contenders for years to come.

There are 23 managers in the Baseball Hall of Fame right now, and they can be split up more or less like so:

19th century (2): **Ned Hanlon; Frank Selee**

Pre-1950 (9): **Rube Foster; Bucky Harris; Miller Huggins; Connie Mack; Joe McCarthy; John McGraw; Bill McKechnie; Wilbert Robertson; Billy Southworth.**

Golden age, 1950-69 (4): **Walter Alston; Al Lopez; Leo Durocher; Casey Stengel.**

Expansion era, 1969-present (8):

Sparky Anderson 3 World Series wins

Bobby Cox one World Series victory, but his teams made the playoffs 16 times and won five pennants. Also got thrown out of games more often than any other manager).

Whitey Herzog Only one World Series victory, but his teams did win three pennants and his high-energy, speed-burns style of managing set him apart.

Tony La Russa Three World Series victories.

Tommy Lasorda Two World Series victories and four pennants.

Joe Torre Four World Series victories.

Dick Williams Two World Series victories, manager of the Impossible Dream Red Sox, the manager of back-to-back Oakland A's champions in the 1970s and manager of the 1984 pennant-winning Padres.

Earl Weaver It's remarkable to me that Weaver won only one World Series — his great Orioles teams won pennants from 1969 through '71, but in '69 they lost to the Miracle Mets and in '71 they lost to the **Roberto Clemente** Pirates. Weaver is, for my money, the best and most innovative manager since probably Stengel himself.

And among active managers, I think that **Bruce Bochy** and **Dusty Baker** are Hall of Fame locks, and I sure think **Terry Francona** should be elected, too. How many World Series does Snitker need to win to join them?

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

Phillies speedster **Trea Turner**, who is a perfect 27-for-27 on steal attempts. If Turner goes the rest of the season without getting caught, then he'll set a new record for the most stolen bases in a season without being thrown out.

Turner has been successful on his last 31 straight steal attempts, which is the longest streak since **Whit Merrifield** stole 33 straight during the 2021 season. No one has stolen more than 33 straight since **Coco Crisp** nabbed 36 in a row in the 2011 and '12 seasons, while **Vince Coleman** holds the MLB record with 50 straight stolen bases across the 1989 and '90 seasons.

The last 5 players to steal 20 plus without getting caught:

Chase Utley, Phillies

23-for-23 in 2009

His 87.5% career stealing percentage is the best in baseball history among players who have stolen 100 bases.

Alcides Escobar, Royals

22-for-22 in 2013

Before Escobar was the 2015 ALCS MVP for a championship-winning Royals club, he etched his name in Royals history by having a perfect season on the basepaths.

Quintin Berry, Tigers

21-for-21 in 2012

After grinding out six years in the Minor Leagues, Berry finally got a chance to make an impact at the Major League level with the Tigers in 2012, when he was a perfect 21-for-21 on the basepaths in 94 games. He won a ring as a speed threat for the Red Sox in 2013. Berry finished his career 39-for-41 (95%) on stolen base attempts across the regular and postseason.

Kevin McReynolds, Mets

21-for-21 in 1988

McReynolds put together a career year in 1988, hitting .288 with 27 home runs, 99 RBIs (a career high) and 30 doubles to go along with a perfect year stealing bases—it was his only 20 steal season.

Paul Molitor, Blue Jays

20-for-20 in 1994

The only Hall of Famer on this list, Molitor swiped 20 bases in 115 games in 1994 before the season was cut short due to the players' strike. Molitor had 13 seasons in which he recorded 20 or more steals, finishing his career with 504 -- 24th most in the Modern Era (since 1900).

Turner has been on another level since early August, hitting .378 and slugging .797 since the Phillies began a homestand on Aug. 4 -- one he entered on the heels of three straight hitless games. Over a 13-game stretch through Tuesday, he hit 11 home runs. He became the third Phillies player with at least 11 homers in a single-season 13-game span, joining **Ryan Howard** in 2006 and **Mike Schmidt** in 1976. Turner is the second shortstop with such a span, joining **Troy Tulowitzki** in 2010.

RICKEY ON THE RUN

Rickey Henderson is one of my all-time favorite players—worth the price of a ticket.

Interesting commentary this week—Rickey Henderson would be a Hall of Famer if he never stole a base. He would be a Hall of Famer if he had less than 1,000 hits. The argument was that with 3055 hits he is in, even without a stolen base. With 1406 stolen bases (MLB all-time leader by almost 500) he'd be in. A few more Rickey highlights:

130 stolen bases, MLB single season record (1982)

Stole 3 or more bases in a game 71 times.

Only player ever with three 100+ stolen base seasons.

AL stolen base leader 12 times (MLB record)

81 home runs to lead off a game (MLB record).

MLB leader with 2,295 runs scored over his 25-season career. (**Ty Cobb** is second, 50 back).

Barry Bonds owns the all-time walks record, with 2,558. But that includes a record 688 intentional walks. As for unintentional walks, Henderson owns the record with 2,129, which is 259 ahead of Bonds.

Henderson led off an inning with a walk 796 times.

Stole 66 bases at age 39, another MLB record.

Henderson stole 109 bases after turning 40, an all-time record. **Cap Anson** is second, with 90. Rickey's 109 steals after age 40 would rank 40th on the active players career list -- only 39 players in the game today have more career steals than Henderson's total from ages 40-44.

Speaking of lead off home runs, **Mookie Betts** hit his 12th of the season this week (48th of his career). He is now one shy of tying the record for most leadoff homers in a season (set by **Alfonso Soriano** in 2003). Betts also became the third lead off batter in history to drive in 100 runs. He is tied with **Charlie Blackmon** with 103 for the MLB record.

Mookie Betts hit his 12th leadoff homer of the year on Monday, which tied for the second-most in a season, behind only Alfonso Soriano's 13 in 2003. It was Betts' 39th home run overall, which is tied with George Springer in 2019 and Soriano in 2006 for the most out of the leadoff spot in a season. But that's not all. Betts is up to 103 RBIs, tied with Charlie Blackmon in 2017 for the most RBIs out of the leadoff spot in a season (since RBIs became official in 1920).

WHOSE HEAD SHOULD ROLL?

Lots of debate over the Yankees horrible season, and should Aaron Boone or Brian Cashman be dumped as a result?

Cashman got caught with a roster that got old fast, suffered injuries, delivered awful offense. That's on him. One measure of a GM is how the players he unloads perform afterwards. Here are guys who left the Yankees 2021 and 2022. Some good but mostly blah.

Lefty starter **Jordan Montgomery** (160+ innings pitched) has been important to the Rangers. **Sonny Gray** has been a leader of the Twins starting staff, 7 wins and 167 innings pitched. **Mike Ford** Called up in June by Seattle, has recorded 16 homers with 33 RBIs and an .839 OPS over 66 games, solidifying what was previously one of the most unproductive DH situations in baseball. In Chicago **Mike Tauchman** was called up in May, the outfielder notched a .688 OPS prior to the All-Star break, in line with his .704 OPS from 2017-21. However, he has put up a .273/.368/.420 slash in the second half, setting the tone as the Cubs' leadoff hitter against right-handed starting pitchers during a stretch in which the club has surged back into the postseason race.

Andrew Benintendi is a .268 hitter for the White Sox with 5 HRs, 43 RBI and 13 stolen bases. The Orioles got a .296 average and 7 HRs from **Aaron Hicks**.

Joey Gallo is hitting only .177 for Minnesota but he has hit 21 HRs. Before he was hurt **Gary Sanchez** hit 19 HRs for the Padres. After playing 144 games for the Twins in 2022 injuries have limited **Gio Urshela** to 62 games this year for the Angels.

James Taillon has been an average starter with the Cubs, 9-7 with 122 innings pitched. **Aroldis Chapman** is 5-4 with 5 saves in 58 relief appearances for the Royals and Rangers. **Chad Green** has relieved in 7 games for the Blue Jays.

Luke Voit had just 15 hits for the Brewers. **Tyler Wade** got 13 hits in 26 games with Oakland.

Cashman's **Frankie Montas** trade with Oakland was not a great moment. The Yankees cleared roster space for a guy with what they hoped would be real upside. **JP Sears** has thrown 157 innings for the A's. **Ken Waldichuk** added another 126 IP for Oakland. **Luis Medina** has 15 starts for the A's. Montas has been hurt, has thrown just 39 innings for his \$7.5 million. There wasn't roster room for Sears-Waldichuk-Medina but New York could have used a better return.

Dodgers – Padres this week. Joe Posnanski asked in his newsletter, how many future Hall of Famers were on the field. He speculated:

Clayton Kershaw

Freddie Freeman

Mookie Betts

With potential for **Manny Machado, Juan Soto, Fernando Tatis Jr.** and likely Dodgers manager **Dave Roberts**, who has the highest winning percentage in non-Negro leagues major league history. How many do you agree with?

Posnanski also had an interesting comparison **Chet Lemon to Kirby Puckett**

Baseball-Reference WAR

1. Chet Lemon, 55.6
2. Kirby Puckett, 51.2

FanGraphs WAR

1. Chet Lemon, 52.0
2. Kirby Puckett, 44.9

So what do we have here? Well, let's begin with this helpful coincidence: Lemon and Puckett had almost exactly the same number of plate appearances. Lemon came to the plate 7,874 times in a 16-year career, while Puckett came to the plate 7,831 times in his 12 years.

Also, both players retired at 35 after dealing with serious injuries. Puckett famously retired after waking up one morning without vision in his right eye. Lemon, meanwhile, was released by the Tigers after a turbulent spring when he dealt with a shoulder injury and made news for covering up the little American flag on his helmet because he was a pacifist who would not pay tribute to the Gulf War. A few weeks after getting released, he had a life-threatening blood clot.

Puckett did play 150 or more games in a season eight times, while Lemon only did it once, so Lemon's career value is spread out over more seasons. Because of that, Puckett's top-end seasons — he could have won the MVP in 1988 or 1992 — are better than any of Lemon's seasons. But Lemon had eight 4-WAR seasons to Puckett's six.

So why does WAR rank Lemon ahead, and does that hold up to scrutiny?

First, the reason Lemon is ahead is defense. That's funny, because Lemon's excellent defense was never really acknowledged in his time (he never won a Gold Glove) while Puckett's defense was wildly celebrated (he won six straight Gold Gloves).

But both bWAR and fWAR have Lemon as the better defender. And even basic stats do support that. Lemon had a better range factor over his career, even when measured against his defensive counterparts. Over their full careers, Lemon probably got 70 more outs against league average than Puckett did. That's worth 60 or so runs, or roughly six wins.

Which is roughly how much higher Lemon's WAR is than Puckett's.

Of course, that means that WAR figures them to be roughly equivalent as hitters, which doesn't feel intuitively right. But let's look ...

Puckett: .318/.360/.477, 414 doubles, 57 triples, 207 homers, 1,071 runs, 1,085 RBIs.

Lemon: .273/.355/.442, 396 doubles, 61 triples, 215 homers, 973 runs, 884 RBIs.

Hmm. That's probably closer than you were expecting. Puckett's huge advantage is in batting average, but Lemon walked a lot more and, crazily, got hit by 100 or so more pitches (Lemon led the league in HBP four times). When you take the times when they played into account, well, FanGraphs and Baseball-Reference have Puckett being worth SLIGHTLY more as a hitter, but not enough to make up for the defensive difference.

Of course, WAR is certainly not the only way to measure such things. By Bill James' Win Shares, Puckett's offense is worth markedly more (18 or so win shares more), and Lemon's defense is worth only a little more (about 5 win shares), so Puckett is rated a bit higher than Lemon.

Who was the better player? I don't think the answer matters as much as the question. Chet Lemon is underrated. He was one helluva player, who was not appreciated enough when he played.

TRADE MIKE TROUT??

With **Shohei Ohtani** likely departing to free agency, the Angels will sit down with **Mike Trout** to discuss his future. He has a no-trade contract but he'd likely be open to a trade if he sees no Angels World Series in his future. You play GM, how much would you give up?

Before you empty your farm system--Mike Trout is 32. Trout's recent injury should somewhat dampen his trade value. He only played 82 games this season, and his 119 games in 2021 were the most he's played in the past three seasons. That's four straight seasons in which he doesn't play in even 120 games. He hasn't played in 150 games since 2016, when he was 24 years old.

When healthy, Trout has been one of the game's preeminent stars, earning 11 All-Star bids, three AL MVP awards and nine Silver Slugger awards. In his time healthy this season he hit .263 with 18 homers, 44 RBI, 54 runs and a .858 OPS.

For his MLB career, his 162-game average comes out to a .301 batting average, 40 home runs, 102 RBI, 120 runs, 22 stolen bases and a .994 OPS. Epic numbers, but injuries have prevented him from getting anywhere close to a full season over the last eight years, missing at least 22 games per season in that span.

Trout is owed \$37 million per year through 2030, his age 38 season. That's \$248 million. Given his age, contract, injury history and declining production, how much would you give up?

IT WAS A GREAT RIVALRY

The Yankees and Red Sox played a regular-season game on Tuesday afternoon in front of maybe 10,000 people at Fenway Park.

If you're a fan who hates the cramped aisles or having to look around a pole to see the plate, this was your lucky day.

There were 35 people in section 43 of the bleachers during the fourth inning and four in section 18 of the pavilion reserved seats above the left-field line.

That was four more than were in section 19. There were empty blue rows throughout the grandstands, too. Even those prime field box seats next to the respective dugouts were open. ACE tickets decided to give tickets to charity rather than sell them for market rate of \$5-\$10. Yes, the Sox sold over 30,000 tickets. Yes, it was a makeup game during school and work hours with a shaky weather forecast. But how the mighty have fallen. The teams were a combined 38 games out of first place when the day started.

Atlanta Braves first baseman **Matt Olson** notched his MLB-best 52nd home run of 2023 on Saturday night to break the franchise record for homers in a single season. Here's what you need to know:

- The record breaking shot came off Miami lefty Steven Okert Saturday.
- The record-tying blast came against Philadelphia Phillies right-hander **Zack Wheeler** in the top of the fourth inning Tuesday. The 367-foot solo shot to left center tied the game 1-1 and Atlanta went on to win 7-6 in 10 innings.
- Olson tied the previous franchise mark set by Braves legend **Andruw Jones** in 2005.
- Olson — batting .281/.388/.619 this season — leads the majors by seven home runs.

Olson leads the majors ahead of **Shohei Ohtani** 44 and **Pete Alonso**'s 45 — and also has a big lead with 128 RBIs, 23 more than anyone else in either league. He's hitting .281 with a 1.007 OPS and is seven RBIs from matching Hall of Famer **Eddie Mathews**' 1953 franchise record of 135.

In his past 71 games, he has hit .336 with 46 extra-base hits including 30 homers and 76 RBIs with a nearly 1.200 OPS, while striking out 57 times with 46 walks. To repeat, that's 30 homers and 57 strikeouts in 316 plate appearances in the last 71 games, compared to 21 homers and 98 strikeouts in 334 plate appearances in the first 74 games. He has started every game this season at first base.

Olson is in his second season with Atlanta, which signed the first baseman to an eight-year, \$168 million extension last March a day after acquiring him in a trade with the Oakland Athletics. The 29-year-old two-time All-Star's previous career high for home runs in a season was 39 in 2021.

The Braves retired Jones' No. 25 in a pregame ceremony Saturday. The 10-time Gold Glove winner tallied 368 of his 434 career home runs during his 12 seasons with Atlanta.

THE METS GOT THEIR GUY

The Mets hired David Stern as President of Baseball Operations. Stearns, a 38-year-old Harvard grad, spent time in the Mets org back in 2008, when he worked in baseball operations. After time with the league office, Cleveland and Houston, he landed the GM job in Milwaukee in Sept. 2015.

Success in Milwaukee didn't take long. The Brewers had been to the postseason four times in the previous 47 years. Under Stearns, they made the playoffs four straight years, from 2018-2021. He stepped down after the 2022 season but was not allowed to interview with other teams until Aug. 1 of this year.

Mets owner Steve Cohen is hoping Stern will bring his small-market creative sensibilities to work for the 'spendiest' owner in the sport — well that sounds a lot like another step in the Dodgers blueprint. They hired wunderkind Andrew Friedman from the Rays in 2014 and have made the playoffs every year since, including a World Series win in 2020.

DODGERS HAVE A PITCHING CHALLENGE

Los Angeles Dodgers' rotation at the start of the season — **Julio Urías, Dustin May, Clayton Kershaw, Noah Syndergaard** and **Michael Grove**, with numerous options in reserve.

Tony Gonsolin, who was on the injured list recovering from a sprained left ankle. Top prospects **Bobby Miller, Ryan Pepiot** and **Gavin Stone**, who figured to contribute at one point or another. **Walker Buehler**, who was pointing toward a possible late-season return from Tommy John surgery.
But...

Urías is on paid administrative leave as the league and law enforcement continue their investigations following his arrest on suspicion of a felony charge of corporal injury on a spouse.

Syndergaard, after joining the team on a one-year, \$13 million free-agent contract, flopped and was traded to the Guardians, who subsequently released him.

May underwent season-ending flexor-tendon surgery in July. Gonsolin had Tommy John surgery on Sept. 1. Buehler announced jointly with the team last week he will be shut down for the rest of the season as he prepares for 2024.

The Dodgers' postseason rotation likely will be Kershaw, who is dealing with a shoulder issue that has diminished his velocity and pushed back his next start five days; **Lance Lynn**, who leads the majors with 41 home runs allowed; and Miller, who has thrown a career-high 115 innings between the majors and minors and has a 4.78 ERA in his last four starts.

The triumph of the Dodgers' season is that they will again win the NL West by a wide margin despite the collapse of their rotation and injury-related absences of several key relievers. But with their pitching in such disarray, how long they will last in October is an open question.

NO TO THE NO-NO

Corbin Burnes of the Brewers through 9 no-hit innings at the Yankees this week but his bullpen let him down in a 4-3 13 inning loss. The Brewers were the 13th team in MLB history to take a no-hitter into extra innings and then lose the game.

The most memorable doubtless occurred on May 26, 1959, at Milwaukee's County Stadium, when Pittsburgh left-hander **Harvey Haddix** threw 12 perfect innings. That's right; Haddix retired the first 36 batters he faced, but had nothing to show for it because his Pirates failed to score against Milwaukee starter **Lew Burdette**.

The Pirates got 12 hits off Burdette, and in the ninth inning advanced Bill Virdon to third base with two out. But Burdette got **Bob Skinner** to ground the ball back to him for the third out. It ended Pittsburgh's only real threat of the night.

In the bottom of the 13th, third baseman Don Hoak threw wildly in an attempt to retire **Felix Mantilla**, ending the perfect game. After a sacrifice and an intentional walk to **Henry Aaron**, **Joe Adcock** hit what appeared to be a game-winning home run only to be called out for passing Aaron on the basepaths. Adcock's hit was reduced to a double, but it didn't matter because Mantilla had already crossed home plate with the game-ending run.

Another oddity from the 13 examples - June 14, 1965, Jim Maloney. Pitching for the Reds, Maloney held the Mets hitless for 10 innings at Crosley Field. But in the 11th, Johnny Lewis tapped Maloney for a home run that decided the 1-0 contest.

Coincidentally, two months later Maloney would get his extra innings no hitter, holding the Cubs hitless for 10 innings at Wrigley Field and winning on an extra-inning home run by **Leo Cardenas**.

The most recent before Burnes, August 23, 2017, Rich Hill. Pitching for the Dodgers against the Pirates at PNC Park, Hill delivered nine perfect innings only to lose the perfect game, no-hitter and decision when **Josh Harrison** opened the bottom of the 10th with a home run.

A LITTLE HISTORY

On Sept. 8, 1939, **Bob Feller** picked up his 20th win of the season, becoming the second pitcher in the 20th century to have a 20-win season at age 20 or younger. The only player since Feller to accomplish that feat is **Dwight Gooden**. Feller's 1939 season was remarkable. He led the AL in wins (24), complete games (24), innings pitched (296.2) and strikeouts (246), finishing third in MVP voting. But Gooden's '85 season was even better. He went 24-4 with a 1.53 ERA and was a unanimous choice for the NL Cy Young award.

Gooden's season was one of the most dominant by any pitcher in MLB history, made even more impressive by the fact that he was only 20 years old. Since then, only 10 pitchers have thrown at least 100 innings in their age-20 season, and only one of them (**José Fernández** in 2013) had an ERA under 3.00.

JOE POSNANSKI ON UNDERRATED FRANK TANANA

Nobody in baseball history has really had a career quite like **Frank Tanana**, who is both one of baseball's great "what if" stories and one of baseball's great survival stories. Those two things don't often go together.

The young Tanana was a fireballer in the mold of **Sandy Koufax**. He was 6-foot-2, 180 pounds, and he was all about a blazing fastball and knee-buckling curveball. In 1975, he was absolutely incredible. He led the league with 269 strikeouts (in 254 innings; this was a time when few pitchers struck out more than one batter per inning), he led the league in strikeout-to-walk ratio, he led the league in FIP and fWAR; he was probably the best pitcher in the American League that year.

In 1976, he was perhaps even better, as he led the league in WHIP. Batters hit just .203 against him.

In 1977, the way Baseball-Reference figures it, he was EVEN BETTER, as he led the league in ERA and posted a league-leading 8.3 wins above replacement. I mean, this is not just Hall of Fame stuff, but first-ballot, inner-circle Hall of Fame stuff.

And, I mean, people knew that Tanana was good then ... but they didn't appreciate how good he was, because he didn't win 20 in any of those seasons. Of course, the reason he didn't win 20 in any of those seasons was because he played for the utterly anemic California Angels, who finished 11th, 12th and 10th in a 12-team league in runs. That 1976 Angels team was something else; they had one player (ONE PLAYER!) who hit double-digit home runs. That one player? **Bobby Bonds**. How many home runs did he hit? Yeah: 10.

So Tanana never really came close to winning a Cy Young Award in those years — he never got a single first-place vote, even though he had the highest bWAR and highest fWAR of any pitcher in the league over those three years (in fact, across baseball, only Tom Seaver had a higher fWAR).

So that was the dominant Frank Tanana. He was an All-Star again in 1978, but already it was clear that the innings were taking their toll. In 1979, he pitched only 90 innings, and after the 1980 season, the Angels traded him to the Red Sox for Fred Lynn, one of those rare deals that hurt both players.

Tanana pushed through a rough season at Fenway Park (1-3, 5.36 ERA, 10 homers in 45 innings in Boston), signed with the Rangers, and in 1982 led the league with 18 losses. He was a different pitcher by now. The fastball was gone, as was the power curveball. In their place, he had a slow curve, a sinking fastball and a change-up; he was now officially trying to be a crafty lefty. He was pulling off the act pretty well, too, when in 1985 he was traded to his hometown Detroit Tigers.

And over eight seasons, he won 96 games for the Tigers with roughly a league-average ERA. He was doing it with smoke and mirrors and lighting by this point ... it's one of the coolest second acts in baseball history. It's as if, say, **Mark Prior** had found his way back and pitched 10 or 15 years as **Bob Tewksbury**.

My favorite Frank Tanana fact is this: He pitched the first game at the Seattle Kingdome in 1977 when he was at his glorious height. He also pitched the first game at New Comerica Park/Guaranteed Rate Field in 1991, when he was just hoping to fool somebody.

He threw shutouts in both games.

You are pretty strong if you can name the 10 pitchers who had a 200 K season pitching for the Minnesota Twins:

Jose Berrios

Bert Blyleven (6 times)

Dave Boswell (famous for fist fight with his manager Billy Martin)

Dean Chance (twice)
Jim Kaat (twice)
Francisco Liriano
Pablo Lopez (this week)
Camilio Pasqual (4 times)
Johan Santana (4 times)

It's too bad the PAC-12 conference is imploding. The PAC-12 'Last 100 years All Star Team' includes a few decent arms:

Tom Seaver	USC
Randy Johnson	USC
Tim Lincecum	Washington
Mark Prior	USC
Jack McDowell	Stanford
Mike Mussina	Stanford

Dontrelle Willis, high kicking right hander for the Marlins, Tigers and Reds, was the last (non-**Shohei Ohtani**) pitcher to bat 7th or above. A strong hitter with a decent .244 career batting average and 28 XBH in less than 400 lifetime ABs, Willis came to bat in the 7 hole on 02-Oct-2005.

Playing stickball as a kid, needing something to deceive his buddies, Willis developed a high-kicking delivery & added a twist to it which made the ball appear to come out of his sleeve. Willis parlayed his funky wind-up into a NL 2003 Rookie of the Year Award, two All-Star nods, a runner-up finish in a Cy Young Award voting (2005, he went 22-10 to finish second to Chris Carpenter of the Cardinals) & a World Series ring (2003 in Marlins win over the Yankees). He won 72 games over 9 seasons.

On Sept. 11, 1966, **John Miller** became the first player in Yankees history to hit a home run in his first at bat. When did he hit his second home run? In his final MLB game. Miller, who died in April at age 79, spent most of his career in the minors. The Yankees called him up in September 1966 as they limped to a last-place finish. He made his debut on Sept. 11 and hit a two-run homer off **Lee Stange** in his first turn at bat.

Before the start of the next season, Miller was traded to the Dodgers. He spent the 1967 and '68 seasons in the minors and saw limited action in '69 with Los Angeles. He didn't hit much that season, but on Sept. 23, 1969, in what turned out to be the final plate appearance of his

career, Miller hit the second homer of his career. (After being let go by the Dodgers, Miller spent three years in Japan, hitting 79 home runs.)

The only other player to hit a home run in his first and last career plate appearances was **Paul Gillespie**, a catcher with the Cubs in the '40s. But Miller's only two homers came in his first and last career plate appearances. What are the odds of that?

Ernie Banks' 2,528 games played without ever reaching the postseason. A bunch of others greats never won a World Series -- **Ted Williams** never won one. Neither did **Ken Griffey Jr., Ty Cobb, Tony Gwynn, Barry Bonds or Harmon Killebrew**.

Some pretty good active players too. Trying for their first ring--**Joey Votto** (Reds), **Evan Longoria** (D'backs), **Bryce Harper** (Phillies).

On Sept. 6, 2000, Major League Baseball finally acquired the rights to the MLB.com domain name after it had been registered six years earlier by Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. The Philadelphia-based global law firm, one of the biggest in the world, registered MLB.com in 1994. When the league decided to embrace the internet later, it had to use majorleaguebaseball.com. Internet users who put MLB.com into their browser bar were taken to the law firm's site, but a link on the page directed wayward baseball fans to the league's page.

By the late '90s, it was clear that the internet was going to be a big deal and that having a concise domain name would be valuable, which meant the league was interested in swapping its 19-character domain name for the more desirable three-character one.

As a 2011 article by George Mason University law professor Ross E. Davies points out, the other MLB had done legal work for the league for decades, which made negotiating the transfer of the domain a little awkward. The firm could have earned a boatload of money for its concise domain name, but maximizing the return for the valuable commodity risked ruffling feathers with a major client. In the end, the firm simply gifted the domain to the league, according to *The American Lawyer*.



Charlie O'Brien became the first catcher in MLB history to wear a hockey-style mask on this day in 1996 while playing for the Toronto Blue Jays. Of course the hockey-style mask originated in Canada. O'Brien had used the traditional mask for his first 10 MLB seasons but eventually realized there must be room for improvement. According to his SABR biography, he "became frustrated with his mask, and the headaches that came from being hit by foul tips." Inspired by seeing hockey goalies take pucks to the face without much trouble, he began working with an Ontario-based company to design a similar mask to wear behind the plate.

The hockey-style mask gave catchers better peripheral vision while also covering more of their head. MLB dragged its feet in approving O'Brien's new style of mask, though, so the season was almost over by the time he was finally permitted to wear it in a game. It became popular

instantly. Several of O'Brien's big-league colleagues began wearing the mask the following year, and it quickly spread to all levels of the game. The success of his invention surprised even O'Brien.

"Now I watch a girls' softball game and the catcher's wearing my mask," O'Brien told *Sports Illustrated* in 1999. "Other guys in the majors have started using them. Kids use it because they can paint things on it and look cool. Really, though, I only thought of it so I could have a mask that would absorb more of the ball. Who'd have thought it'd end up like this?"

Over 15 seasons for 8 teams O'Brien caught 13 Cy Young Award winner in his career. He played in the 1995 World Series for the Braves.

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--I recently read this fun book. (it is out of print but your library can get it for you). I grabbed a few tidbits:

On December 26, 1919 Harry Frazee agreed to sell **Babe Ruth** to the Yankees. The terms were somewhat complicated: the Red Sox would receive \$100,000 \$25,000 in cash and three \$25,000 notes, payable at one year intervals at six percent interest (the owners of the Yankees also loaned Frazee \$300,000 with Fenway Park serving as security. The deal, the largest in baseball history, was contingent on the Yankees signing Ruth to a new contract. Technically already under contract--prior to the 1919 season, Ruth signed a new contract that would pay him \$30,000 over three years. But Ruth wanted more, and told writers he wanted \$20,000 for 1920 alone, or he might not play at all.

It's often written that Frazee sold Ruth to finance a Broadway production of the musical "No No Nanette" but the play wasn't put into production until 1925.

The 1940 Indians were called the Cleveland Crybabies—mid-season about half the roster went to owner Alva Bradely to fire manager **Ossie Witt**. Bradely refused, the Indians finished one game behind the Tigers for the pennant.

In 1945 Washington Senators owner Clark Griffith rented out his stadium to the Washington Redskins football team for the later part of September. Combined with war time travel restrictions, this led the Senators to play 44 doubleheaders. They played 10 games in 5 days to clear way for the Redskins and were exhausted. They finished one game behind the Tigers for the pennant.

The 1935 Boston Braves went 38-115. That's a .248 winning pct., worse than the 1962 Mets (40-120, .250). The Braves had signed Babe Ruth at age 39 to boost attendance. Ruth was a shadow of his former self. But he had a great day in May against the Pirates in Pittsburgh, with 3 HRs including a shot over the roof at Forbes Field. His last HR, his last hit. He was done by June 2 and was released.

In 1942 the Brooklyn Dodgers won 104 games under manager **Leo Durocher**. The Cardinals won 106 to take the NL pennant.

In 1961 the Cubs decided to try a "College of Coaches". Eight coaches would rotate through the entire organization from class D all the way up to the major league club. The idea was consistent coaching at every level. The 8 would rotate as manager ("head coach") of the Cubs.

Confusion reigned, the Cubs went 64-90 in 1961, 59-103 in 1962 and while they kept at it through 1963 (82-80) and 1964 (76-86), the idea was dropped in 1965 and Leo Durocher was hired as full-time manager.

The National League regular season ended in a tie in 1946, 1951, 1959 and 1962 with the Dodgers tied for first place each year.

The last pitcher to win 30 games in a season was Detroit's **Denny McLain**. In 1968, at the age of 24, McLain went 31-6 throwing 336 innings, striking out 280 while posting a 1.96 ERA. Cy Young and MVP.

1969 was also a success—24-9 and another Cy Young.

Sadly McLain battled gambling and mental issues, battled with the front office, was suspended (for amongst other things—carrying a loaded gun on a flight), managed just a 3-5 record in 14 games and was traded to the Senators where he battled manager **Ted Williams**. It didn't get

any better. McLain was 10-22 for Washington in 1972. He had gone from leading the league in wins to leading the league in losses.

He bounced to Oakland and Atlanta in 1972 before being released. Ironically his last batter was **Pete Rose** who had a little gambling problem as well. Four years after winning 31 games and three years after winning his second consecutive Cy Young, he was out of baseball at the age of 29. Post-baseball He was imprisoned for drug trafficking (cocaine), embezzlement, and racketeering.

In 1971 **Steve Carlton** got in a fight with Cards owner Gussie Busch during contract negotiations over \$10,000. Busch decided to trade Carlton, sent him to Philadelphia for **Rick Wise**. After the trade Carlton won 252 games including 27-10 in 1972.

In the same off-season Busch argued with pitcher **Jerry Reuss** over Reuss' mustache. Busch traded Reuss to the Astros. Reuss won 198 games after the trade. (Reuss was traded for one of my favorite baseball names, **Scipio Spinks**). Spinks went 5-10 for the Cards, tore up his knee in a collision with **Johnny Bench** (Spinks was pinch running) and was done.

So in two battles over \$10K and a mustache the Cards gave up 450 wins and who knows how much attendance and World Series appearances. The Cards also traded **Mike Torrez and Fred Norman**. Over 11 months they gave up 4 pitchers who went on to win 716 games.

COMPARING 5 GREAT RIGHT HANDERS

Roger Clemens (1984-2007)

- WAR: 138.7 total, 5.6 per 200 IP
- Averages: 3.12 ERA, .229 BA, .341 SLG, .582 BPO
- Strikeouts: 4,672 total, 8.6 per 9 IP
- Totals: 707 Games Started, 354 Wins
- Notes: Clemens won his first Cy Young trophy at age 24 with the Red Sox. He went 24-4 for Boston's American League champions in 1986. His final Cy came almost two decades later in 2004, capping an 18-4 season for the Houston Astros. Perhaps his best year was 1997, when he went 21-7 with a 2.05 ERA and 292 strikeouts for the Toronto Blue Jays.

2. Nolan Ryan (1966-1993)

- WAR: 83.6 total, 3.1 per 200 IP
- Averages: 3.19 ERA, .204 BA, .298 SLG, .603 BPO
- Strikeouts: 5,714 total, 9.5 per 9 IP
- Totals: 773 GS, 324 W
- Notes: Ryan is associated in the public mind with a pair of nouns — speed and durability. His blazing fastball brought him 5,714 strikeouts, which remains the all-time standard for pitchers. Nobody else has come within 800 K's of his total. Ryan pitched 27 seasons in the majors, wrapping up his career just short of his 47th birthday.

3. Tom Seaver (1967-1986)

- WAR: 106.1 total, 4.4 per 200 IP
- Averages: 2.86 ERA, .226 BA, .342 SLG, .569 BPO
- Strikeouts: 3,640 total, 6.8 per 9 IP
- Totals: 647 GS, 311 W
- Notes: Seaver will always be remembered for his amazing 1969 season, when he went 25-7 with a 2.21 ERA and dragged the New York Mets to a World Series title. He won the first of his three Cy Young Awards that year. Seaver led the National League in strikeouts on five occasions, and he was the ERA leader three times.

4. Pedro Martinez (1992-2009)

- WAR: 86.1 total, 6.1 per 200 IP
- Averages: 2.93 ERA, .214 BA, .337 SLG, .558 BPO
- Strikeouts: 3,154 total, 10.0 per 9 IP
- Totals: 409 GS, 219 W
- Notes: Martinez earned three Cy Youngs between 1997 and 2000, finishing second in the only year that he fell short. He posted the league's lowest ERA in five different seasons, bottoming out at 1.74 in 2000. Only nine pitchers in baseball history have exceeded Martinez's career ratio of 10.04 strikeouts per nine innings.

5. Greg Maddux (1986-2008)

- WAR: 104.8 total, 4.2 per 200 IP
- Averages: 3.16 ERA, .250 BA, .358 SLG, .584 BPO

- Strikeouts: 3,371 total, 6.1 per 9 IP
- Totals: 740 GS, 355 W
- Notes: Maddux won the National League's Cy Young Award in 1992, then took home the next three for good measure. His record during that dominant streak from '92 through '95 was 75-29 in 124 starts with an amazing ERA of 1.98. He led the NL seven times in games started and five times in innings pitched.

EXCERPTS FROM WEIRD & WILD

Jayson Stark, The Athletic (an example of why you should consider subscribing)

The 2023 baseball season was 165 days old when **Kyle Tucker** of the Astros showed up at Minute Maid Park on Sunday. We mention that because you know what his previous 164 days had in common?

He hadn't hit a triple in any of them. But then ...

A Weird and Wild thing happened in the sixth inning. First, Tucker fired an RBI triple off Padres reliever **Tim Hill**. And then ... after ... a ... very ... long ... inning ... he tripled off the wall in deep right center off **Rich Hill**. The San Diego Padres have two pitchers named Hill (Tim and Rich) on their active 2023 roster and, on September 10, the Astros Kyle Tucker tripled off both of them – in the same inning.

So how rare is it to hit two triples in one inning, you ask? Well, it *had* happened once *in the previous seven decades* (the Rockies' **Cory Sullivan** did it on April 9, 2006) ... so it's not as if it had never happened. Before that, it was **Gil Coan** in 1951. And before that **Al Zarilla** in 1946. And that's it in the last 97 seasons!

But guess what? That isn't even the Weird and Wild Part. Here comes that part.

Fourth inning Sunday — Kyle Tucker steals two bases in one inning.

Sixth inning Sunday — Kyle Tucker hits two triples in one inning.

And how many men in the live-ball era have ever had a game like that? Right you are. That would be none!

OUR FAVORITE MARTIAN — The **Jasson Domínguez** era in the Bronx sure was cool while it lasted, wasn't it? Eight games ... with more home-run trots (four) than singles (three)? If that's how Martians swing it, I want to go and watch a little baseball in the Martian League.

Oh, the Martian will be back some day, after Tommy John surgery rehab, to work more of that Martian magic. But in the meantime, the Weird and Wild column wants to remind him he has already climbed way up the ladder of great offensive production by spacemen.

Pat Rockett — one homer in three seasons for the 1976-78 Braves. He could never cut it on Mars.

Moonlight Graham — put on the uniform for those 1905 New York Giants. Then got kidnapped by Kevin Costner and never did reach the heights of the Martian.

Wally Moon — OK, so Moon did hit 142 moon shots in 12 seasons for the Cardinals and Dodgers. But he finished up with fewer homers in his last two seasons combined (three, in 1964-65) than the Martian bopped in a week.

Bill (Spaceman) Lee — Actually hit .208 over 225 plate appearances in a 14-season career for the Red Sox and Expos, which pitchers everywhere would be proud of. But home runs by the Spaceman: two! Home runs by the Martian: four! Case closed.

Sun-Woo Kim — Not much offense on the sun, it turns out. Went to the plate 71 times in six seasons, for four different teams. Got only three more hits in six years than Domínguez got in a week — and never did go deep. Advantage: Martian!

Aroldis (the Cuban Missile) Chapman — Who would send this guy to the batter's box? Almost nobody. Two plate appearances in 14 seasons, leading to no hits. Not sure if he'd fare any better on Mars.

WHO NEEDS SINGLES? -- **Kyle Schwarber** launched his fourth career homer — which also was his fourth career *hit* — off **Johnny Cueto** last weekend, it got me to thinking. Which turned out to be as dangerous as ever.

According to Baseball Reference, it isn't just Cueto who thinks: *All this dude does is homer*. Schwarber has 10 pitchers who have given up at least two hits to him ... *and all of them are homers*. Which seemed like a big number for a guy with "only" 242 career homers.

Oh, I could really make that look impressive by dropping the cutoff to one hit/one homer — since that would add *another 80 pitchers* to this list! But I asked the great Katie Sharp of Baseball Reference to look into how unusual this was, merely in the category of two or more. And as always, Katie didn't disappoint.

- She found five other hitters in the BR database with between 220 and 260 career homers who also have multiple homers, but no other hits, off at least 10 pitchers:

Aaron Judge — 14 (251 career HR)

Eugenio Suárez — 11 (244 HR)

Matt Olson — 12 (227 HR)

Khris Davis — 10 (221 HR)

Tony Batista — 13 (221 HR)

- Beyond Judge, Suárez and Olson, there are two other active members of this club with fewer career homers than Schwarber. You won't be surprised to see them on this list!

Max Muncy — 11 (179 HR)

Joey Gallo — 10 (198 HR)

- Also not a shocker are the two all-time leaders in this category — **Mark McGwire** (24) and the homer-or-bust legend himself, **Adam Dunn** (17). But those two combined for more than 1,000 homers.

THE TIDE HAS TURNERED — OK, one more Phillies note. Is there somebody you know who's having a rough week/month/summer? I think we're aware now that you can fix everything just by gathering 40,000 of your closest friends and giving that somebody a warm old standing ovation.

Hey, it's worked for **Trea Turner**.

The supportive residents of the metropolis of Philadelphia interrupted their boofest to give Turner a standing O on Aug. 4. And all that happened after that was ...

He had the greatest 34-game stretch of any shortstop in history.

I say that because I spent way too much time wriggling down the Baseball Reference/Stathead rabbit hole the other day, looking at this. And I think it's true. No shortstop ever has had a 34-game stretch like the 34 games for the Phillies' trusty shortstop, between Aug. 4 and Tuesday:

.389/.431/.820/1.251, with 16 HR, 41 RBIs, 34 runs, 19 multi-hit games

I even left out the part that he can steal a base any time he wants ... and the part where his wife had a baby in the midst of all that. So I went looking for any other shortstop who could match or beat just that 1.251 OPS, the 16 homers and the 41 RBIs. And I found ... *no other shortstop who could!* There were only three close calls, in fact.

Ernie Banks — had a 17-homer span, with a 1.260 OPS, in 1957, but couldn't match the RBIs or total production.

Alex Rodriguez — got to 16 homers and an OPS over 1.200 in both the 2002 and 2003 seasons in Texas, but was short of the 41 RBIs. Had another stretch in which he crossed the homer/RBI threshold but not the OPS.

Fernando Tatis Jr. — Had the 16-homer and 1.200 OPS part nailed in May/June, 2021, but also came up short on RBIs and total production.

So there you go. Stand. Cheer. And watch the magic unfold.

THAT OTHER 30-30 CLUB — I don't know when the **Juan Soto** "30 for 30" is scheduled to begin production. But he did something this week that, once again, only the Weird and Wild column seems to have noticed.

He hit his 30th home run of the season for the Padres, giving him two of those 30-homer seasons before he's even reached 25 years old. And that alone elevated him into a very cool club. Only Ted Williams had more of those (three) through his age-24 season. And five other famous dudes are on the list with two: **Mickey Mantle, Mel Ott, Jimmie Foxx, Eddie Mathews and Troy Glaus**. But ...

That's not even the Weird and Wild part ... because Soto has now hit 30 in a season *for two different teams* by age 24. And ...

You know how many other players in history have done that? Anyone guess "nobody?" Way to guess! Because he's it.

In fact, only two men in history have hit 30 for two teams by their age-25 season. You've heard of them: **Alex Rodriguez** (Mariners, Rangers) and **Miguel Cabrera** (Marlins and Tigers).

Can we all agree that one of the best things that's happened to the Royals all year is their trade with the Rangers that brought them future rotation cornerstone **Cole Ragans** (in exchange for **Aroldis Chapman**)? So now explain to us what the heck happened Sunday in Toronto.

Let's set the scene. Two outs and nobody on in the sixth inning. No runs on the board. Ragans working on a 26-inning shutout streak, in total control of every pitch of every start. And then ...

I don't even know how to describe this!

Here is how Ragans' afternoon on the mound ended: walk ... walk ... wild pitch ... wild pitch ... wilder pitch *on three consecutive pitches* ... scoring two runs ... then another walk on the next pitch!

So when was the last time you saw anything like that? I asked the amazing Katie Sharp that question. I think it's safe to say, after perusing her research, that answer is ... never!

The Baseball Reference play-by-play database goes back (and is mostly complete) to 1914. She found just five other innings in which any starter mixed in three walks and three wild pitches in any order at any point in a game.

But three of those were guys who came unglued in the first inning. Then there was **Ken Howell**, who self-destructed in the third inning on Aug. 28, 1989 ... and **Don Sutton**, who lost the plate on his radar screen in the fourth inning on Sept. 11, 1970.

And that's everybody else. But how many pitchers were zipping along with a one-hit shutout in the sixth inning *and then did that* (walk-walk-WP-WP-WP-walk)? We now know *it's nobody*.

The Oakland A's started the season 10-40. Yet they weren't the first team in 2023 to lose 100 games—the Royals beat them to it. First time ever a team that started 10-40 or worse wasn't the first team to 100 losses.

Replay reviews have been a part of MLB for 16 years. Only three 1-0 games have been decided with replay reversing the winning run/runner.



Cleveland Guardians pitchers **Lucas Giolito** and **Reynaldo López** met as teenagers in 2012 and have been together ever since, with stops with four organizations.

They are both 29 and have pitched for four different major league organizations. Each has been traded twice and waived once.

The pitchers began their professional careers with the Washington Nationals organization in 2012, with Giolito arriving as a first-round draft pick and López as an international free agent.

In December 2016, the Nationals shipped them to the Chicago White Sox in a trade for outfielder **Adam Eaton**.

This July, the White Sox dealt them to the Los Angeles Angels in exchange for two minor league prospects.

The Angels, who had skidded out of postseason contention waived six players, including Giolito and López, seemingly splitting up the longtime teammates.

And then Cleveland claimed both pitchers.

Giolito is a Southern California native who pitched at Harvard-Westlake School in Los Angeles. There, he was a part of an eye-popping high school rotation that also included the future big leaguers **Max Fried** and **Jack Flaherty**.

López is from the Dominican Republic and came from a family with so little money that, unbeknown to his grandmother at the time, his grandfather sold a cow to earn the money to buy López his first glove. Money from the sale also went to baseball shoes, a bat and two baseballs. López was a catcher as a child, but one day his team's pitcher failed to show up for a game. He volunteered to pitch and never looked back.

They were first teammates at Class A Hagerstown in 2014. When spring camp broke in 2015, the Nationals kept both players at extended spring training in Florida to regulate their workload. Then, early that May, each was assigned to the Nationals' high-A Potomac affiliate in Virginia.

TODAY'S HISTORY LESSON--THE STREAKIEST—THE 1916 GIANTS

By David Karpinski, baseballroundtable.com

In today's post, Baseball Roundtable takes a look at (possibly) the streakiest team in MLB history. As is the Baseball Roundtable tradition, when I look into baseball events (past and current) *"one thing always leads to another."* This journey began with my interest in the remarkable 1916 season of New York Giants' pitcher **Ferdie Schupp** (more on that in a bit.) However, I soon became distracted by the remarkably streaky season of the 1916 Giants as a whole.

On this date (September 7) in 1916, the aforementioned Schupp started for the Giants against **Nap Rucker** and the Brooklyn Robins (Dodgers) at the Polo Grounds. Southpaw Schupp went the distance for the Giants, tossing a two-hitter. Lefty Rucker also went the distance (a six-hitter) and all four runs scored against him were unearned. The win brought the fourth-place Giants record to 60-62 and dropped the second-place Robins to 74-51.

More important, the win was the first of an **MLB-record 26-game winning streak** for the Giants. *(Side note: the streak was interrupted after 12 games by a 1-1 tie. However, ties were not counted in MLB standings and, at the time, games were replayed not resumed. Therefore, MLB recognizes the Giants' streak as the record.)*

That the Giants would go on a streak is no surprise. During the 1916 season, looking at streaks of five or more games, the Giants:

- Had winning streaks of 26 and 17 games;

- Suffered losing streaks of eight games (part of 13 losses in 15 games), five games and six games (the latter two part of a streak of 11 losses in 12 games).

The Giants' two winning streaks provided a record-book bonanza.

- **The 26-game winning streak** (September 7 through September 30) *involved all home games* (part of a 31-game homestand). That gave the Giants the record for the overall MLB winning streak and home winning streak.
- **The 17-game winning streak involved all road games (part of a 21-game road trip).** That streak gave the Giants the record for consecutive road wins. While the Tigers broke the overall record for consecutive road wins in 1983-84, the Giants still share the single-season record of 17 consecutive road wins (with the 1984 Tigers).

A Tiger by the Tail

The 1983 Tigers won their final four road games. Detroit then opened the 1984 season by winning their first 17 road games (on their way to a 35-5 start). The 17 road wins tied the single-season record for consecutive road wins and (with the four final road wins of 1983) helped set a new multi-season mark for consecutive road wins.

Now, let's get back to those 1916 Giants. In their 26-game winning streak, they outscored their opponents 121-32 (not counting the 1-1 tie). The streak included ten shutouts and four one-run victories.

During the streak, southpaw, Ferdie Schupp, the original topic of the research behind this post, started six games and went 6-0, with a 0.33 earned run average. He tossed six complete games and gave up just three runs (two earned) and just 17 hits in 54 innings.

Schupp (who made his first 1916 MLB appearance on June 13) finished the 1916 season with a 9-3, record and a 0.90 earned run average in 140 1/3 innings. Notably, Schupp's 0.90 earned run average was – at the time – recognized as the MLB single-season earned run average record. If you look at today's record books, the single-season lowest ERA record (post-1900) is assigned to the Red Sox' **Dutch Leonard** (0.96 in 1914), with statisticians applying the current qualifying standard of at least one inning pitched per team's game played. But as Daniel Levitt pointed out in his superb article in the 1996 Society of American *Baseball Research* "*Baseball Research Journal* ("Lowest Season ERA? Ferdie Schupp. He meets the Criteria"), the standard for qualifying at the time was a season of with at least ten complete games. Levitt makes a strong case that Schupp should still have the record on the basis of the criteria at the time, longevity of that recognition and the lack of new evidence to the contrary. Baseball Roundtable agrees (that was the original focus of this post).

Schupp followed up his 1916 season with a 21-7, 1.95 record for the 1917 Giants (with 25 complete games in 32 starts). His career MLB mark (10 seasons) was 61-39, 3.32.

Here are a few other factoids about 20+ game MLB winning streaks:

- In their 2017 22-game winning streak, the Cleveland Indians outscored their opponents 142-37, threw seven shutouts and won four one-run games. The streak covered 11 home games and 11 away games. The Indians' big four starters of **Trevor Bauer**, **Mike Clevenger**, **Carlos Carrasco** and **Corey Kluber** picked up wins in 17 of the 22 games (they also got the wins in 65 of the team's 102 2017 victories).
- The 1935 Cubs outscored their opponents 137-50 in their 1935 21-game winning streak. It included four shutouts and five one-run games – and 18 home games (versus three road games). Eighteen of the Cubs' 21 wins involved complete games by the Cubs' starting pitcher (#HowTheGameHasChanged).
- The 2002 A's outscored their opponents 141-65 in their 20-game winning streak, which included four shutouts, four one-run games, ten home wins and ten road wins. The final three wins in the A's streak were walk-off wins at home.

MLB (AL/NL) Teams (post-1900) with 20-game Winning Streaks			
Team	Place At Start of Streak	Place at End of Streak	Finish
1916 Giants ... 26 games	Fourth-NL (-13.5gm)	Fourth (-5.0gm)	Fourth NL (86-66)
2017 Indians ... 22 games	First-AL Central (+4.5gm)	First (+13.5gm)	First (102-60)
1935 Cubs ... 21 games	Third-NL (-2.5gm)	First (+6.))	First (100-54)
2000 A's ... 20 games	Third- AL West (-4.5gm)	First (+3.5)	First (103-89)

Primary Resources: Baseball-Reference.com; Baseball-Almanac.com; “Best Season ERA? Try Freddie Schupp,” by Daniel R. Levitt, The Baseball Research Journal, Society for American Baseball Research, 1996.

THIS WEEK'S BIRTHDAYS

Orlando Cepeda	86
Robin Yount	68
Tim Wallach	66
Orel Hershisier	65
Tim Lincecum	64

Randy Johnson	60
Ellis Burks	59
Bernie Williams	55
Paul Goldschmidt	36

LONGER READS

THE 2023 PADRES EPIC FAILURE

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

San Diego had all of the individual talent needed to keep hopes of a playoff run alive but couldn't put together a team effort worthy of one.

- The Padres are such an abject failure they will stand as a monument to what happens when talented individuals do not play team baseball.
- The wait is over for the “run” we thought might be coming from this team. The Padres (67–77) are eight games out of a wild-card spot with 18 games to play. Their failure in the finer points of the game is epic. They are 0–11 in extra-inning games, 6–22 in one-run games and have never won four games in a row.

How could a team with the highest payroll in baseball outside of New York and with seven Silver Sluggers—six of whom have finished in the top six in MVP voting—turn out to be such a disappointing offensive club? This is what happens when there is not enough buy-in toward the greater good over individual numbers.

The Padres are the worst team in baseball at hitting in late and close situations, the worst team in baseball at hitting the ball the other way and the worst team in baseball when it comes to giving pitchers free strikes.

There is no excuse for what happened to San Diego. Not bad luck. Not injuries. They have five qualified hitters with an OPS+ better than average. Only the Braves and Phillies have more such regulars. No, the Padres earned every bit of their underachievement.

You want their season in a nutshell? Here you go: They have been lousy at almost every measurement of team offensive baseball.

Padres MLB Hitting Ranks

Late & Close	30
High Leverage	30
Opposite Field	30
Called Strikes	30
Opposite-Field Hits	29
RISP	T26
With Runners	T25
2-Out RISP	T24

They have been historically bad when it comes to big spots.

Worst Hitting Teams Late & Close Since 1969

- 1. 2022 Angels (73–89) .179
- T2. 2023 Padres (67–77) .194
- T2. 2019 Padres (70–92) .194
- T4. 2000 Cubs (65–97) .197
- T4. 2012 Rays (90–72) .197

It's not easy hitting in late and close situations. The rise of deeper bullpens, velocity and spin have dropped the batting average in those spots from .258 in 2006 to .234 this year. The four lowest late and close MLB averages in the wild-card era (since 1995) have all been in the past four seasons. That said, **Trent Grisham** (.096), **Matt Carpenter** (.121), **Manny Machado** (.125), **Jake Cronenworth** (.157), **Xander Bogaerts** (.206) and **Gary Sánchez** (.212) all come in well below league average in the big moments.

In addition to taking too many strikes and not using the whole field, San Diego's problems include coaching instability. A.J. Preller is the only GM in baseball who has changed hitting coaches seven times since 2015. And over these nine years, the Padres have been last in the majors in hits, last in batting average and last in on-base percentage. Nothing takes root.

The average MLB team hits better with RISP (.257) than overall (.249). In simplest terms, hitters know in RISP spots they and their team can be rewarded by just putting the ball in play, whereas lower-leverage situations encourage selling out more for extra bases. The Padres have an inverse profile. They are worse with runners in scoring position (.237) than overall (.240).

But what if we are overrating batting with runners in scoring position? As the baseball equivalent of the NFL's "red zone," it's a popular narrative in broadcasts. But does it really matter? How strong of a link is there between RISP hitting and winning? Check the RISP rankings of the past six World Series winners:

World Series Champions, RISP Batting Average Ranking

2022 Astros	2
2021 Braves	3
2020 Dodgers	2
2019 Nationals	5
2018 Red Sox	1
2017 Astros	1

The past six world champions have finished in the top five in RISP hitting. Who are the top five this year? The Orioles, Rays, Red Sox, Astros and Rangers. The Braves are eighth, which may seem like a vulnerability given the past six champions, but they have hit the most home runs in those spots.

Nothing changes an outcome like the home run. So why use batting average, anyway? Maybe you like OPS+ better when it comes to RISP. Let's widen the scope and look for the best teams in the divisional era (since 1969) when it comes to OPS+ in RISP:

Highest OPS+, RISP since 1969 (Full Seasons Only)

	OPS+	Finish
T1. 1975 Red Sox	139	Lost World Series
T1. 2013 Cardinals	139	Lost World Series
3. 1969 Reds	133	89–73
T4. 1970 Braves	131	76–86
T4. 2018 Red Sox	131	Won World Series

What about the recency test of champions we saw with batting average? Here are how the past six champions ranked in OPS+ with RISP:

World Series Champions, OPS+ Ranking with RISP

2022 Astros	3
2021 Braves	1
2020 Dodgers	2
2019 Nationals	2
2018 Red Sox	1
2017 Astros	2

The correlation is even stronger. It turns out RISP hitting really does have serious value, especially in the bullpen-dominated game of this era, when hits are hard to get.

No team outside the top three in RISP as measured by OPS+ has won the World Series since the 2016 Cubs (ranked eighth at the time). Further, in every World Series matchup since '14, the pennant winner with the better OPS+ with RISP won the series. Nine-for-nine.

Based on that history, if you want a peek at who is going to win the World Series this year, the best RISP teams as measured by OPS+ are the Astros (No. 1), Braves and Orioles (tied for No. 2). The Dodgers are fourth, and the Rays are fifth. If form holds when it comes to hitting in key spots, the next champion is likely to come from among that group.

GRANT'S WEDNESDAY NIGHT MASSACRE

Red Smith, The New York Times. June 17, 1977.

In the emotional, aftermath of M. Donald Grant Wednesday Night Massacre, one significant fact emerged yesterday: Contrary to what the Mets' chairman of the board had been saying and his tame columnist had been writing, **Tom Seaver** was not demanding renegotiation of his contract. He was not welshing. He was prepared to fulfill the commitments that extended through the 1978 season, provided the club would start negotiations now on a new agreement for the seasons of 1979-80-81. He -would, of course, have sought a salary for those Sports years comparable with the pay now drawn of by lesser players who became free agents last fall. The best pitcher in baseball made The Times this clear to the passel of reporters, photographers and broadcasters who flocked to Shea Stadium to watch him clear out his locker and depart for the Cincinnati Reds. He also set the record straight on national television.

Grant had been saying that Seaver had demanded to be traded. "It is with sincere regret," M. Donald statement read, "that we have met Tom Seaver request and traded him to Cincinnati."

"I never demanded to be traded," Tom Seaver said, "until Wednesday."

They didn't want to renegotiate," he said of the Mets, "and I can understand that, But they did seem willing talk about 1979-80-81."

They seemed that way Tuesday when Seaver, in Atlanta with team, talked by phone with Lorinda de Roulet., the Mets' president. She was "reasonable and lovely," said Tom's wife, Nancy.

The Great Giveaway

The next day Seaver read some garbage to the effect that his troubles with the brass stemmed from Nancy's resentment of the fact that **Nolan Ryan**, husband of her friend Ruth, got a bigger salary than Tom for pitching for the California Angels. That tore it. "I want out," Seaver told New York. Even as he did, he sensed that the club's attitude had stiffened since his talk with Mrs. de Roulet. He suspected that Grant was infuriated because the pitcher had gone over his head.

For weeks Joe McDonald, the general manager, had been trying to get something of value for Seaver, without success because other clubs knew he was in a bind. Wednesday night he accepted the inevitable—a sophomore pitcher, two minor league outfielders and a utility infielder. **Pat Zachry**, the pitcher, was a good rookie last year but hasn't been getting people out this season. To replace **Doug Flynn**, the infielder, Cincinnati got **Rick Auerbach**, whom the Texas Rangers had picked up after the Mets turned him loose.

Before bringing off that clinker, the Mets had telephoned San Diego to ask: "Would you accept **Dave Kingman** for Valentine and another player?"

Robert John Valentine is a part-time infielder-outfielder with a crooked leg and a batting average of .172. He was considered a bright prospect when he got out of Stanford University, but in 1973 he ran into the wall in Anaheim, Calif., and suffered a double fracture of the right leg. The next year he had a shoulder separation. The Padres hadn't thought of trading for Kingman, but "it was a deal we had to make," said **Alvin Dark**, their manager. As the "other players" the Mets had asked for, San Diego selected **Paul Siebert**, a pitcher fresh from the minors known primarily the son of an old first baseman with the Philadelphia Athletics, **Dick Siebert**.

What Might Have Been

From the talent pool that had enabled them to reach last place in their division, the Mets had now subtracted the best pitcher in baseball and one of the best home run hitters. They also subtracted **Mike Phillips**, a utility infielder who can hit for distance. To replace these three they received seven silhouettes but not one regular player.

Perhaps all seven will become useful players, maybe stars, though the laws of probability are against it. So is the record of the club's earlier adventures in the flesh market. While the Shea Stadium clientele surveyed the wreckage, some wondered what might have been, suppose this team had its present personnel plus Seaver, Kingman, Nolan Ryan, **Rusty Staub and Amos Otis**, all former Mets. It would be in first place, or near it.

"How about Bowie Kuhn?" one fan asked. "He has vetoed other deals. Does he feel this one is in the best interests of baseball?"

Having Tom Seaver pitch for the Reds is not in the best interests of Walter O'Malley's Dodgers, whose fat lead over Cincinnati has been dwindling. When Walter discovers that **Sparky**

Anderson has already calculated Seaver's place the rotation so he will be fit and rested for a start against the Dodgers next weekend, Bowie's phone may start ringing.

A WRITER CALLED RED SMITH

Ira Berkow, The New York Times, March 2, 1986

WHEN RED Smith died, at the age of 76, in 1982, he was in his 55th year as a newspaperman. He began his career with The Milwaukee Sentinel in 1927, a month or so after Lindbergh made his solo flight across the Atlantic. And as Lindbergh was proved more than just a stunt pilot, Smith proved much more than just a sportswriter.

His sports column invariably reflected his nimble use of language, his deft insights and his humor - and there was always, too, his humanity. He wrote for The New York Herald Tribune from 1945 through 1966, when the paper folded, then was carried by the Publishers Newspaper Syndicate to 100 newspapers across the country and abroad with a circulation of some 20 million, and from 1971 until his death, he was with The Times. In 1976, he won the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary. He was the most widely read sports columnist of his time. And one of the most influential.

Marc Connelly, the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright who taught at the Yale Drama School in the late 1940's, told his students: "Those of you with hope should consider it a must to read Red Smith's column every morning. He is one of the truly great writers of our day."

When Robert Frost's publisher gave him a birthday party in New York, the poet specifically requested that Red Smith - whom he read regularly - be invited.

In September 1949, Smith received a letter that said:

My dear Red Smith:

I get a lot of pleasure and fun out of reading your column.

As it happens, in your piece today there are references to two quotations I often use - "Ye call me chief" and "I lay me down to bleed awhile and rise again to fight." I believe the latter quotation goes like this - "I am wounded but I am not slain," Sir Andrew Barton said. 'I will lay me down and bleed awhile and then I will rise and fight again.' " Sincerely yours, Bernard M. Baruch. Smith placed people and events in perspective. He saw through pomposity. He felt for the underdogs and underclass in sports, and wrote about their plight with concern: the stable swipes, the blacks, the baseball players bound by the pernicious reserve clause. His prose was inventive, sharp and worldly. He noted, for example, with typical irreverence, that the Yale Bowl "was just a mite squalid for a shrine." The brushback pitch in baseball, coming after two

strikes, was, Smith wrote, in "the classic pattern, as rigidly formalized as the minuet." When Everett Case, a head basketball coach at North Carolina State, blamed players from the North for college basketball scandals, Smith reminded his readers that southern colleges, too, had been giving players illegal financial help and allowing them to attend phony classes. Case, wrote Smith, "got integrity confused with geography."

Smith was a thoughtful and perceptive critic of humankind.

But he once wrote that, "I flinch whenever I see the word 'literature' used in the same sentence with my name. I'm just a bum trying to make a living running a typewriter." Frequently asked about the so-called "significance" of writing a sports column, he said that his contribution might be "to the gaiety of nations" and asked "Does everybody have to do something 'significant'? I'll leave 'significance' to the political writers."

But this wasn't to belittle the importance of his work. He always enjoyed something the Times columnist James Reston told him. "You don't know how important sports are to me," said Reston. "The things I cover have no resolution, no end. To go to a game that lasts 60 minutes or nine innings and there's a winner and a loser, and it's done and finished and a complete thing, that's very important to me."

"Maybe," said Smith, "that's important to us all."

Throughout his career, Smith continued to grapple with the problems peculiar to the work of serious writers. Asked if it got easier to write as he got older, Smith said no. "Writing well," he went on, "always has been and always will be one of the most difficult of human endeavors. And it never gets easier." Why not? "I don't know," he said. "I know that - well, how many Mozarts are there in the world at any one time? At the very top in any field - and that includes baseball players and football players and racehorses and writers and artists and musicians and lawyers and bricklayers - on the very top level there aren't many. I bet there are precious few superstars among bricklayers.

"But the best are there because they want to be, or had enough self-respect to do a good job.

"I'm not implying that I'm a Mozart of sports writing, but I am on the top level, and you always try to be there without knowing, with no way of finding out, where you really stand. But you try to be as good as you can."

Smith sought strength through simplicity. He worked hard at "the art of rejection," as he called it. That is, editing as one writes. He believed in Hemingway's "iceberg theory," in which seven-eighths of the story is submerged. If the writer is deft enough to use the significant details, the one-eighth that is above the surface is sufficient and wholly satisfying for the reader. Smith told a story about his instruction in the esthetic of what need not be revealed. When he was a young reporter in St. Louis, he interviewed Ann Corio, and, as he would later recall in print, "What, I asked the many-splendored queen of the strippers, was the secret of undressing

artistically? 'Always keep your pants on,' she said, 'it brings the boys back hoping next time you'll take them off.' "

WALTER WELLESLEY Smith was born in Green Bay, Wis., in 1905. In school he was called Wells. He would be pleased as he grew up to be nicknamed Brick because of the color of his hair. After college, he would begin to be called Red, and remained Red long after his hair had receded from his high forehead and turned white.

Red Smith joined The Milwaukee Sentinel shortly after graduating from Notre Dame, but he didn't break into print until several weeks after he started work. He was learning, he said, how to write a story, trying to get his sentences right, to tell the truth as he saw it, and yet not be a snoop. He found, as he would say, that he wasn't "as good as some - I wasn't one of those who could go out and find the kidnapper and the child - but I got my facts straight and did a thorough job." And he would seek the exact word, the one, he said, "that goes straight to the target." He held to what Mark Twain, one of his favorite authors, had insisted: that the difference between the nearly right word and the right word was the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.

Smith covered no sports. The sports department was, as is traditional, a separate domain from general assignment. But he became friendly with the sports editor, Red Thisted, and he read the sports pages. He became a regular reader of Damon Runyon, whose syndicated columns - sports and general assignment - originated in New York and ran in The Sentinel. "Runyon could do things with the alphabet that made a fellow want to throw his typewriter away and go dig coal for a living," Smith would write. "He was one of the few men of our time with genuinely original ideas about what words were for. He created a new language and enough characters to people a fair-sized town."

Smith recalled reading with delight a Runyon column about an afternoon in which J. P. Morgan was called before a Senate banking committee. Everyone seemed to be playing the stock market, and no one played it better than Morgan, perhaps the richest man in the world. Runyon, Smith wrote, "sketched an unforgettable picture of the lawyers hanging breathlessly on the financier's words in the hope that he'd drop a tip."

Another Runyon tale described a deathbed scene in which an old gambler gave advice to his boy. As Smith recounted it:

" 'Son,' the old man said, 'as you go around and about this world, some day you will come upon a man who will lay down in front of you a new deck of cards with the seal unbroken and offer to bet he can make the jack of spades jump out of the deck and squirt cider in your ear. Son,' the old man continued, 'do not bet him because as sure as you do, you are going to get an earful of cider.' "

Smith moved to St. Louis in 1928, to work as a copy editor at The St. Louis Star. One afternoon, the managing editor, a large, gruff man named Frank Taylor, called Smith over to his desk.

Taylor had just dismissed three members of his six-man sports department for accepting gratuities from a wrestling promoter to promote his events in the paper. "Taylor came to me," Smith recalled, "because I was the most disposable body on the copy desk."

"Did you ever work in sports?" asked Taylor. "No," said Smith. "Do you know anything about sports?"

"Only what the average fan knows," said Smith.

Taylor looked at him. "Are you honest? If a fight manager offered you ten dollars, would you take it?"

Smith thought for a moment. "Ten dollars is a lot of money," he said.

"Report to the sports editor on Monday," said Taylor.

I N 1936, WITH A BURGEONING reputation, Smith left St. Louis to join the sports staff of The Philadelphia Record. His ambition was to work in New York, but he spent nine years in Philadelphia before getting the chance. When Look magazine was seeking a sports editor, Smith applied. "Look represented his ticket to New York," his daughter, Kit Smith Halloran, recalled years later. "I remember him saying, 'I'd leave the newspapers for that dumb magazine.' " But Frank Graham got the job. Another time, he received an offer from The Brooklyn Eagle. "But I decided," said Smith, "that Brooklyn was farther from New York than Philadelphia was."

Finally, Smith accepted an offer from The New York Herald Tribune in 1945. He became a regular and honored patron at Toots Shor's restaurant on West 51st Street, which he came to call "the mother lodge." He delighted in the rough-talking owner who described himself as a "saloonkeeper," and Smith found the crowded, noisy Shor's "the easiest place in the world" to find a column. Besides being a haven for journalists and publicity people, Shor's drew ballplayers like **Joe DiMaggio** and **Stan Musial**, celebrated personalities like Frank Sinatra and political luminaries, including Supreme Court Justices and even President Harry Truman.

Ernest Hemingway, when in New York, appeared at Shor's regularly. Smith met him there in the late 1940's. In Hemingway's novel "Across the River and Into the Trees," a dispirited colonel "started to read the Paris edition of The New York Herald Tribune. I ought to take the pills, he thought. But the hell with the pills . . . He was reading Red Smith, and he liked him very much."

In late February 1958, Smith traveled to Cuba to cover some sports events and took the opportunity to visit Hemingway. "He was warm and companionable, quick with wit and laughter, with a strange but genuine shyness," Smith wrote. " 'Here we can talk,' he said in his home outside of Havana. 'When we meet in New York it's always somewhere like Toots's or 21. Those crowds make me nervous.' "

To Smith, Hemingway was not a "drunken braggart," as he was sometimes portrayed. "After he won the Nobel Prize, he was quoted as saying that he used the first \$25,000 to get even. I had the bad taste to ask him why he was broke. 'What bothers me,' I said, 'is that with the exception of Edgar Guest, you are the best-selling author in America, and the top guy should be able to afford anything.'

"He said that with his first successful book - 'The Sun Also Rises' - he gave the royalties to his own mother.

"Then, he said, 'Red, a fellow's only got so many books like that in him.' "

SMITH'S CLOSEST FRIENDS were other sportswriters, W. C. (Bill) Heinz, Frank Graham and Joe Palmer. He first met Heinz in the fall of 1945. Smith had traveled to Annapolis for The Herald Tribune to write a story about the upcoming Army-Navy football game. Heinz, back from his tour as a war correspondent and then a sports columnist for The New York Sun, was there, too. Smith, who admired Heinz's clean style and dedicated professionalism, asked, "Is that the typewriter that you write your stuff on?" "Why yes," replied Heinz. "It's a very good typewriter," said Smith.

Joe Palmer had joined The Herald Tribune as its horse-racing writer in 1946, a few months after Smith arrived. Palmer had been a highly regarded writer for The Blood Horse, a racing magazine, and had also taught English at the University of Michigan while working on his doctorate.

He was a dark-haired, full-faced Kentuckian whom Smith described as "the best writer I ever knew." Smith delighted in Palmer's horse-racing columns, such as the one about Lyin' Fitz, whose wooden-legged stable cat could catch mice with one paw and blackjack them with the other, or about Man o' War, "as near to a living flame as horses get."

Smith not only admired Palmer's writing but envied how he wrote. He was a touch typist. Smith was a two-finger hunt-and-peck man. And, Smith noted, Palmer gave the appearance of writing with "infuriating" ease, especially when seen in the press box by one who had come to "bleed" at the typewriter.

Palmer, who wrote one column a week in addition to his regular racing coverage, could also do square roots in his head or quote from Beowulf in Old English. Smith said that Palmer's "quicksilver mind" intimidated and delighted him.

"One night," Smith wrote, "we were having a drink after attending an amateur boxing card in the recreation hall maintained by backstretch workers in Saratoga. Joe was telling a story about cockfighting. What, he demanded, was wrong with cockfighting?" "It's cruel," I said, 'inhuman.'

" 'Inhuman?' he said. 'Of course it's inhuman. And that stuff we were watching tonight - that's un-chicken!' "

Smith took great pleasure in talking with friends. The conversations ranged widely, from politics to the theater to sports, but frequently focused on writing and language.

One night the Smiths and their children were visiting at the home of Bill and Betty Heinz, who were neighbors in Stamford, Conn. The women were talking in one room and the men in another when Kay Smith looked at her watch and sent her young son, Terry, to tell his father it was time to go home.

Terry left and returned a few minutes later. "Did you tell him?" asked Kay. "No," said Terry, "they don't stop talking."

"Well," said Kay, "the next time one of them comes to a period, interrupt and say it's time to go home."

Terry left and came back a second time. He looked at his mother and shrugged. "They don't even stop when they come to the end of a paragraph."

Smith could be stubbornly idiosyncratic in his opinions about the elements of writing. He and Heinz once had an argument over the word "climb." Smith said, "You can't say, 'climb down.'" Heinz argued that you could. "Climb," retorted Smith, "means up. You clamber down, or struggle down." Smith then made an imaginary well in the middle of the living room and said, "Here, now try to climb down. You can't." Heinz said, "It's easy. You just climb down."

Frank Graham and Smith met to travel south one bitterly cold morning in front of Toots Shor's restaurant on 51st Street. Graham got into Smith's new postwar car, and they drove to The Herald Tribune at 41st Street, where Smith had to drop off his column.

"Would you hold the wheel a minute," said Smith, "while I pop in and leave this copy with the elevator man?"

"No," said Graham. And that, recalled Smith, "was when I learned the bum couldn't drive." Smith had no choice but to do all the driving to Florida.

In a press box one day, Graham rolled a sheet of copy paper into his typewriter, pecked out "By Frank Graham," and sat back to consider his lead. Smith walked by and looked over Graham's shoulder at the words on the page. "It drags," Smith said, and walked away.

Another day, a policeman stopped Smith's car on a highway between Richmond and Petersburg, Va., where large signs warned of a speed limit of 50 miles an hour. "Mr. Smith," the cop said, inspecting the license, "can't you read?"

"The son of a bitch can't even write," said Graham, from the passenger seat.

ON JAN. 16, 1983, ONE YEAR and one night after Red Smith died, some 250 people - including friends, colleagues and a few Smith family members - attended a Red Smith Pipe Night at The Players, on Gramercy Park in Manhattan. Smith had been a member of The Players, a club housed in an old brownstone once owned by the actor Edwin Booth. Booth had bought the home for actors and their ilk who, at the turn of the century, were generally not considered worthy of membership in other places. One of the early members of the club was Mark Twain, whose cue stick now hangs above the fireplace in the basement poolroom.

At the dressy but low-keyed affair, Jack Whitaker, the sports announcer, served as master of ceremonies. Frank Ryan, the former pro quarterback and then athletic director of Yale, spoke, as did the actor Alfred Drake and the former Mayor of New York, John Lindsay. Baseball's Enos Slaughter remembered Red Smith the reporter from the 1940's.

Whitaker then produced a tape recording of Smith speaking at a small gathering less than two years before at a dinner in his honor at the National Arts Club. The lights were dimmed, the audience grew quiet, and on a screen at the front of the dining hall appeared a silhouette of Smith at his typewriter.

And then Smith's words, slightly scratchy, were heard in the room:

"This is a peculiar business we work in. I have to tell you a little about what it's like. There was a sportswriter in Cincinnati years ago named Bill Phelon. He was a bachelor and a lot of people considered him eccentric because he shared his apartment in Cincinnati with a five-foot alligator. And he had a pet squirrel that he carried around the National League circuit in his topcoat pocket.

"Bill Phelon loved baseball, and he was kind to animals, and above all he loved Havana. The city of Havana. As soon as the World Series was over, he would go to Havana, join up with his friend Pepe Conte, who was a sportswriter in Havana at the time, and spend as long a time there as his bankroll and the patience of his paper would allow.

"And eventually the inevitable happened. Bill Phelon died. And in obedience to directions in his will, he was cremated and his ashes shipped to Pepe Conte. Pepe got a letter and a little package. And in the package was a small urn. The letter said, 'Hello Pepe, this is Bill.' Bill asked that Pepe rent a small plane and scatter his ashes over Morro Castle.

"Pepe was deeply grieved by the loss of a friend and he took the little jug under his arm and went down to El Floridita, one of the places they had frequented, and there were a few hangers-on sitting around the joint, and Pepe put the urn up on the bar and said to the guys, 'Remember Bill Phelon?' Sure, they all remembered Bill Phelon. Pepe said, 'This is to Bill Phelon. Have a drink on Bill Phelon.' So they all had a drink on Bill Phelon, and Pepe tucked the jug under his arm and went on to Sloppy Joe's.

"Went through the same routine. 'You guys remember Bill Phelon?' 'Sure.' 'Drink to Bill Phelon.' He went on to the Plaza Bar, maybe the Angle-terre, I don't know. All the spots that were favorites of Bill's and Pepe's. But somewhere on his appointed rounds, Pepe achieved a state of incandescence and he mislaid Bill Phelon.

"Bill was undoubtedly swept out the next morning with the cigar butts and the empty bottles. And I tell this story to make it clear that sportswriters lead glamorous lives and come to unexpected ends. And I thank you."

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Name the four players since 2000 to homer on their 40th (or older) birthdays:

2011 Indians DH, lefty swinger, Hall of Famer, began that season with the Twins.

JIM THOME

2012 National League Hall of Famer made his 8th and last All Star team this season, switch hitting infielder.

CHIPPER JONES

2015 American League infielder. He has 3rd most career home runs of players not in the Hall of Fame.

A-ROD. Barry Bonds and Albert Pujols are ahead of Arod's 696 HRs and not in the Hall of Fame.

2023 lefty hitter, won NL MVP in 2010 with the only team he has played for.

JOEY VOTTO

Tony Phillips in 1999, **Wade Boggs** in 1998, **Darrell Evans** in 1988 (41st), **Joe Morgan** in 1983 and **Bob Thurman** in 1957 also homered on birthdays 40 and above.

Also, **Freddie Freeman** has now homered on his birthday in four seasons, as has Votto with his on Sunday. That's one shy of the most birthdays a player has homered on. Only six players have homered on five of their birthdays: **Al Simmons**, Alex Rodriguez, **Todd Helton**, **Derrek Lee**, **Mark Reynolds** and **Mike Trout**.

16 hitters have Led league in hits 3 or more seasons. 7 did it at least 3 years in a row. I will spot you **Ginger Beaumont** of the 1902-1904 Pirates. How many of the other six 3 straight seasons hits leaders can you name?

AL 2014-2017 infielder, bats right-handed, 3 batting titles, 2017 MVP

JOSE ALTUVE

AL 2006-2010 outfielder, bats left-handed, 2001 MVP

ICHIRO SUZUKI

AL 1987-1989 (and 1992), outfielder, bats right-handed, 1988 batting champ, led majors in hits 3x, Hall of Fame.

KIRBY PUCKETT

AL 1964-1966 (and 1969-1970) outfielder, bats left-handed, Hall of Fame, 3x AL batting champion, 1964 Rookie of the Year.

TONY OLIVA

NL 1920-1922. Infielder, right-handed, 2x MVP, 7x NL batting champ, Hall of Fame

ROGERS HORNSBY

AL 1907-1909 (and 1911, 1912, 1917, 1919).

TY COBB

NL 1902-1904 (and 1907), Pirates and not Honus Wagner, 1902 NL batting champ,

GINGER BEAUMONT



Nap Lajoie (1901, 1904, 1906, 1910), **Johnny Pesky** (1942, 1946, 1947), **Nellie Fox** (1952, 1954, 1957, 1958), **Harvey Kuenn** (1954, 1954, 1956, 1959), **Rod Carew** (1973, 1974, 1977), **George Brett** (1975, 1976, 1979), **Tony Gwynn** (1986, 1987, 1989, 1994, 1995, 1997), **Pete Rose** (1965, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1976, 1981), **Stan Musial** (1943, 1944, 1946, 1948, 1949, 1952).

I was 1997 AL Rookie of the Year. It was a huge rookie season--in 1997 hit 30 home runs among his 209 base hits, and drove in 98 runs, setting a new MLB record for RBIs by a leadoff hitter and most homers by a rookie shortstop. He also batted .306, and his 30-game hitting streak set an A.L. rookie record, also stole 22 bases, and 11 triples led the league

1998 I was AL MVP runner-up to **Juan Gonzalez**.

I won the AL batting title in 1999 and 2000.

I was a 5 time All Star at shortstop.

I played 10 seasons in the American League, 5 seasons in the National League.

In 2004 I was traded to the Cubs.

In 2006 I signed a free agent deal with the Dodgers.

I played in the post-season in 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006 and 2008 but never reached the World Series.

Highest single-season batting average by a right-handed batter in the post-war era, batting .372 in 2000

One of 13 players in Major League history to hit two grand slams during a single game, and the only player to achieve the feat at his home stadium.

In 1,434 games over 14 seasons, posted a .313 batting average (1,747-for-5,586) with 927 runs, 370 doubles, 52 triples, 229 home runs, 936 RBI, 95 stolen bases, 403 bases on balls, .361 on-base percentage, and .521 slugging percentage. Finished my career with an overall .975 fielding percentage. In 32 postseason games batted .321 (36-for-112) with seven home runs and 24 RBI.

Who am I?

NOMAR GARCIAPARA

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.

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HOUSEKEEPING

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