

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

12.10.2023

Good morning baseball fans.

Shohei Ohtani pulls in a cool \$700 million to move down the street to the Dodgers. Yankee fans are celebrating **Juan Soto**—will he last longer than the 16 months he was a Padre?

In this edition draft notes, the phantom IL, bizarre contract demands and another expensive **Babe Ruth** baseball card.

Hall of Fame section—your votes, your editor’s picks and Joe Posnanski continues our series on ballot reviews by prominent writers.

Winter has arrived in Maine—sipping coffee while looking out at snow on the ground. Enjoy your Sunday.

THIS WEEK’S TRIVIA CHALLENGE

(answers at bottom)

Can you name the MLB pitchers to record 200 career wins since 2000?

257 wins	Tigers, Astros, Mets, Astros
251	Indians, Brewers, Yankees
225	Royals, Brewers, Angels, Dodgers, D’backs, Astros, Royals
214	White Sox, Marlins, Blue Jays
214	D’backs, Tigers, Nationals, Dodgers, Mets, Rangers
211	Indians, Expos, White Sox, Angels, Red Sox, Yankees, A’s, Mets, Braves, Twins, Rangers

211	A's, Braves, Giants
210	Dodgers
200	Red Sox, A's, Cubs, Nationals, Cards
200	Cards

Who am I?

3 time Cy Young Award winner

Led my league in ERA 5 times

2 time 20 game winner

Besides Shohei Ohtani, I am the last pitcher to win MVP

Pitched in 3 World Series

Across my career I had seasons where I led the majors in wins, ERA, innings pitched, ERA, complete games, strikeouts per 9 innings

There have been five teams in MLB history to feature 4 former MVPs on the same Roster. Here are the teams—name the former MVPs.

1973 Reds

1982 California Angels

1996 Red Sox

2021 Dodgers

2022 Dodgers

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

I've mentioned Baseballreference.com's Immaculate grid game. MLB.com has partnered with Sporcle.com and also added another quiz mlbpickle.com. You'd probably enjoy them. I'd be interested in your feedback.

Shohei Ohtani surprised almost no one when he signed with the Dodgers. \$700 million over 10 years.

Ohtani's total was 64 percent higher than baseball's previous record, a \$426.5 million, 12-year deal for Angels outfielder **Mike Trout** that began in 2019.

His \$70 million average salary is 62 percent above the previous high of \$43,333,333, shared by pitchers **Max Scherzer** and **Justin Verlander** with deals they struck when signing with the New York Mets. Ohtani's average salary nearly doubles the roughly \$42.3 million he earned with the Angels.

Ohtani joins a lineup that also includes 2018 AL MVP **Mookie Betts** and 2020 NL MVP **Freddie Freeman**.

He was a unanimous AL MVP in 2021 and 2023 — he finished second in 2022 — winning this year despite injuring his elbow in late August and an oblique muscle in early September. He won the AL MVP award with 46 homers and 100 RBIs at the plate while going 9-2 with a 3.18 ERA on the mound. He improved as a pitcher in 2022, going 15-9 with a 2.33 ERA and a 1.01 WHIP while still driving in 95 runs at the plate, but finished behind **Aaron Judge** in the MVP voting after the Yankees star hit an AL record 62 homers.

After winning the MVP award in the World Baseball Classic last March while leading Japan to victory — he struck out Trout to end the tournament — Ohtani maintained his two-way magnificence this year, hitting 44 homers with a career-high 1.066 OPS while going 10-5 with a 3.14 ERA before tearing his elbow ligament again Aug. 23. He didn't hit after Sept. 3 because of the strained right oblique.

Ohtani earned \$42,269,259 in his six seasons with the Angels. After receiving a signing bonus of \$2,315,000 with his initial deal, he had salaries of \$545,000, \$650,000, \$259,259 (in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season), \$3 million, \$5.5 million and \$30 million.

A significant amount of the \$700 million is deferred which helps the Dodgers luxury tax-wise. It does lower the net present value of the deal but we are still talking half a billion dollars.

The Big Bucks Club

\$700 million	Shohei Ohtani
\$427	Mike Trout
\$365	Mookie Betts
\$360	Aaron Judge
\$350	Manny Machado
\$341	Francisco Lindor
\$340	Fernando Tatis Jr.
\$330	Bryce Harper
\$325	Giancarlo Stanton
\$325	Corey Seager

We will start 2024 with 8 new managers – almost 1/3 of MLB teams. Who will enjoy success and who will be seen exiting the building?

1. **Angels: Ron Washington**
2. **Padres: Mike Shildt**
3. **Brewers: Pat Murphy**
4. **Giants: Bob Melvin**
5. **Guardians: Stephen Vogt**
6. **Mets: Carlos Mendoza**
7. **Cubs: Craig Counsell**
8. **Astros: Joe Espada**

From Joe Sheehan

What do you think will be the effect on the market because of Diamond Sports, its bankruptcy, and so many teams in the league scrambling to devise a solution to less TV revenue?

It's an issue for more than half the league, not just the teams like the Padres and Diamondbacks that Diamond left behind, but the AT&T Sports contingent and even potentially the Comcast teams.

My focus has been more on the long-term issues. If half the teams in the league lose an average of \$50 million in local-TV money, that breaks the revenue-sharing formula. The costs end up borne by teams with healthy situations such as the Yankees and Red Sox and Mets. As I have written before, I think we were already at the outer edges of what the high-revenue teams are willing to transfer to the low-revenue ones, and anything that increases that figure could create a war among the owners. I have been thinking of all this as a problem for the 2027 CBA fight.

The DSG bankruptcy has accelerated the problem, not just in the cases where the company abandoned contracts in San Diego and Arizona, but where the uncertainty of which ones it will carry is affecting decision-making. Diamond could wind down its Bally's networks as soon as the end of 2024, which would leave 11 more teams without a local broadcast outlet -- or broadcast revenue -- in 2025.

I haven't dedicated a piece to this yet, but I will this offseason. It's a big, complicated topic that I want to get right. The Rangers just won the World Series, and it affects even them. They have a contract with DSG that pays them \$111 million a year. There's no projected attendance and revenue bump off a championship that makes up for the loss of \$111 million a year in guaranteed TV money. It's a body blow to the business. As the Padres did, the Rangers made long-term commitments -- in their case to **Corey Seager and Marcus Semien and Jacob deGrom** -- with certain revenue projections, and now those projections have been upended in a way that immediately affects baseball operations.

I was surprised to read that 2023 was the first 100 loss season in Colorado Rockies history.

The Jays, 0-6 in the past four postseasons, have not won a playoff game since 2016.

The Giants have one playoff appearance, in fact one above-.500 season, since 2016, and they haven't won an actual playoff series since 2014.

30 or more innings pitched, lowest World Series career ERA.

Madison Bumgarner	36 IP	0.25 ERA	2010, 2012, 2014 Giants
Harry Brecheen	32	0.83	1946
Babe Ruth	31	0.87	1916, 1918 Red Sox

Sherry Smith	30	0.89	1916, 1920 Dodgers
Sandy Koufax	57	0.95	1959, 1963, 1965, 1966 Dodgers
Christy Mathewson	101	0.97	1905, 1911, 1912, 1913 Giants
Mariano Rivera	36	0.99	1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2009 Yankees

SOTO IN PINSTripES

(notes from multiple sources including Jayson Stark)

A few notes on **Juan Soto**—in many Yankee fan email threads I commented over and over this guy is a generational talent—think **Ken Griffey Jr.** or even **Ted Williams**.

Soto has now been traded *for 11 players* just in the past 16 months. How many other Hall of Fame position players were traded as many times as Soto (twice) before their age-25 season? None.

He just turned 25. There are four guys on the MLB top 100 prospects who are older than him. Soto has already played 779 mlb games with 160 HRs.

Soto has never had a sub-.400 OBP or 140 OPS+ season. Not in the majors. Not in the minors. Plus eye, plus contact, plus power. He has a World Series ring, a Home Run Derby trophy, a batting title.

He's one of seven players, including Williams and **Mickey Mantle**, to have multiple seasons of 30-plus home runs and 100-plus walks before the age of 25. His 160 career home runs and 627 walks are the most in MLB history before his age-25 season. His career .946 OPS ranks 27th in MLB history. Of the 26 players ahead of him, 20 of them are already in the Hall of Fame.

Soto has led MLB in walks in three of his six seasons. His 'hard hit' rate is in the top 1% of major leaguers.

In the modern era (1901-present), only five hitters have gotten at least 3,000 plate appearances through their age-24 seasons and come out the other side with an OPS+ of 157 or better. See if any of these names ring a bell:

Ty Cobb: 176

Mike Trout: 170

Mickey Mantle: 166

Jimmie Foxx: 166

Juan Soto: 157

Want to lower the bar to a minimum of 2,500 plate appearances? Then we get to add in four more super-cool names:

Ted Williams: 190
Albert Pujols: 167
Tris Speaker: 162
Rogers Hornsby: 158

Soto has an OBP of .421.

.421 OBP or better through age 24

Ted Williams: .481
Jimmie Foxx: .432
Arky Vaughan: .429
Juan Soto: .421

(minimum 2,500 plate appearances)

So that's a good group. Except that Soto separates himself from almost everyone because he also has 160 career homers to go with that .421 OBP. And here's the complete list of all other hitters who had ever done that, at this age, before Soto entered the conversation: Jimmie Foxx.

Joe DiMaggio was a Hall of Famer. His career OBP was .398.

Joe Morgan is a Hall of Famer. His career OBP was .392.

Honus Wagner is a Hall of Famer. His career OBP was .391.

But here is Soto, already rocking a .421 on-base percentage — and it's hard to see his OBP falling into even their range anytime soon. And why is that? Because for Soto's OBP to drop below .400, he would have to avoid reaching base *in his next 179 plate appearances!*

MLB DRAFT

2024 MLB Draft (Round 1 Order)

1. Cleveland Guardians
2. Cincinnati Reds
3. Colorado Rockies
4. Oakland Athletics

5. Chicago White Sox
6. Kansas City Royals
7. St. Louis Cardinals
8. Los Angeles Angels
9. Pittsburgh Pirates
10. Washington Nationals
11. Detroit Tigers
12. Boston Red Sox
13. San Francisco Giants
14. Chicago Cubs
15. Seattle Mariners
16. Miami Marlins
17. Milwaukee Brewers
18. Tampa Bay Rays
19. New York Mets
20. Toronto Blue Jays
21. Minnesota Twins
22. Baltimore Orioles
23. Los Angeles Dodgers
24. Atlanta Braves
25. San Diego Padres
26. New York Yankees
27. Philadelphia Phillies

28. Houston Astros

29. Arizona Diamondbacks

30. Texas Rangers

Two of the projected top picks:

Wake Forest 1B Nick Kurtz

Baseball America has long considered Kurtz to be the top prospect in the 2024 MLB draft, and for good reason.

The lefty slugger is coming off an exceptional sophomore season at Wake Forest in which he .353/.527/.784 with 24 home runs and 69 RBI in 56 games. He had 63 walks against just 50 strikeouts, displaying impressive plate discipline for his age. He's also a quality defender who can potentially play in the outfield when he makes it to the majors.

Kurtz has what it takes to become the second first baseman in MLB draft history to be selected first overall next to **Spencer Torkelson**, who was taken first by the Detroit Tigers in 2020.

West Virginia 2B/SS JJ Wetherholt

Arguably the best pure hitter in the 2024 draft, Wetherholt could challenge Kurtz for the No. 1 pick.

The unanimous first-team All-American was a finalist for the **Dick Howser** Trophy after an incredible season at the plate. In 55 games, Wetherholt slashed an astonishing .449/.517/.787 with 16 home runs, 60 RBI and 36 stolen bases. He fell just short of becoming the first player to have a batting average of .450 since Buster Posey averaged .463 in his final year at Florida State in 2008.

There are some questions about which middle-infield position Wetherholt would play when he gets to the majors, but all signs point to him being one of the first players selected in 2024.

A year ago, two of the three clubs tied for the best odds for the top choice in the 2023 Draft wound up at No. 1 (Pirates) and No. 2 (Nationals). The Tigers (No. 6 to No. 3), Rangers (No. 7 to No. 4) and Twins (No. 13 to No. 5) all moved up to secure a premium pick in a Draft with five No. 1-caliber talents, which could pay off nicely in a few years.

That was nothing compared to the Brad Paisley-hosted event at this year's Winter Meetings. The Guardians soared from No. 9 to No. 1 and the Reds jumped even further from No. 13 to No. 2. Cleveland had a 2.0 percent chance of grabbing the top pick and Cincinnati had a 0.9 percent chance, and the odds of that all-Ohio parlay hitting were roughly 5,000 to 1.

Not only did the Guardians and Reds gain access to better players at the very top of the Draft, but their bonus pools also swelled considerably. Based on the assigned values in the 2023 Draft, each club gained more than \$4 million for their allotment, and those numbers may well increase for '24.

While Cleveland and Cincinnati were the undisputed winners of the Draft Lottery, there were four clubs that were stung by disappointment -- none more than the A's. For the second straight year, Oakland had odds as good as any club of getting the No. 1 pick, but it dropped to No. 4 in the 2024 Draft after falling to No. 6 in '23. The A's are rebuilding and are heavily reliant on the Draft for talent, but revenue-sharing recipients that receive a lottery (top six) pick in two consecutive years can't choose higher than 10th in the following Draft, so they'll face a harsh reality in '25.

The (Kansas City) A's took the first ever 1-1 pick, choosing **Rick Monday** in 1965, but haven't picked first since. By virtue of their worst-in-baseball records each of the last two years, they have had the best odds of landing the first pick, but have instead bounced to sixth (last year) and fourth (yesterday).

The White Sox are in a similar situation because revenue-sharing payors can't receive a lottery selection or pick higher than 10th in consecutive Drafts, and they wound up with the No. 5 choice. The Royals suffered a significant drop for the second straight lottery, moving from a tie for the best odds at No. 1 to No. 6 after slipping from No. 5 to No. 8 a year ago.

No club dropped more than the Mets, who had the seventh-best odds for the No. 1 choice. New York wound up ninth in the lottery, but because it exceeded the second threshold of the Competitive Balance Tax, it gets docked 10 more spots down to 19 as a penalty. Had the Mets secured a lottery selection, it would have been protected and their second-highest choice would have moved down 10 spots.

Their slides will cost the Royals at least \$2.4 million and the A's at least \$1.3 million in pool money, based on the 2023 assigned values. The difference for the Mets between the last lottery pick at No. 6 and No. 19 represents at least \$2.7 million.

Brilliant Subscriber Suggestion of the Week—set the draft order based on most wins per payroll dollar spent. Rewards both smart roster building and positive results on the field. Tanking doesn't work.

Hall of Famer **Tom Seaver**'s Draft rights were awarded via a lottery. The Braves selected Seaver out of Southern California with the 20th overall choice in the secondary phase of the January 1966 Draft and signed him a month later for \$40,000. The Trojans had started their season before he turned pro, however, so the deal violated MLB's college rule. Commissioner William Eckert nullified the contract and the NCAA declared Seaver ineligible, leaving him in limbo.

Eckert decided to stage a lottery for Seaver's rights. Any team willing to match the \$40,000 (top-10-pick money at the time) was allowed to participate, but only the Indians, Mets and Phillies took that plunge.

When Eckert pulled the Mets' name out of a hat, the franchise began its transition from laughingstock to relevance. Seaver opened his big-league career with seven straight All-Star seasons in New York and won a World Series, two pennants and three National League Cy Young Awards on his way to the Hall of Fame.

MORE MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

More Insight from Joe Sheehan—Baltimore Orioles (his newsletter is worth a subscription)

They have too much talent to fit on one field, so they have to make trades to better build a roster. In addition, because they have so much young talent, they have a microscopic payroll and can easily afford market-value superstars to go with their incredible young core.

The Orioles' projected payroll is currently \$84 million, per Cot's. That's projected as 28th in MLB, and a full \$70 million below the MLB median payroll. They have no one projected to make more than \$11 million, that being **Anthony Santander**'s estimated salary through arbitration. Attendance at Camden Yards jumped to 1.9 million last year, its highest since 2017, and they can take a leap from there coming off a 101-win season with a roster filled with attractive young stars. With MASN, which they co-own, they're immune from the short-term RSN risks half the league is exposed to. Maryland has fallen all over itself to throw taxpayer money at John Angelos to boot.

What are we doing here? The Orioles will have to eventually pay **Adley Rutschman and Gunnar Henderson and Jackson Holliday** and the rest, but for now, they have nine figures burning a hole in their pocket and a need for starting pitching and corner outfielders. Overpay for Yoshinobu Yamamoto and Jung Hoo Lee. Should have put together a package of infielders who can't possibly fit on the Camden Yards diamond for **Juan Soto**. Be bold. Be reckless, even.

Between their talent and their payroll, it's hard to think of a team that's been better positioned in this century to make bold moves.

Mike Elias has built the foundation. He now needs to show that he can build the house, or in two years he'll be replaced by Dave Dombrowski.

Charles Johnson was a catcher for the Florida Marlins. He was the first National Leaguer to play at least one hundred games at catcher in a season without making an error.

Johnson caught 123 games at catcher in 1997. Only **Mike Matheny** with 0 errors in 138 games in 2003 tops Johnson.

Those 1997 Marlins won their franchise's first World Series for their skipper, **Jim Leyland**, who was just elected to the Hall of Fame on Sunday. It was Leyland's only Series title of his 22-year MLB managing career.

Johnson's son Brandon plays for the Denver Broncos.

Jose Rijo pitched 14 seasons and won 116 games in the majors. He won two games in the 1990 World Series for the Reds to win Series MVP. Rijo was Hall of Famer **Juan Marichal**'s son-in-law.

Took a quiz this week—we give you the team, name the players who got their 3,000th hit with that team.

Angels **Albert Pujols** and **Rod Carew**, Red Sox **Carl Yastrzemski**, Tigers **Al Kaline**, Giants **Willie Mays**, Reds **Pete Rose**, Royals **George Brett**, Yankees **Derek Jeter**, Padres **Tony Gwynn**, Pirates **Roberto Clemente** and Orioles **Cal Ripken Jr.** were pretty easy.

But Twins and **Dave Winfield**? Marlins and **Ichiro Suzuki**? Padres and **Rickey Henderson**? Indians and **Eddie Murray**? I missed a few.

Tom Verducci, Sports Illustrated

The great World Series push in San Diego and the wild spending it engendered are officially over. It ended Wednesday as the Padres traded outfielder **Juan Soto** to the Yankees for four pitchers. The all-in, damn-the-budget approach was wildly successful at the gate—the Padres increased their attendance 37% from 2019—but a noble failure on the field.

From 2020, when the late Peter Seidler took over as club chairman, to last season, the Padres increased their payroll 74%, from a CBT number of \$170 million to \$296 million. It was not sustainable in that market. But unlike the 1998-2002 Diamondbacks, who raised their payroll 193%, the Padres could not seize their first title before the bubble inevitably burst.

In this four-year “run,” San Diego never won more than 89 games. It hasn’t won more than 90 games in 27 years.

Now it’s time for the retreat you knew was coming. The payroll will sink closer to \$200 million. Besides their best hitter (Soto), the Padres are also likely to lose their closer (**Josh Hader**), their Cy Young Award winner (**Blake Snell**), their most used pitcher (**Nick Martinez**) and four pitchers who started 91 of their 162 games (Snell, **Seth Lugo**, **Michael Wacha** and Martinez).

The 2023 Padres will stand as one of the most disappointing teams of last season because they had played in the previous NLCS. Truth is, they dropped only by seven wins from the previous season, while the Yankees (-17), White Sox (-20), Cardinals (-22) and especially Mets (-26) were bigger flops.

Hat tip to Red Sox radio voice Joe Castiglione (76) who achieved the highest honor for a baseball broadcaster, the Ford C. Frick Award for Broadcasting Excellence. He will be honored at the Hall on July 20 as part of induction weekend.

“It was just incredible,” said Castiglione, who has called Sox games for 41 seasons, more than 6,000 in all. He joins, among other Frick winners, longtime voice of the Red Sox Curt Gowdy (1984) and Jon Miller (2010), whom Castiglione replaced in 1983.

His hero, Mel Allen, was the first winner of the Frick Award along with Red Barber. His mentor, Ernie Harwell, received the award in 1981. Then came several contemporaries such as Marty Brennaman (Reds), Pat Hughes (Cubs), and his good friend Eric Nadel of the Rangers.

Castiglione rose to the occasion for the final out of the 2004 World Series. Any good Red Sox fan knows his words by heart.

“Swing and a ground ball. Stabbed by Foulke. He has it! He underhands to first! And the Boston Red Sox are the world champions. For the first time in 86 years, the Red Sox have won baseball’s world championship. Can you believe it?”

The Yankees did not give out the first \$100 million contract. The Dodgers did, for **Kevin Brown**. They did not give out the first \$200 million contract. The Rangers did, for **Alex Rodriguez**. They did not give out the first \$300 million contract. The Marlins did for **Giancarlo Stanton**.

But the Yankees, of course, ended up trading for all three of those contracts — and while they already had one hulking right-handed outfielder in **Aaron Judge**, they were all too eager to add another.

Stanton was at his peak, coming off a 59-homer, MVP season, but he had 10 years and \$295 million left on his deal. The Marlins kicked in \$30 million, but Stanton has missed more than 300 games in six Yankee seasons, and his regression has been stark: .202/.286/.442 over the last two years.

HE WANTED WHAT?

Matt Monagan, mlb.com

It's free-agent signing season, and sure, players will be asking for big contracts with big money.

But some guys, sometimes, want a little something extra.

A clause that will keep them comfortable in their new city. A perk that'll ultimately bring them over the line in making their final decision. It could be access to a fun non-baseball activity, an extra incentive for their family or, you know, 37 boxes of orange Jell-O.

Here are some of the more fun player contract clauses over the years.

AJ Burnett, 8 limo rides across two countries

When Burnett signed a five-year deal with the Blue Jays back in 2005, he made sure his family -- who lived in Baltimore -- would be able to get to at least eight of his games in style during the season. The flamethrower arranged eight roundtrip limo rides from Maryland across the northern border (that's about nine hours) into the contract. His wife, Karen, apparently doesn't like to fly.

Pickup trucks were never considered as the family's mode of transport in any of the negotiations.

George Brett, becoming a landlord

Brett signed a "lifetime contract" with the Royals in 1984. Not only did it give him a good chunk of change for the time, but it also gave him an investment for the future: The Hall of Famer received part ownership of an apartment complex in Memphis. KC's owner Avron Fogelman was a real estate baron and thought the added incentive might be the thing to make Brett say yes. The infielder would get a \$1 million cash flow from the 1,100-unit building and the right to sell back his stake to the team for \$2 million.

Let's just hope those Tennessee tenants remembered to pay their rent. You really don't want angry landlord George Brett coming after you.

Troy Glaus, horse-riding lessons

Ann Glaus, wife of former All-Star third baseman Troy, is a world-class equestrian star. She's been competing in dressage, cross country and show-jumping competitions since the age of 7. So when Troy was in discussions for his four-year deal with the D-backs in the mid-2000s, he made sure there was a horse clause. The team would have to put up \$75,000 per year for training and lessons at a stable in Arizona.

After one season with the D-backs, Glaus was traded to the Blue Jays -- possibly putting the equestrian money in jeopardy. But the Blue Jays decided to put up even more support for Ann's passion, giving \$325,000 per year for Glaus' wife to continue to maintain her stable in Arizona.

Charlie Kerfeld, 37 cases of orange Jell-O

If you followed Charlie Kerfeld's career, you shouldn't be surprised.

The colorful reliever routinely wore a lucky Jetson's T-shirt under his jersey, he sported conehead masks in the bullpen and he once said he'd love to become a wrestler and fight alongside Charles Barkley and Hulk Hogan.

And in 1987, when he thought he wasn't getting enough of a raise after a career year in 1986, he tried to stick it to Astros ownership by asking for perhaps the weirdest thing any pro athlete has ever asked for: 37 cases of orange Jell-O (37 because Kerfeld wore the No. 37 for the Astros).

"I wanted the Jell-O so [Astros reliever] **Larry Andersen** and I could pull a prank on some coach or unsuspecting reporter this season," Kerfeld said at the time. "When they least expect it, they might find some orange Jell-O in their toilet or the whirlpool or something. I chose orange because we won't be wearing our orange uniforms anymore."

BABE RUTH 1914 BALTIMORE NEWS ROOKIE CARD SELLS FOR \$7.2 MILLION; 3RD HIGHEST PRICED CARD EVER

Tyler Conway, Bleacher Report

A **Babe Ruth** rookie card sold for \$7.2 million at an auction Monday, making it the third-highest-priced card ever.

The 1914 Baltimore News card is one of just 10 known in existence. Surprisingly enough, the card itself had no known existence until the 1980s, according to Brian Dwyer, president of Robert Edward Auctions, making it a shockingly rare find on the market.

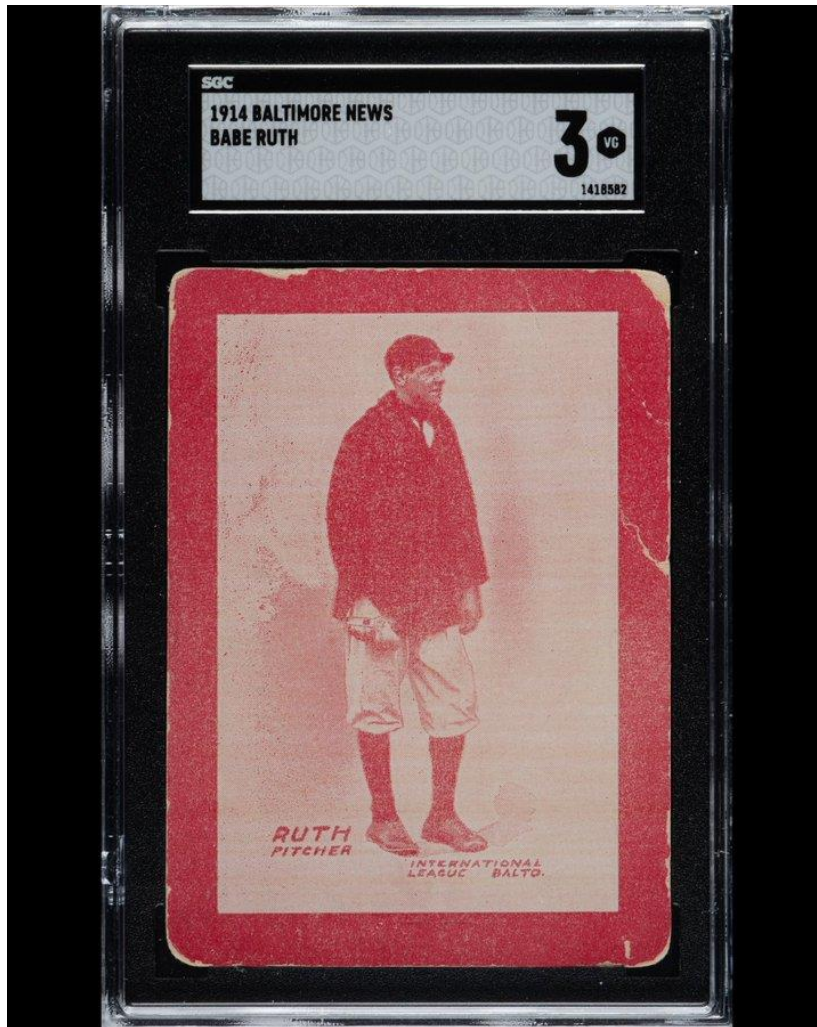
"The last time one of these transacted [in 2013] was \$450,000," Dwyer told Dan Hajducky of ESPN. "It's easier to buy an NFL team in the last decade than it has been to buy one of these cards."

Ruth played for the Baltimore Orioles, then a minor league team, for only a short period before his contract was purchased by the Boston Red Sox in 1914. He would go on to play six seasons in Boston before famously being sold to the New York Yankees in 1920, setting up the "Curse of the Bambino."

"It's miraculous that this card exists," REA communications director P.J. Kinsella said. "He was on the Orioles for a few months and, by the end of [1914], he was in Providence. That he's encapsulated in this set, not knowing what he would become ... it's rather remarkable that he's on this card. The time that in which they were able to get him was so minute."

The highest-ever price for a baseball card was set at \$12.6 million for the 1952 Topps **Mickey Mantle** rookie. A **Honus Wagner** T206 Sweet Caporal card is in second place at \$7.25 million.

The Ruth card sold at auction originated with a then-16-year-old Baltimore paperboy named Archibald Davis, who had several baseball cards in his collection that were passed down by his family.



WHY IS MLB INVESTIGATING THE METS? EXPLAINING THE PHANTOM IL AND STEVE COHEN'S INVOLVEMENT

Chad Jennings, The Athletic

What's the difference between being hurt and having an injury, and at what point does manipulating that blurred line become a punishable offense?

On Thursday, former Mets general manager Billy Eppler resigned amid a New York Post report that he was under league investigation for "improper uses of the injured list." People briefed on the matter confirmed to *The Athletic* that there is an ongoing investigation.

So, what does "improper" use of the injured list mean, what is the Phantom IL, and how might an offense become worthy of resignation and league involvement? As with most things medical, there's quite a bit of gray area to contend with.

Why do teams and players disagree over injured list stints?

In professional sports, injury situations are not always black and white. From diagnosis to expected timetable, to whether there's a meaningful problem to begin with, much can be up for interpretation and debate.

"I mean, everybody's dealing with something," Boston Red Sox shortstop **Trevor Story** said last month after returning from a lengthy elbow issue that eventually led to surgery. "That's part of the job that we have, and you find ways to play and be effective."

A broken leg or fully torn ligament doesn't leave much wiggle room, but a calf strain, sore shoulder, or aching back might come with varying degrees of severity. An injury that's debilitating to a pitcher might be playable for a position player, and inflammation that shuts down one hitter could be little more than an annoyance to another.

According to several longtime executives, this is where most injured list questions begin: with a disagreement between player and team about whether an injury requires a stint on the IL.

Does the team want these IL stints or the player? Who benefits?

It depends on the situation. The answer can be team, player, or sometimes both. At times, a player wants to keep playing while the team wants him to take a two-week break. Other times, the club thinks a player is healthy enough to perform, while the player wants to shut it down to avoid making a situation worse.

A reliever on a hot streak might want to pitch through a little shoulder inflammation, while a starter who's struggling might welcome the chance to take some time off and work on his mechanics (or his team might strongly suggest that he do so). Rehab assignments can be extended longer than is strictly necessary to buy a front office time before making a roster move. Sometimes teams want or need a free roster spot and don't want to lose a player; hence fringe big leaguers who can't be optioned to Triple A are often incentivized to accept an IL assignment rather than be released and lose money and/or service time. And because players often compete through nagging pain and discomfort, a 15-day diagnosis doesn't take much creativity.

"It's not hard to find an injury," one executive said Friday.

To that extent, IL manipulation — agents and executives might disagree on the use of that term — is commonplace, but not seen as a huge problem within the game.

So what's the Phantom IL?

It's one thing to disagree about whether a sore hamstring is worth two weeks on the injured list. It's another thing to tell a player to "pick a body part" for an invented injury and involuntary trip to the IL.

But the latter also happens.

Called the phantom injured list because it involves essentially a ghost of an injury, the practice used to be especially common and rampant in the minor leagues before recent rule changes added an inactive development list to allow roster flexibility without the need for fake muscle strains.

But there is no development list in the major leagues, just a 26-man limit and various rules about who can and cannot be sent to the minor leagues, each of which creates some incentive to use the IL to a team's advantage. In the mid-2010s, this practice became more common, before rule changes helped to stanch what was then a growing problem. Players can complain to the union if they feel their careers are being unfairly maligned by unnecessary IL stints, and phantom IL stints in general are seen as far less common than several years ago.

"I think pulling off the phantom IL is more complicated than people think," one longtime baseball executive said.

Does this mean the league is going to crack down on this now?

The phrase "phantom IL" has become so ubiquitous within the game that players often use or misuse it in casual conversation — sometimes even on the record — to refer to injuries that might exist, but which the player believes unworthy of an IL stint.

Now that the minors have the development list, the phantom IL issue has generally receded from view in recent years — largely due to the fact that the major-league side mostly takes care of itself, as major-league reliever Trevor May noted Friday on the Foul Territory podcast, because teams don't generally like having valuable assets sidelined.

"They don't put people on the phantom very often in the big leagues because you're paying them a lot of money," May said.

Despite the investigation, there's little indication that the league is gearing up for additional enforcement, or that the examination of Eppler is a sign of an injured-list crackdown on the horizon. Even so, many within baseball are waiting to see what comes of this unusual situation, and what it could mean going forward.

As May said on Foul Territory, "I played for Billy for a year, I don't remember anything out of the ordinary ... it is going to be interesting to see what exactly are we talking about here."

How does owner Steve Cohen factor into MLB's investigation?

It's possible that over the course of the investigation that the owner's actions come under scrutiny, but Cohen is not the focus of the probe, according to a person briefed on conversations between the Mets and MLB.

Injured list placements are relatively mundane actions undertaken by major league front offices, so an owner being directly involved in that process would be highly unusual.

HALL OF FAME

2024 HALL OF FAME BALLOT

Holdovers (14)

Todd Helton
Billy Wagner
Andruw Jones
Gary Sheffield
Carlos Beltrán
Alex Rodriguez
Manny Ramirez
Omar Vizquel
Andy Pettitte
Bobby Abreu
Jimmy Rollins
Mark Buehrle
Francisco Rodríguez
Torii Hunter

Newcomers (12)

Adrian Beltre
Joe Mauer
Chase Utley
David Wright
Bartolo Colon
Matt Holliday
Adrian Gonzalez
José Bautista
José Reyes
Victor Martinez
James Shields
Brandon Phillips

Two weeks ago I asked readers to submit their Hall of Fame ballots.

Some people added comments. Thanks to all who responded. Here's what you sent...

Todd Helton - I don't care if he played half his games in Denver. He was a stud.

Adrian Beltre - Unequivocal yes

Joe Mauer - Just based on his first ten years as a catcher and plenty of stats to back it up.

Jimmy Rollins - reasons he should be in HOF: **Luis Aparicio, Phil Rizzuto, Pee Wee Reese, Barry Larkin**, and maybe more.

Billy Wagner - Tough call, great stats, but...?

Chase Utley - Undecided. Honestly, when he played, I always thought he was overrated.

Mark Buehrle - A sentimental vote for a very good pitcher. 5 time all-star, 5 time gold glove, 200+ wins. The perfect exemplar of "work fast, throw strikes, change speed." Loved to watch him pitch.

Todd Helton

Joe Mauer

Gary Sheffield

Carlos Beltrán

Manny Ramirez

Billy Wagner

I'm becoming more selective as I get older and see similar stats from players in your list that closely compare to others that have not made into the Hall. Here are my selections:

Todd Helton

Manny Ramirez

Adrian Beltre

I'm torn over Pettitte – drugs but his success in the post season was impressive.

ps. Loved watching Billy Wagner pitch but even though he received 68% last year, I do not see him in the Hall. Although Wagner was upset with the Astros for trading him to the Phillies, I swear it appears that he got even when he grooved a pitch to his best friend Craig Biggio in the final inning to beat the Phillies and continue the Astros pennant run in 2005. Biggio had never hit a ball that far

While I love David Wright (great player, one team his whole career (which will be increasingly rare and important to sports writers (e.g. Buster Posey)), he needed one of two more solid seasons so, unfortunately, I don't think that he makes the grade. Mauer is the same but likely played long enough to make it. I also think that Beltre, Holliday and Pettitte will each get the nod.

Alex Rodriguez
Adrian Beltre
Manny Ramirez
Todd Helton
Andy Pettitte
Gary Sheffield
Carlos Beltrán
Andruw Jones
Billy Wagner
Joe Mauer

Beltre (although not 1st ballot HOFer) and Utley

Beltre's career speaks for itself. No discussion needed, too bad the post season eluded him. Too bad the Dodgers did not keep him.

Utley. His stats do not speak HOF, but he passes my eye test. A pure ball player who did everything well. If he doesn't eventually make it, I won't complain, but he should.

No one else. However, I have a gripe. If one has to make a case for someone, a la Wright and Super Joe, then they do not belong. It should not be a debate. I mean, if Wright gets in but Mattingly and K. Hernandez aren't, that is a horrific look. You would pay to see Mattingly hit and field and you loved watching how Hernandez defined his position. Wright was a very very good players, but I could leave the room to get a Coke when he was at bat. For hitters, that's my barometer. His fielding was just fine, but not remarkable.

I called WFAN in anger after Vlad did not make the HOF on the first ballot, citing that any general manager would pick him over then recently -inducted first ballot HOFer Derek Jeter. Not to dismiss Jeter in any way, but if they switched uniforms, it's an entirely different conversation. I know, I know: "Dude, Jeter made the Yankee who they were!" Nonsense, that happened to be a reliever with one pitch.

Bigger gripe: Steve's Garvey's exclusion. Six top six MVPs, including a one and a two; 10 all star appearances; post season OPS, .910; six seasons with 200+ hits; never missed a game; and more.

He rarely looked bad at the plate, something voters do not consider.

And Harold Baines is in Cooperstown...

Gotta still think Munson & Mattingly are HOF worthy

I vote for Arod; Helton and Mauer.

How's this for a stab?

1. Alex Rodriguez
2. Adrian Beltre
3. Manny Ramirez
4. Todd Helton
5. Andy Pettitte
6. Gary Sheffield
7. Carlos Beltrán
8. Andruw Jones
9. Billy Wagner
10. Joe Mauer

And from your humble editor. I'm over the steroid thing. After much thought and many arguments my thinking has come around to there have been enough drunks and amphetamine users who made it. They gave a free pass to juicer **David Ortiz**. Let the Hall handle the issue through footnotes on plaques but the best players should be represented.

So here are my ten:

1. Beltre
2. Mauer
3. Helton
4. Jones
5. Sheffield
6. Ramirez
7. Rollins
8. Arod
9. Pettitte
10. Wagner

And the veterans committee should send in Clemens and Bonds, Palmeiro, Sosa and McGwire.

I'm on the fence with Pete Rose, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Carlos Beltran, Curt Schilling.

Contemporary Era Committee vote was this week

Four managers, two executives and two umpires comprise the Contemporary Baseball Era Managers/Executives/Umpires ballot, which features candidates whose primary contribution to the game came since 1980. The ballot included managers **Cito Gaston, Davey Johnson, Jim Leyland, Lou Piniella**, umpires **Joe West and Ed Montague**, executives **Bill White** and Hank Peters.

Leyland was the lone candidate selected by a 16-member committee that met here to review contemporary era managers, executives, and umpires.

Leyland, who turns 79 later this month, received 15 votes. Longtime manager Lou Piniella had 11, one shy of the required 75 percent. Former National League president Bill White, who also had a distinguished career as a player and broadcaster, received 10 votes.

Piniella, 80, also was one vote short in 2018. The other candidates received fewer than five votes.

The ballot itself makes it very difficult for the committee to elect more than one person. Whereas the writer's ballot for players allows 10 votes, the committee's ballot only allows three, but the threshold for induction is still 75 percent.

So Joe West — along with fellow umpire Ed Montague, managers Cito Gaston, Davey Johnson and Lou Piniella, and executives Bill White and Hank Peters — will have to wait two years for another shot, since the committee will vote on "Classic Era" candidates (those whose contributions came before 1980) next December.

Leyland is the first manager elected since **Bobby Cox, Tony La Russa, and Joe Torre** were selected for the Class of 2014. La Russa, Torre, and commissioner Rob Manfred were among those who called Leyland Sunday.

"It's the final stop, really, as far as your baseball career goes," Leyland said. "To land there in Cooperstown, it doesn't get any better than that."

Leyland was 1,769-1,728 over 22 years with the Pirates, Marlins, Rockies, and Tigers from 1986-2013.

Leyland won 95 or more games three times with the **Barry Bonds**-led Pirates but could not get past the NLCS. He finally got to the World Series with the 1997 Florida Marlins and won what proved to be his only championship.

After one season with the Rockies followed by a six-year break, Leyland returned to the dugout.

Dave Dombrowski, who built the '97 Marlins, hired Leyland to manage the Tigers in 2006. He averaged 87.5 victories over eight seasons and won two pennants.

The Tigers won 93 games in '13 but were eliminated by the underdog Red Sox in the ALCS. Leyland told his players after Game 6 at Fenway Park that he was retiring.

Leyland returned to manage Team USA in the 2017 World Baseball Classic and delivered a championship.

Leyland is 18th all-time in victories and tied for seventh with Terry Francona in postseason victories with 44. He was named manager of the year three times.

Leyland played in the minors from 1964-70, reaching Double A. He managed in the Tigers organization from 1971-81 then coached under La Russa with the White Sox from 1982-85.

Leyland will join any players selected by the Baseball Writers' Association of America in the Hall's Class of 2024. The induction will be July 21 in Cooperstown.

You could make a good case for **Jimmy Rollins**. He won an MVP award . . . *and* four Gold Gloves. ... He's the only shortstop in the 2,400-Hit/200-Homer/400-Steal/800-Extra-Base-Hit Club. ... He got the most hits in the history of the franchise that drafted him (the Phillies). ... He owns the longest hitting streak by a shortstop (38 games) since 1894.

Billy Wagner. Among all left-handed pitchers in the entire live-ball era (with at least 900 innings), you know where he ranks? First in ERA *and* WHIP *and* opponent batting average *and* strikeout rate.

Can **Buster Posey** still get elected when he had only 1,500 hits (on the nose)?

Ralph Kiner finished his career with just 1,451 — and still got elected by the writers (on his 15th try) in 1975. Of course, he also won seven home run titles in a row. So he had that going for him.

Or maybe **Roy Campanella**, in some ways, is a better comp. He got 1,422 hits in 12 seasons — as a catcher. And he got elected by the writers in 1969. But his career was also cut short at age 35 by a car crash that left him permanently paralyzed. So it's hard to make an exact comparison with Posey, who walked away from the game voluntarily after his age-34 season.

There is no modern precedent for electing a position player with 1,500 hits, 158 career homers and 44.8 WAR to the Hall. And that will be a huge hurdle for Posey to clear.

On the other hand, the guy does have three rings. And an MVP trophy. And a Rookie of the Year award. And an eight-season peak (2010-17) in which he slashed .309/.377/.475/.873, with a 136 OPS+ and an *average* bWAR of nearly five wins a season. So what's the argument that Posey was *not* the Best Catcher in Baseball for pretty much a decade?

JOE POSNANSKI

OK, by popular demand, we're going to continue the Hall of Fame Special that we started a couple of weeks ago. As a reminder, this only includes post-World War II players (we'll get to pre-World War II candidates at some point), and we're using Career Win Shares as our featured statistic, just to give you a different look from the WAR numbers you normally see.

(editor's note—Bill James invented the concept of Win Shares. Win Shares are a calculation of the number of wins a player contributed to his team. We credit each team with three Win Shares for each win. If a team wins 100 games, the players on that team will be credited with 300 Win Shares, according to their contributions at bat, on the mound and in the field. The quality of a team does not affect an individual player's Win Shares).

I'll start each category with the list from last time, and then add below.

Retired players who I believe *will* be elected

1. **Albert Pujols** (508 WS)
2. **Ichiro Suzuki** (323 WS)
3. **Adrian Beltré** (373 WS)
4. **Todd Helton** (318 WS)
5. **Billy Wagner** (182 WS)
6. **CC Sabathia** (242 WS)
7. **Andruw Jones** (276 WS)

There are three retired players I mistakenly left off this list:

New No. 3: Miguel Cabrera (429 WS): I guess it's hard for me to accept that Miggy is retired now. Just a hitting force. Four-time batting champion. Winner of the 2012 Triple Crown. Hit the ball as HARD as anyone I've ever seen.

New No. 9: Buster Posey (243 WS): I overlooked a couple of catchers because of their relatively low Win Shares/WAR totals. But Posey, in my view, is certainly going to the Hall of Fame. He was the best player and the leader of a three-time World Series champion. Yes, he played in only 1,371 games and managed just 1,500 hits, but his impact was immense, he was a fantastic hitter and a Gold Glove catcher, and in my view, he's in.

New No. 10: Yadier Molina (301 WS): Posey has the higher WAR, Molina has more Win Shares, Posey was the better hitter (by far), Molina was the better defensive catcher (up there with the best ever), Posey's career was short, Molina's was incredibly long, you can go back and forth on the two. I think they're both in.

Retired players who I think have a shot at election

1. **Joe Mauer (306 WS):** Comparing him with Posey and Molina, I think maybe he has more than a shot.
2. **Chase Utley (291 WS)**
3. **Jimmy Rollins (303 WS)**

I'm going to add one more, just for kicks, even though I don't THINK he has much of a shot, based on his early lack of support, but...

New No. 4: Bobby Abreu (356 WS): Bill James, who tends to stay out of Hall of Fame arguments, has been pretty adamant that Abreu was a great player. And he's right. You're talking about a guy who through age 33 was a .300/.400/.500 guy. And on top of that, he led the league in doubles once, in triples once, he would steal you 30 bases a year, he pretty much always scored 100 runs and usually drove in 100 runs. He's a statistical peculiarity, so you can have all sorts of fun with him:

Number of players in modern baseball history who hit .300 with 100 walks, 100 runs, 45 doubles and 30 stolen bases:

1. Bobby Abreu, 2002
2. Bobby Abreu, 2004

Or how about this: Number of players in modern baseball history with 100 walks, 35 doubles, 10 triples, 20 homers and 25 stolen bases:

1. Bobby Abreu, 1999
2. Bobby Abreu, 2000

Or this convoluted one: Number of players in modern baseball history with 100 walks, 100 runs, 100 RBIs, 165 hits, 36 doubles, 30 homers and 30 stolen bases.

1. Bobby Abreu, 2001
2. Bobby Abreu, 2004
3. Bobby Abreu, 2005

I had to do a little extra work on the last one — using 36 doubles as a filter — but I did that so I could get every one of Abreu's years from 2000 through 2005. Each of those six years was a numerical potpourri. I've been lax in my support of Abreu because I found him so boring as a player — I nicknamed him the MBGPE (Most Boring Great Player Ever) — but if our job here is to identify underappreciated great players, Abreu should be right at the top. He has gotten so little Hall of Fame support while other sabermetric darlings like **Todd Helton** (318 WS) and **Scott Rolen** (304 WS) and **Larry Walker** (308 WS) and **Andruw Jones** (276 WS) have flown up the Hall of Fame charts.

There's an argument to be made that Abreu was the best of them all. I'm not sure I want to be the one to MAKE that argument, but I am coming around to the idea that we need to be looking a lot more closely at Bobby Abreu.

Players not in the Hall because of steroid suspicions

1. **Barry Bonds** (702 WS)
2. **Roger Clemens** (437 WS)
3. **Alex Rodriguez** (491 WS)
4. **Manny Ramirez** (409 WS)
5. **Mark McGwire** (342 WS)
6. **Gary Sheffield** (430 WS) — I don't THINK he had enough support his last time on the ballot to jump from 55% last year to election this year, but you never know.

7. **Rafael Palmeiro** (394 WS)
8. **Sammy Sosa** (321 WS)
9. **Kevin Brown** (242 WS)
10. **Juan Gonzalez** (233 WS)

I thought of someone to add here:

New No. 9: Robinson Canó (349 WS): He became such a non-factor late in his career that it's easy to forget both how great a player he was in his prime (truly one of the great second basemen ever from 2006 through '16) and how beloved he was (he was so devoted to the Hackensack University Medical Center that they named the Occupational Therapy Suite after him). But he failed two separate drug tests and then he badly fell off in his late 30s. I imagine the Hall of Fame voters will not be generous, though I guess we don't know what the voting will be like in 2028.

Players not in the Hall for various non-baseball reasons

1. **Pete Rose** (549 WS)
2. **Carlos Beltran** (369 WS)
3. **Shoeless Joe Jackson** (294 WS)
4. **Curt Schilling** (252 WS)

I included Shoeless Joe Jackson here even as a pre-World War II player because he's a decidedly MODERN character thanks to W.P. Kinsella and the movie "Field of Dreams." I emphasized this point by saying how many people have come up to me to complain about Shoeless Joe being absent from The Baseball 100 even though, obviously, none of them actually saw Shoeless Joe play. I'm told that Brilliant Reader Tom took offense to this, thinking that I was saying that because people didn't see someone play, they're not allowed to have an opinion about him. This couldn't be further from what I meant, but when a BR takes away the wrong message, I blame myself for not being clear enough. I was only saying that to point out how many people still CARE about Shoeless Joe, which makes him a modern player, as far as I'm concerned.

Let me add one more here:

New No. 5: Omar Vizquel (282 WS): I forgot about him because, honestly, I was never overly taken by Vizquel's Hall of Fame case. He was a wonderful defensive shortstop, certainly, but so was **Dave Concepcion** and so was **Bert Campaneris**, and you could argue that both were better

hitters than Vizquel. And as for pure defense, people wanted to put Omar up there with **Ozzie Smith** and **Luis Aparicio**, but I'm not sure about that, I'd rank **Mark Belanger** ahead of him, and also maybe the spectacularly underrated defender **Rey Sanchez**, not to mention more modern guys like **Andrelton Simmons**. So, to me, Vizquel was a perfectly fine candidate, I liked watching him play a lot. Anyway, looking at it objectively, Omar was totally headed for the Hall of Fame, even with my reservations ... and then a bunch of bad stuff came out about him, and he lost his Hall of Fame ticket.

Best remaining players not in the Hall

1. **Lou Whitaker** (352 WS)
2. **Dwight Evans** (347 WS)
3. **Dick Allen** (352 WS)
4. **Luis Tiant** (256 WS)
5. **Tommy John** (289 WS)
6. **Bobby Grich** (329 WS)
7. **Graig Nettles** (321 WS)
8. **Dale Murphy** (294 WS)
9. **Dave Parker** (321 WS)
10. **Darrell Evans** (363 WS)

Here's where I asked if you want me to keep going ... and the vast majority of you said yes, because you don't want to let me write my football book. You asked me to go to **Will Clark**, so here we go, and I might even throw in some bonus players after.

No. 11: Bernie Williams (312 WS): There is an enduring theory — a complaint really — that Yankees get preferential treatment when it comes to awards and the Hall of Fame. Even as a charter member of the YLC (Yankee Loather Club), I know that this is actually nonsense. As for the awards, well, one fact puts it in perspective: **Derek Jeter** never won an MVP award. He got beat out, absurdly, by:

1998: Texas' Juan Gonzalez

1999: Texas' **Ivan Rodriguez**

2000: Oakland's **Jason Giambi**

2001: Seattle's Ichiro Suzuki

2006: Minnesota's **Justin Morneau**

2009: Minnesota's Joe Mauer

I'm not saying that Jeter deserved to win the award all these years. I'm just saying he put up MVP-type numbers in those six seasons, and look at the people who beat him out. Then, consider that Mariano Rivera never won a Cy Young Award.

There's no Yankees award bias.

As for the Hall of Fame, well, Bernie Williams is a good example of a pretty great Yankees player who received almost no Hall of Fame support. Again, support for our favorite sabermetric players, like Scott Rolen, skyrocketed ... but taking a step back, was Scott Rolen really a better player than Bernie Williams? Sure, he was a spectacular defensive player, while Williams' defense, despite his four Gold Gloves, doesn't look too great in retrospective, and he was a sleeper sofa in his final few years.

But Bernie Williams was a great hitter, a much better hitter than Rolen in his prime. From 1995 to 2002, Williams hit .321/.406/.531 with a 142 OPS+. That's over eight seasons, during which the Yankees won four World Series and a pennant. Rolen, in his career, had only one season with a 142 OPS+. Williams also hit 22 postseason home runs.

Look, I'm as apt to fall into the statistical hole as anybody, and I imagine I've done as much as anyone to promote the merits of WAR and its holistic view of ballplayers ... but if you take a step back from WAR (which just SAVAGES Williams for his defense), is Scott Rolen REALLY a better Hall of Fame candidate than Bernie Williams? I dunno, man.

No. 12: Reggie Smith (325 WS): I was curious, how many times did Reggie Smith have a higher bWAR than the league MVP? Well ...

1970: **Boog Powell** won the MVP with 5.1 WAR. Reggie Smith had 6.7 and finished 26th.

1974: **Jeff Burroughs** won the MVP with 3.6 WAR. Reggie Smith had 5.5 and finished 11th.

That's actually it ... I thought it might have been one or two more times. Reggie Smith didn't deserve to win the award in either of those years, by the way — it should have Yaz in '70 and

maybe **Rod Carew** in '74 — but my point is Smith put up quite a few good years for good teams, and if the breaks had fallen right, he might have taken an MVP Award. I wonder if that would have made a difference in the Hall of Fame voting.

No. 13: Keith Hernandez (311 WS): Maybe winning an MVP wouldn't have made any difference at all for Reggie Smith — Keith Hernandez won one and still got stunningly little Hall of Fame support. With Keith, I wonder if playing those final two seasons for the Mets and Cleveland cost him some support. Going into the 1989 season, he was a lifetime .300 hitter with 2,100 hits, and he had the MVP and those 11 Gold Gloves, etc. In those last two seasons, his batting average dropped to .296. That shouldn't matter at all, but I suspect it does.

I think the other thing that has held Hernandez back as a Hall of Fame candidate is that he wasn't a prototypical first baseman — he didn't hit home runs and he drove in 100 runs only once. He was, instead, a defensive force (the best defensive first baseman ever, I'd say) who hit for a high average, banged lots of doubles, scored lots of runs and walked a bunch. I wonder if, in today's game, Hernandez would be a leadoff hitter.*

**In his actual career, Hernandez NEVER started a game as a leadoff hitter and incredibly hit second in the lineup only four times, even though he was a prototypical No. 2 hitter.*

You know what else might have held Hernandez back? This is a weird thing to say but ... being born left-handed. I'll bet if Hernandez had been right-handed, he would have been a DYNAMITE shortstop, and at shortstop, with his offensive prowess, he would have been a Hall of Famer years ago. We don't think much about it, but Hernandez being born left-handed limited him to defensive positions where it's very, very, very difficult to get into the Hall of Fame without swatting lots of home runs.

No. 14: Al Oliver (305 WS): If you listen to MLB Radio's "Remember When," you know that host Ed Randall ends shows by saying that Al Oliver should be in the Hall of Fame.

How many people with a lifetime .300 batting average and more than 2,700 hits are not in the Hall of Fame? There are four:

- Ichiro Suzuki. He'll be elected first-ballot, maybe unanimously.

- Miguel Cabrera. He'll be elected first-ballot, maybe unanimously.
- Pete Rose. He would have been elected first-ballot, maybe unanimously, if he hadn't bet on baseball.
- Al Oliver.

You know what's interesting about those four? Only Oliver didn't get 10,000 plate appearances in the big leagues. Which, yeah, if Oliver had gotten as many plate appearances as those other guys, he would have gotten 3,000 hits and he WOULD be in the Hall of Fame.

And he should have been given that chance. Oliver's career ended after the 1985 season at age 39. It was clear that he was still a fine hitter, especially against righties. He was a fantastic weapon for the Blue Jays in the American League Championship Series; he hit .375 in the five games and twice delivered the knockout hit; he was so good that he forced Kansas City manager Dick Howser to change things up just to avoid him (Bill James writes about this at length in his epic review of that series).

Oliver became a free agent after the season ... and nobody offered him a job. Many years later, it would be ruled that Oliver was a victim of owner collusion, and he was awarded \$680,000 ... but that didn't give Oliver the at-bats he needed. I don't know that he would have gotten to 3,000 hits anyway, but he certainly deserved the chance to try, and he was a truly fantastic hitter.

No. 15: Kenny Lofton (287 WS): He was the unluckiest Hall of Fame soul, in that he came on the ballot with, deep breath, Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Sammy Sosa, Curt Schilling, Mike Piazza and Craig Biggio. On top of that, you already had **Jeff Bagwell and Edgar Martinez and Tim Lincecum and Larry Walker**, who would eventually get voted in by the BBWAA, and you had **Jack Morris and Lee Smith and Alan Trammell and Fred McGriff**, who would eventually get voted in by a veterans committee, and you had **Rafael Palmeiro and Mark McGwire** just muddying up the works. Lofton was barely considered, as suggested by the 3.2% he received. He deserves his case to be heard.

No. 16: Will Clark (331 WS): In Will Clark's last year, 2000, he hit .310/.418/.546 with 30 doubles, 21 home runs and a 145 OPS+ in 130 games. In his last 51 games for the Cardinals, he hit .345/.426/.655 and then hit .412 in the NLCS against the Mets.

A month later, he retired.

“The biggest thing is I’ve had three elbow surgeries,” he told the press. “Between 1996 and 1999, I’ve had 36 bone chips taken out of my elbow. The doctor said, ‘You’re not getting any younger, and one of these days I’m going to have to do it again if you keep doing this.’ I’m going to need my left arm for the rest of my life.”

Reporters theorized that he retired so he could spend more time doing the thing he loved most — hunting deer.

Later, he would say that he retired so that he could spend time with his family, particularly his son Trey, who had been diagnosed with a form of autism.

There’s so much happening with people that we don’t know.

Clark’s Hall of Fame case might have appealed to more people if he’d spent his entire career with the Giants. As it was, he bounced from San Francisco to Texas to Baltimore to St. Louis, and while Will the Thrill had big fans in all of those places (Rangers’ fan Clayton Kershaw wears 22 in his honor), he didn’t have one cohesive and concentrated fan base to push his Hall of Fame case the way, say, Jim Rice did.

No. 16: Vada Pinson (312 WS): There was a time when I was collecting all the Vada Pinson cards I could find, in anticipation of his Hall of Fame election. I mean, he had almost 2,800 career hits, and, upon his retirement, was one of two players in MLB history with 250 homers and 250 stolen bases — the other being a guy named **Willie Mays**. Pinson led the league in runs once, hits twice, doubles twice and triples twice. He scored 100-plus runs four times and drove in 100-plus runs twice.

Truth is, after he turned 27, Pinson was a very different ballplayer. Up to that point, he was a .300 hitter with power, he was blazing fast, he won a Gold Glove, he played every single game. But after age 27, he was not the same — a .270 hitter instead of .300, not much power, he began to lose his speed, his defense became a liability. He stayed on the Hall of Fame ballot for 15 years, but never garnered more than 16% of the vote.

No. 17: Lance Berkman (313 WS): The PED Era, we all know, made eye-popping offensive numbers look plain. Lance Berkman hit .293/.406/.537 for his career with 422 doubles, 366 homers and 144 OPS+. Those are just absurd and ridiculous numbers. And yet, so what? Lots of guys put up absurd and ridiculous numbers. Berkman's Hall of Fame candidacy was not only doomed (he got five votes), but nobody ever seems to even talk about him anymore.

You know who people still talk about? **Albert Belle**. There's a powerful feeling, especially in Cleveland, that the only reason Albert Belle is not in the Hall of Fame is because of his charming personality. And yet ...

Albert Belle: .295/.369/.564, 389 2B, 381 HR, 1,239 RBI, 974 R, 144 OPS+

Lance Berkman: .293/.406/.537, 422 2B, 366 HR, 1,234 RBI, 1,146 R, 144 OPS+.

Same-same.

No. 18: Carlos Delgado (303 WS): See Berkman, Lance. Eye-popping hitter whose spectacular career numbers — .280/.383/.546 with 483 home runs and more than 1,500 RBIs — just disappear from memory because of the time when he played.

No. 19: Rusty Staub (358 WS): Holy cow, look at the Win Shares total. WAR is not as impressed by Le Grande Orange — 45.8 bWAR, 47.9 fWAR — but by Win Shares, Staub is kind of a slam-dunk Hall of Famer.

He played forever, and as such he got more than 2,700 hits, 500 doubles (well, 499), almost 1,500 RBIs. But that doesn't really explain such a high Win Shares total, especially because Staub was a subpar defender and added no speed. So what gives?

I'll tell you one thing that gives: Staub spent almost his entire career in TERRIBLE-hitting ballparks. He spent his early years in the Astrodome, then went to Montreal, then went to Shea Stadium. Awful hitting ballparks. And he played in a terrible hitting time.

Look at the difference between Staub's career numbers and his neutralized batting numbers, which try to place Staub in a neutral park and a neutral era.

Career: .279/.362/.431, 2,716 H, 499 2B, 47 3B, 292 HR, 1,466 RBIs, 1189 runs.

Neutral: .290/.374/.444, 2,880 H, 529 2B, 47 3B, 305 HR, 1,588 RBIs, 1,281 runs.

The second of those lines sorta, kinda, maybe looks kind of Hall of Famerish, maybe? Actually it looks suspiciously like this mystery Hall of Famer:

Mystery HOF: .289/.356/.465, 488 2B, 49 3B, 384 HR, 1,628 RBIs, 1,299 runs

Well, that mystery Hall of Famer is **Harold Baines** ... who, no, wasn't my first choice for the Hall of Fame, but he's in anyway.

No. 20: Don Mattingly (263 WS): I've written plenty about Donnie Baseball and what an esteemed and illustrious player he was in the 1980s.

No. 21. Thurman Munson (206 WS): As long as we're talking about Yankees ...

Bill James is not a fan of Munson's Hall of Fame case or, indeed, it seems, Munson himself. I'm sympathetic to the cause. Munson was a force of nature, a fierce leader and competitor, a good hitter, a Gold Glove-fielding catcher, an MVP (though **George Brett*** was probably better) and an icon of the time.

I probably should mention that the MLB Network has a new documentary out on George Brett, and it has all your favorite baseball heroes — Reggie's in there, **Mike Schmidt, Robin Yount, Frank White and Willie Wilson for you K.C. folks, and, you know, me.*

I don't know what Munson had left at the time of his untimely death, but I do know that he wanted to play for Cleveland — he grew up in Northeast Ohio — and on the day that he died, my childhood friend Michael Fainer and I were in the backyard playing catch and talking about how many pennants the Tribe was going to win with Munson behind the plate.

THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS

Can you name the MLB pitchers to record 200 career wins since 2000?

257 wins Tigers, Astros, Mets, Astros

Justin Verlander

251 Indians, Brewers, Yankees

CC Sabathia

225 Royals, Brewers, Angels, Dodgers, D'backs, Astros, Royals

Zack Greinke

214 White Sox, Marlins, Blue Jays

Mark Buehrle

214 D'backs, Tigers, Nationals, Dodgers, Mets, Rangers

Max Scherzer

211 Indians, Expos, White Sox, Angels, Red Sox, Yankees, A's, Mets, Braves, Twins, Rangers

Bartolo Colon

211 A's, Braves, Giants

Tim Hudson

210 Dodgers

Clayton Kershaw

200 Red Sox, A's, Cubs, Nationals, Cards

John Lester

200 Cards

Adam Wainwright

Who am I?

3 time Cy Young Award winner

Led my league in ERA 5 times

2 time 20 game winner

Besides Shohei Ohtani, I am the last pitcher to win MVP

Pitched in 3 World Series

Across my career I had seasons where I led the majors in wins, ERA, innings pitched, ERA, complete games, strikeouts per 9 innings

Clayton Kershaw

There have been five teams in MLB history to feature 4 former MVPs on the same Roster. Here are the teams—name the former MVPs.

1973 Reds

Johnny Bench

Pete Rose

Joe Morgan

George Foster

1982 California Angels

Reggie Jackson

Fred Lynn

Rod Carew

Don Baylor

1996 Red Sox

Roger Clemens

Jose Canseco

Kevin Mitchell

Mo Vaughn

2021 Dodgers

Albert Pujols

Clayton Kershaw

Mookie Betts

Cody Bellinger

2022 Dodgers

Clayton Kershaw

Mookie Betts

Freddie Freeman

Cody Bellinger

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Please check them out and support them.