

THE SQUIBBER

March 2019

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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SABR DAY AT THE BOB DAVIDS CHAPTER: Annual Meeting Review, By Laura Peeples

So, you might start by asking "what's a SABR Day?"

SABR, the Society for American Baseball Research, has chapters around the country, and indeed, around the world (see www.sabr.org). These chapters hold an annual meeting, typically the last Saturday in January (some local variations occur due to facilities availability). Besides the election of officers and the opportunity to talk about baseball with other fans, most have a slate of programs.

Some of them include papers that have been presented at the national SABR conference, but there's a real variety—no worries if you're not a stats geek: there are plenty of other options. Authors and filmmakers often present their work. If there is a

local team, the organizers try to bring in someone from the team. Scouts, media, and former players are also popular presenters. Oh, and there are often raffles for baseball-related items. Here's a summary of the 2019 presentations for the D.C. Chapter.

Inherited runners, and their effect on bWAR Johnny Asel made a presentation on the effect that the treatment of inherited runners has on bWAR, and made suggestions on how to improve the calculation. As an example, he showed Ryan Madson pitching for the Dodgers in the World Series. Since runs are charged to the pitcher who let the runner on base in the first place, rather than the pitcher who allowed them to score, the effect on ERA and WAR is determined by the skill (or luck) of the pitcher than follows, not the original pitcher. Overall, the effect on WAR for pitchers was significant, when stripping out inherited runners: about 1.2 on average, but up to 4 for some pitchers.

Example: Yusmerio Petit allowed no inherited runners to score (0 of 20) in 2017. So he should have about 7.86 more WAR than the calculated stats show. On the other side, Heath Hembree allowed 22 of 46 inherited runners to score.

BB-REF may replace "runs allowed" with RE (run expectancy) in their formula. So, for example, assume Pitcher A leaves with two out and runners on 1st and 2nd, and Ryan Madson comes in and gives up a three-run homer. Pitcher A would be charged with about .35 of a run, rather than 2 runs, because a runner on second with two outs has about a .22 chance of scoring and a runner on first has about a .13 chance of scoring). (See *Johnny's article below*)

Baseball, and baseball players, on stamps. Dave Paulson gave a presentation on baseballs on stamps. Most people thought Babe Ruth would have been the first player on a stamp, but it was Jackie Robinson. Jackie and the Babe are the only two players to appear on three stamps. When the Post Office did the "Shot Heard Round the World" stamp, Brooks Robinson was still alive, so the stamp shows the ball coming at the viewer leaving the park rather than the player (a person, other than a president, has to be dead five years before they can appear on a stamp. So I guess Elvis really is dead.) The Post Office has also issued the "All-Century" team stamps, and a series of historic ballparks. Personally, I liked the round stamp that was just a baseball.

Jimmy Williams, player insights. Jimmy Williams, former player and current coach, gave us some insights on the minor and Japanese leagues based on his experiences. He was signed by the Orioles in 1964, the last year before the draft, so he had choices about where to sign. At that time, the Orioles' Way really meant something, and he was grateful for the exposure to that system emphasizing fundamentals (gee, where have I heard that recently?). He was taken by the Giants in the Rule 5 draft, and was about to make the team when he had an offer to go to Japan. Willie McCovey told him not to go, but he went anyway, and played two years. He said that Japan is definitely better than

AAA, although some might call it AAAA. Playing in front of 50,000 fans all the time was a real change from the minor league 2,000 crowd. One real difference was how the rotation was handled: if a pitcher wasn't good against a particular team, the Japanese teams would bump his start to the next day. When he first got there, he almost threw up when he saw what people were eating, but he came to love it. He only faced racial prejudice in the Florida Instructional League, when he couldn't eat or stay with his teammates.

Nationals Analytics. Lee Mendelowitz and Scott Van Lentenax of the Nationals Baseball Operations (analytics) area spoke about a variety of subjects. The Nationals have a mid-level analytics department: eight people (plus three web developers). They work on player evaluations for signing and trades, player development, and advance scouting (hitting, pitching, baserunning). The manager and the coaches do meet with them.

They can evaluate their effectiveness at year-end by two measures. One: did our projections of the player match the outcome? Two: when we give advice on "defensive positioning" (don't call it shifting!), are the outcomes better when the team takes their advice than when they don't? They don't like to call it "shifting" because that implies a major shift in position, where they may advise just moving a few feet one direction or another.

When evaluating pitcher performance, some teams have a series of cameras trained on the pitcher as they pitch, looking for strains or moves that might lead to injury. Because that's publicly available data, there's no HIPAA issue in analyzing it in game or afterwards.

As players come up now, they are expecting to receive analytical information. Max Scherzer and Sean Doolittle are gluttons for that type of information. Some teams now have people like Dan Haren who can translate the analytics from "geek" to "baseball" to help players absorb and use the information.

They acknowledge that defensive stats are a work in process, although they do use a ton of Statcast data. Part of their daily job is to incorporate the day before's game info into their custom models. Those models are written, tested, and tweaked during the offseason. One of their achievements is an internal website where the scouting reports and other data can be uploaded, compiled and accessed (yes, with state-of-the-art security).

The most popular report they have is the "strike zone by umpire" report for the umpire working the plate that day. The response was better the second year when they took out the numeric data and just had the pictures and a bio blurb about each umpire.

Those are now posted every day by the batting cages.

Responses to audience questions:

- All employees of MLB teams are forbidden to play fantasy baseball (league-level policy).
- They do not have weather-adjusted data (i.e. cold, hot, wet) although you could see them thinking that this might be a really good idea (author's note: I can't believe they don't have this: we've seen how the weather affects Strasburg and increases injury risk!).
- When asked about the human factor, they acknowledge that they can analyze everything that has happened but cannot predict breakout seasons or other human factors. When asked, "so, give an example of someone who broke your models," they responded in unison "Juan Soto."
- There are strict rules about moving between teams, and although the IP itself is proprietary, ideas travel between teams with the employees who thought of them.
- Last question: "Have you done any analysis of 10-year contracts?" Response "I couldn't believe we'd gotten through all of this without a Bryce Harper question. But, to answer your question, no."

Steve Klein on the 1919 Black Sox. He gave us a true-false quiz on the myths that have grown up around that scandal. Most surprising: Hugh Fullerton wrote a book in 1915 "Jimmy Kirkland and the Plot for a Pennant" that predicted, quite accurately, the 1919 Black Sox scandal. So the issue of gambler influence over the game had been growing for a while. Sure, this is 100 years ago, but guess what—gambling is coming, and the issues that go with it. This issue was raised by the speaker and the audience.

Sydney Bergman, Umpires Disproportionately Eject Non-White Players. She presented a 2008-2017 analysis showing that in six of the 10 years studied, umpires disproportionately ejected non-white players at a statistically significant level. In two of the 10 years, it was more, but not statistically significant. In the remaining two, the rates were the same. The vast majority of the ejections were for arguing balls and strikes. She controlled for teams, rivalries, and umpire ethnicity. She also re-ran the stats without certain players who were ejected six or more times during the survey period (hi, Bryce) and it did not change the results. She will be looking at whether the actual location of the "bad" pitch has an effect, but notes that sometimes players are really jawing about a call in the previous at-bat, so it may be hard to isolate that effect. She also will look at crowd size, as that apparently had an effect in an earlier study on ejections overall. Her web page is www.restingpitchface.com, twitter @sydrpfp.

Moe Berg Documentary. Aviva Kempner presented an excerpt from her upcoming Moe Berg documentary, which she hopes to premier at the Avalon in D.C. over Memorial Day. Lots of great interviews and historic footage. Anyway, given what I heard about Season Ticket Holder Hot Stove day, and what I learned at SABR Day, I think I made the right choice. Plus, I came home with 10 baseball books: four for our local “Little Library,” and six for me to read (although Spouse already started “The Catcher was a Spy” so I’ll wait my turn).

BOB DAVIDS CHAPTER OUTING TO NATIONALS PARK: Mark Aug. 18 On Your Calendar, By Mark Pattison

For Nats vs. Brewers: The annual Bob Davids Chapter outing to Nationals Park to see the home team to battle moves this year to a Sunday. It's a first in recent chapter history, so adjust your schedules! The date is Sunday, Aug. 18, a 1:35 start between the Nats and emerging National League powerhouse Milwaukee.

We've already secured 40 tickets for chapter members and their family and friends; reserved the Reagan Room on the 200 level of Nationals Park -- which accommodates 80, so there'll be plenty of room to move about; and told the Nats ticket rep that our acronym is spelled "SABR" -- without an "E"! Chapter leaders have also made overtures for a couple of guest speakers to make presentations for a pre-game program.

We expect to start the program at noon with a ballpark buffet luncheon. Once we're all through the buffet line and seated, we can begin an hourlong program and still get to our seats in plenty of time for the first pitch. The Nats' caterers haven't fixed their prices for the new season yet, so we can't tell you how much it'll cost, but we'll let you know once we do.

MYTHS OF BASEBALL: True or False? By Charles Pavitt

This is the third 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 #7 – The home field advantage for the seventh game of World Series is huge.

The evidence given for this myth is data supporting it for the last couple of decades. But this is almost certainly a fluke due to small sample size. For a few decades beginning with 1950, there was a distinct home field disadvantage for the home team in those games, which spawned a debate among academic psychologists concerning its truth and, if yes, why it would happen. The latest work by Marshall Jones (2014) reveals that, overall, home team winning percentages over the entire Series history have been

about 60 percent for games one and two, 55 percent for game three, and 50 percent thereafter.

Bottom Line: My guess is that even Jones's findings are due to small sample size, and that as the decades go by all games will zero in on the historic 53-54 percent home field advantage that was first calculated by Harold Cavins back in 1938.

Myth #8 – Some batters “own” particular pitchers, and vice versa.

This also seems to be an illusion caused by small sample sizes. Hal Stern and Adam Sugano (two articles in 2007) used something called “multilevel modeling,” which can distinguish effects that occur overall across members of a sample from effects that occur for each individually, to estimate batter/pitcher matchup batting averages given a sufficient number of at bats. For Derek Jeter, for example, his calculated averages ranged from a high of .326 against Hideo Nomo (against whom he had gone 12 for 20 at that point), to a low of .311 against Brad Radke (against whom he had gone 8 for 41). Switching to the other side of the match-up, Mike Mussina's career BAA at that time was .250; the range for specific batters was .312 for Frank Catalanotto (based on 26 for 56) to .214 for Bill Mueller (0 for 23). In Tom Tango, Mitchel. Lichtman and Andrew E. Dolphin's *The Book* (2006), 1999-2000 performances for batter/pitcher matchups were used to predict 2001 outcomes for the same matchups for 300 players with at least 17 plate appearances to predict from and 9 to predict. They concluded that the 2001 outcomes were closer to the players' career wOBAs than to their 1999-2000 matchups. The implication: batters who may seem to “own” pitchers during one season are unlikely to appear that way the next season.

Bottom Line: What appears to be “ownership” is probably a statistical anomaly that will disappear over multiple seasons.

Myth #9 – Never make the first or third out at third base

Ryan Gartner (2016) specifically studied this issue. Beginning with the relevant baserunner on second and assuming no one else on base (Gartner also looked at an additional runner on first, with similar findings) and using 2013 Baseball Prospectus run expectancy tables, the breakeven points (where the odds of the play helping versus hurting are each at 50 percent) were success rates of 76.4 percent for no out, 67.1 percent for one out, and 87.6 percent for two outs; a replication for 2014 provided almost the same figures. This data appear to corroborate the adage; higher breakevens for no and two outs than for one means that likelihood of success has to be higher in those circumstances. However, when including the impact of subsequent possible batters, in 2014 the expected number of runs forfeited by unsuccessful attempts was highest for no outs (.7999), intermediate for one out (.5373), and lowest

for two outs (.2901), which stand to reason given that run scoring is so significantly affected by the number of outs. This implied that making the second out is worse than making the third. Further, using Retrosheet play-by-play data, Gantner noted that break-evens are way lower (.651 for no outs, .540 for one out, .806 for two outs) when only one run is needed than for higher numbers of needed runs, implying that when the score is tied in the ninth the runner should more often go for it:

Bottom Line: Except when one-run strategies are better (i.e., close games in the ninth inning), the fewer outs there are, the worse an out at third is.

THE GLORIES OF SPRINGTIME IN FLORIDA, By Ted Leavengood

A Spring Training trip to Florida is always exciting, a bright harbinger of the summer to come like the flamingo pink sky in the east foretells another Florida sunrise. Our trip was a slow meandering one with its ultimate sights set on Ft. Myers, spring home to the Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins. But as we arrived things heated up noticeably when Bryce Harper announced he was signing with the Phillies, who train in Clearwater.

We booked our first game in Ft. Myers to see the Nationals play the Red Sox, hopeful such a matchup might occur again later in the post-season—emphasis on hopeful. The other goal was to take day trips over to West Palm Beach to the Nationals complex. Knowing that there was a Phillies-Twins contest in Ft. Myers during our stay, I jumped on the web site to assess ticket possibilities. Standing room only as Philly fans were pouring in from all over south Florida for a chance to see the kid. What the hell. SRO was only \$15 so I grabbed my Nikkon and we were off.

Harper was a no-show and Philly fans were not impressed. They seldom are. At this writing, Harper has not appeared in anything more exciting than a “simulated” game, and one might ask whether—other than 2015, if he is anything but a simulated super star? Nate Silver asked a related question about the value of the long-term contract signed and whether Harper is already past his best playing days. As the Viagra label tells you, beware what you wish for.

Back in the real world, Max Scherzer was in mid-season form against the Red Sox A-team. The bullpen looked ragged after Doolittle-Rosenthal-Barracough, and Eric Fedde needs a change of scenery or at least better coaching. The Philly game showcased a Jake Arrieta who could make the Nationals uncomfortable this season, although their bullpen looked worse than ours.

Then we took the drive across the state to West Palm Beach to see the new Nationals complex. Perhaps you don't know, but I am a bit of a curmudgeon and after the first few trips to Viera, I tired of the stadium and its uptight vibe. The minor league complex was fun to visit. Talking to the proud parents of those young talents with big dreams was always fun, but the major league stadium was built 10 feet off the ground like one of those houses on stilts to protect against the next hurricane. The players were on the ground playing baseball and the fans were on stilts waiting for a storm that never came.

There were no other training sites close to Viera. The closest team to visit was in Kissimmee, Florida where the Astros trained. The little bandbox there was a marked contrast to Viera. The stadium walls were two feet high and the players loved hanging on them to chat up fans before games and during batting practice.

The new complex in West Palm reminds me a bit more of Kissimmee and the vibe is definitely more relaxed. We got a late start, but still arrived an hour and a half before game time. Some of the major leaguers were taking batting practice on a field out from where games are played and fans were glued to the fence watching Juan Soto and Ryan Zimmerman take their swings. When they were done the kids made a beeline for the path to the major league complex and a rope line of autograph hounds formed.

I was walking behind an 11-year old girl in a Soto jersey who reminded me very much of my own first spring training trip back in 1999. My then 11-year-old daughter and I had come looking for Mark McGwire after the exciting home run contest between he and Sammy Sosa. So easy to forget that great drama-filled September, but I never will. We stalked McGwire with a ball and a sharpie until we got the deal done at RFK during an exhibition game against the Expos.

This young girl was a bit more timid than my own and her father was trying to coax her into getting into the line for Soto to sign her jersey. Soto was gracious in approaching the waiting throng and happy to sign whatever every third or fourth hand held out to him. As he approached the shy young kid next to me and her father, I told her to turn around and expose the back of her jersey. Then I began hectoring Soto as he moved toward us, holding out a sharpie and motioning to the girl's jersey. He smiled broadly as he put his John Hancock right in the number, thus making what I hope will be a fan for life.

That is what spring training is about: making lifelong memories for youngsters who gather there like me. Patrick Corbin pitched in the game that day and it was good to get a look at him. But the games don't really count and the drama is in watching the hopefuls on both sides of the chalk line. The good news is that the Nationals complex in West Palm Beach is one that can bring the two sides together—fans and players. The place is worth another trip and I hope to have the chance to visit and bring my sharpie along for the ride.

TALKIN' BASEBALL: Upcoming Speakers Announced, By Dave Paulson

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

- April 6 -- Jane Leavy: "*The Big Fella: Babe Ruth and the World He Created.*"
- May 4 -- Anne Keene: "*The Cloudbuster Nine: The Untold Story of Ted Williams and the Baseball Team that helped Win World War II.*"
- June 1 -- Cesar Briosio: "*Last Seasons in Havana: The Castro Revolution and the End of Professional Baseball in Cuba.*"

NOTE: There is a change of the usual venue for the April 6 and May 4 meetings. Those presentations will be held at 9 a.m. at Vantage House, 5400

Vantage Point Rd., Columbia, MD.

The Talkin' Baseball group meets on the first Saturday of each month at 9 a.m. Meetings are normally held at Brighton Gardens, 7110 Minstrel Way, Columbia, Md., and will resume at that location beginning June 1.

Come and bring a friend!

DICK DONOVAN'S DANDY SEASON IN WASHINGTON, By Francis Kinlaw

Few observers of major-league baseball would expect a player with a first-year expansion team to register the most impressive statistic among his peers in any category, but pitcher Dick Donovan achieved precisely that as a member of the 1961 Washington Senators when he posted the lowest earned-run average among all qualifying pitchers in the American or National circuits.

Donovan, a 33-year-old right-hander, thus entered the record books in a relatively unheralded manner during a season remembered most for numerous home runs by Roger Maris, Mickey Mantle, and a host of other sluggers.

Prior to being selected by the Senators from the Chicago White Sox on Dec. 14, 1960 with the 54th overall pick in the American League's expansion draft (conducted to provide players to the newly created Senators and Los Angeles Angels), Donovan had spent the previous six seasons (1955-60) as a prominent starter in the regular rotation of the Chisox.

In those years, the Pale Hose finished in third place three times, in the runner-up spot twice, and at the top of the American League heap in 1959. Donovan had performed in a valuable manner on a consistent basis, winning 73 games and losing 50 times as his effective sliders drew special praise.

His annual earned-run averages were consistent from 1955 through 1959, ranging from a low of 2.77 in 1957 to a high of 3.66 in the pennant-winning season of 1959. He completed 62 of his 154 starting assignments for the White Sox and led the American League in complete games in 1957 by going all the way 16 times.

Donovan's right arm began to give him trouble during the 1959 season and, in 1960, he started only eight games for the Chisox, throwing only 79 innings as his ERA increased to a lofty 5.38. Those developments, as well as a personality conflict with White Sox skipper Al Lopez, caused his name to be placed on the list of players available to the expansion Angels and Senators.

Following the draft, Donovan proclaimed that he was elated to be leaving the White

Sox, saying that he “felt like he had been paroled from prison.” And, after failing to see eye-to-eye with Lopez, he enjoyed his new relationship with Nats manager Mickey Vernon.

With new surroundings and a renewed spirit, a reinvigorated Donovan became one of baseball’s most effective pitchers in 1961. While he posted a respectable record of 10-10 for a team that won 61 games while losing 100, it should also be noted that six of his losses occurred in games decided by a single run. Furthermore, his earned-run average of 2.40 indicates clearly that several of the games he lost were low-scoring affairs. Donovan summarized his remarkable season in a mere eight words: “I have never pitched better in my life.”

Given Donovan’s outstanding performance during the 1961 season, the fact that the Senators decided to part with him a few days after the 1961 season ended seems quite stunning. What circumstance could have possibly persuaded the front office of a struggling franchise to send one of its brightest stars to another organization?

The Senators traded Donovan, catcher-outfielder Gene Green, and rarely used infielder Jim Mahoney to the Cleveland Indians on Oct. 5, 1961 for colorful outfielder Jim Piersall. The intent of the trade, from the Senators’ perspective, was to bolster an anemic offense by obtaining a solid defensive outfielder who had just completed a season in which his batting average was .322. (Other than Gene Woodling, who had hit .313 while appearing in 110 games, no other player in Washington’s 1961 lineup came close to a .300 average.) Piersall’s acquisition may have been perceived as even more sensible because, despite Donovan’s strong performance in 1961, the latter would be a 34-year-old hurler with a history of a sore arm on the next Opening Day.

However, the erroneous reasoning by the Senators (which was reportedly supported reluctantly by Mickey Vernon) became apparent early in the 1962 season. Piersall posted an extremely disappointing batting average of .244 in the ’62 campaign and, to make matters worse, Donovan started 34 games for Cleveland and won 20 of them while registering an ERA of 3.59. Consequently, the serious miscalculation by the Washington franchise regarding Donovan and Piersall must be added to a list of the club’s other disappointments on and off the field, as the Senators lost 100 or more games in each of the next three years (1962-64).

CONSIDERING INHERITED RUNNERS IN WAR, By Johnny AseI

CRACK! As Houston Astros catcher Evan Gattis’s line drive landed down the left field line, it brought both Andrew Cashner’s season and the Texas Rangers’ playoff hopes to their final games. The hit gave the Astros a 8-2 lead and they went on to win the

game. The runners Cashner had left on first and second had come around to score, leaving him with eight runs allowed in three and two thirds innings pitched.

In many ways, the 2017 season was all that Cashner could've hoped it to be. After back-to-back dismal seasons with the Padres and the Marlins, his career was in desperate need of revival. The Rangers took a chance on the struggling pitcher, signing him to a one-year, \$10 million contract. The risk was well worth it as Cashner ended up 11-11 with a 3.40 ERA in 166.2 innings.

As much as he had to be thankful for, he also had every right to complain. Twelve of his 75 runs allowed were unearned due to subpar defense, he played in a hitter-friendly ballpark (thus inflating his ERA), and he faced tough offenses all year (he had the highest RA9/opp among qualified pitchers). Fortunately, WAR takes all this into account and neutralizes them, hence his career-high WAR of 4.3.

Unfortunately for Cashner, something WAR does not take into account is inherited runners. In 28 starts, he left 18 runners on base for the bullpen to deal with. On average, 7.34 of those runners would score; the Rangers bullpen let 12 score. Those 4.66 runs above expected were not charged to the relievers who allowed them to score, but to Cashner.

After Gattis's double, Paolo Espino got Alex Bregman to hit a pop fly to the first baseman for the final out of the inning. The eight-run inning was over, all runs charged to Cashner. While he did not pitch particularly well, the cards were stacked against him. His defense made two errors on plays that could've limited the damage leading to seven unearned runs. His reliever needed just one out to escape the scenario but was incapable of doing so. All of this against the best offense in the league at the time, the Houston Astros.

Based on Baseball Prospectus' 2017 Run Expectancy Matrix (and adjusted for ballpark), the runners Cashner left on first and second with two outs would, on average, result in .35 runs. In a world where blame was properly distributed among pitchers, Cashner would be charged 0.35 runs and Espino would be charged 1.65. This system would properly hold pitchers accountable for the runners they leave on base while punishing/rewarding the relievers based on how they handle said runners.

Using this 'proper blame' system for inherited/uninherited runners would have a significant impact on WAR for pitchers. Among qualified pitchers, 44 out of 58 (75.9%) would see a RAA change of ± 0.5 or more. In terms of average absolute value change in the RAA (amongst players with qualified playing time), incorporating inherited/uninherited runners would have a larger average effect than Rdp (the current smallest factor in WAR).

As much as the graph above verifies inherited runners as a worthy factor, it perhaps

is understating its true value. With most WAR factors, the effect increases as playing time increases because the difference between a player's skill level and the league average is being multiplied. However, the inherited runners factor could affect relievers (despite pitching fewer innings than starters) more profoundly. Although I primarily stuck to testing qualified pitchers, I did test a handful of relief pitchers who were particularly effective or ineffective in preventing inherited runners from scoring. The two extremes in the sample set were Heath Hembree and Yusmeiro Petit.

Yusmeiro Petit was a perfect 20 for 20 in stranding inherited runners, saving his team 6.46 expected runs by doing so. Furthermore, the Angels' bullpen cost him 1.4 runs above expected by allowing five of his 13 uninherited runners to score.

In contrast, Heath Hembree of the Red Sox allowed 22 of his 46 inherited runners to score, costing those pitchers preceding him an extra 6.98 runs. He also benefited from effective relief pitching behind him. Hembree was charged with 4.77 fewer runs than what would have been expected as just 5 of his 25 uninherited runs scored. While these examples represent the extremes, they show that this factor can significantly affect even pitchers with relatively less playing time.

Baseball media has done a good job recently of recognizing that inherited runners is a key part of how relief pitchers should be evaluated. In an era of increased bullpen usage, it is more important than ever to tweak WAR to properly assess their value and how it affects the Andrew Cashners of the world.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: A Visit to the Big Train

The Bob Davids Chapter's "minor league" outing will visit the Bethesda Big Train of the Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League. The date is Saturday, June 8. The first pitch is 7 p.m., and SABR chapter leaders are working with club officials (who include chapter members Bruce Adams and Bill Hickman) on a bang-up program before the game that will include dinner.

It's been a decade -- at least! -- since we stopped by Bethesda and Shirley Povich Field, the crown jewel in the Ripken League. Make plans now to attend what promises to be a terrific event.

SABR FOR BREAKFAST IN ANNAPOLIS

SABR For Breakfast? SABR members in the Greater Annapolis area have begun meeting for breakfast on the third Saturday of each month. We are about evenly split between the D.C. and Baltimore chapters.

So far, our footprint ranges from Severna Park to Mayo, and from Bowie to Stevensville,

but all are welcome. Breakfast starts at 8:30, and we are rotating locations until we find the one we like best. If you'd like to check us out, please send an email to jerry@themanheims.net to join our mailing list.

SA-"BEER," ANYONE?

For those who like to quaff a cold brew with their baseball, we're going to try to gin up (sorry, couldn't resist) a "SABeeR" outing at Chatter, the former Chadwick's restaurant (and Hamburger Hamlet way before that) at 5247 Wisconsin Ave. NW in Washington, close to the Friendship Heights stop on Metrorail's Red Line (there's also meter parking on Wisconsin and some free parking on nearby neighborhood streets).

Since many other nights of the week are taken with at least one SABR-related outing, we're going to make a test flight for a Nationals home game on Monday, April 29, a 7:05 first pitch against St. Louis.

If it works, great! If it doesn't, maybe we'll try another night of the week. But seriously, folks, how many of you have a standing engagement on the fifth Monday of the month? If you're intrigued, call chapter secretary Mark Pattison at 202-247-6435 or email him at mpattison@catholicnews.com.

EXPANSION SENATORS STRUGGLED TO REACH .500, By Andrew Sharp

Prior to the sudden improvement under Ted Williams in 1969, the expansion Washington Senators rarely reached the .500 mark beyond the early days of the season. Even the '69 team struggled to win more games than it lost until a September surge. On July 30, the '69 Senators' record stood at 53-54 before finishing at 86-76, the expansion team's lone winning season.

The '68 Senators, a team that would finish 10th, teased fans by starting with an 11-7 record by April 30. After four straight losses, that team dropped to 11-11 on May 5. It was all downhill from there. The same was true of the "Off the Floor in '64" team after it split its first 12 games. Those Nats at least finished, as promised, out of the cellar despite losing 100 times.

When the American League expanded and the original Senators were allowed to move to Minneapolis-St. Paul for 1961, Washington was stuck with an expansion team. General Manager Ed Doherty and Mickey Vernon, who had been named field manager, chose to go mostly with veteran players in the expansion draft.

Their strategy seemed to work well into mid-June. After beating the Orioles, 5-2, in Baltimore on June 15, the expansion Nats stood at a surprising 30-30, tied with the O's, also 30-30, in fourth place. (The '61 Nats actually were a game over .500 at 24-23 on June 2 before losing five in a row.)

Unfortunately, or perhaps predictably, the penchant for long losing streaks caught up with the Senators. Washington jumped out to a 6-0 lead the next night, June 16, in Boston before the Red Sox came roaring back to win 14-9. The Sox win, coincidentally, left Boston at 30-30. Saturday was more of the same. The Nats blew a 5-1 lead and lost 6-5.

Still, the team was just two games below .500. The Sunday game, however, has to rank as the worst loss in the history of the expansion team, if not the worst ever for a Washington team, up to this past season. Leading 7-5 into the top of the 9th, Washington scored five times, aided by a Willie Tasby grand slam. Despite giving up five runs, Carl Mathias took the mound for the bottom of the 9th, three outs away from what would be his first Major League victory.

The inning began with a harmless groundout by Vic Wertz. Don Buddin singled, but Billy Harrell, pinch-hitting for the pitcher, struck out. One out away from victory, the Nats led 12-5 with a runner on first. A single by Chuck Shilling sent Buddin to second.

Carrol Hardy then singled in Buddin, sending Shilling to third. Still, two outs and a 12-6 lead. Mathias' day was done when he walked Gary Geiger to load the bases. Vernon brought in Dave Sisler, who already had seven saves and whose earned run average at that point was 1.67. Perhaps, assuming the Nats had a safe lead, he didn't have enough time to warm up. In any case, his outing was an utter disaster.

Sisler proceeded to walk Jackie Jensen, forcing in a run, then he walked Frank Malzone, bringing in another run and putting the Sox in slam range at 12-8. Of course, that's just what happened. Struggling to throw strikes, Sisler served up a gopher ball to Jim Pagliaroni. The Nats' 12-5 lead was gone. Mathias, by the way, never did win a Major League game.

The Red Sox, however, were not done, nor was Sisler. He walked Vic Wertz before Vernon replaced him with Marty Kutyna. Buddin greeted Kutyna with another single, moving Wertz to second. Pete Runnels ran for Wertz and Russ Nixon batted for Harrell. Nixon promptly singled to right, scoring Runnels and leaving to Senators stunned losers, 13-12. The Red Sox had scored eight runs with two outs and a man on first.

Washington's third loss in a row would be followed by seven more. August featured a 14-game losing streak. Between Aug. 18 and Sept. 8, the '61 Nats dropped 24 of 25 games. A loss to Kansas City on the final day of the season was the Senators' 100th and left the team in a last-place tie with the A's in the A.L. basement.

Sadly, this 9th- (albeit last-) place finish would be as high as the Senators could get until 1965. After three more 100-loss seasons, the team improved to 70-92 for manager Gil Hodges. The 8th-place finish in '65 was an eight-game improvement over 1964 and four

games better than the team's expected Pythagorean, runs-based, won-loss total.

The '66 finish again was four games better than the Pythagorean expectation. The Senators flirted with .500 that season as late as June 1, when Washington was 22-24. But the Nats dropped 12 of the next 13 games to put an end to that.

Thanks to three games not made up in '66, the Nats lost fewer than 90 games for the first time, finishing 71-88. Still, Washington avoided the cellar by just one game. The Red Sox, a team that would reach the '67 World Series, finished half a game behind the Senators at 72-90 and half a game ahead of the Yankees, who finished 10th at 70-89.

The steady if minimal improvement continued in 1967. Behind a Phil Ortega 3-hitter, the Senators beat the Twins, 5-0, on Aug. 7 to reach .500 at 55-55. The Nats split the next six games. The 9-7 win over the Twins on Aug. 9, pulling the team back even at 56-56 was a 20-inning affair in which the Nats scored seven runs in the seventh after trailing 7-0. The Senators' closer Darold Knowles pitched an amazing 10 shutout innings — the 8th through the 18th — before Ken McMullen put the Nats ahead with a solo homer. Frank Howard doubled and scored an insurance run. Dave Baldwin stopped the Twins over the last three innings for his first Major League win.

After shutting out Kansas City, 2-0, on Aug. 13 behind Frank Bertaina, Washington stood at 58-58. That was as good as it got, however, as Washington dropped 10 of the next 12. Still, the 76-85 finish was good enough for a sixth-place tie with Baltimore and was six games better than the Pythagorean won-loss expectation.

The departure of Hodges to the Mets after his apprenticeship in D.C. probably played a part in the Senators falling to the cellar again in '68, despite the encouraging 11-7 start. The 1969 season would be the one Washington baseball fans would have to savor for more than three decades until the Expos became the Nationals in 2005. Three 100-loss seasons brought back memories of the '60s before the new Nats became consistent winners. Let's hope the success continues.