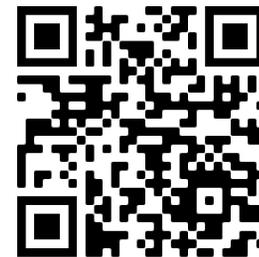




I'll Do It Myself

The Stories Behind the Unassisted Triple Plays



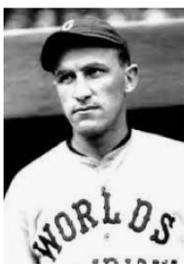
Paul Hines
May 8, 1878

"I nearly fell and broke my neck."



Neal Ball
July 19, 1909

"The darn thing hit my glove and stuck."

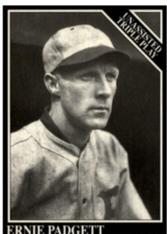


Bill Wambsganss
October 10, 1920

"You'd think I was born on the day before and died on the day after."



George Burns
September 14, 1923



Ernie Padgett
October 6, 1923

"Much easier than making a souffle."



Glenn Wright
May 7, 1925

"That was one of the easiest plays I ever made. I couldn't help it."



Jimmy Cooney
May 30, 1927

"I didn't even get to celebrate. I had a dish of ice cream instead."



Johnny Neun
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"I'm running into the Hall of Fame."



Ron Hansen
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"It just happened."



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"It's nice to do it in front of the family."



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July 8, 1994

"I guess it was my night."



Randy Velarde
May 29, 2000

"I caught it. Tag, Tag, that's it!"

Position Totals			
Shortstops	8		
Second Basemen	5		
First Basemen	2		
Centerfielder*	1*		

Teams Involved More Than Once			
Organization	Turned	Hit Into	Total
Cleveland	3	3	6
Atl/Mil/Bos*	2	2*	4*
Boston Red Sox	2	1	3
Philadelphia	2	1	3
Pittsburgh	1	2	3
St. Louis	0	2	2

*Includes the Providence Grays' disputed UTP

"The Rest of the Story"

There have been 16 unassisted triple plays (UTP) in all of major league baseball. This includes the disputed Paul Hines triple play in 1878. Most of the UTPs have been similar. There are runners on first and second moving on the pitch with a line drive to a middle infielder who catches the line drive, steps on second and tags the runner coming from first. The play itself (over in just a few seconds) isn't the main attraction of this

Stars or Not?

Four Highest in WAR	
Paul Hines	44.9
Troy Tulowitzki	44.5
Rafael Furcal	39.5
George Burns	35.1

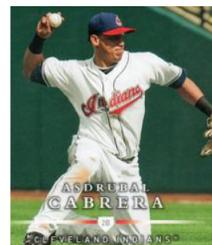
Four Lowest in WAR	
Ernie Padgett	0.8
Eric Bruntlett	0.8
Neal Ball	1.0
Johnny Neun	1.3

Hall of Fame? As of 2022, no player with an unassisted triple play has been inducted into the Hall of Fame.



Eric Bruntlett
August 23, 2009

"The whole game, it seemed, was strange."



Asdrubal Cabrera
May 12, 2008

"The only thing that I remember is that I threw the ball to the fans."



Troy Tulowitzki
April 29, 2007

"It kind of just fell into my lap, but I'll take it."



Rafael Furcal
August 10, 2003

"I was just trying to get outs."

The First UTP?

May 8, 1878
Paul Hines, CF, Providence Grays
Boston Red Caps at Providence Grays

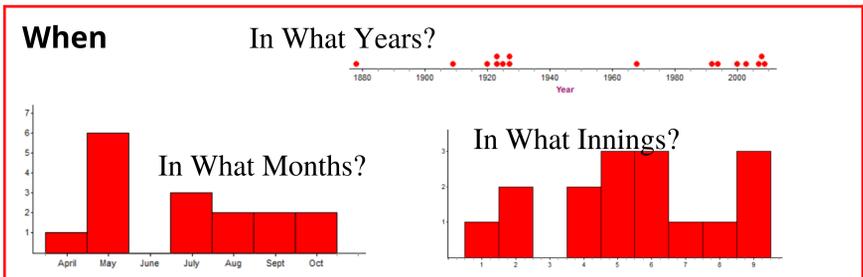
Paul Hines

Charlie Sweasy

The Setup: The Providence Grays led the Boston Red Caps/Red Stockings 3-0 in the top of the eighth inning. A walk, a throwing error by the second baseman, and a muffed popup by the first baseman, made the score 3-1, with Jack Manning on third and Ezra Sutton, the tying run, on second. Jack Burdock, the Boston second baseman, was up to bat.

The Play: Paul Hines, the Providence centerfielder, was playing deep, but then took a few steps in and towards leftfield. Burdock hit a short fly ball over the shortstops head. Both runners, seeing the opportunity to tie the game, took off for home. Hines came sprinting in and made an ankle-high catch, losing his balance and nearly falling. In fact, as Hines retold the story years later, "I nearly fell and broke my neck." Without falling, he regained his balance with his momentum carrying him towards third base. With both runners near home plate, he stepped on third base which, according to the rules of the day, (not today's rules), put both runners out. The umpire called out, "That's three outs. Side is out." And there you have it - The first unassisted triple play in the history of major league baseball...or was it...?

The Rest of the Story: After Hines stepped on third base, the Providence second baseman, Charlie Sweasy, called for the ball. Hines threw it to him, and "for good measure," Sweasy stepped on second base. **Everybody agrees that it was a triple play, but there is disagreement on whether Hines should receive all three putouts, or two putouts and an assist.** Box scores in newspapers differed, as do accounts of the play as told by players, coaches, and an umpire. Two questions need to be answered to know unambiguously if Hines should receive credit for a UTP. First, **where was Sutton when Hines stepped on third base?** Was he between third and home, which could give Hines credit for that putout, or was he between second and third, which would credit Sweasy with the putout? Second, **would stepping on third retire Sutton if he was between third and home?** According to the rules today, Sutton's original base (second base) would have to be tagged. However, the rules in 1878 were not clearly written and could be interpreted to think tagging third base would be sufficient to put out the runner who originated at second. It should be noted that Major League Baseball does not credit Hines with a UTP. In recent correspondence with MLB's historian, **John Thorn, he still believes Hines should be credited with a UTP.** In this presentation, I am including Hines' play. Who am I to argue with John Thorn?



Redemption

John Valentin made an error in the fifth inning that led to an unearned run before turning his UTP in the sixth inning.

Randy Velarde made an error on Jorge Posada's groundball allowing an unearned run to score. He turned his UTP on the next batter.

Eric Bruntlett committed a fielding error and then mishandled a groundball (ruled a hit), putting the tying runs on base in the ninth. He turned his UTP on the next batter, ending the game.

John Valentin and Randy Velarde had both redemption and a great day

Having a Great Day

After turning his UTP, **Neal Ball** led off the bottom of the inning with a homerun on the first pitch. It was his first major league homerun, and his only homerun that season.

John Valentin also hit a homerun leading off the bottom of the inning after his UTP.

Randy Velarde hit a homerun in the ninth inning (his next at bat) after his UTP three innings earlier.

Twice as Nice

When **Randy Velarde** turned his UTP on May 29, 2000 while playing for Oakland against the New York Yankees, it was actually the second UTP of his career. Five years earlier, in 1995, while with the Yankees he turned one against the Angels in a Spring Training game.

Glove used by Jimmy Cooney for his UTP

Barry McCormick

There have been seven umpires who have been on the field for two unassisted triple plays. **Barry McCormick** is the only one of the seven who made the out calls for two UTPs. His second was for Jimmy Cooney's UTP (the second Cooney was involved in), and the other field umpire was Hank O'Day who had made the out calls for Bill Wambsganss' UTP in the 1920 World Series.

The Most Recent UTP

August 23, 2009
Eric Bruntlett, 2B, Philadelphia Phillies
Philadelphia Phillies at New York Mets

The Setup: Philadelphia led New York, 9-6, in the bottom of the ninth. Brad Lidge, the Phillies closer, came on to pitch the ninth. Angel Pagan reached on a three-base error by first baseman, Ryan Howard. **Eric Bruntlett made an error** on a groundball hit by Luis Castillo which scores Pagan. Daniel Murphy is credited with a single on a groundball that Eric Bruntlett misplays; Castillo stops at second base. The tying runs were on base with Jeff Francoeur, the winning run, coming to bat.

The Play: With a count of 2-2, the Mets started the runners. Eric Bruntlett, already shading the batter up the middle took a couple of steps towards second, and Jeff Francoeur hit a line drive just to the right of second base. Bruntlett easily took a couple of steps to catch the line drive as he stepped on second base. Daniel Murphy, running from first base, stopped and tried to back pedal away, but Bruntlett was able to tag him to complete the unassisted triple play, which ended the game.

Quotes:
"I didn't know how to react. I didn't know what to do." – Eric Bruntlett
"What a bizarre ending. That's definitely not the way you draw it up." – Brad Lidge (pitcher who earned the save)
"To end the way it did was a little disheartening." – Jeff Francoeur (batter who hit into the triple play)

The Rest of the Story: This is the second time in baseball history that an unassisted triple play ended a game. First baseman, Johnny Neun, also ended a game with one in 1927. **Eric Bruntlett was a utility fielder** who in 2009 appeared in games at all positions except pitcher and catcher, and this was one of only five games that he started at second base for the Phillies that year. He was filling in for Chase Utley, who had been given the day off. **Bruntlett had misplays on the two previous batters** (an error and then a mishandled grounder that was ruled a hit). After Bruntlett's two misplays in the ninth inning, the television cameras showed Utley sitting on the bench in the Philadelphia dugout as if to ask, "Shouldn't he be out there instead of Bruntlett?" With the game on the line, Bruntlett redeemed himself with the UTP.

On the offensive side, Bruntlett was having a poor season. His batting average at that point was .154. However, he hit well that day going 3 for 5. It would have been an even better day, but in his final at bat in the ninth inning, he was robbed of an extra base hit by Jeff Francoeur with a diving catch in right-centerfield. However, **Bruntlett got his revenge in the bottom half of the inning as it was Francoeur who lined into the triple play to end the game.**

Bruntlett played in 512 games during his seven seasons in the major leagues. **After his unassisted triple play, he would appear in the field in only four more games in his career.**

- ### Fun Facts
- Game 5 of the 1920 World Series not only had **Bill Wambsganss'** UTP, it also featured the first World Series grand slam, and the first World Series homerun by a pitcher.
 - After **Ron Hansen** turned his UTP in 1968, he struck out in his next six plate appearances, followed by a grand slam. He was traded the day after his grand slam.
 - George Burns** was on the bench for Cleveland when Bill Wambsganss turned his UTP. He was then traded to Boston, where he turned his UTP against Cleveland. Then he was traded back to Cleveland in a trade that sent Wambsganss to Boston.
 - Johnny Neun** read in the newspaper about Jimmy Cooney's UTP the day before. He asked a teammate when he thought that would happen again. Neun turned his own later that day.
 - As a rookie, **Glenn Wright** got a lot of good advice from Rogers Hornsby when Pittsburgh stayed at a hotel in St. Louis where Hornsby was living. The next year, as Wright tagged out Hornsby for the third out in his UTP, Hornsby said, "Nice work, kid!"
 - When **Asdrubal Cabrera** turned his UTP, **Ron Hansen** was in attendance at the game as a scout, forty years after he turned his own UTP.

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Resources

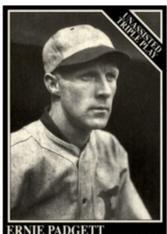
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