

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

9.24.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

THE AL west is giving the Lords of Baseball what they wanted – its anybody's division and the wild cards aren't decided with a week to go.

For those of you of a certain age, it has a 1967 feel to it (the Sports Illustrated description of that battle is included in this week's Longer Reads).

It was a transformative September '67. I was an 11 year-old 5th grader when the Red Sox outlasted the Twins, Tigers and White Sox. My father and I tracked the standings every day in The New York Times—no MLB network to watch the games or ESPN for highlights. He taught me the concept of games back and how to calculate it. I also

Later I wrote a book report on Veeck as in Wreck, Bill Veeck's autobiography. Between the 1967 pennant race and the book, I was hooked, and here we are.

This week **Ronald Acuna Jr.** continues his amazing season, **Tony Lazzari**, **Cal Ripken Jr.**

In Longer Reads, to celebrate "The Saint of Second Chances" on Netflix, a profile of the Bill and son Mike Veeck plus **Rip Sewell** and the eeplus pitch.

Pistachio muffins here in Maine. Enjoy yourself a coffee and dig in.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

(answers at bottom)

Pete Rose played in 3,562 games, the most in MLB history. Which player ranks second all-time in games played?

Unlike Rose and third place **Hank Aaron** (3,298 games), this player played his entire career for one team.

Lefty hitter. He played in the post-season in the 1960's and 1970's.

Three-time batting champion, 18x All Star, 7x Gold Glove.

Who is he?

Three pitchers threw multiple no-hitters, multiple Cy Young awards and multiple World series championship rings.

Four no-hitters 1962-1963-1964-1965; Cy Youngs 1963-1965-1966, World Series wins 1955, 1959, 1963, 1965.

No hitters 2013-2014, Cy Youngs 2008-2009 World Series wins 2010-2012-2014. Lefty.

No hitters 2007-2011-2019, Cy Youngs 2011, 2019, 2022, World Series wins 2017, 2022.

MLB debut at age 19 in 2012

303 career HRs, lefty hitter

2x National League MVP, Rookie of the Year, 7x All-Star

Lost in the first round of the playoffs 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017; went to World Series in 2022 with a different team.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

DOWN THE STRETCH THEY COME

Dodgers win NL west for 10th time in 11 seasons.

Rays and Orioles are in. Baltimore reached the postseason for the first time since 2016.

Twins are in. The Twins have lost 18 straight postseason games--Minnesota hasn't won a postseason game since 2004, taking the first game of the Division Series 2-0 in New York with Johan Santana on the mound.

Cards first losing season in 15 years.

Angels 8th straight losing season.

Divisional play started in 1969, AL west this season is the first time that 3 teams in the same division were all within half a game or fewer of first place with all having 10 games or fewer left to play.

Padres 8 game winning streak is worth watching.

IRON MAN

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Want to feel old? **Cal Ripken Jr.**'s consecutive game streak ended 25 years ago this week. Ripken Jr was baseball's Ironman and on September 6, 1995, he broke **Lou Gehrig's** "unbreakable" record when he played his 2,131st consecutive game. That achievement cannot be commended enough, and Ripken has deserved all of the accolades he has received, but there is one thing that gets overlooked. 2,131 gets all of the attention but Ripken's record streak continued three more years. Ripken finally brought the streak to an end 25 years ago today, on 9/19/98 at 2,632 games.

That means that Ripken extended his own record 501 times. To put that into context, Ripken's 501 consecutive games after breaking Gehrig's record would be the 40th longest streak in MLB history. **Miguel Cabrera** is the only active player to have played more total games (2,787) than

Ripken's streak. As amazing as the streak seems, Ripken always downplayed it by suggesting that all he did was show up to work every day.

Cal Jr played every game for about 16 years. During that time, Ripken was the Rookie of the Year (1982), two-time MVP (1983, 1991), World Series Champion (1983), eight-time silver slugger (1983-86, 1989, 1991, 1993-94), two-time gold glove winner (1991-92), **Roberto Clemente** Award recipient (1992) and a 16-time all-star.

He also set the record for consecutive innings played during the streak. Ripken played 8,264 consecutive innings between June 5, 1982, and September 14, 1987. That's over five straight seasons. Cal played with 150 different Orioles and had eight different managers during his streak. He also faced 526 different pitchers in that time.

He did play through several injuries that some thought would have ended the streak, to include sprained ankles and knees, and a broken nose suffered during a team photograph in the 1996 all-star game. But Ripken played through all of those injuries, including playing in the all-star game just a short time after breaking his nose.

Finally on September 20, 1998, Cal Ripken Jr went into manager **Ray Miller's** office and said it was time. At 38 years of age, Ripken decided he needed a day off. **Ryan Minor** played third base and batted fourth for the Orioles in a 5 - 4 loss to the New York Yankees as Ripken watched from the bench. Ripken went on to play three more seasons for the Birds and was a first ballot hall of famer.

The streak is still commonly brought up when people discuss the most unbreakable records in baseball. There are numerous records that are definitely safe such as Cy Young's 511 career wins and 749 complete games, **Walter's Johnson's** 110 career shutouts and **Johnny Vander Meer's** two consecutive no-hitters.

Offensive records that may never be topped include **Fernando Tatis's** two grand slams in one inning, **Joe Sewell** only striking out three times in a season as a qualified hitter and **Hugh Duffy's** .440 batting average in 1894. As tempting as it is to say that Ripken's streak will never be broken, people said the same thing about Lou Gehrig's streak.

In today's game you rarely see people play all 162 games in a season, but things change. It took 66 years for a player to surpass Gehrig's streak. Cal Jr's streak may stand the test of time, but records are made to be broken.

Rookie shortstops with 20 or more HRs and 20 or more stolen bases

Nomar Garciaparra 1997 30 HRs 22 SB

Bobby Witt Jr. 2022 20 HRs 30 SB

Anthony Volpe 2023 20 HRs 23 SB

Bravo **Adam Wainwright**. The Cardinals righthander became the 122nd pitcher in baseball history to win his 200th game Monday night with a 1-0 victory over the Brewers.

Wainwright came into the season with an explicit goal to reach the 200-win plateau and has had a long, hard season trying to get there. He entered Monday's start with just four wins in 20 starts and his ERA now stands at 7.40. He only has two more starts before he retires -- next weekend in San Diego, and then in his final weekend at his beloved Busch Stadium.

Wainwright is the 14th pitcher to win 200 games while playing with only one team, the first since **Clayton Kershaw**. Before that, you have to go back to **Jim Palmer**, who won 268 games for the Orioles from 1965-84.

One thing is definitely clear about Wainwright reaching 200: He may be the last pitcher to get there for a while -- maybe ever. There are only four active pitchers who have reached the mark -- **Justin Verlander** (255), **Zack Greinke** (224), **Max Scherzer** (214) and Clayton Kershaw (209) -- and the only active pitcher who would seem to be in shouting distance is **Gerrit Cole**, who may win the AL Cy Young Award this year at the age of 33, but still has only 143 wins. If he stays at his current average of wins-per-season (13), he'll have a chance to get there in about four-and-a-half years. *A chance.*

We once cheered pitchers on the way to 300 wins and now we're not sure anyone's going to make it to 200 again. Pitching has fundamentally changed—5 man rotations, pitchers pulled before seeing the third trip through a lineup, the availability of flame throwing relief pitchers behind your starter.

Besides Cole, **Johnny Cueto** (144), **Lance Lynn** (135), **Charlie Morton** (130), **Chris Sale** (120) are the only active pitchers within 80 wins of 200. You want to bet on any of them getting there?

From 1942–74, no more than four active pitchers had 200 wins at any time, but in 1978 alone four players surpassed the mark, running the active total to 10; four of them, and three others nearing the mark, would go on to surpass 300 wins for their careers, distorting Hall of Fame elections for decades. In 2007, the total spiked to a record 12, but currently as mentioned above, only four other active pitchers besides Wainwright have 200 wins under their belts, namely Verlander, Scherzer and Kershaw.

Stolen bases are up significantly this season, by 41.2 percent per game compared to the same average through Sept. 18 a year ago.

WHAT A SEASON, RONALD

Ronald Acuña Jr. added yet another historic achievement to his MVP resume, hitting his 40th homer to begin the Braves' 9-6 win over the Nationals on Friday night at Nationals Park. He can now lay claim to producing the fifth 40-40 season in AL/NL history and the first 40-60 season. With two more stolen bases, he'll have constructed what had previously been a seemingly unthinkable 40-70 season.

Of the previous 40 HR-40 SB members — **Jose Canseco, Barry Bonds, Alex Rodriguez and Alfonso Soriano** — Soriano had the highest home-run total (46) and Rodriguez the highest stolen base total (also 46). Acuña already is the first player to go 30-60. He obviously would be the first to go — 40-70. His 83.8 percent success rate on stolen-base attempts is above the league average of 80.3.

But before you anoint Acuna as MVP, Dodgers GM Brandon Gomes brought up an interesting angle when considering **Mookie Betts'** candidacy.

"From our standpoint, his ability to play multiple positions speaks volumes," Gomes said. "It has allowed us to get both of our corner outfielders — both **Jason Heyward and David Peralta** — into the lineup with regularity. ... (Plus), if there's a really tough lefty, we can hit one of our right-handed-hitting infielders, and we can kick (Betts) back out to right field, and we don't miss a beat, defensively."

I came into the conversation thinking there was no way I could be talked out of Acuña as NL MVP (I don't have a vote in that category, by the way). Come on — a 40/70 season? That felt like a slam dunk.

But Gomes makes a compelling point. Betts' numbers aren't as big, round and historic as Acuña's, but he's right there in terms of production (all numbers as of last night).

- Acuña: 7.9 bWAR, 7.7 fWAR, .338/.418/.596 (1.014 OPS)
- Betts: 8.1 bWAR, 8.1 fWAR, .311/.410/.596 (1.006 OPS)

Gomes raises one other point. There was a specific stretch when Betts' versatility was essential. When **Miguel Rojas** went on the injured list in mid-April with a hamstring strain (and with **Gavin Lux** already out for the year with a torn ACL), Betts stepped in.

We always wrestle with the ambiguity of the word "valuable" as it applies to this award. Usually, the player with the best numbers (generally on a team that has won a lot of games) has been the most valuable. But Gomes might have a point when he says that Betts' versatility — allowing the Dodgers to play bats that the manager might not otherwise have been able to write into the lineup — provides a lot of "value" as well.

One more bit about Acuna. Leading the majors in OBP (.416) which has helped him score 140 runs. The last 140 run season came via the Yankees' Alex Rodriguez in 2007, just a year after the most recent 40-40 campaign, by Alfonso Soriano.

Individual 140-run seasons by decade

Modern Era (Since 1900)

2020s - 1
2010s - 0
2000s - 2
1990s - 7
1980s - 1
1970s - 0
1960s - 0
1950s - 0
1940s - 3
1930s - 22
1920s - 13
1910s - 2
1900s - 2

Over the last 26 seasons—

Seasons of 140-plus runs

Expansion Era (Since 1961)

2023 - Ronald Acuña Jr. (ATL), TBD
2007 - Alex Rodriguez (NYY), 143
2001 - **Sammy Sosa** (CHC), 146
2000 - **Jeff Bagwell** (HOU), 152
1999 - Jeff Bagwell (HOU), 143
1997 - **Craig Biggio** (HOU), 146
1997 - **Larry Walker** (COL), 143
1996 - **Ellis Burks** (COL), 142
1996 - **Chuck Knoblauch** (MIN), 140
1996 - Alex Rodriguez (SEA), 141

1993 - **Lenny Dykstra** (PHI), 143

1985 - **Rickey Henderson** (NYY), 146

Nobody has reached the 150-run plateau in 23 years, with Bagwell the only player to do so going back to 1950. Of the 19 instances in the Modern Era, 17 occurred in the 1920s and '30s, when a shorter season was counteracted by a wild offensive environment.

Most recent seasons of 150-plus runs

2000 - Jeff Bagwell (HOU), 152

1949 - **Ted Williams** (BOS), 150

1937 - **Joe DiMaggio** (NYY), 151

That's right: Nobody has reached the 150-run plateau in 23 years, with Bagwell the only player to do so going back to 1950. Of the 19 instances in the Modern Era, 17 occurred in the 1920s and '30s, when a shorter season was counteracted by a wild offensive environment.

Who are the kings of reaching home?

If you're looking at the entirety of Major League history, then **Billy Hamilton** -- not the present-day speedster -- tops the list. He crossed the plate 198 times for the 1894 Phillies, posting a .521 OBP and stealing 100 bases for a team that hit a combined .350, scoring nearly nine runs per game. It was a different time, to say the least.

The Modern Era (since 1900) record holder is a more familiar name: **Babe Ruth**. The Sultan of Swat scored 177 times in 1921, his second year with the Yankees.

Most runs scored in a season

Modern Era (Since 1900)

177 - Babe Ruth (1921 NYY)

167 - **Lou Gehrig** (1936 NYY)

163 - Lou Gehrig (1931 NYY)

163 - Babe Ruth (1928 NYY)

158 - **Chuck Klein** (1930 PHI)

158 - Babe Ruth (1927 NYY)

158 - Babe Ruth (1920 NYY)

Ruth (eight) and Gehrig (four) and Williams (three) are the only players in the Modern Era with more than two seasons of 140 or more runs scored. Bagwell and Rodriguez are the only players with more than one since 1950.

As we have discussed here many times, availability = value. Most games at shortstop of any player since 2016:

- **Francisco Lindor**, 1,095
- **Xander Bogaerts**, 1,068
- **Brandon Crawford**, 976

Juan Soto. Amidst the Padres disaster of a season, Soto has done this— *153 OPS+, 32 HR, 123 BB, 23.1% of swings producing hard contact*. He has the lowest swing rate among qualified players (35.9%), the second-lowest chase rate (16.9%, just behind **Mookie Betts'** 16.8%) and the third-highest percentage of swings producing hard contact (23.1%). 32 HRs and MLB leading 123 walks.

Soto is the sixth player with multiple seasons with at least 30 home runs and 100 walks before turning 25, joining **Ted Williams** (three), **Mel Ott**, **Eddie Mathews**, **Mickey Mantle** and **Jimmie Foxx**.

Most 200-inning seasons since 2015:

6: **Gerrit Cole**

4: **Justin Verlander**, **Zack Greinke**, **Max Scherzer**, **Corey Kluber**

3: **Aaron Nola**, **Jacob deGrom**, **Chris Archer**, **Madison Bumgarner**, **Jeff Samardzija**, **Chris Sale**

Gerrit Cole is a throwback, the major-league leader in innings pitched since 2017 and only the second pitcher to reach 200 this season, after **Logan Webb** of the Giants.

Zach McAllister, whom the New York Yankees drafted and signed in 2006, made his Yankees debut this past Tuesday. Per the Elias Sports Bureau, the 17-year gap between being drafted and debuting with the Yankees is the longest in franchise history.

Firpo Marberry became the first pitcher in MLB history to record at least 20 saves in a single season when he logged 22 for the Washington Senators in 1926. The right-hander from Streetman, Texas led the American League in saves six times.

Mike Trout has 368 home runs in 6,521 plate appearances. **Ralph Kiner** had 369 home runs in 6,256 plate appearances.

Dave Kingman went deep for the New York Yankees this week in 1977, giving him home runs with four different teams on the season. The slugger also homered that year for the California Angels, New York Mets, and San Diego Padres. (it was the only season Kingman played for more than one team).

Corey Seager of the Rangers hit his 32nd home run in just his 110th game. Seager also leads the league with 42 doubles, even though he has missed 40-plus games.

Richie Sexson, Milwaukee Brewers, At 6'7", homered for the NL Brewers with 45 in 2001 & hit 45 again in 2003. Tallest batter in NL history to hit 45 or more HRs in a season. On September 25, 2001 Sexson and teammate **Jerome Burnitz** each hit three HRs in a game-an MLB first.

Aaron Judge slammed three home runs Friday evening in the 7-1 win over the D-backs at Yankee Stadium, receiving a curtain call after becoming the first player in franchise history to collect a pair of three-homer games in a season. Judge is the sixth player in franchise history to record multiple three-homer games, joining **Lou Gehrig** (four), **Joe DiMaggio** (three), **Alex Rodriguez** (three), **Tony Lazzeri** (two) and **Bobby Murcer** (two).

Jim Palmer. Only pitcher with a World Series game victory in three separate decades—Game 2 1966 vs. Dodgers, Game 1 1970 vs. Reds, Game 3 1983 vs. Phillies. He pitched a record 3,948 innings in the majors without allowing a grand slam. He threw the first shutout of the Seattle Pilots and was the first pitcher to no-hit the newly-relocated Oakland A's (August 13, 1969).

Christian Walker. Arizona D'backs 1B. How many of you knew he had 36 HRs last year with a Gold Glove, 30 this year? I didn't.

Eddie Murray. Most MVPs votes in history without ever winning. He was second to **Robin Yount** in 1982 and second to **Cal Ripken Jr.** in 1983. His 128 sacrifice flies in the MLB record. He hit 504 career HRs but never had more than 35 in a single season. His 504 homers is 22nd all-time, second to **Mickey Mantle's** 536 for a switch hitter.

The 500 career HR club has 28 members. **Ted Williams.** 521 HRs, 721 strikeouts. **Mel Ott** 511 HRs, 896 strikeouts. The only two with less than 1,000 whiffs. (Williams is tied with Willie McCovey and Frank Thomas for 20th place with 521 HRs. Ott is 25th, ahead of Miguel Cabrera (510), Gary Sheffield (509) and Eddie Murray (504).

Samy Sosa. One of 9 players to hit 600 HRs. The 292 homers he hit between 1998 and 2002 are the most over any five-year span in history. He hit over 60 homeruns in a season 3 times—only player to do that. He didn't win the HR title in any of those seasons.

Ron Hunt led the majors in HBP 7 straight seasons including a record 50 in 1971.

Aroldis Chapman threw a 102.7-mile-per-hour fastball that nicked the outside corner to strike out **Rafael Devers** on Tuesday night in Texas. It was his 1,143rd strikeout in relief, 10th all time. **Hoyt Wilhelm** has the record with 1,363. Among active players, **Craig Kimbrel** is sixth with 1,186 and **Kenley Jansen** is ninth with 1,159.

Minnesota manager **Rocco Baldelli** left the team and returned to Rhode Island to be with his wife Allie for the birth of their twin sons, Nino and Enzo, last Sunday. Yes, the manager of the Twins has twins

Babe Ruth. 1920. His first season with the New York Yankees yielded a .376/.532/.847 batting line and 54 home runs. Notably, those home runs were:

- 25 more than his record-setting 29 from 1919
- 35 more than the runner-up for 1920
- More than any non-Yankees team in the American League

Nolan Ryan. In 69 games he allowed 3 or less hits—7 no-hitters, 12 one hitters, 18 two hitters and 32 three hitters.

1986. **Bert Blyleven** served up 50 home runs in 36 starts for the Twins. **Jesse Barfield** won the AL HR crown with 40. Biggest gap between HR champ and pitcher who gave up the most.

Steve Carlton. Picked off an MLB record 146 runners. He also committed an MLB record 90 balks.

Arizona D'backs are battling for a NL Wild Card spot. From 2020-2021 they went 77-145...quite a turnaround.

Forget about complete games. Here are the top pitchers with eight-inning starts since 2021:

1. **Sandy Alcantara**, 27
2. **Aaron Nola**, 10
3. **Adam Wainwright**, **Corbin Burnes** and **Framber Valdez**, 9

Sept. 19, 1920 – Last week the Baltimore Orioles celebrated their first playoff berth since 2016. Over a century ago on this day, the Minor League club by the same name defeated the Reading Barons, 17-4, for its 25th straight win, thus locking up the International League with a 110-43 season and just sneaking past the 108-46 Toronto Maple Leafs. **Lefty Grove**, playing in his age-20 season, went 12-2 with a 3.80 ERA over 123 innings for the O's that summer.

The game has changed a lot. Hall of Famer **Eddie Collins** (1906-1930, 1914 MVP with Philadelphia A's) is the all-time sacrifice hit leader with 512. No one is within 120 of him. Of the top 75, just three have played since 1960-**Omar Vizquel** (35th with 256), **Tom Glavine** (69th with 216) and **Ozzie Smith** (73rd with 214).

Julio Rodríguez of the Mariners became just the third AL/NL player age 22 or younger to hit 30-plus homers, steal 30-plus bases and drive in 100-plus runs, joining **Ronald Acuña Jr.** in 2019 and **Alex Rodriguez** in 1998.

Kyle Schwarber of the Phillies could set a somewhat dubious mark, producing the lowest batting average ever in a 40-home run season. But Phillies hitting coach **Kevin Long** has told Schwarber that if you count his 122 walks, he effectively has 168 singles this season, not 46. Long's point is not unreasonable. Schwarber is second in the majors in walks only to Juan Soto, and his .345 on-base percentage is 25 points above league average.

- **Adam Dunn**, 2012: 41 HRs, .204 BA
- **Joey Gallo**, 2018: 40 HRs, .206 BA
- **Joey Gallo**, 2017: 41 HRs, .209 BA
- **Kyle Schwarber**, 2022: 46 HRs, .218 BA
- **Kyle Schwarber**, 2023: 45 HRs, .197 BA

Schwarber went into the weekend hitting .196 with 207 strikeouts. He also had 123 walks, 45 home runs, 104 runs, 99 RBIs, and an .817 OPS. Schwarber has the most home runs ever by a player with a batting average under .200. Only eight others players have had as many walks, homers, runs, and RBIs in a season. **Babe Ruth** did it eight times, **Barry Bonds** four times, and **Mark McGwire** twice. The others were **Lou Gehrig**, **Chipper Jones**, **Aaron Judge**, **Harmon Killebrew**, and **Mickey Mantle**.

Corbin Carroll Keeps Setting Records

On Wednesday night, **Corbin Carroll** became the 9th player in AL/NL history to hit 25+ home runs and steal 50+ bases in a season. This milestone has been reached 13 times by nine different players. However, Carroll is the first rookie ever to do it.

	HR	SB	Year
Corbin Carroll	25	50	2023
Ronald Acuña Jr.	39	67	2023
Hanley Ramirez	29	51	2007
Rickey Henderson	28	65	1990
Barry Bonds	33	52	1990
Eric Davis	37	50	1987
Eric Davis	27	80	1986
Rickey Henderson	27	87	1986
Ryne Sandberg	26	54	1985
Joe Morgan	27	60	1976
Cesar Cedeno	26	57	1974
Cesar Cedeno	26	56	1973
Joe Morgan	26	57	1973

The Mets finished June with a 7-19 record. The three teams ahead of them in the National League East standings (Atlanta, Miami and Philadelphia) combined during the month to lose just 20 games. In 30 days, New York lost 14 1/2 games in the NL East standings to Atlanta.

After spending more days in first place (289) than any other team in 2021-2022, the Mets spent all of two days in first place this season, the last of them on April 2. The \$445 million Cohen spent on the team was just over 10 times the amount spent on the '92 Mets, a team immortalized as the worst that money could buy. That team won 72 games. This one is on pace to win 75.

The Yankees are going to slug less than .400 for just the third time in 30 years. they're paying **Giancarlo Stanton and Aaron Judge** a combined \$72 million. The good news, about \$100 million is coming off the books this off season.

The World Series MVP was not awarded until 1955, when the Brooklyn Dodgers' **Johnny Podres** was its first recipient. **Don Larsen** received the award in 1956, following the Yankees' victory in a Fall Classic during which he pitched the only perfect game in World Series history. Houston Astros shortstop **Jeremy Peña** won the award in 2022. Three players have won the award twice--**Sandy Koufax** (1963, 1965), **Bob Gibson** (1964, 1967), **Reggie Jackson** (1973, 1977).

Willie Mays. Baseball's all-time leader in outfield putouts with 7095. Mays was the first player to post back-to-back 30/30 seasons. 1956, Mays had 36 HR & 40 SB. In '57, it was 35 & 38. He missed doing it a 3rd consecutive year by only one HR. From 1959 through 1966, Mays's RBI output exceeded 100 each season, 8 straight years.

Since the beginning of June, free-agent to be **Blake Snell** has made 20 starts — the Padres are 15-5 in those starts. Snell's ERA is 1.30 over that stretch, the league is hitting .152 against him.

But before you think this is historic—**Bob** Gibson in '68 had a 20-game stretch in which he had an 0.84 ERA and the league hit .168 against him. But it's not comparable, because Gibson threw almost 100 more innings in those 20 games than Snell did in his 20. **Pedro Martinez** in his first 20 starts of 2000, for example, had a 1.46 ERA and the league hit .165 against him. Similar to Snell's recent awesomeness. But Pedro pitched into the eighth in 13 of those 20 starts and pitched 70 more innings over the 20 games.

Reliever **Gregg Olson** was the last Baltimore Oriole to win American League Rookie of the Year back in 1989. The team had a more recent Manager of the Year, **Buck Showalter** in 2014. But only two other Orioles managers have earned that honor in the award's 40-year history — **Frank Robinson** in 1989 and **Davey Johnson** in 1997.

Get ready to update those lists. The voting members of the Baseball Writers Association of America seem almost certain to recognize the Orioles' renaissance this season. Infielder **Gunnar**

Henderson is the front-runner for AL Rookie of the Year, while manager **Brandon Hyde** appears to be the favorite for the AL manager's award.

On May 20, Henderson was batting only .192 with four homers and a .696 OPS. Since then, he has batted .283 with 23 homers and an .875 OPS.

Shohei Ohtani the hitter batted .314/.412/.654 and currently leads the league in triples, homers, walks, on-base, slugging, OPS, OPS+, total bases and intentional walks. The season goes on, and he might get caught in a couple of those categories, but he will surely lead the league in homers (he's up nine) and runs created (he's up 27) just as a starting point. He made himself into the league's most dangerous hitter.

Shohei the pitcher went 10-5 with a π ERA, 167 strikeouts in 132 innings and his .183 batting average against is the lowest in all of baseball.

If you prefer more straightforward comparisons, Ohtani the hitter led the league in OPS, and Ohtani the pitcher is third in the league in lowest OPS against.

He could become the first MVP who didn't play most of September (**Mike Trout** won in 2019 after being shut down 9/7).

Matt Williams. 2001 World Series playing for the D'backs against the Yankees. Game 6. First player to hit two doubles in a single inning of a World Series game.

He is still the only player to hit a World Series home run for three different teams—for the 1989 Giants against Oakland, 1997 for Indians against the Marlins, 2001 for Arizona against Yankees.

In 17 seasons with the Giants, Indians and D'backs Williams won 3 Gold Gloves, hit 378 homeruns, in 1999 finished third in NL MVP vote behind **Chipper Jones** and **Jeff Bagwell**. He managed the Nationals 2014-2015.

Reggie Smith. Bet you could win a free beer asking 'who was the first switch hitter to hit 100 HRs in both leagues?' Over 17 seasons Smith hit 149 HRs for the Red Sox, then 165 for the Cards, Dodgers and Giants.

Just over a week after the shakeup of the Red Sox baseball operations department, former general manager Brian O'Halloran has agreed to stay with the team in a new role. O'Halloran accepted a senior leadership position as executive vice president of baseball operations. He'll report to the new leader of the baseball operations department (whenever the Sox make a hire), with his exact role to be determined.

O'Halloran has been with the Red Sox for 22 seasons, having joined the team as an unpaid volunteer charting video during graveyard shifts in 2002 before being hired as a baseball operations assistant at the end of that year. His responsibilities steadily grew thereafter, leading to his appointment as GM when chief baseball officer Chaim Bloom was hired in October 2019.

When the Sox fired Bloom last week they also announced that O'Halloran would no longer serve as GM but would be offered another senior position in baseball operations and asked to aid the team during its transition period while searching for a new head of the department. O'Halloran has now accepted a role that will have him assisting that person upon his or her hiring. I'm guessing if Brian Cashman gets dumped as GM of the Yankees will slide into a new role.

I was amazed to read if you flipped the results of every one run game, the Yankees would be ahead of the Orioles in the standings. Many of you are skeptical of the concept of clutch (your old school editor likes RBIs and batting average and slugging pct with RISP). Highest batting average in baseball, runners in scoring position--orioles lead the majors. Highest OPS in high-leverage situations—Orioles lead the American League.

Juan Soto hit two home runs on Sunday, which gives him 157 over his young career. That is the 10th-most by a player who is 24 or younger. Soto doesn't turn 25 until October 25, so he could keep moving up this list for the rest of the season!

Rk	Player	HR
1	Eddie Mathews	190
2	Mel Ott	176

Rk	Player	HR
3	Jimmie Foxx	174
4	Mickey Mantle	173
5	Ken Griffey Jr.	172
6	Álex Rodríguez	172
7	Albert Pujols	160
8	Frank Robinson	160
9	Mike Trout	159
10	Juan Soto	157

Born on today's date was **Kewpie Pennington**, a right-handed pitcher who threw a scoreless inning for the St. Louis Browns in his lone big-league appearance. **Eddie Cicotte** tossed a no-hitter for the Chicago White Sox against Kewpie's club in the April 14, 1917 contest.

Miguel Cabrera has 3,168 hits: 2,017 singles and 1,151 extra-base hits.

Adrian Beltré had 3,166 hits: 2,015 singles and 1,151 extra-base hits.

Ronald Acuña leads the Atlanta Braves in runs scored this year with 143.

Ryan Noda leads the Oakland Athletics in runs scored with 60.

Luis Arraez has a 5.5% strikeout rate, a 5.7% walk rate, and a .361 BABIP.

Kyle Schwarber has a 30.0% strikeout rate, a 17.6% walk rate, and a .213 BABIP.

Cody Bellinger's 438-foot blast on Tuesday was the 15,000th home run in Chicago Cubs franchise history (they now have 15,006). The New York Yankees (16,998) and San Francisco Giants (15,365) are the only franchises to have hit more home runs.

Jack Morris finished his career with the independent Northern League's St. Paul Saints in 1996. The Hall of Fame right-hander, then 41 years old, pitched in 10 games and went 5-1 with a 2.61 ERA.

MAKING CONTACT

Have posted this before but it's worth a re-run--**Tony Gwynn** faced **Greg Maddux** 103 times and never struck out. Which of course leads to a rabbit hole:

Let's look at the top 10 pitchers in strikeouts:

— **Nolan Ryan**

Most PAs without a K: **Julian Javier**, 18

— **Randy Johnson**

Most PAs without a K: **Mel Hall**, 18

— **Roger Clemens**

Most PAs without a K: **Brian Harper**, 23

— **Steve Carlton**

Most PAs without a K: **Tommy Helms**, 65

— **Bert Blyleven**

Most PAs without a K: **Scott Bradley**, 26

— **Tom Seaver**

Most PAs without a K: **Craig Reynolds**, 35

— **Don Sutton**

Most PAs without a K: **Rudy Law**, 30

— **Gaylord Perry**

Most PAs without a K: **Bill Buckner**, 46

— **Walter Johnson**

Most PAs without a K: **Bill Lamar**, 57

And a few others!

— Maddux's old teammate **Tom Glavine**

Most PAs without a K: **Don Slaught**, 35

— **Max Scherzer**

Most PAs without a K: **Chris Getz(!)**, 17

— **Justin Verlander**

Most PAs without a K: **Adam Frazier**, 23

— **Clayton Kershaw**

Most PAs without a K: **Orlando Hudson**, 21

— **Zack Greinke**

Most PAs without a K: **Carlos Lee**, 22

And some of the greatest hitters in the game's history:

— **Ted Williams**

Most PAs without a K: **Dutch Leonard**, 45

— **George Brett**

Most PAs without a K: **Bob Stanley**, 45 (also **Oil Can Boyd**, 43)

— **Rod Carew**

Most PAs without a K: **Doyle Alexander**, 53

— **Wade Boggs**

Most PAs without a K: **Bill Wegman**, 46

— **Joe DiMaggio**

Most PAs without a K: **Joe Dobson**, 71

MORE NO TO THE NO-NO

Blake Snell left Tuesday night's game, he had thrown seven no-hit innings against the Rockies. **Robert Suarez** kept Colorado out of the hit column through the eighth, but in the final frame before history, **Brendan Rodgers** wrecked all the fun, leading off the ninth with a single against **Josh Hader** to break up the no-hitter (the Padres still walked it off on a **Xander Bogaerts** home run in the ninth).

As Dylan Svoboda at MLB.com notes, this is the first time since 1974 that *four* no-hitters have been broken up in the ninth inning or later in one calendar month. Here are the other three, if you missed any of them.

- Sept. 15: **Chase Anderson** of the Rockies pitches seven no-hit innings against the Giants. **J.D. Davis** doubles off **Nick Mears** to lead off the ninth inning.
- Sept. 13: **Hunter Brown** of the Astros goes five hitless against the A's. **Ryan Noda's** one-out single in the ninth off **Ryan Pressly** breaks it up.
- Sept. 10: **Corbin Burnes** goes eight innings against the Yankees with no hits, then the Brewers bullpen keeps the dream alive until the 11th inning when **Oswaldo Cabrera** doubled home a run against **Joel Payamps**.

YOU ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR FIRST

Doug Clark had 2,384 professional hits in a playing career that spanned the 1998-2015 seasons and included stops in Korea, Mexico, and several minor-league outposts stateside. One of them stands out above the rest. On June 28, 2006, Clark stroked a single while wearing an Oakland Athletics uniform.

Seventeen years later, he remembers his lone big-league hit like it was yesterday.

"It was in San Diego," recalled Clark, who is now the hitting coach for the Portland Sea Dogs, Boston's Double-A affiliate. **Frank Thomas** was on the [injured list] at the time. We'd gone to Colorado and San Francisco, and I'd had some pinch-hit at-bats and come up empty. Then, in San Diego, **Joe Blanton** was on the mound for us and was struggling. [Manager] **Ken Macha** told me that his spot was coming up second, and if he gets out of the inning he's done. So, I ran down to the tunnel.

“**Bobby Kielty** was one of my teammates, and he was down there feeding the tee, feeding me soft-toss, boom boom boom. We knew each other from Triple-A, and we were talking about it. First hit is special, right? It was, ‘Here we go, here we go; base hit up the middle.’ Boom boom boom.

“**Clay Hensley** was on the mound. Nobody was on. **Mike Piazza** was catching. I step up to the plate. First pitch, a two-seam and I swing over it. Second pitch, another two-seam and I swing over it even more. Third pitch is a two-seamer that sticks middle and I clock it on the barrel. Line drive to center field. **Mike Cameron** is the centerfielder. He comes running in and it looks like he’s going to get it, but it drops in. I round first base....”

At this point in the telling, emotion kicks in. Clark pauses for a few seconds to compose himself before continuing.

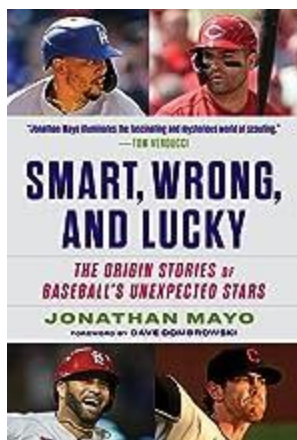
“Thinking about it gets me going,” admitted Clark, who went 1-for-11 in a pair of big-league cups of coffee. “To give that ball to my dad, to my mom, to live that moment... that’s what I want these guys to feel. It’s a big reason I’m coaching. I mean, when you’re rounding first base after that first one, it’s like everything flashes in your head. It’s special. It really is.”

Freddie Freeman stole his 20th base this week. It marked just the 16th season ever for a first baseman with 20 home runs and 20 stolen bases, the first since **Ian Desmond** in 2018 and a feat only 10 other full-time players at the position had ever accomplished. Freeman has only been caught once in his 21 tries this year.

Freeman’s 20-20 campaign is also just the 23rd such season for a player in their age-33 season or older, and the first since **Brett Gardner** in 2017. With four more hits, he’ll have his first 200-hit campaign — and become the second-oldest player to collect 200 or more hits in a 20-20 season, behind **Paul Molitor** in 1993.

	<u>HRs</u>	<u>SB</u>	<u>Year</u>
Freddie Freeman	26	20	2023
Brett Gardner	21	23	2017
Coco Crisp	22	21	2013

Jimmy Rollins	23	30	2012
Bobby Abreau	20	24	2010
Bobby Abreau	20	22	2008
Gary Sheffield	25	22	2007
Mike Cameron	22	25	2006
Reggie Sanders	22	21	2004
Roberto Alomar	20	30	2001
Paul O'Neil	21	22	2001
Brady Anderson	24	36	1999
Barry Bonds	37	28	1998
Jose Canseco	46	29	1998
Devon White	22	22	1998
Eric Davis	26	23	1996
Rickey Henderson	21	53	1993
Paul Molitor	22	22	1993
Lonnie Smith	21	25	1989
Bobby Bonds	25	34	1979
Davey Lopes	28	44	1979
Joe Morgan	22	49	1977
Hank Aaron	29	28	1968



“**Jacob deGrom** thinks he’s a shortstop, and he always has.”

That sentence leads a chapter in Jonathan Mayo’s new book, *Smart, Wrong, and Lucky: The Origin Stories of Baseball’s Unexpected Stars*, and as the MiLB.com writer goes on to explain, deGrom became a pitcher rather reluctantly. While at Stetson University, the two-time Cy Young award winner actually walked away from his summer ball team — one managed by World Series-winning manager **Davey Johnson** — because he wasn’t getting an opportunity to log at-bats as an infielder. Only through cajoling was Stetson’s head coach able to get the two-way player to take the mound more than occasionally as a collegian.

The right-hander, whom the New York Mets took in the ninth round of the 2010 draft, logged four wins, two saves, and a 4.44 ERA in 83-and-a-third NCAA innings. As a hitter, he slashed .255/.299/.300 in 330 at bats. As Mayo also chronicled in his must-read book, deGrom hit his only collegiate home run off of **Chris Sale**.

THE RAYS WILL STAY

The Commissioner has said that once the Oakland and Tampa stadium issues are resolved MLB would add two teams for a total of 32, making for more balanced scheduling, travel, etc. Oakland seems set to relocate to Las Vegas. What if you are one of the cities hoping for an expansion team? What if you are Montreal, Nashville, Portland, Charlotte, Salt Lake City or Vancouver and you see too many players in musical chairs? So you whisper to the owners in Tampa—“we’ll make you richer?” And if you own the Rays you say to local government—“do you want to go down in history as losing your baseball team? Give us tax breaks and other incentives or we are out of here.” Bingo, follow the money—the Rays announced this week that with new-found state and local financial help a new 30,000 seat dome will be built in downtown St. Petersburg to open in 2028.

The Rays have searched for a new stadium site for more than 10 years while annually being near the bottom of Major League Baseball in attendance. We've heard for years that the problem wasn't only so much the park itself, but the location. Traffic on the bridge between St. Petersburg and Tampa can be a nightmare during rush hour (which just so happens to be the window of time before most baseball games start). In 2022, MLB rejected a plan for the Rays to split home games between Florida and Montreal. Tampa Bay's stadium and attendance issues have made the club a potential candidate for relocation over the years. Finally, goodbye Tropicana Field.

FROM A BILL JAMES/JOE POSNANSKI DISCUSSION

There has never been anything in baseball history remotely like the Los Angeles of Anaheim of California of **Brian Downing** Angels.

The Angels records:

2016: 74-88

2017: 80-82

2018: 80-82

2019: 72-90

2020: 26-34

2021: 77-85

2022: 73-89

2023: 68-81

With one more loss, the Angels will clinch their EIGHTH consecutive losing season, the longest such streak in baseball. But, of course, there have been much longer consecutive losing streaks in baseball history. What makes these Angels unique in baseball history is, of course, this:

Question: Did the Angels, in my opinion, have the best player in baseball?

2016: Yes (**Mike Trout** won the MVP)

2017: Yes (Trout played only 114 games, but he was still the best player)

2018: Yes (**Mookie Betts** had the better year, but Trout retained the overall title)

2019: Yes (Trout won the MVP)

2020: Yes (Trout was down a touch, but it was a short season, and he was still the best)

2021: Yes (**Shohei Ohtani** won the MVP and blew our minds)

2022: Yes (**Aaron Judge** had the best season, but Shohei's was beyond imagination)

2023: Yes (Shohei will almost certainly win the MVP again)

Bill says — and I don't see how you can argue — that this is basically impossible. You cannot have the best player in the game (or at least ARGUABLY the best player in the game) every year and also stink every year. It just can't happen. It is unimaginable that an in-his-prime **Ty Cobb** or **Willie Mays** or **Babe Ruth** or **Henry Aaron** or **Albert Pujols** or **Ken Griffey Jr.** (much less TWO OF THEM) could play on eight consecutive losing teams.

IT WAS GREAT WHILE IT LASTED

Marlins second baseman **Luis Arraez** managed to keep his batting average above .400 as late as June 24. He batted .402 in Miami's first 78 games this season, spraying 110 hits in 274 at-bats. Pundits began to debate the odds of Arraez finishing the year as the first .400 hitter since **Ted Williams** reached .406 in 1941.

That's when 2023's leading hitter proved to be mortal. Arraez batted .286 from June 25 through the end of August — a nice average for most hitters, though not for a star who aspired to a superhuman feat. He entered September with a .350 BA for the 2023 season, still the best in the majors, though far short of the promised land of .400.

But don't feel sorry for Arraez. He's still in line to become the first player to win batting titles in separate leagues in consecutive years. (He led the American League in 2022 with a .316 BA while playing for the Minnesota Twins.) And he stands apart as the only big leaguer to put the ball in play more than 90 percent of the time in 2023.

JAYSON STARK ON THE BRAVES HISTORIC OFFENSE

The Athletic

THE MAGIC NUMBER: 125

WHAT IT MEANS: *For the last 96 years, the fabled 1927 Yankees have stood alone atop the rankings of greatest Weighted Runs Created Plus of any lineup in history, at 125. But with 12 games to go, the wRC+ of the '23 Braves is ... 125!*

There's no perfect stat. There's no perfect metric that reveals, unequivocally, the identity of the The Greatest Offense of All Time. But wRC+ is an all-encompassing way to measure teams across eras and ballpark environments. So if you're even in the argument, alongside those '27 Yankees, there's no need to quibble about where to place the decimal points. We're witnessing greatness, period.

BEST wRC+, all time*

125 — 1927 Yankees, 2023 Braves

124 — 1931 Yankees, 2019 Astros

123 — 1930 Yankees

*(Source: FanGraphs; *full seasons only)*

There's an incredible difference between these Braves and those Yankees. **Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig** both had a wRC+ over 200, meaning they were twice as good at creating runs as the average hitter of that era. But they were part of a top-heavy lineup that didn't have the depth of this Braves lineup, believe it or not. So beyond them ...

'27 Yankees with a wRC+ over 100: 5*

'23 Braves with a wRC+ over 100: 9*

*(*minimum 400 plate appearances)*

And one more thing: The National League record, if we throw out seasons shortened by labor snafus and the pandemic, is held by the storied 1976 Big Red Machine ... at "only" 120!

THE MAGIC NUMBER: 300/100

WHAT IT MEANS: *The Braves are almost certainly going to be the first team in history to hit 300 home runs and steal at least 100 bases in the same season. They already have 117 steals. They're just 11 away from 300 homers with 12 games left.*

We've assessed their greatness with the new-school metrics. But it doesn't get much more old-school than home runs and stolen bases. And the triple digits in those categories are a reminder that the Braves can beat you one way one night and a whole different way the next.

That 2019 Twins team that set the home run record the Braves are chasing, for most homers in a season (307)? That team stole 28 bases all season. **Ronald Acuña Jr.** almost had that many himself by Memorial Day.

And only two teams in history that stole 100 bases even reached 250 homers the same season: the 2019 Brewers (250) and last year's Yankees (254).

Hard to argue! The only two previous teams in history to bop 300 homers — the 2019 Twins and 2019 Yankees — stole 83 bases combined. Acuña is on pace to steal 73 this year all by himself!

THE MAGIC NUMBER: .500

WHAT IT MEANS: *José Ramírez is pretty good, right? Well, his career slugging percentage is .501. So does it seem hard to fathom that the Braves have a slugging percentage of .500 this year as a team? It should ... since no National League or American League team in history has slugged .500 for a full season. But it looks as if that's about to change. Repeat after us ... wow.*

How can we put this into a context that will drive home how astounding it is for any group to slug .500 *as a team* over a six-month season? What about this: 15 of the 30 teams don't even have a single qualifying *player* who is slugging .500 this year, and that group includes the Blue Jays, Yankees, Phillies, Brewers, Giants, Padres and Reds.

Or how about this: If we filter out teams that played at Coors Field and teams that played in shortened seasons, no NL lineup since 1900 is within 20 points in slugging of these 2023 Braves. And the last NL team that slugged .481 over a full season was **Gabby Hartnett's** 1930 Cubs.

But the Braves are almost certainly going to slug .500 — because their slugging percentage has actually been going up all season. It was .448 after April, .458 after May, .493 at the end of June and didn't top .500 until Aug. 12. So if you toss out the first two months, they're slugging .526.

Does a .526 slug seem good? It ought to ... since it's essentially the same as **Mike Schmidt's** career slugging percentage. Yep, it doesn't sound real, all right.

THE MAGIC NUMBER: 57 (Going into Monday night's Dodgers game)

WHAT IT MEANS: *It's hard to believe that the Braves are not only leading the major leagues in homers ... but also leading by an incredible 57 homers over the next-closest team, the Dodgers. So has any team ever hit that many more than anyone else? Oh, it's happened ... but the last team to do it was Johnny Mize's 1947 Giants ... that played 76 years ago!*

Even if they take their foot off the gas in the next week or so, the Braves are almost a lock to lead the majors in homers by 50. And no team has even done that in 55 years, since **Willie Horton's** 1968 Tigers (plus-52).

Or suppose they lengthen that lead to plus-60? The only teams in history to do that were those 1947 Giants (plus-65) and **Fred Pfeffer's** 1884 Chicago White Stockings (plus-102).

But here's the best way of looking at this: The Braves also employ the major-league home run leader, Matt Olson. So even if you took away all 52 homers Olson has hit, *they would still be leading the whole sport in homers.*

Just think about last year, when Judge led the world in homers and his team needed every one of them. And now this Braves team is so deep, it could employ the home run king but still lead the league *without any of them.*

THE MAGIC NUMBER: 52

WHAT IT MEANS: *Speaking of Matt Olson, it's September, and despite the Braves' messy little four-game losing streak since clinching their division, he still has a shot to finish with more home runs than his team has losses (currently 54). And that's just ridiculous.*

So how many hitters have ever piled up more home runs in any season than their team had losses? Here's the list in the live-ball era. Good chance you've heard of these guys.

1921 Babe Ruth	59 55
1927 Babe Ruth	60 44
1928 Babe Ruth	54 53
1961 Roger Maris	61 53
1961 Mickey Mantle	54 53
2001 Barry Bonds	73 72

THE MAGIC NUMBER: 50-50

WHAT IT MEANS: *On one hand, there's Olson and his 52 homers. On the other hand, there's Acuña — and his 66 stolen bases. And perhaps you're wondering how many teams have ever had both a 50-homer guy and a 50-steal guy in the same season. It won't take long to go through the others!*

According to ESPN Stats and Info, only three other teams in history have joined this 50-50 Club:

1995 Indians (Albert Belle, Kenny Lofton)
2000 Cubs (Sammy Sosa, Eric Young Sr.*)
2017 Marlins (Giancarlo Stanton, Dee Strange-Gordon)

*(*Now the Braves' first-base/base-running coach)*

THE MAGIC NUMBER: 68

WHAT IT MEANS: *There are a zillion mind-warping Ronald Acuña Jr. numbers. But we love this one. The Braves have played 150 games. Acuña has reached base, to kick off the first inning, in 68 of them. If he gets to 70, that will put him in the top five for the most times to reach base to start a game (in the live-ball era). Except that he does far more damage starting this team's engine than anyone else ever has.*

Here is every leadoff hitter in the live-ball era who reached base at least 70 times in a season when leading off games (errors not included). Acuña will be joining this group any minute.

Chuck Knoblauch	1996 Twins	75
Eddie Yost	1951 Senators	71
Brett Butler	1991 Dodgers	70
Eddie Stanky	1945 Dodgers	70

(Source: Baseball Reference / Stathead)

But here's why Acuña is nothing like those guys. His six leadoff homers are as many as those other four men hit combined. His 16 leadoff extra-base hits are also the most among that group. And his 38 first-inning runs scored are by far the most of anyone on that list.

The Braves have scored more runs in the first inning this season (136) than any other team has scored in *any* inning. And that all starts with Acuña, the human energizer.

Four more magic numbers

The Braves could have *nine* players with at least 20 homers! No team has ever done that. Or they could join the 2019 Twins as the only teams with eight. (They're at seven right now, but Orlando Arcia has 17 and **Michael Harris II** has 18.)

- The Braves could also have five players with at least 30 homers! Only the 2019 Twins have done that. And they just became the first team ever to have four men hit 35 or more.
- They could lead the sport in slugging by 40 points! (They were at 43 through Sunday.) The only teams since 1900 to do that are the '27 Yankees and 1953 Boys of Summer Dodgers.

- They're going to have the highest slugging percentage in the first inning ever! They're slugging .595 now — way above the record of .574, by the 2019 Reds. The Braves' first-inning slash line (.322/.384/.595) means they're essentially an entire team of 1961 Henry Aarons (.327/.381/.594).

WHO WAS THAT GUY? TONY LAZZERI



Tony Lazzeri played for six New York Yankees pennant winners from 1926-37, batting .293 with 169 home runs during his 12 seasons in pinstripes. Lazzeri, though, temporarily quit baseball in 1923, when as a 19-year-old he grew disillusioned with being shuttled back and forth between minor league posts. But he secured regular play with Salt Lake City of the Pacific Coast League in 1924, and with the same club in '25 the San Francisco native enjoyed a season for the ages, batting a robust .355 while setting PCL records that still stand with 60 home runs, 222 RBI and 202 runs scored. Lazzeri played in 197 games that year.

The Yankees parted with \$50,000 and three players to acquire Lazzeri in August 1925, and the 22-year-old rewarded them with a fine rookie season in '26. He belted 18 home runs, a total he would match three other times but never surpass, while holding down the keystone and finishing 10th in America League MVP balloting.

New York lost a taut 1926 World Series to the St. Louis Cardinals in seven games, with Lazzeri entering baseball lore after striking out with the bases loaded and two outs in the seventh inning of Game 7 as the Cardinals clung to a 3-2 lead. Lazzeri struck out swinging on a 1-2 pitch from future Hall of Famer **Grover Cleveland Alexander**, but he just as easily could have been the hero. One pitch earlier, Lazzeri had launched a ball out over the fence – but just foul.

Lazzeri secured some measure of redemption by playing well in his next five World Series appearances, batting .291, with four home runs and 16 RBI. The Yankees won all five Series in convincing fashion, dispatching the Pittsburgh Pirates (1927), Cardinals ('28), Chicago Cubs ('32) and New York Giants ('36 and '37).

Lazzeri closed out his career with partial seasons for the Cubs in 1938 and the Brooklyn Dodgers and Giants in '39.

Lazzeri passed away on Aug. 6, 1946. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1991.

Lazzeri played 1,740 games. He had 1,840 hits, another 869 walks, batted .292.

986 runs scored, 334 doubles, 115 triples, 178 HRs with 1,194 RBI.

Lazzeri was the first player in professional baseball to hit sixty home runs in one season when he hit 60 HRs for PCL's AA Salt Lake City Bees in 1925.

Lazzeri was the first player to appear with teams in different leagues in consecutive World Series, 1937 Yankees and 1938 Cubs.

THIS WEEK'S BIRTHDAYS

Ryne Sandberg 64

Joba Chamberlain 38

LONGER READS

A WILD FINALE—AND IT'S BOSTON

It went on and on and on, the American League pennant race, to the last week, the last weekend, the last game. A super player named **Carl Yastrzemski** brought it to its proper conclusion late Sunday

William Leggett, Sports Illustrated. October 9, 1967

Cal Ermer, the gray-haired manager of the Minnesota Twins, stood behind the batting cage at Boston's Fenway Park early last Sunday afternoon, watching his team take batting practice in preparation for what turned out to be the vital game of the longest, daffiest and most desperate American League pennant race in history. "In bullfighting," Ermer said, "I understand that the moment of truth usually comes sometime around 4 in the afternoon. I have a feeling that it will come a lot earlier today."

Not really. It was 3:21 p.m. when the truth came out about Ermer's Twins. In the ensuing 24 minutes the city of Boston went wild as the Red Sox scored five runs to beat Minnesota 5-3 to win their first pennant since 1946. Of course, in keeping with the nature of the race, Boston's victory could not be fully savored until nearly four hours later when **Bobby Knoop** of the California Angels picked up a ground ball 700 miles west at Tiger Stadium in Detroit and turned it into a double play. That ended the game there and knocked the Tigers, who up to then had a chance to tie, into oblivion.

In retrospect, this season's American League race seemed destined from the start to be won by the Red Sox, who now take their place with the 1914 Braves and the 1951 Giants as the most improbable pennant winners in baseball's long and wonderfully colored history. Since July, people in New England—and almost everywhere else in the U.S., except Detroit, Chicago and Minnesota—had been talking about the Red Sox and their chances of winning as "the impossible dream." They kept dying in August and September—do you remember that they lost five out of seven games to Baltimore as summer turned to fall two weeks ago?—and, like a fighter who is either punch-drunk or gallant, kept getting up and swinging. Before those last two decisive games against Minnesota, a wire was pinned upon a bulletin board hung in

Boston's clubhouse. It read: "We ask nothing, but our hopes are high. Godspeed". And when the Red Sox trotted out on the field for their final game of the season, the swollen crowd of 35,770 in Fenway Park (2,246 beyond official capacity) stood and cheered. The crowd in Boston wanted the Red Sox to win, sure, but the salute the team received was more a thank-you for bringing back the thrill of winning baseball to one of the great baseball cities.

The man who had made the Red Sox win all season long was Carl Yastrzemski, the brown-eyed, 28-year-old left fielder who in the last two dramatic games against the Twins did more than it seems possible for one man to do in a baseball game. Yastrzemski made breathtaking running catches and at least one utterly extraordinary throw, and he hit—oh, how he hit! Eight times he came to the plate in the two games, and seven times he got hits; two infield hits, a double, three solid singles and a dramatic three-run homer.

The most important thing that Yastrzemski did, however, was take charge of a pennant race that during the final two weeks of the season threatened to disintegrate into farce. Just because four teams are locked in a fight for a championship does not mean that the race is automatically majestic—not if the teams involved play poor baseball, fumble away opportunity after opportunity and lose as many games as they win. That was what was happening, except for Yastrzemski.

The White Sox, the scramblers, had found themselves in the perfect spot, half a game out, five games to play against Kansas City and Washington, their nonpareil pitching staff rested and ready. But the White Sox were shut out three times in these last five games, lost them all and fell clammily out of the race.

The Tigers kept lurching into contention and then, as though aghast at finding themselves in the spotlight, scurrying into shadow. They beat the White Sox twice, once with a spellbinding seven-run rally in the ninth, then dropped a doubleheader the next day. They rallied to win four straight and the lead, then bowed 5-0 to the Washington Senators and blew two seemingly sure wins to Boston. They rallied again to win three straight, then threw away a 4-2 lead to Washington in the ninth. On the final weekend of the season, confronted with successive doubleheaders, they won the big first game each day and then died in the second.

Minnesota held onto first place, either in whole or in part, from September 2 to the end of the season, except for two days in midmonth and on the fateful 1st of October. The Twins, though they did not know it for certain at the time, abandoned the pennant in Chicago when they were beaten once, twice, three times by the White Sox, the middle game falling through their hands like quicksilver when the Sox scored four times in the last of the ninth to win 5-4.

Yet by last Saturday afternoon Boston's chances for a pennant required a sweep of the Twins, and Minnesota had its two best pitchers, **Jim Kaat** and **Dean Chance**, ready to pitch. The Twins had always played well in Fenway Park; in their pennant-winning year, 1965, they had beaten the Red Sox in 17 of 18 games and had won eight of nine played in Fenway.

But bad luck and bad morale dogged this year's Twins. Not long before the crucial meeting with the Red Sox, the team divided even further on the question of who would get World Series shares and why. Many veteran members of the Twins felt that **Sam Mele**, the deposed manager, should be cut in. He had handled the club from late 1962 until Owner Cal Griffith relieved him of his post in early June this year and replaced him with Ermer. The players argued violently, and the wishes of the veterans were rejected. As one of them said, "I was never so ashamed of anything in my life. And we had enough problems even before that came up."

When they went against Boston in the showdown series last weekend, the Twins played their absolute worst. An elbow injury forced Minnesota's best September pitcher, Jim Kaat, out of the first game in the third inning. But even so, the Red Sox seemed always to be the attacking team. In the Saturday game Minnesota carried a 1-0 lead into the fifth inning, and then Boston got two runs. The Twins tied the game in the sixth, but when Ron Kline came on in relief **George Scott** launched his first pitch into the center-field stands for a homer that put the Sox ahead. In the seventh Boston put two runners on base, one on a grievous error by Shortstop **Zoilo Versalles**, and Yastrzemski came to bat. Carl instantly homered into the bullpen, and one Vice-President, six governors, two Senators and all of Boston stood up and cheered, though the Vice-President was just being polite.

That homer eventually proved to be the hit that won Yastrzemski baseball's Triple Crown and Boston the pennant. When Yastrzemski went out to left field the next inning, with the crowd still cheering, he scraped for a moment at the grass with his spikes and hollered over his shoulder to the man in the left-field scoreboard to ask about the progress of the Detroit-California game. Then, when the crowd finally quieted down he looked up into the stands and raised his cap just slightly. Later he said, "I knew the dream was no longer impossible."

In Sunday's game Yastrzemski had trouble picking up a base hit by **Harmon Killebrew**, and it went through his legs for an error that let Minnesota go ahead 2-0. "I felt awful," he said afterward, "like I goofed the whole world up." But in the sixth inning Yaz's hit was the key one that rocketed Boston to the championship. With the bases loaded, the Red Sox losing 2-0, he deftly pounded a single to center to tie the game. That was the inning that Pitcher **Jim Lonborg** launched with a startling safe bunt, and when it was over Boston led 5-2. But Yastrzemski was not through. With Minnesota threatening in the seventh inning, one run in, Killebrew chugging to third and **Bob Allison** digging for second with the tying run after dumping a double, seemingly, into the left-field corner, Yastrzemski came up with the ball, threw strongly and perfectly to second and cut Allison down. "I looked for an exacting second," Yastrzemski said later. And then he threw, to the right base at the right time.

When the game was over Yastrzemski was pounded on the back by Tom Yaw-key, who has been the owner of the Red Sox for more than three decades. Later, after Detroit had lost to California, Yawkey walked over to Yastrzemski and said, "Carl, I don't know what to say to thank you. In my 33 years of baseball nothing has ever had me more excited." Yastrzemski looked at Yawkey and said, "Do we finally get a chance to drink the champagne?"

Dick Williams, the 38-year-old manager, raised a glass and said to Yawkey, "Here's to the pennant." Yawkey said, "I haven't had a drink in four years, but I'll drink to that." The impossible dream had come.



A TIMELINE OF THE VEECK FAMILY'S IMPRINT ON BASEBALL

Editor's Note—I mentioned in the intro my book report on Veeck as in Wreck. It's a great read—I own a copy signed by Bill Veeck. I also recommend Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick, by (Wesleyan grad) Paul Dickson. "The Saint of Second Chances" on Netflix is a fun documentary. In these days of corporate ownership, it is a great look back to when owners even in the majors were hustling to put butts in seats.

By Michael Clair, mlb.com
September 19, 2023

If you've ever enjoyed a modern ballgame, you should thank a Veeck. Whether you dig the new pitch clock, the ivy on Wrigley's famed outfield walls, or the kind of wacky ballpark promotions that thrive in Major and Minor League parks around the country, it was likely the brainchild of Hall of Fame owner Bill Veeck or his son Mike.

That's right: This one baseball family could be considered the true forefathers of the modern game. Whether it was ideas a little too early for their time -- Veeck's Pitch-O-Meter was actually never used in a game, though it did make an appearance on the Comiskey Park scoreboard -- or simply too out there to ever really catch on (Ballplayers in shorts? A pig as a batboy??), the Veecks were never scared of trying something new in an attempt to put a smile on the fans' faces.

"We can't always guarantee the ballgame will be good," Bill Veeck said. "But we can guarantee the fan will have fun."

With the release of Netflix's documentary "The Saint of Second Chances" about Mike Veeck out today, let's run through the timeline of the Veeck family legacy.

Feb. 9, 1914: Here's where it all begins as William Louis Veeck Jr., better known as Bill, is born in Chicago. His father, William Sr., was a local sportswriter who would later become president of the Chicago Cubs. While growing up, Bill would sell popcorn at Cubs games and was a concessions salesman at White Sox games.

1933: Following the death of his father, Bill becomes treasurer for the Cubs. He will take on a variety of roles with the Cubs over the years, doing everything the team may need, including slicing hot dog buns before games.

1937: You know the famed ivy that hangs on Wrigley Field's walls? You can thank Veeck for that. While there is debate on the issue -- some believe it was the Clavey family that planted it a month before Veeck claims to have come up with the idea -- we'll likely never know if perhaps Veeck was the originator of the idea.

1940: Teaming up with former Cubs star Charlie Grimm, Bill becomes an owner for the first time: He buys the Milwaukee Brewers -- then a Triple-A club in the American Association.

November 1943: Bill enlists in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II. He serves for nearly three years and sustains injuries to his right leg that require amputation above the knee.

Veeck even wrote a letter to the fans of the team announcing his goodbye and offering assurances that the good times wouldn't come to an end at the ballpark:

Dear Fans,

It's going to be kind of funny not to be around that ball yard this season because I have enjoyed so much being with you. However, you know that wherever I may be stationed, I will be looking forward to getting back to Borchert Field. I am not worried at all about leaving because I know we will have a good ball club and one that is ably managed both on the field and in the office. I know that you are going to keep having a good time at the ball games, and I hope you'll feel free to drop in and see the gang at the office just as you did while I was here.

1945: Veeck claims that he arrived in Milwaukee with just \$11 in his pockets, but he left with a fair amount more: This year, Bill sells his stake in the Brewers, making a \$275,000 profit.

June 22, 1946: Veeck buys the Cleveland Indians. While the club places last in the American League in attendance this year, his penchant for signing good ballplayers regardless of race and implementing fan-friendly promotions helps the team climb to first in attendance by 1948.

April 26, 1947: Veeck installs a portable outfield fence, able to be moved in or out depending on the opponent. At the end of the year, the AL makes a new rule that the outfield walls must have a fixed distance during the season.

July 5, 1947: Veeck signs **Larry Doby**, the first Black player in the American League, who makes his debut on this day.

Veeck also did something that other owners didn't: He honored the Negro Leagues contract, paying the Newark Eagles \$10,000 for the rights to Doby's contract, with another \$5,000 if he stayed up with the team for another month.

July 7, 1948: Veeck signs another Negro Leagues great, this time inking the legendary Satchel Paige to a contract. The difference here is that Paige is 42 years old, making him the league's oldest rookie. He pitches two seasons with the team, posting a 2.78 ERA in 155 2/3 innings.

Oct. 11, 1948: Cleveland wins the World Series under Veeck's ownership, defeating the Boston Braves in six games. It's Cleveland's last World Series title to this day.

1949: After the team falls short of winning the pennant, Veeck holds a mock funeral in the outfield and buries the previous year's pennant. Later, after needing to liquidate assets following his divorce from his wife, Veeck sells the team.

He won't be out of baseball long.

April 29, 1950: Bill marries Mary Frances Ackerman, a publicist for the Ice Capades. Their marriage lasts 35 years, until his death.

March 5, 1951: Mike Veeck is born in Tucson, Ariz.

July 2, 1951: Bill becomes majority owner of the St. Louis Browns, buying 75 percent of the controlling shares of the team from Bill and Charlie DeWitt for \$1.5 million.

Feb. 9, 1951: Veeck brings back **Satchel Paige**, who had been out of the Majors since '49. He'll pitch three seasons with the Browns, going 18-23 with a 3.57 ERA, and be selected to two All-Star Games. He's the first Black pitcher to be named an AL All-Star.

Aug. 19, 1951: Standing just 3-foot-7, **Eddie Gaedel** makes his debut as the shortest player in Major League history. Wearing the number 1/8, Gaedel draws a walk in his lone plate appearance. After the game, Gaedel's contract was voided by MLB, giving him a career OBP of 1.000.

"The austere American League, celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, will reach the ripe old age of 100 before anyone other than Phineas T. Veeck, the Barnum of baseball, tops the colorful substitute for winning ball the sport-shirted showman offered yesterday at Sportsman's Park," sportswriter Bob Broeg wrote.

Aug. 24, 1951: Just five days later, Veeck holds "Grandstand Manager's Day," allowing the 1,115 fans sitting behind the dugout to vote on in-game strategy. Given large "yes" and "no" placards, the fans voted on when to steal, move the infield and even set the starting lineup.

The plan worked: The Browns lose 102 games this season but win on this night, defeating the Philadelphia A's, 5-3.

1953: Following the 1953 season, another 100-loss campaign that saw the Browns finish in the bottom of the league's attendance, Veeck sells the Browns. They move to Baltimore and become the Orioles in 1954.

1959: Veeck, along with Hall of Famer **Hank Greenberg**, buys the White Sox. Chicago wins its first pennant in 40 years.

1960: Veeck introduces the famed "exploding scoreboard," which is still an enduring symbol the White Sox use to this day.

Veeck actually got the idea for it after watching Jimmy Cagney in the film "The Time of Your Life."

"This character in the film was always playing pinball machines," Veeck told the Chicago Tribune in April 1960. "Toward the finish, he finally hit the jackpot and there was the darndest racket and flashing of lights you ever heard or saw."

1961: In poor health, Veeck sells his stake in the White Sox for \$2.5 million. He finds occasional work as a television commentator.

1962: Veeck's autobiography, "Veeck as in Wreck," co-written with Ed Linn, is released. He'll later write two more books: "30 Tons a Day," covering his time managing Boston's Suffolk Downs racetrack, and "The Hustler's Handbook," about how Veeck navigated the world of modern baseball.

Dec. 16, 1975: Never one to sit out of baseball for long, Veeck purchases 80 percent control of the White Sox from John Allyn. Within two years, he takes the team from 11th in attendance to fifth.

During the Winter Meetings, Veeck and general manager Roland Hemond make four public trades in the lobby of a hotel. Ever the pitchman, Veeck negotiates the deals near a sign that reads, "Open for business."

1976: Mike Veeck takes a job selling season tickets for the White Sox. Before that, he toured the country with his band, The Chattanooga Glass Company.

Aug. 8, 1976: The White Sox become the first -- and still only -- Major League team to wear shorts when they take on the Kansas City Royals. (Though the Minor Leagues beat Veeck to this by about 25 years.) They wore the shorts two more times, on Aug. 21 and 22, but then that was it: Ballplayer complaints about sliding and a less-than-enthused fanbase spelled the end of the short pants.

Sept. 11, 1976: Veeck activates White Sox coach and beloved former ballplayer **Minnie Miñoso** and gives the then-52-year-old eight at-bats across three games. Miñoso collects one hit and strikes out twice.

"He's in remarkable condition," Veeck told reporters before Miñoso took the field. "If he doesn't get a hit, he'll get hit by a pitch."

1977: Bill Veeck asks Harry Caray to sing, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" during the seventh-inning stretch. Caray was originally opposed to the idea, so Veeck told the bespectacled broadcaster that he already had a tape of Caray singing it and he would use that instead.

"Harry was very vain," Mike Veeck told ESPN in 2008. "He really didn't understand the concept that the people in the extreme bowels of the stadium, the people in the left-field upper deck, because he was one of their own, how he would bring them together. He didn't quite get that if he could sing it, everybody could sing it."

Fortunately, Caray gave it a shot: The broadcaster ended up taking it with him when he left for the Cubs, and it remains a Wrigley tradition to this day.

April 10, 1979: After the Sox lose to the Blue Jays, 10-2, on Opening Day, Veeck makes the promotion of all promotions: He offers fans free admission to the next game.

Unfortunately, that game ends much the way the first one did: The White Sox give up six runs in the top of the eighth and lose, 9-7.

July 12, 1979: This is it, perhaps the most infamous ballpark promotion of all: Disco Demolition Night. Between games of a two-night doubleheader with the Tigers, a crate of disco records is

set to be blown up on the field by Chicago disk jockey Steve Dahl. Unfortunately, the event quickly gets out of hand when fans storm the field, forcing the White Sox to forfeit the second game.

Though many don't know it, one week earlier, the White Sox held a pro-Disco night, too.

Oct. 4-5, 1980: Veeck again gets Minnie Miñoso into a game, stretching his big-league career to *five* decades. He appears in two games as a pinch-hitter at the age of 56, going 0-for-2.

1980: Mike Veeck leaves the White Sox at the end of the season. This will begin a nearly decade-long break from the game for Mike.

Jan. 29, 1981: Claiming to be unable to compete financially with the game's other owners, Bill Veeck sells the White Sox to Jerry Reinsdorf. Though this would end Veeck's time as a big-league owner, it wouldn't keep him away from the ballpark: The elder Veeck, having grown up attending Cubs games, can be seen hanging out at Wrigley as a fan.

Jan. 2, 1986: Bill Veeck passes away at the age of 71 from cancer.

April 11, 1986: Mike's son, William "Night Train" Veeck, is born in Pompano Beach, Fla.

May 1986: Night Train Veeck likely starts working in Minor League Baseball. (A family joke: Veeck legally started working in baseball in 2006 for the Charleston RiverDogs.)

1989: Actor Bill Murray, lawyer Marv Goldklang and artist Van Schley buy the Minor League Miami Miracle. Sitting next to former White Sox GM and then-Orioles GM Roland Hemond, Schley mentions the purchase they made.

"Well, if you're dumb enough to buy the Miracle, then you're dumb enough to hire [Mike] Veeck," Hemond supposedly said. Sure enough, the team does hire Veeck, bringing him back to baseball.

July 21, 1991: Bill Veeck is inducted into the Hall of Fame. The last sentence on his plaque reads, "Champion of the little guy."

Dec. 12, 1991: Mike's daughter Rebecca is born. He and his wife, Libby, skip putting her in daycare, letting her come to the Saints Park most days as a young child.

1992: Murray, Goldklang and Veeck purchase the independent St. Paul Saints, ushering in a new era of independent baseball success.

1993: This marks the first appearance of the team's pig mascot, the St. Paul Swine. Since then, there's been a new pig christened for the Saints every year. The original was just known as "The Saint."

June 30, 1993: Miñoso is expected to make another appearance for the White Sox, but commissioner Fay Vincent intervenes before White Sox players also come out against the move. Undaunted, Mike Veeck signs the star for the St. Paul Saints. Facing rookie **Yoshi Seo**, Miñoso grounds a ball back up the middle ... that is unfortunately snagged and thrown to first for the out.

"I don't think of it as a promotion, I think that's an appearance of talent," Veeck told MLB.com. "That's how I view it -- it's an opportunity for these younger fans, and for fans who enjoy them to see this remarkable human who all these years later could still swing the bat, who still hustled out to first base."

1994: Now also a co-owner of the Class A Charleston RiverDogs in South Carolina, Veeck helps initiate the construction of "The Joe" -- a new stadium for the team. It will be completed in 1996.

May 3, 1996: After struggling with addiction, famed slugger **Darryl Strawberry** finds himself without a big-league job after 13 seasons with the Mets, Dodgers, Giants and Yankees. That's no issue for Veeck, who happily offers the outfielder a second chance. Strawberry plays 29 games with the Saints, hitting 18 home runs in that time. It's enough to catch the eye of the Yankees, who re-sign him on July 4.

May 31, 1997: Ila Borders makes her debut for the Saints, becoming the first woman in the post-integration era to play professional baseball. She makes seven appearances for the team and continues to play independent baseball through 2000.

1998: With a brand new franchise and the desire to bring in fans, Tampa Bay Devil Rays owner Vince Naimoli hires Veeck to be the team's senior vice president of marketing and sales. Veeck stays on the job for nine months.

February 2001: The Marlins hire Veeck to be a consultant. Marlins executive vice president Julio Rebull Jr. announces, "Whenever you have the opportunity to work with someone the caliber of Mike Veeck, it's certainly advantageous. His experience and stature in baseball brings a great level of excitement and energy to our organization."

May 2002: Following Dave Dombrowski from Miami to Detroit, Veeck becomes the Tigers' senior vice president of marketing and communications. He stays for three seasons.

July 2002: Veeck's Charleston RiverDogs host "Nobody Night" -- a promotion where *no* fans are allowed in the stadium. After the bottom of the fifth inning, when the official attendance count was read as "Zero," fans were allowed into the ballpark.

July 16, 2003: Veeck gets Miñoso into uniform one more time for the Saints, making him the only pro baseball player to play in seven different decades. Wearing a New York Cubans uniform, Miñoso draws a walk against Tim Byrdak in his first plate appearance.

“Miñoso was no fool, and he understood what he represented -- not just to baseball fans who had seen him play but to Cubanos who came up,” Veeck said. “This was a remarkable feat. Forget baseball, this comes down to being sharp enough at his age to compete with kids a third his age. And so he was thrilled.”

May 8, 2005: The Saints play a Mother’s Day game at 5:35 a.m., with 500 fans tailgating overnight in the parking lot. The Saints set a record for the earliest game start time.

2010: Night Train Veeck begins working for the Chicago White Sox, making him the third generation of Veecks to work for the team.

June 18, 2012: The Charleston RiverDogs host the South Atlantic League Home Run Derby on the USS Yorktown aircraft carrier.

May 11, 2013: The Saints play a game without umpires. Instead, there's a judge who calls balls and strikes from behind the pitcher. Calls at first and third base are made by a "jury" of 12 Little League players.

July 21, 2015: The world's largest pillow fight is held after the second inning of the Saints game, with 6,261 participants taking part.

2015: CHS Field in the Lowerton area of St. Paul opens as the Saints' new home. The \$63 million facility stands as a testament to the work and success of the ballclub.

2016: Showing a commitment to all bat-and-ball sports, Night Train goes to Australia to work for the Cricket League.

Aug. 14, 2018: To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the film "Animal House," the Saints hold a food fight. Roughly 8,000 fans don rain ponchos to hurl mashed potatoes, hot dogs, popcorn and whatever other foodstuff they can get their hands on:

Sept. 30 2019: Rebecca Veeck passes away from Batten Disease, a rare neurological disorder that afflicted Rebecca for most of her life.

Early 2023: Veeck sells the St. Paul Saints. After 28 seasons as an independent club, they became the Twins' Triple-A affiliate before the 2021 season.

Sept. 19, 2023: Mike Veeck's documentary "The Saint of Second Chances" debuts on Netflix.

HISTORY FROM JOE POSNANSKI

Let me tell you a little bit about the real Eephus pitch.

The eephus was invented by a character named **Rip Sewell**. Rip was probably more of a football prospect than baseball when he was young, but he grew up in a baseball family — three of his cousins played in the big leagues — and after he flunked out of college, he decided to give baseball a go.

For a time, it seemed like his career was dead on arrival because in 1934 he got into a fight with **Hank Greenberg**. Sewell admitted he made a crack about Greenberg's Jewishness but insisted that Greenberg started it by insulting Sewell's Southern background. Greenberg and others said that Sewell started it and wouldn't shut up. Whatever, Greenberg pummeled Sewell and, shortly afterward, he was released.

"We've got 30 pitchers and only one first baseman," Tigers manager **Mickey Cochrane** is said to have told Sewell. "What do you think I'm going to do?"

Sewell resurfaced with the Pirates a few years later and pitched pretty well — he went 16-5 with a 2.80 ERA in 1940 and even received a down-ballot MVP vote. He was always trying to get by on a slow slider, a subpar fastball and a lot of guile. In 1941 he led the league in losses with 17 and then went on the hunting trip that changed his life and gave us one of baseball's most wonderful stories.

The hunting trip story has been told several different ways*, but the one that seems closest to the truth is that Sewell was with some buddies in the bushes, waiting for some deer, when he stood up and made a bit too much noise. One of his friends thought it was a deer and opened fire. Sewell's legs were hit with 14 pellets of buckshot. He lost the use of his big toe.

"My legs were so full of holes," he would say, "they looked like a screen door."

**The hunting accident actually happened on Dec. 7, 1941 ... that date might look familiar. That's the day that will live in infamy, the day Pearl Harbor was attacked.*

Sewell told reporters that very day that he wouldn't be slowed down by the injury and, sure enough, he showed up to Pirates spring training on time, and he pitched

248 innings in 1942. But after the accident, he couldn't really push off his legs the same way, so he had to develop a different way of pitching.

That is what led to his development of the eephus pitch in 1943 — the eephus was a pitch with heavy backspin that he would throw as high as 25 feet off the ground. According to legend, he unleashed the first-ever eephus pitch on April 21, 1943, against the Chicago Cubs. The first batter to face it was **Dom Dallessandro**, who struck out by watching the floating pitch (which was called a “crawler” at that point) cross the plate for strike three.

“You \$#^\$&,” Dallessandro was said to have shouted after the whiff. “If I had a gun, I’d shoot you again.”*

**The actual first person to face the eephus might have been Detroit mega-prospect Dick Wakefield in a 1942 exhibition game, though I can’t find details.*



Necessity was the mother of invention for Sewell.

Sewell had his best year in 1943, going 21-9 with a 2.54 ERA. True, this was against somewhat lesser competition, as most of the top players were already off fighting in the war. But Sewell was 36 years old, and he finished sixth in the MVP balloting. He won 21 games again in 1944.

It should be said here that Sewell was certainly not the first to throw a blooper pitch. John Thorn and John Holway discovered that Indianapolis' Bill Phillips was throwing something like it as far back as the turn of the 20th century. But the eeephus pitch was Sewell's and Sewell's alone. It was his teammate, **Maurice Van Robays**, who came up with the Dr. Seuss "eeephus" name.

"An eeephus ain't nothing," Van Robays said. "And that's what that pitch is: nothing."

Sewell would throw the eeephus with regularity. In a nine-inning, one-run outing against Boston in 1943, for example, he threw 17 of them. That was pretty typical.

"It's a hell of a pitch," National League president Ford Frick said. "It's good publicity."

In 1946, Sewell was 39 years old and still trying to get by with his imagination and junk pitches. It was around that time that he started fooling around with an underhand knuckleball. He was not as effective as he had been, but the 1946 Pirates were pretty terrible and so Sewell was selected for the All-Star team (along with Pirates second baseman **Frankie Gustine**).

Four days before the All-Star Game in Boston, Sewell threw a curveball and heard something in his elbow pop. He kept pitching because that's what you did in 1946, but his elbow was super sore and he told reporters that he would probably miss a couple of starts and wouldn't be able to pitch in the All-Star Game. Still, he went to Boston to take part in the festivities.

As the story goes, before the game, Sewell and **Ted Williams** were talking. The conversation might have gone something like this:

“You pitching or ain’t ya?” Williams asked.

“I might,” Sewell responded.

“You’re not gonna throw that pitch, are you?” Williams asked.

“Yeah, boy, I am,” Sewell said. “Get ready.”

Sewell entered the game in the bottom of the eighth with the National League already trailing 8-0. And he figured this was his last time around — he’d pitched in two All-Star Games and had not given up a hit — and so he decided to have some fun. He threw the eeplus pitch at will.

“I introduced the blooper into the game because it had become just a drab, unfunny battering,” Sewell would say. “I decided to give the crowd a few laughs.”

The American Leaguers had never seen a pitch like the eeplus before — “It was a really funny thing,” Boston’s **Bobby Doerr** would tell the *San Francisco Chronicle* many years later — but they unloaded on it anyway. Sewell gave up a couple of hits, and with two outs and Williams on deck, he threw an eeplus to **Vern Stephens** with runners on base, something he almost never did because it would be so easy to steal on the pitch.

Stephens swung hard but managed only a bloop into rightfield. But it landed for a hit, bringing Williams to the plate.

Ted had a plan. **Bill Dickey** had told him that the only way to hit the ball out — nobody had ever homered off Sewell’s eeplus — was, essentially, to hop up on the ball. You know. Get a running start. Stephens threw an eeplus, Williams tried to run up to the ball but he mistimed his swing and fouled it into the stands. The next eeplus pitch was outside for a ball.

And then came the moment: Sewell threw the eephus, Williams took two steps on it and unloaded the biggest swing he had in him. “It would have broken a window in the 10th floor of the Grant building,” the *Pittsburgh Press* would write of the height of Williams’ shot. But it just kept going and going (“The wind was blowing out that day,” Williams would say, “until it landed in the bullpen for a home run.”

“I didn’t believe that any batter could get enough power on a pitch of that sort to drive it nearly 400 feet,” Sewell would say. “**Stan Musial** once rapped my blooper for a triple, and I considered that phenomenal enough. But a homer — well, that kid is something of a hitter.”

After getting the third out of the inning, Sewell walked off the mound to a standing ovation at Fenway Park.

THAT is the Eephus pitch. There have been other famous bloop pitches. The Yankees had a 6-foot-7 relief pitcher and character named **Steve Hamilton** — he played for the Minneapolis Lakers with Elgin Baylor and Hot Rod Hundley back in the late 1950s — and late in his big-league career, he threw a bloop pitch he called “The Folly Floater.” He actually asked fans to come up with a better name for the pitch, but apparently none of them did.

The wonderful **Bill Lee** threw what he called the “Leephus pitch” — he threw some Leephus pitches just LAST YEAR for the Savannah Bananas at age 75.

Dave LaRoche, a childhood hero of mine, threw the “La Lob.” “I figured, in long relief, the fans are bored, and they’re looking for a little excitement,” LaRoche said. “Then when I started having success with it, I started working to perfect it.”

Point is, the eephus — and the true bloop pitches of baseball history — are real things. They are meant to create joy and laughter at the ballpark but also to actually get hitters out. Second basemen throwing 50-mph would-be-sliders that get smashed into the water in blowout games are not throwing eephus pitches. They’re throwing garbage. And that’s not nearly as much fun.

THE CY YOUNG AWARD RACE, AND HOW HARD IT IS TO EVALUATE TODAY'S STARTING PITCHERS

The oddsmakers, best I can tell, have set the lines for the American and National League Cy Young winners: It's going to be the Yankees' Gerrit Cole and the Padres' Blake Snell. I don't claim to have any understanding AT ALL about that, but from what I'm seeing out there:

- You need to bet like a thousand or two thousand dollars (or more) on Cole taking the Cy to win \$100. That seems pretty conclusive.
- You need to bet \$750-plus on Snell to win \$100. Not AS conclusive, but still a runaway favorite.

I bring this up because something pretty dramatic seems to be happening in baseball, something we've all seen building for years and years, and now it's upon us, or at least upon me: I have no real idea how to value starting pitchers anymore.

I admit the following will come off a bit old-man-yelling-at-cloudsish, but if you'll stay with me I hope the point will feel less so.

— Between them, Snell and Cole have completed one game this year. Snell has never completed a game in his entire career ... and on Tuesday was perfectly happy to be pulled from a seven-inning no-hitter after 104 pitches. "I understand my body really well," Snell said. "I understand the risk/reward of injury, with pushing it. With how hard I was throwing today, it's not worth it."

— Neither one will come CLOSE to winning 20 games this season; neither one has yet won 15. Snell, it should be noted, didn't even get the victory in his seven no-hit innings because the Padres didn't score until the bottom of the ninth.

— They each lead the league in ERA, but both of them have higher FIPs — measuring only strikeouts, walks and home runs allowed — than ERAs. Cole's FIP is about a half-run higher; Snell's is more than a full run higher. One possible analysis of this is that they've both been hit-lucky.

As such, the way FanGraphs ranks them, neither pitcher should be in line for the Cy Young. Cole ranks fourth in the American League in fWAR, behind Minnesota's Sonny Gray, Toronto's Kevin Gausman and Tampa Bay's Zach Eflin.

And Snell? He's not even in the picture, ranking sixth in fWAR, well behind Philadelphia's Zack Wheeler and Atlanta's Spencer Strider, among others.

I'm not saying that fWAR — which, again, looks entirely at those whiffs, walks and bombs — is right. I'm just saying I'm not sure it's wrong. I'm saying that with the way that starting pitching has changed, even over the last few years — not to mention over the last few decades — it's not so easy to separate the quality of starters. When you have starters who throw fewer innings, make fewer starts, often leave games based on pitch counts rather than game situations, old-time measurements don't do an especially great job of separating them.

It hasn't been *that* long since a time when it would have been inconceivable for a starter to willingly leave in the middle of a scoreless game, much less to leave in the middle of a no-hitter. That is not to say Snell was *wrong*; he was, and let me put this in bold letters, **not wrong**. He got it exactly right: He knows his own body and he knows his job. And his job is not to throw nine innings. His job is not to throw no-hitters.

His job is to go out there and throw ungodly stuff for as long as he can. He walks a bunch of people and he rarely gives up hits or runs, and he will sign for a bajillion dollars this offseason because what he does is in the greatest demand.

But when that's the job, it gets harder and harder to say who does it best.

Let's look a bit more closely:

Snell has thrown 174 innings, given up only 111 hits, walked a league-leading 97 and struck out 227. He leads the league in lowest ERA and also wild pitches.

Now, what about Logan Webb? I obviously could choose Strider, who is likely Snell's biggest competition, but the contrast with Webb is starker.

Webb has thrown 201 innings in the same number of starts, which means he's going almost a full inning more per start. That has to be worth something, no? He gives up more hits than Snell, but because he might be the best control pitcher in baseball, Webb actually has a lower WHIP. He doesn't strike out as many batters as Snell, but his strikeout-to-walk ratio is significantly better. His ERA is almost a full run higher, and his won-loss record not nearly as good, but he has a better FIP and, as such, a higher fWAR.

Can you say with any real assurance that Blake Snell, overall, has pitched better than Logan Webb? How much better? Snell might win the Cy Young running away. Webb will likely get little to no support.

Do the same thing with Cole and, say, Sonny Gray. In this case, it's Cole with more innings — he leads the league with 192 innings pitched. Gray has 174. Cole also leads the league in ERA, and he has a significantly lower WHIP than Gray and a better strikeout-to-walk ratio.

But Gray's ERA is basically the same (2.84 vs. 2.81), and Gray has his own advantages. He very rarely gives up home runs. In a time when home runs play such a massive role in scoring, being the best in the league at avoiding them (Gray has allowed seven homers all year; Cole has given up 20) is a pretty big deal. Because of that, Gray's FIP (2.85) almost perfectly aligns with his ERA, while Cole, because he does give up the long ball, has, as mentioned, about a half-run gap.

Again, let me repeat, I'm not saying that Cole and Snell are undeserving of the Cy. They ARE deserving. But so are others. And it's harder than ever to tell the difference.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Pete Rose played in 3,562 games, the most in MLB history. Which player ranks second all-time in games played?

Unlike Rose and third place **Hank Aaron** (3,298 games), this player played his entire career for one team.

Lefty hitter. He played in the post-season in the 1960's and 1970's.

Three-time batting champion, 18x All Star, 7x Gold Glove.

Who is he?

CARL YASTRZEMSKI, who played in 3,308 games. Yaz played every one of them for the Red Sox. He played in the World Series in 1967 and 1975. American League batting champ 1963-1967-1968.

Three pitchers threw multiple no-hitters, multiple Cy Young awards and multiple World series championship rings.

Four no-hitters 1962-1963-1964-1965; Cy Youngs 1963-1965-1966, World Series wins 1955, 1959, 1963, 1965.

SANDY KOUFAX

No hitters 2013-2014, Cy Youngs 2008-2009 World Series wins 2010-2012-2014. Lefty.

TIM Lincecum

No hitters 2007-2011-2019, Cy Youngs 2011, 2019, 2022, World Series wins 2017, 2022.

JUSTIN VERLANDER

MLB debut at age 19 in 2012

303 career HRs, lefty hitter

2x National League MVP, Rookie of the Year, 7x All-Star

Lost in the first round of the playoffs 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017; went to World Series in 2022 with a different team.

BRYCE HARPER. Lost in playoffs with Nationals, went to the World Series with the Phillies.

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