

THE SQUIBBER
SABR Bob Davids Chapter newsletter
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The Squibber is the Bob Davids chapter's quarterly newsletter. It is emailed to chapter members roughly every three months. If you're a Bob Davids chapter member and are not getting the Squibber, please check that your email address and chapter affiliations listed on the SABR site are correct. Please send submissions for future editions to Squibber editor Walt Cherniak at wcherniakjr@aol.com.

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TRIVIA QUESTION: The Nationals' Juan Soto hit 22 home runs as a teenager, tied for the second most all-time. Two other Washington players are in the top 10 for home runs by teenagers. Who are they? (See answer below)

SHINING STAR IN A DARK SKY: Roy Sievers' Amazing 1957 Season
By Francis Kinlaw

As baseball's pecking order of the 1950s became established, the Washington Senators (or Nationals) suffered greatly from the lack of a strong beak. Teams from the nation's capital consistently played in a manner that inspired ridicule in an enduring jingle ("First in war, first in peace, and last in the American League"), satire in a popular novel (Douglass Wallop's *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*), and amusement on the stage and screen (*Damn Yankees*). The cellar-dwelling 1957 club, while posting a woeful record of 55-99 and finishing 43 games behind New York's first-place "Bronx Bombers," unfortunately exhibited the undesirable characteristics of other Washington teams of the decade.

Amid such discouragement, one very impressive individual performance was achieved as nearly every other competitive aspect relating to the team turned sour. Roy Sievers, a 30-year-old veteran usually playing left field but also appearing in 21 games at first base, slammed 42 homers and drove 114 runs across home plate.

He led his league in both categories, with four more home runs than runner-up Ted Williams and nine more runs-batted-in than Cleveland's Vic Wertz. (Hank Aaron did hit 44 round-trippers to lead the National League, and Ernie Banks circled the bases 43 times. In the RBI category, only Aaron—with 132—surpassed Sievers' total as the latter became the first representative of the local team since Goose Goslin in 1924 to top all sluggers in RBIs.)

Sievers was consistent in hitting baseballs over outfield walls throughout the 1957 season, as he homered at least six times in every month except April (when he circled the bases four times in the Nats' 15 scheduled games). However, his consistency was overshadowed from July 27th through Aug.

3 by a hot streak of seven homers in eight games that concluded with a game-winning blast against the Detroit Tigers that brought a 17-inning contest to an end.

Aside from the slugger's frequent offensive contributions and that one torrid week, other interesting facts regarding Sievers' season are noteworthy. He hit 26 home runs in Griffith Stadium, and 16 in road games. Twenty-nine of his 42 homers were surrendered by right-handed pitchers. Twenty of the 42 homers were hit with no runners on base, 18 came with one man on base, two men scored ahead of Sievers twice, and there were a pair of grand-slam pokes. Sievers hit two home runs in a game three times, and three of his long drives occurred in extra innings.

The list of teams and opposing pitchers victimized by Sievers is interesting and, in some cases, runs counter to expectations. The Yankees won the 1957 American League pennant and at season's end were followed in order by the White Sox, Red Sox, Tigers, Orioles, Indians, Athletics (and Senators).

Yet, despite the relatively high quality of the Yankees and White Sox rosters, 45% of Sievers' home runs (19 of 42) were hit against those two teams with 12 long blows against the Pale Hose and seven against the fellows in pinstripes. Seven homers came in games against the Kansas City Athletics, six against the Baltimore Orioles, five against the Detroit Tigers, and four against the Cleveland Indians.

It is surprising that only third-place Boston was able to limit damage from Sievers' home-run habit but, even with the inviting "Green Monster" lingering in Fenway Park's left field, the slugger who swung from the right side of home plate connected for only one homer against the Red Sox---and it was hit in Griffith Stadium rather than Boston.

Twenty-eight opposing pitchers delivered at least one of Sievers' long balls, with Ray Moore of the Orioles topping the list of victims with a total of four. Whitey Ford of the Yankees and Jack Harshman of the White Sox were next on the list with three gopher balls each.

Seven hurlers surrendered two homers: Johnny Kucks of the Yankees, Ned Garver and Alex Kellner of the Athletics, Frank Lary of the Tigers, and a trio of White Sox moundsmen (Billy Pierce, Dick Donovan, and Bob Keegan).

Eighteen other men watched one "Sievers ball" disappear over a wall or fence: Gerry Staley (White Sox), Dixie Howell (White Sox), Jim Derrington (White Sox), Ralph Terry (Athletics), Tom Gorman (Athletics), Virgil Trucks (Athletics), Hal Brown and Charlie Beamon (Orioles), Billy Hoefl (Tigers), Paul Foytack (Tigers), Al Aber (Tigers), Ray Narleski (Indians), Mike Garcia (Indians), Cal McLish (Indians), Stan Pitula (Indians), Frank Sullivan (who threw the only pitch hit by Sievers against the Red Sox), Tom Sturdivant (Yankees), and Art Ditmar (Yankees).

Ditmar's low total may also be considered a bit of surprise because Sievers---during his career---took the righthander deep more times (11) than any other major-league pitcher. So, at least from one perspective, Ditmar had reason to consider his performance in 1957 against Sievers to be rather successful!

At the conclusion of the 1957 season, Sievers finished third---behind Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams---in voting by members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America for the American League's Most Valuable Player. Although he did not capture that prestigious award, the votes he received served as recognition of his excellence during a summer when optimism from other sources was virtually absent from the world of Nats baseball.

TALKIN' BASEBALL: Upcoming Speakers Announced

By Dave Paulson

Here is the speaker schedule for the upcoming meetings of the "Talkin' Baseball" group:

- Aug. 7 -- Steve Bratkovich: "The Baseball Bat: From Trees to the Major Leagues, 19th Century to today"
- Sept. 4 -- Steve Steinberg: "Comeback Pitchers: The Remarkable Careers of Howard Ehmke and Jack Quinn"
- Oct. 2 -- Luke Eplin: "Our Team: The Epic Story of Four Men and the World Series That Changed Baseball"
- Nov. 6 -- TBD
- Dec. 4 -- Jack Bales: "The Chicago Cub Shot for Love: A Showgirl's Crime of Passion & the 1932 World Series"

The Talkin' Baseball group normally meets on the first Saturday of each month at 9 a.m. Meetings are normally held at Brighton Gardens, 7110 Minstrel Way, Columbia, Md.

But due to restrictions caused by COVID-19, meetings are being conducted by Zoom. Check your email each month for meeting login information,

Whether virtually or in person, join us, and bring a friend!

MYTHS OF BASEBALL -- TRUE OR FALSE?

By Charles Pavitt

This is the eleventh in a series of Squibber contributions intended to report the truth (as far as present data suggests) of the tidbits of "conventional wisdom" that TV analysts and comparable pundits make without any true knowledge about their validity.

Myth #31 – On borderline pitches, batters should swing to protect themselves against being called out on strikes with a 3-2 count.

Using 2009 PITCHf/x data on pitch location, Craig Glaser (2010) demonstrated in a number of different ways that batters were swinging too often on 3-2 counts. Here are the reasons why: To begin, 59 percent were strikes, and batters swung at 91 percent of them. When batters swung at a strike, their overall wOBA that year was .330, versus .273 when they did not. Therefore, batters were .057 wOBA units ahead of the game 59 percent of the time for swinging at strikes.

The other 41 percent of pitches thrown were balls, and batters swung on 48 percent of them. When batters swung at a ball, their overall wOBA that year was .188, versus .688 when they did not. Therefore, batters were .500 wOBA units behind of the game 41 percent of the time when swinging at balls.

Across all batters, walk rate on 3-2 pitches was negatively correlated at a quite high .75 with swing rate on balls. BA was positively correlated at only .21 with swing rate on strikes. (For those not statistically minded, this means that the negative impact of swinging on balls had a much greater impact on walk rate than the positive impact swinging on strikes had on batting average.)

Putting all of this together, it is obvious that batters did worse swinging at balls than swinging at strikes. Numerically, swinging overall led to a .293 wOBA, and not swinging to a .603. In fact, batters would have been .199 better off if they had never swung at a 3-2 pitch.

Bottom line: The myth appears to be false. The take-away is not that batters should never swing at 3-2 pitches, but that they should not swing on borderline pitches even though the ump's call will sometimes go against them.

Myth #32 – Speed is good everywhere in the lineup, but it is particularly important for the leadoff position.

Russell Carleton (2014) used his version of Bill James's Speed Score to estimate how much impact speed has on run scoring. He ran a 10,000-game simplified simulation (no bunting, no pinch hitters, average opposition pitchers) of the 2013 season with each lineup spot assigned the mean performance of all batters excepting pitchers in those spots and with everyone's speed score at league average. On average, this lineup scored 687.0 runs. He then repeated the 10,000-game simulation with the leadoff batter assigned the speed of baseball's fastest, then again analogously for the #2 batter, and so on down the lineup; and again for all nine lineup positions with the speed of baseball's slowest, and one last time with every lineup position either very fast or very slow. Here are his findings concerning team run production:

Very Fast Runner	Very Slow Runner
Lineup position	Runs Scored
	Difference From 687.0
1st	697.7
	10.7
2nd	691.4
	4.4
3rd	701.2
	14.2
4th	680.7
	-6.3
5th	702.5
	15.5
6th	678.2
	-8.8
	699.6
	12.6
	683.5
	-4.5
	705.0
	18
	684.3
	-2.7
	6th

688.7
1.7
685.4
-1.6
7th
701.9
14.9
682.1
-4.9
8th
689.1
2.1
684.7
-2.3
9th
695.3
8.3
682.8
-4.2
Everyone!
762.1
75.1
629.7
-57.3

Some of these figures are pretty substantial; that's almost two wins for a very fast #5 hitter. But the difference in runs scored between the "everyone is fast" lineup and 687.0, which is 75.1, is more than two wins less than the difference in runs scored summed across the nine lineup positions (rest of second column), which is 98 runs, implying that there are diminishing returns for adding speed to the lineup. In contrast, the difference in runs scored between the "everyone is slow" lineup and 687.0, -57.3, is almost two wins worse than difference for the sum across the nine lineup positions (rest of fourth column; -30.9), meaning that having a slow lineup results in a compounding effect for the worse.

Now to the major point for this myth; the impact of speed was less for the leadoff position than for the second, third, fifth, and seventh positions, and for some reason that neither Russell nor I can come up with it was actually helpful to have a slow leadoff hitter. Russell replicated the entire exercise using the overall league average hitter in every batting position, and got analogous results.

Myth #33 – The designated hitter increases the home field advantage.

This myth is almost certainly accurate. The home field advantage was measured fairly accurately as early as 1938 by an academic named Cavins, and has been consistently calculated at 53-54 percent. Without going into details (which would take many pages), the two proposed explanations that have received the most empirical backing have been fan support (it seems to get larger with greater attendance; and some of its impact seems to be due to increased home field umpire bias toward the home team) and travel (a tendency for the advantage to be greater with larger distances traveled and in the first game of a series if only the visiting team had to travel).

There are now two studies comprising different years (1997 through 2005 by Callahan, Pfaff, and Reynolds, and 2010 to 2014 by Russell Carleton) that estimate the DH to increase the advantage by 2

percent. Russell succinctly explained why; “The AL team is hurt significantly in the NL park by the loss of its DH. The NL team just plays its usual lineup. The NL team is hurt by the DH rule in the sense that the AL team has a guy who is a hand-in-glove fit for the role already on their roster, while the NL team can only match it by playing a bench guy.”

D.C. HIGHLIGHTS: Ruth Hit His Last Homer as a Yankee at Griffith Stadium **By Andrew Sharp**

Babe Ruth appeared in 171 games at the ballpark that became known as Griffith Stadium, including his last two in a Yankees’ uniform – Sept. 29 and 30, 1934. His homer in the first game of a doubleheader on September 29, a three-run shot, was the last he hit as a Yankee.

Ruth hit 34 home runs in Washington, the fewest at any of the seven A.L. cities he played in, hardly a surprise given the depths of the fences at Griffith Stadium. Ruth had 18 triples in D.C., however. (His favorite ballpark for homers on the road was Shibe Park in Philadelphia, where he hit 68.) In any case, Ruth’s 34 homers at the Washington ballpark were the most ever hit by a visiting player.

Although Ruth hit 10 inside-the-park homers in his career, none of them came in Washington. On May 7, 1921, he connected for what for years was considered the longest homer ever hit in D.C. It came off Walter Johnson, no less. Ruth went deep against the Big Train 10 times in his career.

Ruth, the star Red Sox left-hander, beat Johnson the first six times they matched up and both got decisions. Before he began hitting home runs off everybody, Ruth beat Johnson in a 13-inning, 1-0, game on Aug. 15, 1916, in Boston. Both Ruth and Johnson went the distance.

Although Johnson won a 10-inning game in 1916 in which Ruth didn’t get a decision, the Big Train finally defeated Ruth, 6-0, on Oct. 3, 1917, in Boston. Johnson’s lone victory over Ruth in D.C. came in the Bambino’s last pitching appearance in Washington — on May 9, 1918. The Nats won in walk-off fashion, 4-3, against Ruth with two outs in the 10th.

As a pitcher with Boston, Ruth was 4-4 in D.C., but 12-6 overall against the Senators with five shutouts. Ruth’s best D.C. performance on the mound was his two-hitter on May 7, 1917, a 1-0 victory over the Big Train. Later that month, he shut out the Nats again on a six-hitter in Washington. (Making a token start with the Yankees in New York on June 1, 1920, Ruth was awarded the victory over Washington under the rules of the day, although he pitched just four innings.)

In New York, between the Polo Grounds and Yankee Stadium, Ruth connected for homers off Washington pitching 55 times. But in D.C., Ruth never hit more than one homer in any game against the Senators. With the Yankees, Ruth hit .340 at Griffith Stadium, close to his .342 lifetime average. Overall, including his Boston years, he hit .332 in D.C. Senators pitchers walked him 107 times here, which produced an on-base percentage of .435, considerably shy of his lifetime .472 against all opponents. His OPS in Washington was 1.072, well under his lifetime 1.164, but still the highest of anyone who played more than 100 games in D.C.

Ruth hit two milestone homers against the Senators. Most famously, his record-setting 60th home run came on Sept. 30, 1927, at Yankee Stadium off Washington lefty Tom Zachary. On Sept. 24, 1920, Ruth hit his 100th career homer in New York against Washington. The homer was Ruth’s 50th of the season, but it was the only run the Yanks could muster in a 3-1 loss to the Senators. (On July 18, 1921, in Detroit, Ruth hit his 139th career home run to become the all-time leader, a position he held until the 1974 season.)

Outfielder Gavy Cravath had been widely credited with setting the single-season home run record, prior to Ruth, when he hit 24, playing for the Phillies at the homer-friendly Baker Bowl in 1915. In

fact, playing under essentially the same rules, Buck Freeman's 25 home runs for the 1899 National League Washington Senators should have been the record. Ruth, still with Boston in 1919, topped Cravath's total and tied Freeman with his 25th homer on Sept. 5 at Shibe Park. He broke Freeman's record by hitting his 26th homer at the Polo Grounds against the Yankees on Sept. 8, 1919.

(Editor's note: While many have dismissed the accomplishment, Chicago's Ned Williamson is actually credited as the single-season home run record holder before Ruth, hitting 27 round trippers in 1884. The fences at Chicago's Lake Park, where Williamson hit 25 of his homers, were only about 200 feet from home plate. Williamson's total was primarily the result of a ground-rule change; balls hit over the Lake Park fences were doubles before that season.)

Ruth first appeared in a game against Washington at Fenway Park on Oct. 5, 1914, when he pinch hit and struck out. Pitching in relief on Oct. 7, he batted for himself and singled. This was Ruth's second big-league hit. A blow-out win for Washington, 44-year-old Nats' manager Clark Griffith pitched the ninth inning in the final appearance of his career. (Tris Speaker pitched the ninth inning for Boston.) So if anybody asks if Griffith and Ruth ever appeared in the same game, the answer is yes.)

His first appearance at what was then known as National Park came on June 21, 1915, when he went the distance for his fourth win of the season, beating the Nats, 8-3, in the first game of a twin bill. He doubled in four plate appearances. His next times at bat in D.C. came in both games of an Oct. 2 doubleheader. He pitched two innings in relief of Smokey Joe Wood in one game and pinch hit in the second, 0 for 2 in two at-bats.

In six games in D.C. in 1916 — four as a pitcher — Ruth had two hits but did not homer. He appeared in just three games in Washington 1917, but had yet to homer against the Nats.

Ruth's first home run in Washington came on May 7, 1918. He was playing first base and hit it off Johnson, accounting for the Red Sox only two runs in a game Walter won on a four-hitter, 7-2. Ruth was 7-for-12 in this three-game series with three doubles, a triple and the homer.

On June 28, 1918, in Washington, Ruth's seventh-inning homer was the only hit off Nats starter Harry Harper. Two days later, Ruth's two-run homer in the 10th beat Johnson and the Nats, 3-1. Ruth was playing center field for the Red Sox in both those games.

Playing nearly every day for the first time in 1919, Ruth hit three of his then-record 29 homers against Washington, but just one — his 29th, on Sept. 27 — came in D.C. Although Ruth obliterated his single-season home run record with 54 in his first year with the Yankees, again he hit just one in Washington.

A famous photo from a game on July 5, 1924, shows Ruth unconscious on the ground near the concrete wall down Griffith Stadium's right field line. The Bambino crashed into the wall tracking a fly ball off the bat of Joe Judge. Ruth was out for about five minutes until the Yankees trainer revived him by pouring cold water on Ruth's head. Looking on over the wall at the scene below the right-field pavilion were several Black fans. Clark Griffith set aside this segregated seating for them, at a time when most major league stadiums were not segregated. Ruth, by the way, stayed in the game.

In that September 29, 1934, game, his playing days almost over, Ruth hit a foul ball to right that glanced off the arm of a young fan. After he walked, Ruth motioned the bench to put in a pinch runner. According to a story in the next day's Washington Post, Ruth "started out for the kid his foul had hit. On the way, the Babe called for a baseball from an umpire. He reached the stands and looked down at the kid and the kid looked up at him," the Post's account read. "He autographed the ball and gave it to the lad and also put his autograph in the boy's book.... The 5,000 (fans) cheered again — not the Babe this time, but his big heart.... That's why he is the Might Man of Baseball."

TRIVIA ANSWER: Bryce Harper also hit 22 home runs as a teenager with the Nationals. Harmon Killebrew hit eight round-trippers with the original Senators in the 1950s.