

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

12.3.2023

Good morning baseball fans,

I'm eagerly awaiting a block-buster coming out of the winter meetings.

In this week's edition a base running rule change, who knew NFL Hall of Famer **Ernie Nevers** pitched to **Babe Ruth?**, \$80 million for a kid with 6 games above AA?.

More Hall of Fame discussion including re-considering 'one and done's', an argument for **David Wright** and a (long) analysis of why **Joe Mauer** should get elected—your ballot is below. Please send me your votes this week (thank you to those who already did). I'll highlight your expert responses next week.

In Longer Reads **Ichiro Suzuki** Keeps Rolling, the Hall of Fame drum via Cleveland, **Frank Crosetti** and 17 World Series Rings

Grab a cup and enjoy.

### 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

## **THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE**

(answers at bottom)

**Two Hall of Famers played for the 1967 Yankees.**

**Whitey Ford** retired after 1966 so it's not him.

They were both position players.

The Yankees were everything to one of these Hall of Famers, a very small part of the career of the other.

Who are they?

**10 MLB players who hold their franchise's career record for hits but are not in the Hall of Fame:**

Mets

Angels

Oakland A's

Marlins

Rays

Blue Jays

D'backs

Phillies

Rangers

Nationals

Reds

Rockies

Mariners

**Most recent Cy Young by Team**

|              |      |            |
|--------------|------|------------|
| Arizona      | 2006 | RH starter |
| Atlanta      | 1998 | LH starter |
| Baltimore    | 1980 | RH starter |
| Boston       | 2016 | RH starter |
| Cubs         | 2015 | RH starter |
| White Sox    | 1993 | RH starter |
| Cincinnati   | 2020 | RH starter |
| Cleveland    | 2020 | RH starter |
| Detroit      | 2013 | RH starter |
| Houston      | 2022 | RH starter |
| Kansas City  | 2009 | RH starter |
| Angels       | 2005 | RH starter |
| Dodgers      | 2014 | LH starter |
| Miami        | 2022 | RH starter |
| Milwaukee    | 2021 | RH starter |
| Minnesota    | 2006 | LH starter |
| Mets         | 2019 | RH starter |
| Yankees      | 2023 | RH starter |
| Oakland      | 2002 | LH starter |
| Philadelphia | 2010 | RH starter |
| Pittsburgh   | 1990 | RH starter |
| San Diego    | 2023 | LF starter |

|               |      |            |
|---------------|------|------------|
| San Francisco | 2009 | RH starter |
| Seattle       | 2010 | RH starter |
| St. Louis     | 2005 | RH starter |
| Tampa Bay     | 2018 | LF starter |
| Toronto       | 2021 | LH starter |
| Washington    | 2017 | RH starter |

## **MISCELLANEOUS STUFF**

Good for White Sox pitcher **Liam Hendriks**, who beat cancer to pitch again—he was named American League Comeback Player of the Year.

Hendriks, who returned from Stage 4 non-Hodgkin's lymphoma to pitch for the White Sox last season, was selected for the **Tony Conigliaro** Award.

The Red Sox have presented the award annually since 1990 to players who have overcome adversity in the manner of the late Conigliaro, a Swampscott native whose career was shortened by a beanball in 1967.

Hendriks was diagnosed in December 2022 and underwent eight rounds of chemotherapy and four rounds of immunotherapy before pitching for Chicago on May 29 of this year.

He appeared in five games before an elbow injury ended his season. He is now a free agent.

**Willie Hernandez.** 1984 AL Cy Young and MVP winner as Tigers closer. He had a 13 year career, pitched in 744 games. He's the only player to win a Most Valuable Player and a Cy Young Award in the same season coupled with receiving no votes at all for either award at any other time.

**Christy Mathewson**, Hall of Fame pitcher won 373 games over 17 seasons. In 1908 the righthander went 37-11 for the New York Giants with a 1.43 ERA. He won 30 or more games 4 times. 435 complete games, 79 shutouts (he led the majors in shutouts 4 times). Mathewson was the first player to be elected to the Hall of Fame posthumously. He was a member of the inaugural class in 1936 but had died in 1925 from the effects of a WWI training accident.

Giants' now have a streak of 19 seasons without a 30-plus home run hitter (**Barry Bonds** hit 45 in 2004).

Two from Dan Shaughnessy column in the Boston Globe:

**Bill Lee and Danny Ainge** both finished their MLB careers with two home runs.

Five players went on to hit 45 or more homers in a single season after they played for the Red Sox--**Babe Ruth, Brady Anderson, Jose Canseco, Carlos Pena, and Kyle Schwarber**.

#### Youngest Average Age Position Players in 2023 playoffs

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| Rays         | 26.8 |
| Orioles      | 27.3 |
| Diamondbacks | 27.4 |
| Brewers      | 27.7 |
| Braves       | 27.9 |

The Pirates gave more than 40% of their playing time last year to players 24 and younger, more than 2300 plate appearances, second only to the Royals. That group, with all that playing time, produced a grand total of 0.7 fWAR, 25th among MLB teams for that cohort. The group hit just .222/.301/.260, with a 3/1 K/BB and just a 138 isolated power (166 was the league mark).

That's the future, and it tanked. The Pirates did exactly what a bad team is supposed to do: use the main asset they have -- playing time -- to develop the kids. But the kids threw up.

Five members of Philadelphia's bullpen — **José Alvarado, Seranthony Domínguez, Jeff Hoffman, Yuniór Marte, and Gregory Soto** — made 40 or more appearances and averaged 97 MPH or better with their heaters. The power helped produce results. The club's bullpen arms combined to log a 25.4% strikeout rate (sixth-highest in MLB) and a 3.88 FIP (fifth highest). Nine Philadelphia relievers recorded at least one save

**Matt Stairs** holds the record for most pinch-hit home runs with 23. He had at least one pinch-hit home run for eight different teams from 1992 to 2011. The New Brunswick, Canada native also had a pinch-hit homer in the 2008 NLCS for the Phillies.

**Sandy Koufax** struck out 15 or more batters 8 times in the regular season and once in the World Series (game 1 in 1963 against the Yankees). **Randy Johnson** holds the record with 29 games of 15+ K's.

Koufax led the NL in ERA his last 5 seasons (1962-1966), 3 of them he led the majors. **Clayton Kershaw** won 5 era titles including 4 in a row 2011-2014.

**Lefty Grove** won 11 AL ERA titles including 6 in a row 1934-1939. **Roger Clemens** won 6 AL ERA titles but never more than 3 in a row.

The Milwaukee Brewers agreed to an eight-year, \$80 million contract with outfield prospect Jackson Chourio. The deal includes two team options and sets the all-time record for the richest contract given to a minor league player.

The previous record belonged to Chicago White Sox outfielder **Luis Robert**, who signed a six-year, \$50 million deal in 2020 and has gone on to become an All-Star, Gold Glove and Silver Slugger Award winner.

Chourio, 19, has yet to play in a major league game, and he has just six games of experience above the Double-A level.

Chourio, who is originally from Venezuela, signed with the Brewers as an international free agent in 2021. He has quickly worked his way through the organization since then and is ranked as the No. 2 prospect in all of baseball by MLB.com.

After impressing across multiple minor league levels in 2022, Chourio started at Double-A last season and in 122 games, he slashed .280/.336/.467 with 22 home runs, 89 RBI, 84 runs scored and 43 stolen bases.

Chourio was selected to the All-Star Futures Game as a result of his stellar play, and he earned a six-game look at Triple-A, hitting .333 with two RBI and a steal.

The kid may be a star and it will wind up a very team-friendly contract, but that's an \$80 million risk for a mid-market team that needs plenty of help at the major league level.

The current ages of the last three World Series-winning managers are 68 (**Bruce Bochy**), 74 (**Dusty Baker**), and 68 (**Brian Snitker**). The World Series-winning managers in three of the four preceding seasons — **Dave Roberts**, **Alex Cora**, and **A.J. Hinch** — were all in their 40s when their teams took home the title. The fourth, **Dave Martinez**, was 55.

### Quick Comparisons

**Juan Soto** slashed .307/.422/.604 with 23 home runs in road games this year. He slashed .240/.398/.429 with 12 home runs in home games.

**Cody Bellinger** slashed .311/.358/.502 with 12 home runs in away games this year. He slashed .302/.354/.548 with 14 home runs in home games.

**Chase Utley** had 154 stolen bases and was caught stealing 22 times.

**Dave Parker** had 154 stolen bases and was caught stealing 113 times.

**Jorge Orta** was a second baseman/outfielder who logged 1,619 hits, including 130 home runs, while playing for five teams from 1972-1987. An All-Star with the Chicago White Sox in 1975 and the Cleveland Indians in 1980, the Mazatlan, Mexico native won a controversial 1985 World Series with the Kansas City Royals. In the bottom of the ninth inning of Game 6, first base umpire **Don Denkinger** incorrectly called Orta safe, and the Royals proceeded to plate a pair of runs to beat the St. Louis Cardinals 2-1. They won the franchise's first-ever title the following day.

### Yoshinobu Yamamoto

The right-handed Japanese pitcher, still just 25, was officially posted this week, meaning he has until Jan. 4 to sign a contract with a big-league team. Yamamoto is coming off a 2023 campaign that saw him go 16-6 in 23 starts, striking out 169 hitters against 28 walks in 164 innings, and posting a minuscule 1.21 ERA. Worried that might have been a one-year aberration? How about we combine the last *three* seasons? 49-16, 557 2/3 innings, 580 strikeouts, 110 walks, 1.44 ERA.

Oh, you want career numbers? In NPB, he's 70-29 over his seven-year career, striking out 922 in 897 innings, walking 216 and posting an ERA of 1.82. It all adds up to big upside as a player and for his salary.

The Yankees are coming off 82 wins, their fewest over 162 games since 1992.

This list is painful. Eleven different Yankees started in left field during the 2023 season:

**Oswaldo Cabrera** (51 games), **Isiah Kiner-Falefa** (37), **Billy McKinney** (33), **Everson Pereira** (27), **Jake Bauers** (23), **Aaron Hicks** (19), **Greg Allen** (11), **Franchy Cordero** (4), **Willie Calhoun** (3), **Giancarlo Stanton** (2).

**Babe Ruth**—only player with over 1,000 innings pitched (1,221) and career average over .300 (.342).

On Nov. 28, 1929, **Ernie Nevers** made NFL history by scoring all of his team's points in a 40–6 Cardinals win over the Bears. Nevers, a Hall of Fame fullback, had six rushing touchdowns and kicked four extra points. He also accounted for all of his team's points the previous week in a 19–0 win over the Dayton Triangles (three touchdowns and one extra point).

Nevers played only five NFL seasons (two with the Duluth Eskimos and three with the Cardinals) before retiring but was a first-team All-Pro in all five seasons and was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame as part of the inaugural class in 1963.

Nevers also starred as a baseball and basketball player at Stanford and played three seasons as a pitcher for the St. Louis Browns. His pro baseball career was unremarkable (4.64 ERA), but he did play a role in MLB history by giving up two home runs to **Babe Ruth** during his 60-homer season in 1927.

Not the A's. Not the Rockies. Not the Pirates, Marlins or Tigers. The Royals now have the worst record in baseball since winning the World Series in 2015.

Most times 2<sup>nd</sup> in MVP voting without ever winning-- **Duke Snider**, 4 (1950, 1953, 1955, 1956).

Rumors fly that **Juan Soto** is on the trading block as the Padres try to save payroll and likely don't want to shell out more than half a billion \$ to extend him.

Free agency eligibility leads usually to older guys where the big bet is about when they will fall off their norms as they age. Soto at age 25 is rare—a star available for his prime. 25 years old and has a .284/.421/.524 slash line in 779 career games. 776 hits in those 779 games including 319 extra base hits. He has hit 160 HRs and walked 640 times. His defense ain't great (neither was **Ted Williams**) but the offensive production is undeniable.

From San Diego's perspective-- Six pitchers who combined for nearly 700 innings with the Padres last season — **Blake Snell, Seth Lugo, Michael Wacha, Nick Martinez, Luis Garcia and Josh Hader** — are on the open market.

Their regional TV deal has fallen apart. MLB Trade Rumors projects Soto's salary in his final year of arbitration to be \$33 million. The Padres intend to open the season with a payroll of approximately \$200 million, and Fangraphs projects their current number with Soto to be \$189 million. Their projected luxury-tax payroll of \$242 million, meanwhile, is \$5 million above the threshold. A Soto trade not only could replace some of those innings, but also create the financial flexibility to add even more pitching.

Speaking of Josh Hader -- *He averaged 14 strikeouts per nine, the league hit .163 against him.*

The Pittsburgh Pirates have hired Sarah Gelles as an assistant GM. The Amherst College graduate joined the Pirates as a baseball operations intern in 2009 before going on to work for MLB's Labor Relations department in 2010, the Baltimore Orioles from 2011-2018, and the Houston Astros for the last five years. Her most recent position was Director, Research & Development.

Which player holds the record for most one-base hits in a single season? (A hint: he also has the third-highest single-season singles total.)

The answer is **Ichiro Suzuki**, with 225 singles in 2004. **Wee Willie Keeler** had 206 in 1898, while Suzuki's 203 in 2007 is the third-highest single-season total.

Hall of Fame right-hander **Don Drysdale** went 11-11 with a 3.33 ERA for the Montreal Royals in 1955. **Tommy Lasorda**, a left-handed pitcher before becoming a Hall of Fame manager, went 9-8 with a 3.27 ERA for the Triple-A club that year.

#### **LARGEST SINGLE YEAR FREE AGENT HAULS (HOW MANY WOULD YOU RATE A SUCCESS?)**

**2022-23 Mets: Brandon Nimmo, Edwin Díaz, Justin Verlander, Kodai Senga, José Quintana, Adam Ottavino, David Robertson, Omar Narváez**

*Nimmo: 8 years, \$162 million*

*Díaz: 5 years, \$102 million*

*Verlander: 2 years, \$86.7 million (with 2025 vesting option)*

*Senga: 5 years, \$75 million*

*Quintana: 2 years, \$26 million*

*Ottavino: 1 year, \$14.5 million (with 2024 player option)*

*Robertson: 1 years, \$10 million*

*Narváez: 1 year, \$8 million (with 2024 player option)*

**2021-22 Rangers: Corey Seager, Marcus Semien and Jon Gray**

*Seager: 10 years, \$325 million*

*Semien: 7 years, \$175 million*

*Gray: 4 years, \$56 million*

**2014-15 Red Sox: Hanley Ramirez, Pablo Sandoval**

*Sandoval: 5 years, \$95 million*

*Ramirez: 4 years, \$88 million*

**2013-14 Yankees: Jacoby Ellsbury, Brian McCann, Masahiro Tanaka**

*Tanaka: 7 years, \$155 million*

*Ellsbury: 7 years, \$153 million*

*McCann: 5 years, \$85 million*

**2011-12 Angels: Albert Pujols, C.J. Wilson**

*Pujols: 10 years, \$240 million*

*Wilson: 5 years, \$77.5 million*

**2011-12 Marlins: José Reyes, Mark Buehrle, Heath Bell**

*Reyes: 6 years, \$106 million*

*Buehrle: 4 years, \$58 million*

*Bell: 3 years, \$27 million*

**2008-09 Yankees: CC Sabathia, Mark Teixeira, A.J. Burnett**

*Teixeira: 8 years, \$180 million*

*Sabathia: 7 years, \$161 million*

*Burnett: 5 years, \$82.5 million*

**2004-05 Mets: Carlos Beltrán, Pedro Martínez**

*Beltrán: 7 years, \$119 million*

*Martínez: 4 years, \$53 million*

**2003-04 Angels: Bartolo Colón, Vladimir Guerrero**

*Guerrero: 5 years, \$70 million*

*Colón: 4 years, \$51 million*

**2000-01 Rockies: Mike Hampton, Denny Neagle**

*Hampton: 8 years, \$121 million*

*Neagle: 5 years, \$51 million*

**1998-99 D-backs: Randy Johnson, Steve Finley**

*Johnson: 4 years, \$53 million*

*Finley: 4 years, \$21.5 million*

**1996-97 Marlins: Moises Alou, Bobby Bonilla, Alex Fernandez**

*Fernandez: 5 years, \$35 million*

*Alou: 5 years, \$25 million*

*Bonilla: 4 years, \$23.3 million*

**1979-80 Astros: Nolan Ryan, Joe Morgan**

*Ryan: 4 years, \$4.5 million*

*Morgan: Details not available*

**1976-77 Angels: Bobby Grich, Don Baylor**

**1976-77 Padres: Gene Tenace, Rollie Fingers**

**1976-77 Yankees: Reggie Jackson, Don Gullett**

**MOST HOME RUNS FOR A SINGLE TEAM 2010-2019**

(your faithful editor got 11 of 18)

Angels            **Mike Trout**            285

Blue Jays        **Jose Bautista**            272

Tigers            **Miguel Cabrera**            268

|           |                          |     |
|-----------|--------------------------|-----|
| Marlins   | <b>Giancarlo Stanton</b> | 267 |
| Orioles   | <b>Chris Davis</b>       | 253 |
| Brewers   | <b>Ryan Braun</b>        | 241 |
| Orioles   | <b>Adam Jones</b>        | 235 |
| Blue Jays | <b>Edwin Encarnacion</b> | 231 |
| Reds      | <b>Joey Votto</b>        | 231 |
| Rockies   | <b>Nolan Arenado</b>     | 227 |
| Braves    | <b>Freddie Freeman</b>   | 227 |
| Red Sox   | <b>David Ortiz</b>       | 224 |
| Cubs      | <b>Anthony Rizzo</b>     | 217 |
| Rockies   | <b>Carlos Gonzalez</b>   | 214 |
| Angels    | <b>Albert Pujols</b>     | 211 |
| D'backs   | <b>Paul Goldschmidt</b>  | 209 |
| Indians   | <b>Carlos Santana</b>    | 208 |
| Rays      | <b>Evan Longoria</b>     | 201 |

**DIRT IS GOOD, GRASS IS BAD. MLB MIGHT ELIMINATE ITS MOST CONTROVESIAL RULE**



ROB SCHUMACHER THE REPUBLIC VIA USA TODAY NETWORK

Arizona Diamondbacks **Corbin Carroll**, center, is forced out by Los Angeles Dodgers first baseman **Freddie Freeman**, right, in the first inning of Game 3 of the NLDS at Chase Field on Oct. 11. The MLB Joint Competition Committee is looking at ways to simplify the rules dealing with the running lane to first base.

TOM VERDUCCI, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Is the most controversial rule in baseball about to die?

Around this time last year, I wrote how the MLB Joint Competition Committee was exploring ways to simplify or eliminate the running lane to first base. Now, the committee has made a formal proposal that has entered the required 45-day review period. By Christmas, we may have seen the last of the running lane rule as we know it-but not the lane itself.

Confused? That's the nature of the running lane, a century-long source of controversy and confusion among umpires, managers and players. It was a veteran umpire on the committee,

**Bill Miller**, who suggested an end to keeping runners in that 45-foot lane on the foul side of the first base line. The proposal: Allow the runner the entire width of the dirt path between home and first base.

As one veteran manager put it: “I’m glad there is no more interpretation. Dirt is good. Grass is bad.”

The running lane would still be chalked before games. An MLB source said the lane would be needed for “the right boundary of the line to keep runners from running too far in foul territory on plays where the ball is in foul territory,” such as dropped third strikes.

The amended running lane is one of several rule changes-most dealing with pace of play-proposed by the 11-member Competition Committee, which includes six MLB representatives, four players and one umpire. No proposal can go to a vote until after the 45-day consultation period. That window can be extended by mutual agreement of the MLBPA and MLB.

The running lane rule, officially Rule 5.09(a)(1), states that a runner is out when he runs outside of the 45-foot lane and in the umpire’s judgment interferes with the fielder’s ability to catch a throw. The runner is permitted outside of that three-foot-wide lane for his last step to the base.

Game 4 of the 1969 World Series ended when Mets pinch hitter **J.C. Martin** was hit by a throw from Orioles pitcher Pete Richert while outside the lane and more than one step from the base. No call was made by the umpires. Reports at the time mentioned the rule had been in place for “50 years” but rarely called.

Recent running lane controversies involved **Cody Bellinger** in Game 4 of the 2018 World Series (not called), **Trea Turner** in Game 6 of the ‘19 World Series (called out) and **Jake Myers** last June 14 (not called on a game-ending play). The Turner and Myers calls both went against Washington manager **Dave Martinez**, who lashed out after the Myers non-call by saying, “They need to fix the rule. ... I’m tired of it. Fix it!”

The Competition Committee was formed out of the most recent CBA negotiations. Any member of the committee or the commissioner’s office may formally propose a rule change for consideration. Following the 45-day review period, a final vote is taken, requiring majority support to pass. Any rule change approved by the committee must be announced before the mandatory spring training reporting date for players.

The three major rule changes adopted for last season were proposed by the commissioner’s office: the pitch timer, the ban on defensive shifts and bigger bases. The proposals passed by votes of 7–4, 7–4 and 11–0, respectively. The votes against came from the four player representatives on the committee.

Here are other key rules proposals for 2024 and my takes on them:

Reduce the pitch timer with bases occupied from 20 seconds to 18 seconds. Fine with it. Not as big of a deal as it seems. Pitchers delivered the ball last season with an average of 7.3 seconds left on the 20-second timer, so there is room to trim. (For the 15-second clock with the bases empty, an average of 6.5 seconds remained.)

As big of a hit as the pitch timer was last season, games slowed as the season played out. Average time of game increased from 2:37 in April to 2:44 in September. Players learned to adjust under the new rules (more batter timeouts, more pitcher step-offs, more balls tossed out of play, etc.). MLB wants to get closer to, not further from, the 2:30 preferred time of game from its fan polling.

One significant caveat: the MLBPA has concerns about pitcher injury rates under the pitch timer. Those concerns must be met with comprehensive data.

One eventual solution might be a one-size-fits-all clock (regardless of runners). In the last month of last season, MLB experimented with a universal 17-second clock in Triple A. It found no significant increase in violations in that small sample. In MLB, 67% of games last season did not have a violation.

Reduce mound visits from five to four in a nine-inning game. Fine. I'm on board with anything that puts the game more in the hands of players and keeps managers and coaches off the field. While we're at it, please get rid of the rule that allows an uncharged mound visit every time a pinch hitter is announced. Teams generally have only four hitters on the bench. The time to review how to pitch those four guys is in pregame meetings, not by bringing an automatic and unnecessary stop to the game. Again: Let the players figure it out.

Infielders cannot block bases. Thanks to **Whit Merrifield** for this common-sense proposal. This is a player safety issue. Why should infielders be allowed to block a base with their leg when catchers can't?

It's especially dangerous now because most runners slide headfirst due to an unintended consequence of replay (runners who arrive safe but are ruled out when their toes get one millimeter off the bag on a feet-first slide). In 2022, White Sox star center fielder Luis Robert Jr. sprained his wrist on a headfirst slide in which **Jonathan Schoop** dropped his knee to put his entire left leg in front of the bag.

One offshoot of the swipe tag-only proposal is a proposal to eliminate replay challenges of catchers blocking the plate. In some cases, umpires in the replay center were interpreting plays differently than umpires on the field.

"That makes sense," says one veteran manager. "[I] just don't want the rule to be abused by catchers. The only reason I liked [a challenge option] is because it changes the scoreboard."

Pitchers must work out of the stretch with runners on. Not a fan. The proposal stems from confusion with a runner at third base and pitchers who use a “hybrid” delivery, which borrows elements from the stretch and windup positions.

Many pitchers prefer the windup with two outs and a runner on third, in part because they are more comfortable and/or more effective. MLB shouldn’t legislate that choice of how a pitcher competes, especially when it’s not a big enough problem that needs a solution.

## **HALL OF FAME**

**Torii Hunter** played in 2,372 games and had 2,452 hits, including 488 doubles and 353 home runs. He had 4,087 total bases, 195 stolen bases, and a 110 wRC+.

**Andruw Jones** played in 2,196 games and had 1,933 hits, including 383 doubles and 434 home runs. He had 3,690 total bases, 152 stolen bases, and a 111 wRC+.

Jones has a clear advantage in fWAR — the margin is markedly smaller by WAR — largely because of his glove. It is no secret that the Willemstad, Curaçao native was an elite defender — arguably the best ever at his position — before seeing his skills rapidly erode after age 30. That said, Hunter won nine Gold Gloves as a centerfielder, one fewer than Jones was awarded. Was the gap in their defensive prowess truly as wide as the metrics suggest? Color me skeptical. Both players are on the Hall of Fame ballot

First player in five decades to make the Hall with less than 2,000 hits? **Jimmy Rollins**? **Chase Utley**? Three years from now **Buster Posey**? A few pretty good hitters in the Hall who did not have 2,000 hits—**Bill Dickey** (1969), **Tony Oliva** (1917), **Gil Hodges** (1921), **Lou Boudreau** (1,779), **Mickey Cochrane** (1,652), **Hank Greenberg** (1,628), **Jackie Robinson** (1,563), **Ralph Kiner** (1,451), **Hack Wilson** (1,461).

Hall of Famers have often made these sorts of brief detours, even if the memories of them in those uniforms don't seem quite right years later.

St. Louis Browns **Dizzy Dean** 1947, 1 game

Baltimore Orioles **Tim Lincecum** 2001, 4 games

Boston Red Sox: **Tom Seaver** 1986, 104 innings

Chicago White Sox: **Ken Griffey Jr.** 2008, 41 games

Cleveland Guardians: **Dave Winfield** 1995, bated .141 at age 43

Detroit Tigers: **Larry Doby** 1958, 18 games

Houston Astros: **Randy Johnson** 1998, 11 games

Kansas City Royals: **Gaylord Perry** 1983, 14 games

Los Angeles Angels: **Rickey Henderson** 1997, 32 games

Minnesota Twins: **Seve Carlton** 1987-88, 13 games

Washington Senators: **Lefty Gomez** 1943, 1 game

New York Yankees: **Lee Smith** 1993, 8 games

Oakland Athletics: **Orlando Cepeda** 1972, 3 games

Seattle Mariners: **Goose Gossage** 1991, 36 games

Tampa Bay Rays: **Wade Boggs**, 1998-99

Texas Rangers: **Vladimir Guerrero**

Toronto Blue Jays: **Phil Niekro**

Niekro debuted with 1964 Milwaukee Braves as a teammate of **Warren Spahn** and finished with one game for the '87 Atlanta Braves, who had a rookie named **Tom Glavine**. Over those 24 seasons, the knuckleball artist threw 5,404 innings, more than any other pitcher who started his career after 1907. Twelve of those innings came for the Jays in '87 at age 48.

Arizona Diamondbacks: **Roberto Alomar** 2004, 38 games

Atlanta/Milwaukee/Boston Braves: **Babe Ruth** 1935 hit .181 with 6 HRs in 92 games

Chicago Cubs: **Hoyt Wilhelm** 1970, 3 games

Cincinnati Reds: **Christy Mathewson** 1916, 1 game (but he did take over as Reds manager)

Los Angeles Dodgers: **Juan Marichal** 1974, 2 games

Miami Marlins: **Mike Piazza** 1998 4 games (then traded to the Mets)

Milwaukee Brewers: **Hank Aaron** 1975-76.

New York Mets: **Yogi Berra** 1965, 4 games (he became coach and then manager)

Philadelphia Phillies: **Ryne Sandberg** 1965, 2 games (then traded to the Cubs where he did all right).

San Diego Padres: **Greg Maddux** 2007-08, 60 starts

San Francisco Giants: **Steve Carlton** 1986, 6 games

St. Louis Cardinals: **John Smoltz** 1979, 7 games

Washington Nationals/Montreal Expos: **Randy Johnson** 1988-89, 11 starts (then traded to Seattle).

**Gary Sheffield.** He won a batting title, launched over 500 home runs — he had 14 seasons with at least 20 and eight with at least 30.

In his 2015 debut, he received just 11.7% of the vote, and over the next four years, he gained barely any ground. But from 2019 to '21, he jumped from 13.6% to 30.5% to 40.6%, with the fifth-largest and third-largest gains on the '20 and '21 ballots. After repeating with the same percentage in 2022, he jumped to 55% in '23,

**Adrián Beltré** stands out as a near lock for first-ballot election.

Beltré is in the conversation as one of the top half-dozen third basemen in history, and perhaps even that standing understates an incredible body of work. Over 21 big league seasons from 1998-2018, he hit .286/.339/.480 with 477 homers (third most by a third baseman) and 3,166 hits (more than anyone whose primary position was the hot corner) while winning five Gold Gloves.

**Andre Dawson** has petitioned the Hall to change his plaque so he has a Cubs hat—he currently is in an Expos hat. In his 21 year career Dawson played 11 seasons in Montreal, 6 for the Cubs (he also played for the Red Sox and Markins). He was 1977 Rookie of the Year with the Expos and twice was NL MVP runner-up. He won MVP in 1987 with the Cubs.

Jayson Stark, The Athletic

**The All One-and-Done team.** By and large, when my good friends in the Baseball Writers' Association of America vote, we're mostly not the knuckleheads you undoubtedly think we are. We get lots and lots and lots of these votes right. No kidding.

But we have whiffed on some really good players, who deserved better than to get booted off the ballot after one appearance because they didn't get at least 5 percent of the vote. Here's a partial list of our worst one-and-dones, just from the last decade — and I didn't even include any obvious PED luminaries:

**2022 — Mark Teixeira**  
**2019 — Lance Berkman, Roy Oswalt**  
**2018 — Johan Santana, Johnny Damon**  
**2017 — Jorge Posada**  
**2016 — Jim Edmonds**  
**2015 — Carlos Delgado**  
**2014 — Kenny Rogers, Luis Gonzalez**  
**2013 — Kenny Lofton, David Wells**

In our defense, we were dealing with massively overstuffed ballots in many of those years and not enough slots to include everybody. Still, every player on that list except Posada (42.7 WAR) and Delgado (44.4) finished his career with at least 50 wins above replacement (the Baseball Reference version). Edmonds and Lofton were in the 60s. So it's hard to believe that not one of them collected enough votes to get even a second look.

### **David Wright**

Wright's first 10 seasons were spectacular. If we'd been writing a pick-the-active-Hall-of-Famers column a decade ago, 10 seasons into Wright's career, he'd have zoomed right to the top of that list, alongside **Albert Pujols, Miguel Cabrera and Joe Mauer**, who also is making his first appearance on the ballot this year. Wright was still only 30 years old after those first 10 seasons (2004-13). And his eyeball-grabbing stat line looked like this:

.301/.382/.506/.888 slash line  
222 HR, 183 SB  
46.5 Baseball Reference WAR  
48.7 FanGraphs WAR

Only six retired third basemen from that era were ahead of him on the WAR leaderboard through their first 10 seasons. All six are in the Hall of Fame: **Wade Boggs, Mike Schmidt, Ron Santo, George Brett, Chipper Jones and Scott Rolen**.

A mere four players from that era — at any position — rolled up that many homers, steals and wins above replacement in their first 10 seasons. How about this foursome: **Mike Trout, Barry Bonds, Bobby Bonds** and ... David Wright.

**Wright had eight seasons with an OPS+ of 124 or better.** So how many third basemen in history had that many seasons that were that much better than league average (with at least 475 plate appearances)? Well, only three finished their careers with *more than* eight of those seasons: Schmidt (11), **Eddie Mathews** (11) and Brett (10). Plus there were four others, besides Wright, with exactly eight: Chipper, Boggs, Santo and Rolen. And all seven of those third basemen have plaques in Cooperstown.

**Wright had five seasons with at least 40 doubles and 20 homers.** So is that good? It seems good. In fact, it's the most by any third baseman in history — two more than anyone else who ever played there.

**He once spun off four straight seasons (2005-08) with at least 70 extra-base hits.** That's monster production at third base, friends. The only third baseman in history with a longer streak is **Nolan Arenado**, with five. the only other third baseman who even had four in a row was some guy named ... Mike Schmidt.

**So about that Kirby Puckett comp ...** David Wright isn't the first player to find himself in that *if Kirby Puckett is a Hall of Famer* discussion. I'm sure he won't be the last.

Not that Puckett's first-ballot election in 2001 was any sort of blight on the process. But because the Twins' center fielder awoke one day in spring training 1996 and found himself essentially blind in one eye, his career was way too short (12 seasons). So that opens the door for comparisons to other players whose Cooperstown path was also rudely interrupted by health issues beyond their control.

All right, so how does Wright stack up against Puckett? Incredibly well ... if you choose the right metrics. Such as these, for instance:

|      | Wright | Puckett |
|------|--------|---------|
| fWAR | 51.2   | 44.9    |
| bWAR | 49.2   | 51.2    |
| HR   | 242    | 207     |
| SB   | 196    | 134     |
| OPS+ | 133    | 124     |
| wRC+ | 133    | 122     |
| WPA  | 30.2   | 27.0    |

JAWS\* 44.3 44.4

WAR7\*\* 39.5 37.6

*(\*The Jay Jaffe metric that factors in both career WAR and seven-year peak WAR.)*

*( \*\*A way to measure a player's peak, via combined WAR over his seven best seasons.)*

So by all those measures, does David Wright look like a Hall of Famer *if Kirby Puckett is a Hall of Famer*? I'll say. Except ...

We left some really important other factors out of that chart! Let's discuss.

- For one thing, volume does (and should) still matter. So it's not exactly irrelevant that Puckett played nearly 200 more games (1,783) than Wright (1,585).
- It's even more relevant that Puckett topped 2,300 hits, but Wright never made it to 1,800 (finishing with 1,777). It has been nearly 50 years since the writers elected any player with fewer than 2,000 hits (**Ralph Kiner** in 1975).
- And then there are all those bonus points Puckett rolled up ... by winning two World Series (to Wright's zero) ... by winning a batting title (while Wright never led his league in any traditional stat) ... by winning six Gold Glove awards (to Wright's two) ... and by making 10 All-Star teams (to Wright's seven) ... among other things.

So once you factor all that in, is David Wright a Hall of Famer? I can hear the Andruw Jones Fan Club howling from here. If we based our Hall of Fame votes just on how everybody's career looked through age 30, we'd have a very different Hall than we have now. So we're traveling down a rocky road if we start selectively deciding to overlook lack of longevity in some players but not others.

This is not a *David Wright is a Hall of Famer and anybody who doesn't think so is an idiot* kind of column. This is a column that says I've seen what can happen when we allow ourselves time to give the best players of their era the long, thoughtful look they deserve. Ask **Edgar Martinez**. Ask **Tim Lincecum**. Ask **Larry Walker**.

And now it's David Wright's turn. He's earned that long look. So let's hope he gets it.

Jay Jaffe, FanGraphs

**Joe Mauer** was one of baseball's greatest hometown-boy-makes-good stories. A former No. 1 overall pick out of Cretin-Derham Hall High School in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 2001, he spent the

entirety of his 15-year career with the Twins. Despite a listed height of 6-foot-5, he excelled at catching and was also an elite left-handed hitter, with a quick, compact stroke and impeccable judgment of the strike zone. Between his outstanding two-way performances, his handsome good looks, and his wholesome public persona, he was an ideal face-of-the-franchise player. He played a central role in helping the Twins, who were targeted for contraction just five months after he was drafted, to four postseason appearances. Along the way he made six All-Star teams and won three Gold Gloves and three batting titles apiece, not to mention the 2009 AL MVP award.

Alas, the Twins were swept in each of their playoff series, and for all of Mauer's accomplishments, his career was punctuated by injuries, starting with a meniscus tear in the second game of his rookie season. Post-concussion problems forced him to hang up the tools of ignorance and shift to first base; his power, which had only intermittently shown up even in the best of times, with one season of more than 13 homers, dissipated upon moving to the team's beautiful new ballpark; and some segment of the fan base blamed his eight-year, \$184 million contract extension for the team's apparent financial limitations. Ultimately, he chose to retire at age 35 due to continued concussion-related complications.

All of that is proof that Mauer's story wasn't a fairy tale, but even so, it was a great career. So great, in fact, that Mauer ranks seventh in JAWS among catchers despite its limitations, and that's without accounting for his above-average pitch framing, a factor that will become increasingly important to grapple with in upcoming Hall of Fame debates. Even without a bonus for his upstanding character (the original intent of the infamous clause in the voting rules), he's eminently worthy of a spot in the Hall of Fame. Whether he'll get there on the first try is another question, however, particularly amid a crowded field and an electorate that has not only become much less generous lately but also has rarely treated even the most obvious honorees among catchers with appropriate respect.

2024 BBWAA Candidate: Joe Mauer

| Player     | Career WAR | Peak WAR       | JAWS |
|------------|------------|----------------|------|
| Joe Mauer  | 55.2       | 39.0           | 47.1 |
| Avg. HOF C | 53.6       | 34.7           | 44.2 |
| H          | HR         | AVG/OBP/SLG    | OPS+ |
| 2123       | 143        | .306/.388/.439 | 124  |

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference

Joseph Patrick Mauer was born into a baseball-saturated family on April 19, 1983 in St. Paul. His grandfather, Donald C. "Jake" Mauer Sr. (born 1931) had a brief professional career in the

White Sox organization; his three older brothers played professionally as well, with John Mauer (b. 1922) playing for independent teams before and after World War II and Ken Mauer (b. 1927) playing in the Dodgers' chain (which had a St. Paul affiliate) from 1944 to '48.

When Joe was nine, Jake Jr. invented and later marketed a device to aid hitting called Mauer's Quickswing, which uses a tilted PVC pipe, "a unique delayed gravity-drop design to help batters develop greater bat speed, hand-eye coordination, reflexes, and muscle memory." Young Joe and his brothers spent hours in the family basement honing their craft with the Quickswing. At Cretin-Derham High, Joe was a three-sport star, earning two All-State honors as a guard in basketball, and *USA Today's* national player of the year honors in both football (as a quarterback, in 2000) and baseball (2001); he's the only athlete ever to win both. He was also *Baseball America's* High School Player of the Year, the first of numerous top rankings bestowed upon him by the publication.

Following in the footsteps of Cretin-Derham's Chris Weinke, the 2000 Heisman Trophy winner (and previously a minor leaguer in the Blue Jays chain), Mauer signed a letter of intent to play football at Florida State. With **Mark Prior** thought to be more expensive to sign, the Twins chose the local boy with the first pick of the 2001 draft despite the football risk and signed him for a bonus of \$5.15 million; Prior, chosen second by the Cubs, received a \$10.5 million package, including a \$4 million bonus and a five-year major league deal.

Mauer began his professional career with a flourish, hitting .400/.492/.491 in 130 plate appearances for the Twins' Rookie-league Elizabethton affiliate; he didn't homer but vaulted to no. 7 on *BA's* Top 100 Prospects list the following spring. He spent 2002 at A-level Quad Cities and split '03 between High-A Fort Myers and Double-A New Britain, hitting a combined .338/.398/.434. On the strength of his 80-grade arm and the belief that his game power would eventually manifest itself ("Twins scouts insist he has the power to one day hit 35–40 in a season if he wants to," to quote *BA*), he entered 2004 as the game's no. 1 prospect. He also had a clear path to the starting job thanks to the trade of starter **A.J. Pierzynski** to the Giants, a heist that fetched **Joe Nathan, Francisco Liriano, and Boof Bonser**. The 20-year-old Mauer made the Twins out of spring training and went 2-for-3 with a pair of walks against Cleveland on Opening Day; his first base on balls came against **CC Sabathia**, and his first hit was a single off **Rafael Betancourt**.

Alas, the next night Mauer tore the medial meniscus in his left knee while sliding in an attempt to catch a foul ball, though the Twins only became aware of the injury after he singled and stopped abruptly while being waved home. He underwent surgery and missed nearly two months, returning on June 2. Dr. Joel Boyd, who performed the surgery, "told the Twins' doctors that it's inevitable Mauer will have problems as he adjusts to the constant strain that catching puts on knees," according to a report by ESPN's Phil Rogers. Mauer went hitless in his first three games back before connecting for a tiebreaking three-run homer off the Tigers' Esteban Yan. "I don't know what it is about superstars, but they do those things," manager **Ron Gardenhire** said... after Mauer's sixth major league game. No pressure, kid.

Mauer was hitting .308/.369/.570 with six homers in 122 PA when he was sidelined again in mid-July due to continued soreness in his left knee and didn't play again that season. The Twins, who finished first in the AL Central, hoped to activate him to serve as their designated hitter had they gotten past the Yankees in the Division Series, but they lost in four games.

Concerns about Mauer's knee lingered into the spring, but aside from minor aches and pains, he remained healthy, playing in 131 games, catching in 116 of those, and hitting .294/.372/.411 (107 OPS+) with nine homers and 2.8 WAR. It was a solid campaign, but the Twins went 83–79, slipping to third in the AL Central. Though he'd been *BA's* no. 1 prospect again, he wasn't actually eligible for Rookie of the Year voting because he'd exceeded the maximum for days on a roster before September (45).

Mauer broke out in 2006, hitting .347/.429/.507 with 13 homers. He made his first All-Star team and joined **Deacon White** (.367 in 1875), **Bubbles Hargrave** (.353 in 1926), and **Ernie Lombardi** (.342 in 1938 and .330 in 1942) as the only catchers to win batting titles to that point; **Buster Posey** (.336 in 2012) is the only one to do so since. Mauer's 144 OPS+ ranked seventh in the league, his 5.8 WAR fifth, and he placed sixth in the AL MVP voting. Aided by a Cy Young-winning campaign by **Johan Santana** and an MVP-winning one from **Justin Morneau** (who had just 4.3 WAR but 34 homers and 130 RBIs), the Twins won 96 games and the AL Central, but they were swept by the A's in the Division Series, with Mauer going just 2-for-11 without an extra-base hit.

Mauer signed a four-year, \$33 million extension in February 2007, buying out not only his arbitration years but also his first of free agent eligibility. A quad strain limited him to 109 games and a 118 OPS+ that season, though he still produced 3.9 WAR. He rebounded to hit .328/.413/.451 with nine home runs in 2008, winning his second batting title to join Lombardi as the only other catcher with multiple titles. Meanwhile, his 5.6 WAR ranked seventh in the league, his 134 OPS+ eighth. He made his second All-Star team, won his first Gold Glove, and finished fourth in the AL MVP voting; again, Morneau placed above him despite a lower WAR but better counting stats.

It turns out, Mauer had been playing through pain caused by a blockage in one of his kidneys. He underwent surgery to correct the problem on December 22, 2008, which limited his offseason conditioning; he couldn't run or lift weights. As camp opened, he dealt with inflammation of his right sacroiliac joint, which kept him out of major league action until May 1, 2009. He homered off the Royals' **Sidney Ponson** on his first swing of the season, though, then just kept hitting. Through June 16, he was batting a sizzling .429/.497/.756 with 13 homers in 42 games, matching the career high he'd set in 2006. At a point when he was still chasing .400, *Sports Illustrated's* Tom Verducci checked in:

The secret to Mauer's success is his serenity, his minimalist movement and emotion. He is the Ben Hogan of hitters, bringing the sweet spot to the hitting area with no extraneous movement. "I think the biggest thing about my swing is I don't have a lot of stuff going on," he says. "Guys have different triggers for timing, and my timing is very simple."

...Mauer is so calm he seems to change the physics of the game. Because his swing is so compact, he can wait longer to commit to pitches, which has the effect of stretching the 60 feet, six inches between the pitching rubber and home plate. "He sees the ball longer than any hitter in baseball," [bullpen coach **Rick] Stelmazek** says.

Mauer couldn't maintain the .400 average and barely missed surpassing **Babe Phelps'** .367 from 1936, the high-water mark for a modern AL/NL catcher, hitting .365/.444/.587. He won not only his third batting title but also the "Slash Stat" Triple Crown — the only catcher who's ever done so. Additionally, he led the AL with a 171 OPS+ and placed second behind Ben Zobrist with 7.8 WAR. After hitting a modest 29 homers over the previous three seasons, he clubbed a career-high 28 in 138 games and 606 PA; though he missed the season's first 22 games, he played in all but three of Minnesota's last 141. The Twins won a Game 163 tiebreaker against the Tigers to claim the division title, but despite Mauer's 5-for-12 showing, they were swept by the Yankees in the Division Series. In the AL MVP voting, Mauer received 27 out of 28 first-place votes.

The 2009 season was the Twins' final one in the much-derided Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome. Anticipating the revenue boost that would come with the move to outdoor Target Field, and fearful of losing their hometown star after trading Santana to the Mets and watching **Torii Hunter** sign with the Angels, they inked Mauer, who was heading into the final season of his four-year deal, to an eight-year, \$184 million extension. It was the fourth-largest contract to that point after **Alex Rodriguez's** 10-year deals of \$252 million and \$275 million and **Derek Jeter's** 10-year, \$189 million deal. The Twins, who opened the 2009 season with the majors' seventh-lowest payroll at \$65.3 million, according to Cot's Contracts, jumped to 10th at \$97.7 million in '10, when Mauer was making \$12.5 million; they would climb to ninth at \$113.2 million the next year, when the catcher began receiving his annual \$23 million salaries.

Where the Twins and their opponents ranked ninth in the majors with 189 homers at the Metrodome in 2009, they hit just 116, the majors' fourth-lowest total at Target Field in '10. Mauer's total sank to nine as he battled right shoulder woes and persistent left knee pain, but he still hit .327/.402/.469, good for a 140 OPS+ and 5.9 WAR (both 10th in the league), not to mention his third straight season as the starting catcher on the AL All-Star team. The Twins improved to 94 wins and claimed their sixth AL Central title in nine years but were again swept by the Yankees, this time with Mauer going 3-for-12.

After the season, Mauer underwent surgery on his left knee to alleviate discomfort caused by the plica band, a fold of tissue that lines the knee and that sometimes gets irritated by overuse. Shortly after camp opened, Gardenhire revealed that the catcher had received an injection of joint lubricant into the knee. Mauer was "miffed the shots are public," according to one of many reports that expressed his disgruntlement. He issued a clarification, saying, "It's more of a preventative thing just to make sure I'm good to go for the season. It's really not that big of a deal and I kind of wish it wasn't out there, but here we are."

Though he inaugurated his new contract while making the Opening Day lineup, Mauer played just nine games before landing on the disabled list with what the Twins termed "bilateral leg

weakness” — a vague phrase describing a mysterious constellation of symptoms, and one that did the catcher no favors in a state with a hockey-toughness mentality. “Perhaps it’s time to ask Joe for some of those millions back,” wrote the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*’s Jim Souhan in an ugly hit piece, calling Mauer “the softest of stars” for missing over two months. Fans began to boo him. It didn’t help that Morneau was sidelined by a ruptured disc in his neck as well, that after missing half of the 2010 season due to a career-altering concussion.

Mauer played just 82 games, hitting a thin .287/.360/.368 with three homers before an upper respiratory infection turned into pneumonia and ended his wretched season — one in which the Twins lost 99 games — in mid-September. Fortunately, he came back strong, batting .319/.416/.446 (140 OPS+) with 10 homers in 2012, leading the AL in OBP for a second time (all other catchers in the AL, NL and bygone 19th-century leagues have done so just twice) and producing 4.4 WAR in a career-high 147 games. Just 74 of those were behind the plate, with 42 at DH and 30 at first base.

Mauer was in the midst of another outstanding season in 2013, hitting .324/.404/.476 (142 OPS+) with 5.5 WAR, when a foul ball off the bat of the Mets’ **Ike Davis** hit his mask on August 19. He suffered a concussion, was placed on the seven-day concussion disabled list, and didn’t play again that season. When he had tried to return, headaches, bouts of dizziness, sensitivity to light, and other post-concussion symptoms prevented him from doing so. After the season, Mauer consulted with physicians at the Mayo Clinic as well as team doctors. He and the Twins concluded it would be best for him to stop catching and move to first base — a position opened up by Morneau’s free agency — on a permanent basis.

Heading into his age-31 season, Mauer still had five years remaining on his eight-year deal, and it was apparent given his modest power that he would have trouble providing the level of offense expected from a first baseman. He eventually became strong enough defensively to provide significant value, but from 2014 to ’16, he hit a combined .267/.353/.380 (103 OPS+), averaging just eight homers and 1.8 WAR.

Mauer did have one more exceptional season, however. In 2017, he hit .305/.384/.417 with seven homers and a 115 OPS+. Boosted by his 13 Defensive Runs Saved (third among all first basemen), he finished with 3.9 WAR. His performance helped the Twins to a Wild Card berth, but once again they ran into the Yankees; Mauer went 1-for-5 in the loss.

On April 12, 2018, Mauer singled off the White Sox’s **Aaron Bummer**. It was his second hit of the night and the 2,000th of his career.

On May 11 against the Angels, he was shaken up diving for a foul ball. He played another six games before being removed in the fifth inning of a May 18 contest due to whiplash-like symptoms, at which point manager **Paul Molitor** revealed that Mauer had also been dealing with balance issues and sensitivity to light. “We ran through the protocol last night,” Molitor said, “and there was no definitive answer there as far as what exactly is ongoing, but given his history ... it looks to me like it’s gonna be at least a few days.”

The Twins placed Mauer on the injured list with a cervical strain and concussion-like symptoms. “(On) the drive home, the symptoms started to really kind of pour on,” Mauer later said. “That’s why you didn’t see me for a couple days.” He cut short an on-field workout at Target Field on May 30 due to the return of symptoms; he had hoped to sit in the dugout to test his tolerance for the noise levels of a game. “Hitting, I felt pretty good, but taking groundballs and moving around is kind of when I started to feel some of that stuff, so we kind of backed off... I’m not there yet.”

Mauer missed 25 games and lost 53 points of on-base percentage between the point of his latest injury and the end of the season, finishing at .282/.351/.379 (100 OPS+) with 1.4 WAR. With two five-year-olds at home and wife Maddie pregnant with the couple’s third child, he reassessed his priorities but played his cards close to the vest. While he hadn’t officially made up his mind regarding retirement, the Twins hatched a plan for him to make a one-pitch cameo behind the plate in the ninth inning of the season’s final game, with his family in attendance.

Mauer waited until November 9 to announce his retirement, writing a letter to fans that cited his concussion issues: “The decision came down to my health and my family. The risk of concussion is always there, and I was reminded of that this season after missing over 30 games as a result of diving for a foul ball... I am soon to be a father of three and I find myself thinking about my future health and its impact on my family more than I had years ago... If I were to continue playing this game I would want to do so without reservation and I no longer feel that is possible.”

Three years later, with concussions and young children at home, Buster Posey made a similar exit.

To put it bluntly: BBWAA voters have done a horseshit job of electing catchers for the Hall of Fame in timely fashion. To date, just two have been elected on the first ballot: **Johnny Bench** in 1989 (53 years after the first election!) and **Ivan Rodriguez** in 2017. Both were eminently worthy, ranking first and third in WAR and JAWS among backstops. **Gary Carter**, an 11-time All-Star and three-time Gold Glove winner who ranks second, needed six years to gain entry in 2003. **Carlton Fisk**, who battled injuries early in his career but recovered to set all kinds of longevity records, made 11 All-Star teams and ranks fourth in JAWS; he needed two years. Fifth-ranked **Mike Piazza**, a 12-time All-Star who stands as the best-hitting catcher in AL/NL history, needed four years, though PED allegations played a role in that delay. Sixth-ranked **Yogi Berra**, a three-time MVP and 10-time champion as a player, needed two years. Eighth-ranked **Bill Dickey**, an 11-time All-Star and eight-time champion, received votes in nine elections (not counting runoffs), though to be fair, that tally began before the five-year waiting period was established; he was elected in what would have been his third year of eligibility by modern rules. Ninth-ranked **Mickey Cochrane**, a two-time MVP whose career ended in 1937, the year after the first Hall election, wasn’t elected until a decade later. Tenth-ranked **Gabby Hartnett**, whose career ended in 1941, wasn’t elected until ’55, and 11th-ranked Ted Simmons went one-and-done in his only BBWAA appearance in 1994; he wasn’t elected until the 2020 Modern Baseball Era Committee ballot.

In all, just 16 non-Negro Leagues catchers are enshrined, counting **Roy Campanella**, whose 10 years with the Dodgers made him BBWAA-eligible long before his Negro League stats were considered part of his major league totals. That total of 16 is tied with third basemen for the fewest at any position besides relievers and DHs. When it comes to evaluating the position that may be the most important on the diamond and is certainly the most physically demanding, voters have dropped the ball again and again. Constraints on playing time and susceptibility to injury tend to suppress catchers' offensive totals, which puts them at significant disadvantages when they're compared to other position players. The comparatively recent introduction of pitch-framing metrics helps to close some of the gaps when it comes to value, but it also limits the scope of historical comparisons. It's against that backdrop that I've been awaiting — anticipating and sometimes dreading — the reaction to Mauer's candidacy since his final seasons as a first baseman. Particularly given his position switch, we haven't had a BBWAA candidate quite like this in my 23 years of Hall coverage dating back to my pre-JAWS days.

We'll start with the elephant in the room: Mauer caught only 921 games, a total that ranks 154th all-time. Of the 16 catchers in the JAWS pool, 13 caught 1,451 games or more, the exceptions being Campanella (1,364 including Negro Leagues games but not the uncounted number of non-league games he must have played early in his career) and 19th-century backstops **Roger Bresnahan** (974 out of a total of 1,446) and **King Kelly** (584 out of 1,456, but with more value there than in the 750 games he played in the outfield, which is why he's counted as a catcher).

Even at the outset of his career, Mauer's height — officially listed at 6-foot-5 but commonly referred to as 6-foot-4 — made him an anomaly, and it was widely presumed he'd be unable to spend his entire career behind the plate. That proved to be true, albeit not for the reasons expected. Via Stathead, since the start of the 20th century, just 12 players listed at 6-foot-5 or 6-foot-6, including Mauer, have caught even 10 games in an AL/NL season, with only eight reaching 100 in a season, and only three — Mauer, **Sandy Alomar Jr.**, and **Matt Wieters** — doing so more than twice. Only that trio and **Larry MacLean** (1901–15) caught more than 501 games in their careers.

It's not hard to understand why. With extra height generally comes extra weight, which translates to extra stress on joints already overtaxed by so much squatting and contorting. Usually if a tall amateur catcher is a talented enough hitter, he gets moved to a less physically demanding position before he reaches the majors; **Jayson Werth** is a prime example. Mauer might have had a longer career had he followed that path, but would it have been a better one? We can't know.

Regardless of height, it's because of the impact of catching — figuratively and literally, as we know the dangers of collisions and concussions — that I believe we should still be comparing Mauer to other players who spent the substantial portions of their careers behind the plates. There's a reason none have reached the milestones such as 3,000 hits and 500 home runs that all but guarantee induction; Piazza's 427 is tops in the latter category, and 31 of those came playing positions besides catcher.

Anyway, among the 68 players who played at least 50% of their non–pinch-hitting games behind the plate and accumulated at least 5,000 PA in the AL, NL and 19th-century leagues, Mauer ranks 11th with a 124 OPS+. Raise the bar to 6,000 PA, and he’s eighth of 36; raise it to 7,000, and he’s sixth of 20. Let that sink in: only 20 players who have spent a majority of their careers behind the plate in those leagues have even reached 7,000 PA, the cutoff I generally use when I’m reporting rate-stat rankings for position-playing candidates such as **David Ortiz**, **Gary Sheffield**, **Larry Walker**, *et al.* Ten of the 20 are in the Hall, including nine of the top 11 in OPS+, with Mauer and **Jorge Posada** (121 OPS+) the exceptions.

Letting go of the PA cutoffs but still maintaining the percentage one, Mauer ranks sixth in terms of batting runs (Rbat), the offensive component of bWAR; his 239 trails only Piazza (418), Cochrane (273), Bench (269), **Gene Tenace** (259 thanks to a .388 OBP in just 5,527 PA) and Dickey (244). For both that category and OPS+, Mauer might have regressed had he spent longer behind the plate or in the majors at all. Still, we’re talking about rankings on lists that are far fewer in number than the number of catchers in the Hall.

Throw in Mauer’s slightly above-average baserunning (worth eight runs), double play avoidance (-5 runs) and fielding via Defensive Runs Saved at both catcher and first base (19 runs), and his career total of 55.2 WAR ranks ninth, both among players with at least 50% of their non–pinch-hitting games played at catcher (which Stathead uses) and those who accumulated the plurality of their value as catchers (which JAWS uses). The other 10 in the top 11 of either category are all enshrined. Mauer’s total is 1.6 WAR above the position standard.

As for seven-year peak, Mauer’s 39.0 WAR ranks fifth behind only Carter (48.4), Bench (47.2), Piazza (43.1), and Rodriguez (39.8), 4.3 WAR above the standard. All seven of his peak seasons are from his catching days (his 3.9 WAR in 2007 is tied with that of his standout season at first, ’17), which is to say that he’s not gaining any traction from his late-career move. Indeed, it’s because of the positional adjustments and his decline as a hitter that his WARs at first base weren’t higher. In terms of JAWS, his 47.1 ranks seventh, between Berra (48.7) and Dickey (45.9), and it’s 2.9 points above the standard.

Above the career standard, above the peak standard, above the JAWS standard: That’s an easy Hall of Famer right there, or it should be one if you’re at all familiar with the system, particularly as we’re talking about a player with no known connections to PEDs. Do you know how many position players clear all three standards, have no PED links, and are outside the Hall but eligible as of this ballot? It’s a short list: Mauer, the first-time eligible **Adrián Beltré**, and long-lost **Bobby Grich**, who fell short of 2,000 hits and for some reason has yet to appear on a small-committee ballot. That’s it.

I’m of the mind that Mauer is worthy of a spot on every voter’s ballot, and he’ll certainly be on mine. I’ve been bracing for the possibility that he won’t get to 75% this time, both because of the BBWAA’s track record and because his case requires some digging and comparison. With Beltré and holdover **Todd Helton** (72.2% last year) the most obvious honorees amid a crowded picture that includes **Gary Sheffield** (55% in his ninth year), **Billy Wagner** (68.1% in his eighth),

and Utley, I projected that Mauer would be elected next year alongside Wagner in my most recent five-year electoral outlook. I remain optimistic about his chances long-term, but I dearly hope BBWAA voters can do a little to make up for past sins by beating that timetable.

## **LONGER READS**

### **ICHIRO SUZUKI KEPS ON ROLLING**

Lindsey Adler, WSJ

**Ichiro Suzuki** strode onto the field at the Tokyo Dome and steadied himself for his first performance in that legendary stadium since his retirement from Major League Baseball more than four years earlier.

Here he was again, now 50 years old and in full uniform. On this night, one of the purest hitters in the history of the game was preparing to pitch. Suzuki steadied his small frame, peered over his glove and stared down his fearsome opponent in the batter's box.

It was a high-school girl.

For nine innings, Suzuki unleashed strike after strike in an exhibition spectacle. Playing for a team of Japanese retired ballplayers in a game to promote women's baseball in his homeland. Suzuki pitched nine remorseless innings and allowed five hits and zero runs. On this Tuesday evening, the man who collected 4,367 hits during his professional career in Japan and MLB, struck out the high-school girls nine times.

Suzuki, the relentless competitor with nowhere to compete, left no doubt that he had given his all. In addition to pitching the 116-pitch shutout, he also recorded two hits at the plate.

"More than anything," Suzuki told Japanese reporters afterward, "I'm glad I got a hit."

Suzuki's full-effort display against a team of teenage girls embodies the relentlessness he became known for upon arriving as a member of the Mariners in 2001. It doesn't matter that it has been more than 30 years since Suzuki went pro in Japan. The competition, the venues have changed. Suzuki's single-minded pursuit of competition hasn't.

(His eye at the plate isn't quite what it once was, however. Suzuki was struck out in the seventh inning by high schooler Ryona Domae; he later declared she was "harder to hit than [**Roger Clemens.**"]")

When he retired in 2019 aged 45, Suzuki was faced with a dilemma that haunts aging professional athletes. His entire life had been built around the structure of baseball—the 60 feet, 6 inches between the pitcher’s mound and home plate, the 90 feet between bases. Routine-oriented to a point of zealotry, he had constructed his entire life around the diligence of preparation and performance. At age 45, Suzuki finally faced the abyss: He was no longer performing at a major-league level, but how else could he stick to his routine?



Ichiro Suzuki gives a demonstration to players at a high school in Japan. Photo: Kyodonews/Zuma Press

Many retired greats turn to television analysis or coaching or pursue business interests to get them through the long retirement that comes after their bodies give out. They take the knowledge of the game and competitive spirit to a new venture. Suzuki, by contrast, has found a way to keep things mostly the same.

He is a constant presence during Mariners’ home series in Seattle, acting as star outfielder Julio Rodriguez’s catching partner. He participates eagerly in the tedious pregame work despite no longer appearing in the major-league lineup. It’s a way for him to exercise the discipline and diligence he enjoyed throughout his playing career. The major-league paycheck is no longer there, but the practice remains.

Even Mariners manager **Scott Servais** consults Suzuki about the current Seattle roster. “It usually happens in the outfield, it doesn’t happen in my office.” Servais said this year at the All-Star game in Seattle. “The outfield is his office, I should say.”

This year in spring training, on a warm morning in Peoria, Ariz., at the sprawling spring training home of the Mariners, Suzuki could be seen dressed in full uniform, going through the extensive stretching routine he used throughout his career to preserve his flexibility and strength. Players walked past him to the backfields and the batting cages, minor league players who were largely born after Suzuki made his MLB debut in 2001.



Ichiro Suzuki did stretches with Mariners players on the field before a game in 2023. Photo: Steph Chambers/Getty Images

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary as this scene played out, other than the fact that everyone around him aspired to reach the pinnacle of the sport. Suzuki has been there, done that—and yet, with a world full of options at his disposal, baseball is the one thing he can’t stop doing.

It isn’t uncommon for a retired MVP to spend his middle-aged years working to promote amateur baseball or serving as a “special assistant” for an MLB club. But it is highly uncommon for a retired MVP to appear on the mound, in full uniform, in an amateur exhibition game against a bunch of high-schoolers.

Still, there are signs that Suzuki is working to wean himself off his obsession with the game. “He’s actually been taking some time away and taking more trips to Japan,” Servais said. “He’s realized he can do other things while we’re on a road trip. You’ll never miss Ichi when we’re at home, but he has started to take some time away, which is good.”

Even his time away has a habit of ending up with Suzuki surrounded by adolescent players in Japan or helping to tutor the next generation of MLB stars. Suzuki has found a way to give back to the game while still taking what he needs from it.

As his age creeps up and his hair goes gray, Suzuki sticks to his own program. The professional game left him behind. But he’ll assume whatever role he needs to stay on the field.

### **FROM GARAGE SALE TO COPERSTOWN: THE SAGA OF CLEVELAND’S JOHN ADAMS AND HIS HALL OF FAME DRUM**

Zack Meisel, The Athletic

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — It was July 22, 2020, two days before the start of a strange, shortened baseball season, and John Adams sat beside his trusty sidekick in his home office in Parma, Ohio. He wasn’t going to be at the ballpark — no one would be, aside from the players, coaches, reporters, certain team staffers and a collection of cardboard cutouts — so John was eager to talk to anyone about baseball.

He grabbed a mallet, wound up ...

Thump. Thump. Thump.

The drumbeat didn’t pack quite the same punch in his 93-year-old home that it did during a ninth-inning rally before a capacity crowd on a crisp autumn evening.

Baseball, and especially the ballpark experience, was missing from his life in a way few other fans could grasp. Yet even if the league were to make an exception for him to attend games in the midst of the pandemic, he said he’d turn it down. He wasn’t passing through the turnstiles until the gates were reopened for everyone.

He didn’t know it at that time but he had already attended his last game.

John and his drum were inseparable until the very end, when his health deteriorated but he still tuned in for every Guardians first pitch. The drum only left his side once, when a team employee handed it off to Patrick Carney, drummer for the Black Keys, at John’s perch atop the left-field bleachers.

That moment came on Opening Day 2021, and it was perfectly imperfect. There was no duplicating the magic John and his drum created for nearly a half-century, whether it was a substitute drummer (even a Grammy-winning rocker) or an audio recording, which the team used for the 2020 campaign.

The drum now rests at the bottom of a display locker on the third floor of a brick building in a quaint town in central New York, surrounded by bats and gloves and uniform tops. Since its arrival earlier in November, baseball fans from across the globe have filtered through the Your Team Today corridor at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and spotted John's companion, the 26-inch bass drum that barely fits within the walls of the exhibit.

It's fitting, considering John would regale strangers with stories about how he had shaken hands, posed for pictures and chatted with people at the ballpark from every continent — except for Antarctica, he'd say, because penguins didn't buy bleacher seats.



John Adams' drum, at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. (Zack Meisel / The Athletic)

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John never would have imagined a residency at the Hall. He was too humble. He embodied what it's like to be a fan, to find one's passion and treasure every breath spent doing it. And there were a lot of breaths over the course of nearly 4,000 Cleveland baseball games spanning nearly a half-century.

John could have dumped his drum for a better model along the way, but he refused. Jordan Gauthier, a drum architect and expert, suggests it was crafted in the 1930s, a Ludwig-model single-tension bass drum. Perhaps it was used in a marching band, or used as an outlet for someone frustrated during the Great Depression.

John stumbled upon the drum in the early '70s, a marriage formed at a garage sale. No one would have envisioned such a prosperous union. It came as part of a set, but John, a member of the Parma High School pep band and supporter of The Music Settlement and its music therapy program, really just wanted the drum. He paid \$25.

The drumming from the bleachers dated back to Aug. 24, 1973. John received advance approval from the Indians' PR staff, but when he entered the ballpark, a police officer stopped him and asked what he planned to do with a big, old drum in a big, old, empty ballpark.

John was 21, an avid Indians fan who spent his childhood riding the Union Avenue No. 15 bus with his dad to the corner of E. 4th Street and Prospect Avenue. They'd walk past Otto Moser's restaurant with the pickle jars in the front window and continue toward the cavern on the lakeshore. When Municipal Stadium came into view, John would say, everything morphed from black and white to vivid color, like when Dorothy opened the door in the Wizard of Oz.

By 1973, John was an expert in Cleveland baseball fandom. He had spent hundreds of hours smacking the metal bleachers with his hands. There had to be a better way, he thought, to generate noise, to make the crowd of a few thousand sound as if the deserted venue was filled.

Enter the drum.

John had better, more expensive drums — including a Slingerland Radio King signed by the 1975 team — but none he trusted more for his Municipal Stadium mission. He said if it rained, his mallets would carve right through the cat-skin canvas, so the team constructed the Adams Awning above his seat to shield him from the elements.

On that first Friday night 50 years ago, as 16 East Tech students filed into the row in front of him, John suffered stage fright. One of the kids turned around and asked in a snooty tone, "You're not going to hit that, are you?"

John didn't want to disturb anyone. A man making a beer run urged him to relocate to the back of Section 55, the ideal setting for him to bang away in peace. A group of six people walking past offered encouragement.

It caught the attention of Bob Sudyk, a reporter who wrote in the Cleveland Press: “Adams is one of the chosen few who can thump a drum and receive a standing ovation.” That night, John said: “I’ve found the perfect place and I love it.” Sudyk suggested John and his drum would become ballpark staples, and John didn’t want to make him a liar, so he came back, again and again and again, for the rest of his life.

“People who love to bam away on a drum have a following,” Sudyk wrote. “But the following is usually in pursuit. People who play drums often are evicted by landlords who cancel apartment leases, wives who leave home for mother, dogs who bark and neighbors who call the cops.”

John started beating the drum when the opposing team’s reliever warmed up. That night, Cleveland scored three runs off Texas hurler **Charlie Hudson**.

“The bleacher fans thought I had psyched him out with the drum,” John said.

He quickly developed a routine; he’d buy a 50-cent bleacher ticket and trek to his spot in front of the brick wall at the top of the section, where he composed the soundtrack to Cleveland baseball. John became a fixture, the unofficial team musician everyone wanted to meet.

“All it takes at a ballgame is to lean over and start talking to people and you’ve got a new friend,” he said all those years ago.

That was his favorite part of the gig. He’d gush about how he could sit at a game and solve the world’s problems with a fellow fan he met two innings earlier. He didn’t care about the publicity that followed him. He simply cherished the camaraderie. He’d say the ballpark was his “escape from reality” and “a magical land.”

It afforded him some unforgettable opportunities.



Adams before his 3,000th game in 2011. (AP Photo / Amy Sancetta)

The team handed out a bobblehead of John in his patented white button-down and jeans, holding a baseball and a pair of mallets while leaning on the drum. Great Lakes Brewing Company crafted a beer, Rally Drum Red Ale, in his honor.

He made TV appearances, showing up at the ballpark for the 5 a.m. news on Opening Day. John would shout “Happy New Year” and thwack away. He joined the team’s local radio affiliate for its live broadcasts on the Gateway Plaza and the team’s fan club for its regular meetings.

He attended Len Barker’s perfect game in 1981, three All-Star Games, three World Series spectacles. He marched with the Ohio State band during a pregame performance at Jacobs Field.

He sat through teeth-chattering frigid, flurry-filled spring nights when you could see chunks of ice bobbing in Lake Erie. He sat through sweltering summer afternoons, sporting a tank top and clutching the mallets with sweaty paws. He sat through 100-loss seasons in a mostly abandoned venue and through hallmark October evenings with 40,000 people hanging on every note he hit.

He was the last one out of the stands at the old place in October 1993. He journeyed to Milwaukee in 2007, when the Indians “hosted” the Angels 400-some miles northwest of

Cleveland after Mother Nature mercilessly dumped piles of snow on the lakefront in early April. In 2011, for his 3,000th game, John stood at home plate and swung his drum like a bat to hit a ceremonial first pitch from **Joe Charboneau**.

All of it with the same drum, because John refused to break their bond.

He'd carry the drum to his neighbor's house every year or two, where Kurt Nicolay, a welder, would fuse its tension rods back together. Kurt would tell him he needed a new drum, but John was unwavering.

"Nope, I want this one."

"OK," Kurt would reply, "we'll make it work."

Much of its black paint has worn off. There's a chunk of its wooden rim missing. The tension rods have seen better days. There are a couple of yellow smiley face stickers on its base, and some eroded signatures that have become illegible.

John often said the drum wasn't worth much but was invaluable to him, even if he once estimated spending \$200 a year on maintenance.

He was climbing toward milestones he never imagined. Four thousand games. Fifty years.

John didn't need the urging from Sudyk or the team's PR staff to make this a habit. It's all he ever wanted to do, the only place he ever wanted to be. Sudyk once wrote, after a sleepy, one-hit loss in May 1978, Cleveland's eighth defeat in 12 games, that "even the drummer is staying home." But he was mistaken. He had ditched a picnic and driven 50 miles to attend the game, even though, as John said, "There wasn't much to beat about." John joked that Sudyk "probably was asleep like most of the other 19,000 there."

He'd pack the drum in his car — he used to have a van on which a close friend named Harold painted "Follow me to Indians Baseball" — and he would head downtown. He'd park in a lot behind the bleachers at the old stadium. When the team moved into Jacobs Field in 1994, he'd park on E. 18th next to the Wolstein Center, across from the Salvation Army. He'd lug the drum down Carnegie Avenue to the ballpark, stopping to talk to vendors and fans along the way. In more recent years, as it became more demanding to lug a 26-inch drum a long distance, he had a spot in the Gateway East Garage beside the ballpark.

On the 49th anniversary of that first game, the team inducted John into its Distinguished Hall of Fame, an exclusive group of 12 members, most of whom were broadcasters or executives. They placed a bronze replica of the drum atop his green bleacher seat in Heritage Park, a permanent reminder of the music they made together.

That drumbeat lurked in the background of every sacred moment, every clutch hit, every walk-off, every key pitch in a postseason game when every pause in the action was accompanied by a spike in blood pressure and that familiar sound.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

The players were missing that presence during the 2020 season. In an empty ballpark, the audio recording the team occasionally blared on the speakers didn't strike the same note. When a team staffer relayed that message to John, he supplied mallets that the club stored in the dugout as good-luck charms.

John passed away in January. He willed the drum to the Guardians.

A few weeks back, team historian Jeremy Feador shoved the drum — and the bat (belonging to **Bob Feller**) that **Babe Ruth** leaned on in his final appearance at Yankee Stadium — into the back of a red Hyundai Santa Fe at 3 a.m. He picked up a pair of copilots and headed east.

Since John's death, the drum had been stored in the team's offices, but those are being renovated. It needed a new home, even if only for a couple years, until the Guardians design its future display space.

After six and a half hours, Feador pulled up beside a grassy courtyard with sculptures of a pitcher and catcher. He pulled the drum out of the trunk and stuck it on a slab of gray concrete in front of the building entrance before snapping a series of photos and transporting it inside.

Cleveland was a charter member of the American League in 1901. The franchise has a rich catalog of history and an endless supply of memorabilia and artifacts, some of which reside at the Cooperstown museum.

Tom Shieber, the Hall's curator, showcased the maroon-collared wool uniform **Nap Lajoie** wore in 1910, when he battled **Ty Cobb** for the batting crown and a Chalmers model 30 automobile; a pair of black Feller cleats with metal spikes from his final start of 1938, when the 19-year-old set a team record with 18 strikeouts (a feat **Corey Kluber** would match 77 years later with Feller's widow in attendance); a base used during the 1948 World Series at Municipal Stadium; the baseball **Jim Thome** slugged during the 1999 ALDS, when he became the first player in postseason history with multiple grand slams; a photo of the participants in a 1911 All-Star benefit held for the family of the late **Addie Joss**, with Jack Graney featured on both ends of the panoramic shot because the Cleveland outfielder raced from one side to the other during the 15 seconds it took the tripod to rotate.

Elsewhere in the museum, there's a baseball from **Early Wynn's** 300th victory, a ball from Feller's Opening Day no-hitter, a '48 championship ring, the bat **Sandy Alomar Jr.** used to swat the decisive home run in the 1997 All-Star Game, the jersey **Frank Robinson** wore for his first

game as the league's first Black manager, a rare Lajoie card and a medal honoring **Neal Ball** for converting the league's first unassisted triple play.

There's a trophy Cy Young's teammates handed him on his 41st birthday, a "Go Joe Charboneau" record — the Section 36 track reached No. 3 on the local charts — from his award-winning rookie season, a \$20 auxiliary field box ticket to the 1981 All-Star Game and an arm-warming sleeve Feller's mother fashioned for him in 1934.

In that display locker resides **Rajai Davis'** navy uniform top from Game 7 of the 2016 World Series, **Shane Bieber's** cap from when he claimed All-Star Game MVP honors in Cleveland in 2019 and the dirt-stained base **Jay Bruce** tagged for his walk-off double that pushed the Indians' record-setting win streak to 22 games in 2017.

So much Cleveland history — and now the drum is a small (well, rather large) part of it.

At the entrance of the third level sits the Sacred Ground exhibit, where visitors are greeted by seven fabric maché figures that honor some of the most renowned fans in the sport's history. There's Hilda Chester and her trademark cowbell at Dodgers games, Harry Thobe, known for dancing in the aisles in a suit at Reds games and Lolly Hopkins, who shouted into a megaphone in Boston. Several Hall officials agreed John would fit in with this group, a fundamental component of the fan experience in his city.

Before the Guardians' home opener this year, the club's first game at Progressive Field since John's passing, fans streamed to his empty seat atop the bleachers, where the team had nailed a plaque to the wall and left a wreath of bright blue, red and white flowers that surrounded a logo of his initials and a couple of mallets. It wasn't just the Cleveland diehards who marched to Section 182 to pay tribute.

One fan who hailed from Houston remembered Adams and his drum from a tour of the league's 30 ballparks a quarter-century earlier. He returned for a game in 2017, sat in the bleachers and was reacquainted with John's work. He attended the 2023 home opener and made John's shrine his first stop. John's passion and loyalty resonated beyond Cleveland.

In 2013, as his retirement tour rolled through Progressive Field, Yankees closer **Mariano Rivera** asked to meet John and tap the drum. A decade later, both are honored in the Hall of Fame.

In a museum full of reminders of icons such as Ruth, **Cy Young**, **Willie Mays**, Cobb, **Jackie Robinson**, **Ted Williams**, **Hank Aaron**, **Lou Gehrig** and **Rickey Henderson**, there's now an item that represents a devoted fan who only had a bird's-eye view of the field, but was so prominent to the franchise.

The Guardians will unveil the John Adams Bleachers at Progressive Field in April. His legacy lives on — in Cleveland and in Cooperstown.

## **FRANKIE CROSETTI-THE UNSUNG INFIELDER HAD WINNING IN HIS DNA. AS A PLAYER AND A COACH, CRO WON 17 WORLD SERIES TITLES.**

By Andrés Chávez, Pinstripe Alley

Frank Peter Joseph “Frankie” Crosetti

**Position:** Shortstop

**Born:** October 4, 1910 (San Francisco, CA)

**Died:** February 11, 2002 (Stockton, CA)

**Yankee Years:** 1932-48

**Primary number:** 1 (player), 2 (coach)

**Yankee statistics:** 1,683 G, .245/.341/.354, 260 2B, 65 3B, 98 HR, 89 wRC+, 23.9 rWAR, 27.8 fWAR

**Frankie Crosetti** might not have been a particularly impressive hitter, but he was good enough to win 17 World Series titles with the Yankees: eight as a player and nine as a coach. His high baseball IQ, excellent defensive skills and incredible loyalty are traits that will give “Cro” a privileged, permanent place in franchise history.

He ended up signing and playing for the Pacific Coast League powerhouse Seals at age 18, but played for the Butte Mining League before that. When the skinny Crosetti bulked up enough, he was allowed to play for the Seals and started captivating everyone with his talent, even homering against major league competition (the Pittsburgh Pirates) in a 1928 exhibition game.

Crosetti played third base and shortstop for the Seals. His batting average progression was impressive in the late 1920s: he hit .248 in 1928, .314 in 1929 and .334 in 1930, with 27 home runs, 18 stolen bases and 171 runs, leading the circuit.

### **Starting Off His Career In Style**

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# BASEBALL

MAGAZINE



The Yankees, of course, had their eye on Crosetti after the impressive performances. With an assist from super-scout Bill Essick, who had also signed **Tony Lazzeri**, they signed Crosetti for \$75,000 and left him in San Francisco one more year, in 1931, to get more experience. He joined the Bombers in 1932.

After winning the Fall Classic in 1927 and 1928, **Connie Mack**'s Philadelphia Athletics dominated the scene in 1929 and 1930, though the St. Louis Cardinals taking the title home over the Mackmen in 1931. However, Philly fell back again a bit in '32, allowing **Babe Ruth** and company to get back into the Fall Classic.

That year marked Crosetti's MLB debut. He slashed .241/.335/.374 with 5 home runs, 20 doubles, 9 triple, 57 RBI, 51 walks, 51 strikeouts, and a .709 OPS. He was 21 for the whole campaign. Those numbers — and mostly his acclaimed glove work — helped him grab a hold of the Yankees' shortstop position and win the World Series in his first season as an MLB player, as the Bombers swept the Chicago Cubs.

From a very early age, Crosetti, who earned the nickname "The Crow" (or just "Cro") built a reputation as a "holler." According to his SABR bio page, his manager **Joe McCarthy** wanted to have the team snap out of an ugly stretch and "used" him to achieve this goal. Crosetti grew to idolize the serious-but-successful McCarthy and adopt his principles.

### **Mastering The Art of Hollering**

McCarthy told Crosetti that first baseman **Lou Gehrig** looked a bit too apathetic at first base. "When you get the ball in infield practice, fire it back hard at Gehrig. Holler at him. See if you can't wake him up," the skipper told the rookie.

Crosetti did just that and told some hilarious stories about the Iron Horse. "(...) Gehrig was giving me dirty looks. I remember him saying, 'If I get a hold of you, I will break you in half!' — which he easily could have done!" Tara Krieger wrote on Frankie's SABR page. In the end, it was the first-year infielder the one who needed the extra motivation, and that "loud" style stuck for years and became one of his most famous traits.

Four years later, in 1936, the Yankees would win the World Series again and Crosetti, who was 25, had the finest season of his career. It was the only time in his MLB tenure that his OPS was higher than .800: .824 to be more specific. The infielder slashed .288/.387/.437 that year, with 15 home runs, 78 RBI, 90 walks, 18 thefts, 35 doubles, 7 triples, and a whopping 137 runs. For the first time, he was an MLB All-Star.



Crosetti, Lazzeri, and DiMaggio

1936 was also the first of five-straight years for Crosetti of leading the majors (not just the AL) in hit by pitches. From 1936-40, he got plunked 62 times, a mark that even **Craig Biggio** would applaud.

That was **Joe DiMaggio**'s first season as a major leaguer, and the Yankees went on to beat crosstown rivals New York Giants for the World Series title. Crosetti was on top of the world.

The 1936 Fall Classic victory was, in fact, the first of an incredible four consecutive championships for McCarthy's Bombers, and Crosetti was an important contributor in each one of them. In 1938, he stole a career-high 27 bases, leading the American League, and had an incredible 1.056 OPS in the World Series, driving in six runs. He would've had a case for World Series MVP if the award existed, though ace Red Ruffing dominated in his own right.

### **A Two-Time All-Star**

Crosetti made his second All-Star Game in 1939, scoring 109 runs, doubling 25 times and homering 10 times. From 1936-39, he scored 100+ runs every year, but he began to decline in 1940, when he had a poor .572 OPS. Crosetti's bad performance motivated the Yankees to make a change, and they gave a young **Phil Rizzuto** the shortstop job over Crosetti (though he still won another championship in '41).

Rizzuto left for the Navy to battle in World War II, however, and Crosetti took up the vacant position in 1943. The Yankees won their third consecutive AL pennant and avenged their '42 World Series loss to St. Louis by dispatching the Cardinals in five games. Crosetti played 95 games, posting a poor .596 OPS. He did rebound in the Fall Classic with a .278 average and the perfect example of his quiet contributions with what turned out to be a game-winning sacrifice fly in the 2-1 victory in Game 4.

Rizzuto returned from military service in 1946, and Crosetti was a player/coach until retiring in 1948. That still gave him time to win one last World Series as a player in 1947, when he made just one plate appearance all year while focusing on his coaching duties.

And so it was that arguably Crosetti's biggest contribution in his late-career years was taking Rizzuto under his wing. He taught him, according to Crosetti's SABR page, "how to position himself on each pitch, and how to bluff a bunt. He let him in on the secrets of being hit by a pitch and how to pull off the hidden-ball trick."

In total, Crosetti won a remarkable eight World Series as a player. He was the definition of a pro: rock-solid defense, solid power at peak, some speed, high energy and a contagious optimism and enthusiasm.

### **The Most Annoying .245 Hitter You Will See**

Writers said that Crosetti was "one of the most annoying .245 batters that baseball ever had", and all-time great **Rogers Hornsby** had some incredible praise for him, too: "Crosetti is the sparkplug of the Yankees. Without him they wouldn't have a chance. He is a great player and he is about the only one on the club who does any hollering."

Crosetti walked away with a .245/.341/.354 batting line, 98 home runs, 1,006 runs scored, 649 RBI and 113 stolen bases in 1,683 games. He accumulated 1,541 hits and had an 89 wRC+ and 27.8 fWAR.

Again, offensive rate stats didn't have him as an all-time great, but his totals were very solid, especially the hits and the runs. To get to those totals you have to be good enough to play nearly every day for years, and Crosetti definitely fit the bill while holding down the six.

### **A Well-Decorated Coach**

In his first season after retiring as an active player, Crosetti would become the Yankees' full-time third base coach. He kept that job title until 1968 and added nine additional World Series to his resume, to give him 17 in total: 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1956, 1958, 1961, and 1962.

During his coaching career, many teams approached Crosetti, who had incredible baseball knowledge (from stealing signs to infield positioning to knowing what pitch the hurler was about to throw by looking at certain patterns), to manage. However, he had no interest in that whatsoever, as he thoroughly enjoyed his coaching job with the Yankees.

Thanks to a combination of \$142,989.30 in total World Series check earnings and smart real estate investments, Crosetti became a wealthy man. The Yankees eventually eschewed giving him rings in favor of engraved shotguns, tokens that he preferred. He remained stern, refusing to deal with the press (whom he never liked), and unrelenting on even **Mickey Mantle** when his knees were shot. He was such a stickler that for several years, he would chase after fans who tried to run off with balls hit into the foul territory stands during batting practice. It was said that the only time Crosetti shook hands with players after homers were when Mantle hit his 500th home run, when **Roger Maris** tied and broke Ruth's single season record, and, while coaching with the Twins near the end, when **Harmon Killebrew** joined Mantle in the 500-homer club.

The 1968 season was his last one with the Yanks as a coach. He joined an expansion MLB franchise, the Seattle Pilots, to coach in 1969, though as noted by Jim Bouton in *Ball Four*, it was not exactly a sunny experience. When the Pilots moved west for Milwaukee in 1970, Crosetti went that way as well ... but stopped in Minnesota instead. He joined the staff of new Minnesota Twins manager **Bill Rigney** (a fellow Bay Area native) and helped them win the AL West in 1970. They were swept in the ALCS, and after one last season in '71, Crosetti retired for good.

## **THIS WEEK'S TRIVIA CHALLENGE ANSWERS**

### **Two Hall of Famers played for the 1967 Yankees.**

**Whitey Ford** retired after 1966 so it's not him.

They were both position players.

The Yankees were everything to one of these Hall of Famers, a very small part of the career of the other.

Who are they?

**Mickey Mantle and Bobby Cox.** Cox hit .225 in parts of 2 seasons with the Yankees before going on to be a HOF manager.

**10 MLB players who hold their franchise's career record for hits but are not in the Hall of Fame:**

Mets

**David Wright**

Angels

**Garret Anderson**

Oakland A's

**Bert Campanaris**

Marlins

**Luis Castillo**

Rays

**Carl Crawford**

Blue Jays

**Tony Fernandez**

D'backs

**Luis Gonzalez**

Phillies

**Jimmy Rollins**

Rangers

**Michael Young**

Nationals

**Ryan Zimmerman**

Reds

**Pete Rose (ineligible)**

Rockies

**Todd Helton (maybe this year)**

Mariners

**Ichiro Suzuki (not yet eligible)**

**Most recent Cy Young by Team**

Arizona          2006    RH starter

**Brandon Webb**

Atlanta          1998    LH starter

**Tom Glavine**

Baltimore       1980    RH starter

**Steve Stone**

Boston          2016    RH starter

**Rick Porcello**

Cubs            2015    RH starter

**Jake Arrieta**

White Sox       1993    RH starter

**Jack McDowell**

Cincinnati      2020    RH starter

**Trevor Bauer**

Cleveland       2020    RH starter

**Shane Bieber**

Detroit          2013    RH starter

**Max Scherzer**

Houston          2022    RH starter

**Justin Verlander**

Kansas City     2009    RH starter

**Zack Greinke**

Angels            2005    RH starter

**Bartolo Colon**

Dodgers           2014    LH starter

**Clayton Kershaw**

Miami            2022    RH starter

**Sandy Alcantara**

Milwaukee       2021    RH starter

**Corbin Burnes**

Minnesota       2006    LH starter

**Johan Santana**

Mets              2019    RH starter

**Jacob de Grom**

Yankees           2023    RH starter

**Gerrit Cole**

Oakland           2002    LH starter

**Barry Zito**

Philadelphia     2010    RH starter

**Roy Halladay**

Pittsburgh       1990    RH starter

**Doug Drabek**

San Diego        2023    LF starter

**Blake Snell**

San Francisco   2009    RH starter

**Tim Lincecum**

Seattle            2010    RH starter

**Felix Hernandez**

St. Louis          2005    RH starter

**Chris Carpenter**

Tampa Bay    2018    LF starter

**Blake Snell**

Toronto        2021    LH starter

**Robbie Ray**

Washington    2017    RH starter

**Max Scherzer**

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