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CAGUAS CRIOLLOS: Puerto Rican Powerhouse



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Note from the Editor

I was at a spring training game in Florida this year when I struck up a conversation with a stranger in the stands, as one usually does. He was passingly familiar with SABR and I told him I was the editor of the *Baseball Research Journal*. “Oh,” he said, “is that one about stats or about history?” He seemed surprised when I said “both.” I’m not sure why the idea persists that there is a divide between stats and history, other than the prevalent human reflex to categorize things into polar opposites, even when no opposition exists. Did any developmental psychologist ever truly debate “nature versus nurture?” All scientific evidence about what makes us who we are points to important contributions on both sides of the ledger.

But that reflex to divide things into opposing sides persists. Whether the behavior is innate or learned, there is something satisfying to our brains about it. Perhaps that’s part of why two-sided games are so interesting to us. We create two artificial opponents—maybe even rivals—and watch them compete. Major league baseball accepts no ties: each game must have a winner.

In real life, though, outside the artificial confines of fair versus foul, history and stats are not in opposition any more than letters and numbers are rivals. Both are needed for understanding and learning. Stats are not the enemy of poetic pursuits. When a player or team makes an assault on the record books, those books are not filled with the prose of Homer or Shakespeare, but with numbers. I have never heard a critic of analytics claim that a baseball game’s score being counted in discrete runs and declaring the winner based on quantity “takes away the human element,” so why should counting any other element of the game? After all, although it’s the final score that matters, it’s how it was achieved that is the story. Every number is a creation of history in action.

So whether you are all about the journey or the destination—or, more likely, you enjoy both—I hope you’ll enjoy this issue of the *Baseball Research Journal*. As usual, these SABR researchers take us to places near and far, to times recent and distant, and look at names, numbers, people, teams, players, incidents, rules, terminology, and more. Nearly every piece has some measure of both stats and history in varying amounts, a variety that hopefully means there’s something for everyone here.

— Cecilia Tan
Publications Director



Caguas Criollos

Five Caribbean Series Crowns and Cooperstown Connections

Thomas E. Van Hyning

The Caguas Criollos won back-to-back Caribbean Series crowns in 2017 and '18, beating Mexicali 1–0 in 10 innings on February 7, 2017, and defeating Aguilas Cibaenas from the Dominican Republic on February 8, 2018. The Criollos' fifth Caribbean Series title puts them in elite company: Only the Dominican Republic's Tigres del Licey have won more Caribbean Series titles, with 10. Aguilas Cibaenas from the Dominican Republic and the Santurce Cangrejeros from Puerto Rico have also won five.

Caguas has won 18 league titles in Puerto Rico and played in 14 Caribbean Series. Its five wins were in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1954; Hermosillo, Mexico, in 1974 and 1987; Culiacán, Mexico, in 2017; and Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2018. The Caribbean Series is now a five-team event between champions of the Cuban National Series, the Dominican Winter League, the Mexican Pacific League, the Puerto Rican Roberto Clemente Professional Baseball League, and the Venezuelan Professional Baseball League.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CAGUAS AND ROBERTO CLEMENTE PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL LEAGUE

Caguas is 20 miles south of San Juan. Its name comes from the Taíno chieftain Caguax. "Criollo," within the context of Puerto Rico, refers to those who are natives of and indigenous to the island. Native players representing Caribbean Series teams are "criollos," a source of pride. Luis Olmo was an original 1938–39 Caguas Criollo; Víctor Pellot (Vic Power) was a Caguas star and seven-time AL Gold Glover. Caguas stars included

Roberto Vargas, Jim Rivera, Félix Mantilla, Félix Millán, José Pagán, Julio Navarro, Willie Montañez, Jerry Morales, José "Cheo" Cruz, Eduardo Figueroa, Sixto Lezcano, Henry Cotto, Francisco Oliveras, Bernie Williams, Omar Olivares, Juan González, Joey and Alex Cora, Roberto Clemente, Roberto Alomar, and Iván "Pudge" Rodríguez.

Caguas was one of six franchises in the inaugural 40-game season in 1938–39.¹ It merged with the Santurce Cangrejeros (Crabbers) during World War II and again in 1992–94 as cost-cutting measures. The Criollos won 1940–41 and 1947–48 league titles prior to their first Caribbean Series in 1950, a tiebreaker loss to Panama's Carta Vieja Yankees. The 1950–51 Criollos lost a dramatic final series to Santurce, on the "Pepelucazo," a two-out walk-off home run by Pepe Lucas, on February 16, 1951.² This was Puerto Rico's version of Bobby Thomson's "Shot Heard 'Round the World." Caguas won the 1954 Caribbean Series after a five-team, 80-game regular season plus league finals.³ Its 1974 championship team went through a six-team, 70-game season and two playoff series. The 1987 champs had participated in a six-team, 54-game regular season, a 12-game round-robin, and league finals. The 2017 Caribbean Series winners were in a five-team, 40-game regular season, then semifinals and finals. The abbreviated four-team, 18-game regular season in January 2018 was a result of damage from Hurricane Maria, which hit Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017. Table 1 highlights the five Caribbean Series title seasons.

Table 1. Caguas Five Caribbean Series Winners

Season	W–L	Manager	League Standing	Postseason Summary
1953–54	46–34	Mickey Owen	1	Won finals over Mayagüez Indios 4–1
1973–74	39–31	Bobby Wine	2	Won semis over San Juan Senadores 4–2; won finals over Ponce Leones 4–2
1986–87	31–23	Tim Foli, Ramón Avilés	2	Won round-robin tournament (8–4 record); won finals over Ponce, 4–2
2016–17	19–21	Luis Matos	3	Won semis over Mayagüez 4–2; won finals over Santurce 5–3
2017–18	11–7	Luis Matos	1	Won finals over Santurce 3–0

1954 SERIES: SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

Mickey Owen was a marvelous player-manager. Caguas won 15 of its last 17 regular-season games with Owen catching to overtake San Juan. Owen said, “Brooks Lawrence was the best pitcher on the Caguas staff; could start or relieve...reason I went back to catching. Lawrence moved the ball around the plate with a sliding curve/big curveball; Guigui Lucas [Pepe Lucas’s brother] felt uncomfortable catching certain pitches. Guigui was a character—carried his money and even a paycheck in his back pocket; played in lots of places where money was taken from locker rooms.”⁴

Hank Aaron contributed to Caguas’s regular-season and league title series efforts but returned to the States after Caguas won Puerto Rico’s league title. Aaron’s two homers in the All-Star Game on December 23, 1953, duplicated Josh Gibson’s feat 12 years earlier. Vic Power recalled: “Aaron, Jim Rivera, Bob Buhl, Brooks Lawrence, and I were the key players that championship season.”⁵

Caribbean Series reinforcements were and are a common practice. Aaron was replaced on Caguas’s roster by Bill Howerton Sr., a Mayagüez outfielder in 1953–54 after his release by a Cuban team. Caguas also reinforced itself with two more position players—outfielder Carlos Bernier of Mayagüez and second baseman Jack Cassini of San Juan—plus four pitchers: Luis Arroyo and Jack Sanford (Ponce), Rubén Gómez (Santurce) and Corky Valentine (Mayagüez).

The four teams in the six-game round-robin series were Almendares Alacranes from Cuba; Panama’s Carta Vieja Yankees; Venezuela’s Pastora Lecheros (Milkers); and host Caguas. Games were played at San Juan’s Sixto Escobar Stadium. The key Game Three was Almendares-Caguas. The Cubans were up 1–0 in the seventh inning but Howerton tied the game with a homer and Rance Pless won it, 3–1, with another. Billy Howerton Jr. recalled that after the Cuba game, “Fans began to torch newspapers and anything they could lay their hands on. It was like a huge bonfire. After the game, I remember my father being interviewed for several radio stations. He received gift certificates.”⁶ Howerton Sr. had revenge on his mind: “I had been released by Cuba’s Marianao team early that season; but I could always hit.”

Rance Pless recalls serenades all night long after Caguas won four series games to clinch the title. Pless gave a speech in the Caguas town plaza.⁷ He received a portable TV and other gifts and noticed fans were passed out everywhere the next morning. Caguas center fielder Jim Rivera was the series MVP. Player-manager Owen rode the team mascot, a mule or

“yeguita,” around the field in a victory celebration. Vern Benson made the 1954 Caribbean Series All-Star team for Venezuela’s Pastora Lecheros. He recalled Luis Aparicio, his backup, got a lot of playing time in Aparicio’s first Caribbean Series.⁸ Luis Arroyo, Rubén Gómez, Jack Sanford, and Corky Valentine pitched well for Caguas in the series. Tables 2, 3, and 4 have series standings, leaders, and All-Star team.⁹

Table 2. 1954 Series Standings

Team	W–L	Manager
Caguas Criollos	4–2	Mickey Owen
Almendares	3–3	Bobby Bragan
Carta Vieja	3–3	Al Kubi
Pastora	2–4	Napoleón Reyes

Table 3. 1954 Series Leaders

MVP	Jim Rivera, Caguas	
Batting Average	Jim Rivera, Caguas	.450
Home Runs	Ray Orteig, Almendares	2
RBIs	Luis García, Pastora	9
Stolen Bases	Jack Cassini, Caguas	2
Wins	Victor Stryka, Carta Vieja	2
Innings	Victor Stryka, Carta Vieja	18
ERA	Victor Stryka, Carta Vieja	0.50
Strikeouts	Joe Hatten, Almendares	12

Table 4. 1954 Series All-Stars

Pos.	All-Star	Team
C	Ray Orteig	Almendares
1B	Vic Power	Caguas
2B	Jack Cassini	Caguas
3B	Luis García	Pastora
SS	Vern Benson	Pastora
LF	Bob Prescott	Carta Vieja
CF	Jim Rivera	Caguas
RF	Sam Chapman	Almendares
P	Victor Stryka	Carta Vieja

CAGUAS FALLS SHORT

Caguas won league titles in 1955–56, 1957–58, and 1959–60, but not a Caribbean Series. Cuba won five straight from 1956 to 1960 before the series was discontinued for a decade. First baseman Lou Limmer and pitcher Tom Lasorda were Caguas contributors on the 1955–56 team; Limmer’s three homers in the 1956 series placed him on the All-Star team. Power was the 1956 All-Star third baseman. Roberto Clemente’s .391 batting average and .609 SLG earned him series All-Star laurels in 1958. Tommy Davis was the 1960 Caribbean Series MVP with a .409 batting average, three homers, six RBIs, seven runs, and two stolen bases.¹⁰ Caguas’s

1955–59 transactions included the purchase of Clemente, Juan Pizarro, and Ronnie Samford in late December 1956 from Santurce for \$30,000; the acquisition of Julio Navarro and Jose Pagán from Santurce in 1959 for Pizarro and \$10,000; and the 1959 trade that sent Clemente and two minor leaguers—José Santiago and Marcial Allen—to the San Juan Senadores for \$30,000 and two other minor leaguers, Herminio Cortés and Rafael Salamo.¹¹

Caguas contended in the 1960s and early '70s, winning the 1967–68 title over Santurce. Luis Tiant was a 1961–62 Caguas star. Two other imports were Pete Richert and Frank Howard of the Los Angeles Dodgers. Richert appreciated his teammates showing him a good time. “It was fun. José [Pagán] and Félix [Mantilla] found a way to take care of us,” said Richert. “After a game, four or five of us would get in a car and drive to San Juan for a show and something to eat.” Richert said Puerto Rico was a great place to play and learn about someone else’s culture and lifestyle.¹² Howard hit the longest home run in Caguas history, conservatively estimated at 536 feet, against Jack Fisher of San Juan, in a January 1961 championship series game. “You learned to hit in old Sixto Escobar Stadium when you faced Bob Gibson, Juan Pizarro, Bob Bolin and Tite Arroyo,” said Howard. “Every young player should play two or three years of Winter League baseball to refine their skills. The Puerto Rico league kept me in the big leagues and toughened me up. It was better than Triple A.”¹³

Caguas had loyal and rabid fans who could double as groundskeepers. John Strohmayer was pitching in 1970–71 at Caguas when a deluge stopped play in the fourth inning. “Within 20 minutes, the entire infield was covered with two inches of water,” he recalled. “I put my arm in a bucket of ice.” Fans who lived in neighboring houses went home and got their wheelbarrows. A big pile of loam was under the stands and put to use. It stopped raining and play resumed 40 minutes later!¹⁴

1974 SERIES: HERMOSILLO, MEXICO

Venezuela did not participate because of a players’ strike. Two teams from host Mexico—Mazatlán Venados (Deer) and Yaquis de Obregón, participated, with the Tigres del Licey, managed by Lasorda, plus the Criollos. Caguas won over defending champion Licey. Héctor Barea, Caguas’s public relations official, said, “This was the best team Caguas ever produced, with Gary Carter and Jim Essian catching; Willie Montañez at first, Félix Millán and Pedro García at second; Mike Schmidt at third; Rudy Meoli at short; an outfield with Jay Johnstone, Jerry Morales, and Otto Vélez. Their starting pitchers were Craig Swan, Eduardo Figueroa, John Montague, and Eduardo Rodríguez. Willie Hernández, Bombo Rivera, and Sixto Lezcano were on that team.”¹⁵ Millán also ranked the 1973–74 Caguas team as the best one, position by position. Its chemistry was the icing on the cake. “That’s why we won,” said

COURTESY OF ANGEL COLÓN



*The 1986–87 Caguas Criollos, Puerto Rico and Caribbean Series Champions. Team photo taken prior to Caguas roster changes for the February 1987 Caribbean Series. **First row, seated, left to right:** Adalberto Peña, Francisco Oliveras, José Meléndez, Angelo Cuevas, Jack Lazorko, Tim Foli, Jim Steels, Orlando Mercado, Rey Sánchez, Carlos Zayas, Ramón Avilés, Germán Rivera. **Third Row, left to right:** Bill Taylor, Bernie Williams, Randy Bockus, Jim Siwy, Ellis Burks, Eddie Vargas, Mike Kinnunen, Scott Anderson, Eduardo Figueroa, Primitivo Vélez (Director) and unidentified. **Top row, left to right:** Ricky Torres, Roberto Alomar, Willie Lozado, Carmelo Martínez, Van Snider, Pitoco Rodríguez, Kiki Díaz, Henry Cotto, Omar Olivares, Félix Millán (General Manager), Team President Julio Torres and unidentified.*

Millán. “We were a family who came together toward season’s end.”¹⁶

Jerry Morales noted, “Don’t forget I hit 14 homers as the leadoff hitter.”¹⁷ Morales led Caguas in homers, followed by Schmidt (12) and Johnstone (10). Barea saw Schmidt and Johnstone playing chess en route to Mexico for the 1974 Caribbean Series. Bob Apodaca’s relief work for Caguas prepared him for 1974 spring training with the New York Mets, where he threw 18 scoreless innings to impress manager Yogi Berra. “You had to go down there and reestablish yourself in Puerto Rico,” said Apodaca, who left Puerto Rico prior to the postseason.¹⁸ Caguas reinforced itself with two relievers for the Caribbean Series: Ponce’s Steve Blateric and Santurce’s Ramón “Mon” Hernández. The latter’s two saves earned him a spot on the series All-Star team. Woody Huyke, a Caguas coach, praised the team’s Puerto Rican major-league players—Figueroa, Millán, Montañez, Morales, Vélez, and Eduardo Rodríguez—as “true professionals who set a positive tone for the younger players.”¹⁹ Schmidt said, “Winning the Caribbean Series was one of the highlights of my pro career.”²⁰ Vélez added that there was “no envy on this team.”²¹

Table 5. 1974 Series Standings

Team	W–L	Manager
Caguas Criollos	4–2	Bobby Wine
Tigres del Licey	3–3	Tom Lasorda
Yaquis de Obregón	3–3	Mike Alejandro
Mazatlán Venados	2–4	Ronny Camacho

Table 6. 1974 Series Leaders

MVP	Héctor Espino, Obregón	
Batting Average	Héctor Espino, Obregón	.429
Home Runs	Derrel Thomas, Obregón	2
RBIs	Celerino Sánchez, Obregón	11
Wins	Charlie Hough, Licey	2
Innings	Ed Bauta, Obregón	13
ERA	Ed Bauta, Obregón	0.69
Saves	Mon Hernández, Caguas	2

Table 7. 1974 Series All-Stars

Pos.	All-Star	Team
C	Gary Carter	Caguas
1B	Héctor Espino	Obregón
2B	Jorge Orta	Obregón
3B	Celerino Sánchez	Obregón
SS	Rudy Meoli	Caguas
LF	Jesús Alou	Licey
CF	Cesar Gerónimo	Licey
RF	Tom Paciorek	Licey
RHP	Ed Bauta	Obregón
LHP	Mon Hernández	Caguas



COURTESY OF ANGEL COLÓN

José Cruz Sr, left, receives the Puerto Rico League’s 1976–77 MVP trophy from Angel Colón, President of the Puerto Rico Professional Baseball Players Association.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CANCELLATION OF THE 1981 SERIES IN CARACAS

Caguas won the 1976–77 and 1978–79 league titles but did not fare well in either Caribbean Series, finishing 1–5 and 2–4, respectively. Their 1976–77 club hit .307, with seven regulars surpassing .300. José Cruz Sr. won league MVP laurels with a .338 average, 14 homers, 40 RBIs, and a .615 SLG, the all-time single-season record for a native.²² Caguas’s 1976–77 rotation was Dennis Martínez, Scott McGregor, Mike Krukow, Miguel Cuellar, and Rodríguez. Martínez, Caguas’s best pitcher from 1976 to 1981, also outpitched Jack Morris of Mayagüez in Game Seven of the 1978–79 finals.

The 1980–81 Criollos, under skipper Ray Miller, finished fourth but bested first-place Bayamón in the semis and Mayagüez in the finals. Howard Cosell, on vacation, enjoyed a 1980–81 Caguas-Bayamón game. A strike by Venezuelan League players resulted in the cancellation of the 1981 Caribbean Series. Cal Ripken Jr., the Caguas third baseman, didn’t get to play, nor did pitcher Mike Boddicker. Teams to have faced Caguas in that series were host Leones de Caracas, managed by Alfonso Carrasquel; Leones de Escogido, managed by Felipe Alou; and the Yaquis de Obregón.

“We had a lot of big-leaguers in Puerto Rico,” recalled Ripken. “Our Caguas team, God, had at least six to seven good big-league players. A lot of the pitching was Triple-A, so the level was between Triple-A and the big leagues. So coming out of Double-A [in 1980], I had to compete at a higher level and learned quite a few things playing all those games.”²³

Francisco Oliveras, a Caguas mainstay and the league’s top pitcher in 1984–85 with an 8–0 record, won a Caribbean Series game reinforcing San Juan. “When I started [1980–81], the league had a lot of big-league players,” said Oliveras. “Around 1984–85 things began to change, with fewer big-leaguers. I

played for Vic Power that season and it was fun.”²⁴ Power enjoyed managing Caguas and helping Don Mattingly, his 1983–84 first baseman, with fielding and hitting. Randy Ready of Mayagüez was challenging Mattingly for the batting title. “We were up against a tough lefty, and I suggested Mattingly take the night off,” Power said. “If he goes hitless, he falls behind Ready. But Mattingly wanted to play; went 3-for-4.”²⁵ Mattingly won the batting title, .368 to .361 for Ready.

1986–87 REGULAR SEASON AND 1987 SERIES: HERMOSILLO, MEXICO

Bernie Williams, a reserve outfielder in 1986–87, appeared in 27 regular-season games for Caguas. “The 1986–87 group was terrific,” Williams said. “I was 18 and looking forward to a career in baseball. I’ll never forget the time when Iván Calderón gave me one of his gloves in the 1985–86 season when I practiced with Caguas.”²⁶ Fellow Caguas rookie Omar Olivares complimented Figueroa, the team’s pitching coach and the first Puerto Rico-born 20-game-winner in the majors. “Eduardo Figueroa really helped me that winter and gave me confidence,” Olivares said.²⁷

Ellis Burks, like Aaron 33 years earlier, helped Caguas win the league title, but did not play in the Caribbean Series. “It was fun,” Burks said. “Everyone would compliment each other and have a positive attitude. Tim Foli was a very aggressive manager. Ramón Avilés and Jerry Morales were coaches who helped a lot. So did [general manager] Félix Millán. I opted to go home and relax after the finals. ... Caribbean Series would have been a good experience.”²⁸

Burks and teammate Van Snider were replaced by Arecibo’s Candy Maldonado and Mayagüez’s Bobby Bonilla on Caguas’s 1987 Caribbean Series roster. Snider furnished valuable perspective from an import, “Everyone should be busting their butt to really do good—try hard for yourself to make sure you still have a job,” said Snider. “The pressure in winter ball, even though it’s a team game, is to put up numbers, because if you don’t, they’re going to release you and get someone else to take your place.”²⁹

Caguas and the Aguilas Cibaeñas, from the Dominican Republic, played a tiebreaker to decide the series after each finished with a 4–2 record. Aguilas had beaten Caguas 14–13 in the third game, a contest that featured eight homers and eight errors by the Criollos. Carmelo Martínez (2), Eddie Vargas (2), Bonilla, Henry Cotto, Maldonado, and Germán Rivera homered. Roberto Alomar committed two errors on his 19th birthday—February 5, 1987. General Manager Millán argued with skipper Foli after the 14–13 loss

and fired him the next day, the first time a manager had ever been fired in a Caribbean Series.³⁰ Foli was replaced by coach Ramón Avilés. “I felt for Tim Foli because he has the ability to manage in the majors,” Avilés said. “In Puerto Rico, he displayed a temper and I tried to help him. During the regular season, when I took the lineup card to the plate, there were times the umpires would ask me what inning would I like to manage the team because they planned to send him to the showers. I would defend Foli and tell the ump that this wasn’t right, they shouldn’t think this way.”³¹ Alomar called Foli an “aggressive type who taught me quite a bit.” Alomar loved to play under pressure, noting, “After that [14–13] loss, we came back.”³²

Caguas won its next three games to reach the tiebreaker final: Henry Cotto stole four bases in a 6–1 win over Mazatlán; Francisco Oliveras pitched a 7–1 win over Caracas; and Juan Nieves threw six innings of one-hit shutout ball against the Dominicans, with David Cone getting the save in the 4–0 win. The Caribbean Series title carried special meaning for Nieves: “On the field, there is so much pride in representing your country. Puerto Rico was in our heart. Off the field, we would share moments with opposing players and hear music at the night spots and discos, talk about our big-league aspirations. But when we played, it was serious business.”³³

The Criollos routed the Dominicans, 13–2, in the seventh game behind Jim Siwy, Luis de León, Cone, and Olivares. Alomar, Maldonado, and Martínez did the hitting. José Rijo took the loss. Oliveras and Nieves made the All-Star team with Orlando Mercado, Martínez, and Vargas. The 18 Caguas homers in this 1987 series eclipsed the record of 12 held by Panama’s



Broadcaster Howard Cosell enjoys a behind-the-scenes moment with league and team officials at Juan Ramón Loubriel Stadium, Bayamón, Puerto Rico, 1980–81 season, during a Caguas-Bayamón game. From left: Angel Colón, Luis Rodríguez Olmo, Roberto Inclán and Luis Rodríguez Mayoral.

COURTESY OF ANGEL COLÓN

Chesterfield Smokers in 1956.³⁴ Tables 8, 9, and 10 have standings, leaders and the All-Star team.³⁵

Table 8. 1987 Series Standings

Team	W-L	Manager
Caguas Criollos	5-2	Tim Foli-R. Avilés
Aguilas Cibaenas	4-3	Winston Llenas
Mazatlán Venados	2-4	Carlos Paz
Leones de Caracas	2-4	Bill Plummer

Table 9. 1987 Series Leaders

MVP	Carmelo Martínez, Caguas	
Batting Average	Carmelo Martínez, Caguas	.556
Home Runs	Candy Maldonado, Caguas	4
RBIs	Dion James, Aguilas,	
	Carmelo Martínez, Caguas	9
Stolen Bases	Henry Cotto, Caguas	6
Wins	Francisco Oliveras, Caguas	2
Innings	Juan Nieves, Caguas	15
ERA	Alan Fowlkes, Aguilas	0.00

Table 10. 1987 Series All-Stars

Pos.	All-Star	Team
C	Orlando Mercado	Caguas
1B	Carmelo Martínez	Caguas
2B	Juan Castillo	Aguilas
3B	Nelson Barrera	Mazatlán
SS	Alfredo Griffin	Aguilas
LF	Luis Polonia	Aguilas
CF	Raymundo Torres	Mazatlán
RF	Alonso Tellez	Mazatlán
DH	Eddie Vargas	Caguas
RHP	Francisco Oliveras	Caguas
LHP	Juan Nieves	Caguas

Table 11. Caribbean Series Hall of Famers with a Caguas Connection

Player	Puerto Rico Team(s)	Pos.	Series Year	Induction
Willard Brown	Santurce, Humacao-Arecibo	OF	1950*	1996
George Brunet	Caguas-Santurce	P	1960	1999
Rubén Gómez	Santurce-Bayamón	P	1954*	1999
Juan Pizarro	Santurce-Caguas	P	1958	2000
Wilmer Fields	San Juan-Mayagüez	P, 3B	1950*	2001
Luis Arroyo	Ponce-San Juan (SJ)	P	1950*, '54*	2002
José G. Santiago	Ponce-Mayagüez-Santurce-SJ	P	1960*	2003
Carmelo Martínez	Bayamón-Caguas-SJ-Arecibo	1B	1987	2004
Luis R. Olmo	Caguas-Santurce	OF	1950, '54	2004
Vic Power	Caguas	1B-3B	1950, '54, '56, '58, '60	2004
Héctor Cruz	Caguas-Mayagüez	OF	1977, '79	2007
Roberto Alomar	Caguas-Ponce-SJ	2B	1987	2011
Luis de León	Ponce-Mayagüez	P	1987*	2011
Candy Maldonado	Arecibo-SJ	OF	1987*	2011
Roberto Clemente	Santurce-Caguas-SJ	OF	1958	2015
Juan González	Ponce-Caguas-SJ-Santurce-Carolina	OF	1990**, 1995**	2015
Bernie Williams	Caguas-Arecibo	OF	1987	2015
Felipe Alou	Caguas	MGR	1985-86***	2016

* Reinforcement / ** Reinforced Senadores de San Juan / *** Regular season

This was the fifth and last Caribbean Series for Mario Mendoza in a 20-year winter-ball career in Mexico. He relished playing against Tony Peña of Aguilas Cibaenas; Andrés Galarraga and Tony Armas of Caracas; and Maldonado of Caguas.³⁶ Maldonado, Alomar, de León, Martínez, and Williams were 1987 Caribbean Series players inducted into the Caribbean Series Hall of Fame (Pabellón de la Fama del Caribe). Table 11 lists inductees with Caguas connections.³⁷

CAGUAS UPDATES: ECONOMIC CHANGES, 1989-2013

Higher major-league salaries affected winter ball by the late 1980s. Big-league teams stopped sending top prospects to Puerto Rico. Pudge Rodríguez joined Caguas in 1989-90. Caguas acquired 20-year-old Juan González from Ponce by trading Alomar, who wanted to play for his father, Sandy Alomar Sr. Caguas director of player personnel Moisés González got feedback from Sandy Johnson, the Texas Rangers' director of player personnel and scouting, who felt the Rangers outfielder was ready to play regularly.³⁸ González welcomed the trade. "Ramón Avilés gave me a chance to showcase my skills," he said. "I proved to everyone Juan González could play on an everyday basis."³⁹

González played in the 1995 Caribbean Series, hosted by San Juan. The "Dream Team" won this classic with a 6-0 record. Series MVP Roberto Alomar—with San Juan—was joined by Carlos Baerga, Carmelo Martínez, Carlos Delgado, Rey Sánchez, and Edgar Martínez; plus reinforcements González (Caguas), Rubén Sierra (Santurce), and Williams (Arecibo).⁴⁰

Caguas won three league titles between 2001 and 2013 but disappointed its fans in the 2001, 2011, and 2013 Caribbean Series. Sandy Alomar Sr. managed the 2000-01 team to a 2-4 record and fourth place in Culiacán, Mexico. Carlos Beltrán made the 2001 Series All-Star team by hitting .409 with seven RBIs. So did teammate Gary Matthews Jr., who hit .360 with six RBIs. The 2011 Caribbean Series, hosted by Mayagüez, was dedicated to Roberto Alomar; Caguas, at 3-3, tied for second-place. The 2012-13 Criollos played in Hermosillo and won two of six games for a third-place tie.⁴¹

2017 SERIES: CULIACÁN, MEXICO

Caguas won its fourth Caribbean Series title, and first in 30 years, after defeating the Santurce Cangrejeros in a best-of-nine finals. Ex-Caguas catcher Pudge Rodríguez had his number 7 retired prior to Game Eight on January 25, 2017.⁴² Alex Cora, Caguas's fifth-year general manager, expressed confidence in his team going into the 2017 Caribbean Series.⁴³ The Criollos finished fourth in the preliminary round before defeating Venezuela's Tigres de Aragua in the semi-final, 9-6, and besting the Aguilas de Mexicali, 1-0, in 10 innings in the final.

David Vidal of Caguas, the 2017 Caribbean Series MVP, had played for the Somerset Patriots, an independent league team, in 2015 and 2016. The 27-year-old third baseman hit three homers and drove in five runs to earn a 2017 All-Star berth alongside teammate Iván de Jesús Jr.⁴⁴ Jonathan Morales, who drove in the only run in the win over Mexicali with a 10th-inning sacrifice fly, said, "This is incredible—the biggest moment of my life; 16 years since the last time we won it. Sixteen years ago I was a kid with no clue of what I wanted to do for a living. This is unreal."⁴⁵

Luis Matos, the Caguas manager, addresses the media Friday, February 9, 2018, at a press conference at Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport, Isla Verde, Puerto Rico. Raúl Rodríguez, Caguas team owner, is on the far right.

Table 12. 2017 Series Standings

Team	W-L	Manager
Caguas Criollos	3-3	Luis Matos
Aguilas de Mexicali	4-2	Rob Vizcarra
Tigres de Aragua	3-2	Lipso Nava
Alazanes de Granma	3-2	Carlos Martí
Tigres del Licey	0-4	Audo Vicente

Table 13. 2017 Series Leaders

MVP	David Vidal, Caguas	
Batting Average	Iván de Jesús Jr., Caguas	.500
Home Runs	David Vidal, Caguas	3
RBIs	3 Tied	5
ERA	Lázaro Blanco, Granma	0.68
Saves	Jake Sánchez, Mexicali	2

Table 14. 2017 Series All-Stars

Pos.	All-Star	Team
C	Sebastián Valle	Mexicali
1B	William Saavedra	Granma
2B	Carlos Benítez	Granma
3B	David Vidal	Caguas
SS	Freddy Galvis	Aragua
LF	Jason Bourgeois	Mexicali
CF	Chris Roberson	Mexicali
RF	Ronier Mustelier	Mexicali
DH	Iván de Jesús Jr.	Caguas
RHP	Lázaro Blanco	Granma
LHP	Jake Sánchez	Mexicali

Jeff Idelson, president of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, attended the 2017 series in Culiacán. He took back jerseys belonging to Jonathan Morales and Randy Ruiz. "The artifacts we collect can end up anywhere in the museum," Idelson



CARMEN PÉREZ, CRIOLLOS DE CAGUAS

said to Jesse Sánchez of MLB.com. “Viva Béisbol!, our first bilingual exhibit, talks about great baseball countries like Puerto Rico and Mexico. What we collect could very well end up in Viva Béisbol!”⁴⁶ Table 15 lists 13 ex-Caguas regular-season players and managers inducted in Cooperstown.

The Criollos arrived back on the island Wednesday evening, February 8, 2017, and Caguas hosted a major celebration on February 10. Thirty-eight-year-old rookie manager Luis Matos said, “Fans need to support and fall in love with this team; with its players...some of whom hope to make it to MLB. This [Puerto Rico] league must continue. It’s not just a workshop for the players, but others. Look at the experience I acquired. It will be beneficial for managing in the States.”⁴⁷ Matos then led Caguas to a 2018 league title and 2018 Caribbean Series crown. He became the first manager in 60 years to win back-to-back Caribbean Series titles.⁴⁸

JANUARY 2018 SEASON AND 2018 SERIES: GUADALAJARA, MEXICO

Hurricane María put a damper on the 2017–18 Roberto Clemente Professional Baseball League season. A compressed 18-game schedule in January 2018 was followed by an elimination game between second- and third-place teams. Caguas played its home games six miles to the east, in Gurabo’s Evaristo “Varo” Roldán Stadium, also used as a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center.⁴⁹ The 18 regular-season games were played in daylight hours due to power outages and electrical problems. The Criollos won their 18th league title prior to flying to Mexico for the Caribbean Series. Their plane

stopped in the Dominican Republic to pick up the Aguilas Cibaeñas, winners of the Dominican League.

The Opening Ceremonies before the Caguas-Culiacán game on February 2, 2018, featured an appearance by former US President Bill Clinton, who was seen in the Puerto Rico dugout, shaking hands and inquiring about players’ families in the aftermath of the hurricane. Guadalajara native Saúl “Canelo” Alvarez, a world middleweight boxing champion, threw the first pitch. Caguas won the opener; had a February 3 bye; lost to the Dominicans on February 4; rebounded with a 12–7 win over Venezuela’s Caribes de Anzoátegui on February 5; and lost to Cuba’s Alazanes de Granma 6–3 to end the preliminary round in third place.

Caguas bested Venezuela, 6–5, in the semifinals on February 7, behind Anthony García’s grand slam and closer Miguel Mejía’s save. Series MVP García had a .556 on-base percentage, 1.042 SLG, and 1.598 OPS. In the final on February 8, Caguas trailed the Aguilas, 4–3, in the seventh inning. Catcher Jonathan Morales’s three-run homer gave Caguas a 6–4 lead, and the Criollos went on to win, 9–4.⁵⁰ When Morales reached home, he pounded his chest and stomped on home plate like the game was over. “This victory means a lot for me and my country of Puerto Rico, because it’s been hard and it’s been a tough situation because of the hurricane,” he said. “But it doesn’t matter, because when you have God in your heart, you play and you get that W. I feel blessed.”⁵¹ Table 16 summarizes the series. Luis Matos was thankful his players came through.⁵²

Table 15. Caguas to Cooperstown

Hall of Famer	Inducted	Caguas Career Highlights
Roy Campanella	1969	Hero, 1941 finals; co-leader, eight homers, 1940–41
Sandy Koufax	1972	3–6 record, 74 strikeouts, 65 innings, one SHO, 1956–57
Roberto Clemente	1973	.529 BA, 1958 finals; .391 BA, 1958 Caribbean Series
Hank Aaron	1982	.322 BA; co-leader, nine homers, 1953–54
Ferguson Jenkins	1991	Best ERA, 1.38, 1965–66; 18–12, 1.70 ERA, two seasons
Mike Schmidt	1995	MVP, All-Star Game; 1974 Caribbean Series champs
Jim Bunning	1996	78–52 as Caguas manager, 1974–75 and 1975–76
Tom Lasorda	1997	1956 Caribbean Series; Sandy Koufax teammate
Gary Carter	2002	All-Star, 1974 Caribbean Series
Eddie Murray	2002	.315 BA, 18 homers, 76 RBIs, 1976–79
Cal Ripken Jr.	2007	All-Star, 1980–81, 1981–82; league-best 50 RBIs, 1981–82
Roberto Alomar	2011	1987 Caribbean Series champs; All-Star, 1987–88
Pudge Rodríguez	2017	Caguas uniform number 7 retired on January 25, 2017

* Radio broadcaster Buck Canel (1947–50) was also awarded the 1985 Ford C. Frick Award by the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

Table 16. 2018 Series Standings

Team	W–L	Manager
Caguas Criollos	4–2	Luis Matos
Alazanes de Granma	3–2	Carlos Martí
Aguilas Cibaenas	3–3	Lino Rivera
Caribes de Anzoátegui	2–3	Omar López
Tomateros de Culiacán	1–3	Benji Gil

Table 17. 2018 Series Leaders

MVP	Anthony García, Caguas	
Batting Average	Juan Pérez, Aguilas	.563
Home Runs	Anthony García, Caguas	3
RBIs	Anthony García, Caguas	8
ERA	4 Tied	0.00
Saves	Miguel Mejía, Caguas	3

Table 18. 2018 Series All-Stars

Pos.	All-Star	Team
C	Willians Astudillo	Aguilas
1B	Baldino Fuenmayor	Aguilas
2B	Irvin Falú	Caguas
3B	David Vidal	Caguas
SS	Abiatal Avelino	Aguilas
LF	Junior Lake	Aguilas
CF	Roel Santos	Granma
RF	Anthony García	Caguas
SP	Bryan Evans	Aguilas
RP	José Martínez	Culiacán

The team returned to Puerto Rico on February 9, stopping in the Dominican Republic to drop off the Dominican team. The Criollos took part in a Governor's Mansion reception honoring them on February 12. ■

Acknowledgments

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Thomas E. Van Hyning, "Hall of Famers Shine in Puerto Rico," *The National Pastime*, no. 12, (1992): 14–16.
 Thomas E. Van Hyning, "Dennis Martinez's Winter League Career," *The National Pastime*, no. 16, (1996): 51–53.

Notes

1. Thomas E. Van Hyning, *Puerto Rico's Winter League: A History of Major League Baseball's Launching Pad* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1995), 9. From 1938 through 1941 the Puerto Rico League formed part of the National Semi-Professional Baseball Congress, presided over by Raymond J. Dumont.
2. Thomas E. Van Hyning, *The Santurce Crabbers: Sixty Seasons of Puerto Rican Winter League Baseball* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1995), 35–36.
3. José A. Crescioni Benítez, *El Béisbol Profesional Boricua* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: First Book Publishing of Puerto Rico, 1997), 87, 127, 153; and www.ligapr.com.
4. Mickey Owen, telephone interview, June 1992. Owen was scouted by the Boston Red Sox in Puerto Rico, and was able to qualify for an MLB pension after playing for Boston in 1954 and coaching for them in 1955–56. He suggested that Hank Aaron move from second base to right field early in the 1953–54 Puerto Rico season.
5. Vic Power, in-person interview, Ponce, Puerto Rico, October 20, 1991. Power said that the 1950–51 Caguas team, with a 57–20 regular-season record, was the best Caguas team he ever played on.
6. Bill Howerton Sr. and Bill Howerton Jr., in-person interview, Scranton, Pennsylvania, July 1992. Bill Howerton Jr. was eight at the time of his dad's 1954 Caribbean Series heroics.
7. Rance Pless, telephone interview, May 1992. Pless was a fan favorite in Caguas his three seasons there, hitting .293 with nine homers and 82 RBIs. His best season was 1955–56 with a .336 average, third in the league behind Power's .358 and Santurce's Bob Thurman at .348. Pless led the Puerto Rico League with 17 doubles in 1955–56.
8. Vern Benson, telephone interview, April 1992. Benson managed Santurce to the 1961–62 league title, after a seven-game semifinal series with Caguas. Santurce won the 1962 Interamerican Series over Panama-Nicaragua, Venezuela, and the Mayagüez Indians. Benson also managed Licey to a 1963–64 Dominican Winter League title.
9. http://www.Caribbean_Series.
10. http://www.Caribbean_Series.
11. José "Palillo" Santiago, in-person interview, San Juan, Puerto Rico, January 9, 1993.
12. Pete Richert, telephone interview, April 1992. Caguas management and native players went out of their way to make the imported players feel at home. The Dodgers sent top prospects to Caguas in the early 1960s: Richert, Tommy Davis, Ron Perranoski, and Frank Howard. Most imports were stateside players, but Luis Tiant was Cuban.
13. Frank Howard, in-person interview, Yankee Stadium, New York, October 5, 1991. Howard was a coach with the Yankees at the time. He played one season of winter ball in the Dominican Republic, followed by two seasons with Caguas. Howard spoke highly of his playing and cultural experiences on both islands. Felipe Alou, the Caguas manager in 1985–86, befriended Howard in the Dominican Republic and took him fishing.
14. John Strohmayr, telephone interview, August 1992. Strohmayr, a Caguas starter: "That epitomizes the word 'fan,' root coming from the word 'fanático.' They really loved their baseball and I felt a lot of satisfaction when I was able to perform well—so much appreciation on the part of the fans, more so than any other place I played."
15. Héctor Barea, in-person interview, Hato Rey, Puerto Rico, November 1995. Barea was the Caguas batboy in 1940–41, when Roy Campanella and Luis Olmo paved the way for the team's first title. Billy Byrd won 15 games.
16. Félix Millán, in-person interview, Hiram Bithorn Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico, November 1993. Millán won back-to-back batting titles, 1968–69, .317 BA; and 1969–70, .345 BA. He had a .289 BA in his 17-year Caguas career.
17. Jerry Morales, in-person interview, Hiram Bithorn Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico, January 1993. Morales was the "Teenager de Yabucoa," a reference to his hometown, and made his Caguas debut in 1966–67 at age 18.
18. Bob Apodaca, in-person interview, Lackawanna County Stadium, Moosic, Pennsylvania, June 1992. Apodaca fondly recalled the red-and-white Caguas uniforms.

19. Woody Huyke, in-person interview, Bradenton, Florida, March 1993.
20. Mike Schmidt, written responses to survey questions, July 1991. Schmidt's 1972–73 Caguas teammates included Bob Boone, Roger Freed, and Wayne Twitchell from the Phillies. Jay Johnstone went to Caguas via the Phillies in 1973–74. Bobby Wine was sent by the Phillies to Caguas, for Wine to get more managing experience. Jim Bunning managed the 1974–75 and 1975–76 Caguas Criollos, due to their working relationship with the Phillies.
21. Otto Vélez, in-person interview, Hiram Bithorn Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico, November 1993. Vélez noted Mike Schmidt was determined to have a good 1973–74 season after Schmidt's sub-par season with the 1973 Phils.
22. Crescioni Benítez, 247. José Cruz Sr., 1978–79, led the league in BA (.379), stolen bases (21), and hits (78). He teamed with brother Héctor and Cal Ripken Jr. in 1981–82 to give Caguas three players who hit over .300 with 40-plus RBIs. Cruz's 119 career regular-season home runs in Puerto Rico are second to Bob Thurman's 120. Eddie Murray used the 1976–77 Caguas season as a launching pad for his major-league career. John Wockenfuss caught all 60 games.
23. Cal Ripken Jr. in-person interview, St. Petersburg, Florida, March 1992. Ripken played in all 60 Caguas regular-season games in 1981–82, plus six semifinal series games against Bayamón. Ripken's Caguas career stats: .299 BA, 16 home runs, 88 RBIs, with 123 hits in 411 regular-season at-bats with Caguas. Ripken affirmed his Caguas seasons allowed him to get to the big leagues before age 21, and part of his goal in baseball was to reach the big leagues early and be able to play a long, long time. Ripken: "I don't think I'd be able to do it without Puerto Rico."
24. Francisco Oliveras, in-person interview, Hiram Bithorn Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico, January 1993. Oliveras was Ripken's teammate in 1980–81 and 1981–82. He hurled for Santurce in 1992–93 and 1993–94, when the Caguas franchise temporarily folded. Oliveras recalled Don Mattingly's 1983–84 batting race with Randy Ready, Arecibo's Candy Maldonado, Santurce's Jerry Willard and San Juan's Tony Gwynn.
25. Vic Power, Ponce, Puerto Rico, October 20, 1991. Power's league batting titles were in 1955–56, .358 BA; and 1959–60, .347 BA. He was the 1955–56 league MVP, and chosen to the 1958 Caribbean Series All-Star team in addition to 1956. Caguas won seven league titles in Power's 16 winter seasons. His career BA was .296. Power liked working with the players who were on their way up to the majors, and did all he could to help get them there.
26. Bernie Williams, in-person interview, Yankee Stadium, Bronx, New York, October 5, 1991. Williams hit .417 with three home runs and four RBIs in the 1995 Caribbean Series for Puerto Rico's undefeated Dream Team and led the 1995–96 Arecibo Lobos (Wolves) to a 1995–96 league title and 1996 Caribbean Series berth.
27. Omar Olivares, in-person interview, Florida, March 1993.
28. Ellis Burks, in-person interview, Florida, March 1993. Burks went into Boston's 1987 spring training drills "battle-tested" after his .291 BA for Caguas with seven home runs and 30 RBIs. The Vicksburg, Mississippi, native had a solid 18-year major-league career following the 1986–87 Caguas season and league finals.
29. Van Snider, in-person interview, Lackawanna County Stadium, Moosic, Pennsylvania, May 1992. Snider returned to Puerto Rico in 1991–92 and played with league and Caribbean Series champion Mayagüez. Puerto Rico League rules allowed up to 10 imports, or non-native players, on rosters in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.
30. Tim Foli, in-person interview, Camden Yards, Baltimore, Maryland, August 3, 1993. Foli was OK with Caguas winning the 1987 Caribbean Series after his firing since Félix Millán and the Caguas management group wanted to win just as badly as he [Foli] did. Foli played in Puerto Rico for the 1971–72 San Juan Senadores, managed by Bill Virdon, and the 1974–75 Bayamón Vaqueros, winners of the 1975 Caribbean Series, under José Pagán's leadership. Foli was proud he played for winning Caribbean Series (1975) and World Series (1979) teams.
31. Ramón Avilés, in-person interview, Pioneer Stadium, Elmira New York, June 1992. Avilés played second base for two-Caribbean Series champs: 1978 Mayagüez Indios and 1983 Arecibo Lobos. He helped Ponce win a 1981–82 league title, and was 1989–90 league Manager of the Year, leading Caguas to a 28–22 regular-season record. Avilés earned a 1980 World Series ring as a utility infielder with the Philadelphia Phillies.
32. Roberto Alomar, in-person interview, Toronto Blue Jays clubhouse, Dunedin, Florida, March 1992. Alomar also complimented Felipe Alou, his 1985–86 manager with Caguas, as a "straightforward guy, similar to Cito Gaston." Alomar, the 1995 Caribbean Series MVP, had a .560 BA, two homers, 10 RBIs and .840 SLG in the 1995 event.
33. Juan Nieves, in-person interview, Hiram Bithorn Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico November 1993. Nieves became the first Puerto Rico-born MLB hurler to pitch a big-league no-hitter on April 15, 1987. He was the pitching coach for: 1995 Caribbean Series Dream Team; 2013 World Champion Boston Red Sox; and the 2018 Miami Marlins.
34. Héctor Barea, *Historia de los Criollos* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ana G. Méndez University System, 1997).
35. http://www.Caribbean_Series.
36. Mario Mendoza, in-person interview, Smith-Wills Stadium, Jackson, Mississippi, May 22, 1994.
37. https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Caribbean_Baseball_Hall_of_Fame.
38. Tracy Ringolsby, "No Growing Pains—Rangers' González Hastens Maturing Process in Winter Ball," *Dallas Morning News*, January 21, 1990.
39. Juan González, in-person interview, Hiram Bithorn Stadium, San Juan, Puerto Rico, January 1993. González hit .375 with two homers and six RBIs for the Dream Team in the 1995 Caribbean Series, and two homers as a San Juan reinforcement in the 1990 Caribbean Series. González never played with Caguas in a Caribbean Series.
40. *Béisbol Profesional de Puerto Rico: Recuento Temporada 1994–1995*, 173–174. In the 1995 Caribbean Series, team Puerto Rico hit .346 and scored 49 runs in six games. This was the first Caribbean Series where Puerto Rico was on the team's uniform. Uniforms used by Puerto Rico prior to 1995 were those of the winning league teams.
41. http://www.Caribbean_Series.
42. www.ligapr.com.
43. Jesse Sánchez, "Puerto Rico looks to make mark in Caribbean Series," mlb.com, February 1, 2017. Caguas native Alex Cora was the Puerto Rico GM in the 2017 World Baseball Classic and the Houston Astros 2017 bench coach.
44. http://www.Caribbean_Series.
45. "Puerto Rico tops Mexico 1–0 in 10 for Caribbean Series title," Associated Press, February 8, 2017.
46. Jesse Sánchez, "Caribbean Series artifacts to be displayed in Hall," mlb.com, February 8, 2017.
47. Karla Pacheco Alvarez, "Sopla Bairoa! Los Criollos ya están en casa," *Primera Hora*, February 9, 2017. Luis Matos was a major-league outfielder in 2000–6 with Baltimore and Washington. He has coached the Oklahoma City triple-A team in the Dodgers organization since 2016.
48. Napoleón Reyes was the first manager to win back-to-back Caribbean Series events, in 1957 and 1958, with Cuba's Tigres de Mariano. Luis Matos became the second manager to do so.
49. Jorge Castillo, "Puerto Rico isn't back, but its game is" *Washington Post*, January 22, 2018.
50. <http://www.sabrhornsbys.org/2017/08/serie-del-caribe-2018>. This homer gave Morales the series game-winner two years in a row. The 1997 and 1998 Águilas Cibaeñas had been the last team to win back-to-back Caribbean Series.
51. Jesse Sánchez, "Puerto Rico captures Caribbean Series title," mlb.com, February 9, 2018. Full site: <https://www.mlb.com/news/puerto-rico-wins-2018-caribbean-series-title/c-266183340>. The 2018 Caribbean Series featured the 1,000th homer in series play, by Dominican Junior Lake. The 500th Caribbean Series homer was hit by Santurce's Dickie Thon, in Mazatlán, Mexico, during the 1993 event.
52. Javier Sedano, "Luis Matos, Dirigente Histórico," *Puro Béisbol*, February 9, 2018; and, Rubén A. Rodríguez, "Por las nubes Alex Cora con el triunfo de los Criollos de Caguas," *El Nuevo Día*, February 16, 2018. Alex Cora hired Luis Matos to a multi-year contract, as Caguas's 2016–17 manager. He says he is proud of Matos's managerial skills. Cora, who made savvy GM moves for Caguas, e.g., signing catcher Jonathan Morales, was ecstatic after Caguas won the 2018 Caribbean Series. He watched it on TV prior to his first spring training as Boston Red Sox manager.

Author Wigen Goes East

Jim Brosnan and the 1958 Cardinals Tour of Japan

Adam Berenbak

October 16, 1958

Robert Hyland, General Manager, KMOX Radio

In my opinion, there is no more effective way of strengthening mutual understanding among nations than through the people to people approach, and I am convinced that international sports engagements are playing a very important role in building international friendship and good will. For that reason, I particularly appreciate this opportunity to congratulate KMOX Radio and all those responsible for broadcasting the games which the St. Louis Cardinals will be playing in Japan. Because of your efforts a maximum number of both Japanese and Americans will be able to communicate with each other through the common medium of baseball, and thereby promote the spirit of sportsmanship and international understanding. It gives me great pleasure to join baseball fans in extending best wishes to all those associated with KMOX Radio and good luck to the St. Louis Cardinals on what I know will be a most enjoyable and rewarding trip.

Richard M. Nixon
Vice-President¹

They played in Honolulu, Manila, Seoul, Tokyo, Sendai, Sapporo, Osaka, Hiroshima, Shimonoseki, Mito, Fukuoka, and elsewhere. The average attendance was 25,000, including 40,000 fans for the two final games, a doubleheader in Tokyo. The team left by plane for Kahului on October 11, 1958, less than two weeks after the conclusion of a fifth-place finish in the National League.² By the 13th they were in Honolulu, where Jim Brosnan had already submitted his first dispatch.

The St. Louis Cardinals had embarked on their 1958 tour of Japan in the midst of management changes and a rebuilding effort, the impending twilight of Stan Musial's career and the dawn of a new age of Japanese baseball. Watching it all was Jim Brosnan, whose series of articles would be some of the first words written from the perspective of an American ballplayer on playing in postwar Japan. They would

go on to form a literary foundation not only for his own writing, but for the future of baseball literature.

American pros had been visiting Japan for over half a century. The Reach All-America Team had visited in 1908, Herb Hunter's All-Stars twice in the 1920s and once in 1931, as well as the Negro Leagues All-Star squad the Philadelphia Royal Giants and a major league All-Star team in 1931.³ The 1934 tour, however, outshone the rest in its grand scope as well as its importance to the foundation of professional baseball in Japan. The tour introduced, in the flesh, the almighty Babe Ruth to the baseball-hungry fans of Japan, gave birth to new heroes like Eiji Sawamura and, in the person of Moe Berg, played a role in international intrigue. It led to the formation of Japan's first professional team and set the standard for diplomacy that would become the hallmark of the postwar tours.

In 1949, spurred on by the occupation government, the PCL San Francisco Seals became the first American team since the mid-1930s to play against teams in Japan, and inspired the expansion of the professional leagues into a two-league system the following year. More All-Star tours followed, including the Joe DiMaggio-led bunch in 1951 and the Eddie Lopat All-Stars in '53, before the American and National leagues finally relented and allowed actual major league teams to tour after the season (bypassing a rule in practice for decades not allowing more than three teammates to barnstorm together after the season).⁴ All three New York teams took turns playing against a combination of established Central and Pacific league teams (usually headed by the Yomiuri Giants) as well as All-Star teams formed by various players.

After several visits from New York teams 1953–57, the Cardinals' tour of 1958 stands out as the first to represent the rest of the majors. Mainichi Newspapers proposed that the '58 tour include a number of changes to coincide with the Cardinals, including a fully representative group of Japanese All-Stars to play the majority of the games.⁵ The fifth-place Cardinals had not been a powerhouse for most of the decade. Despite the star power of Musial, the tour was really a vehicle

to show off the new era of talent in Japan against an established team from the United States.

THE PROFESSOR

Ignominy! For Shame! Fie on us! In the cold, cold city of Sendai, where the other touring United States clubs have had a rough time, the Cardinals bit the mud (it's still raining) for the first time since leaving the U.S.A. Solly Hemus, previously undefeated as Cardinal manager, has thus suffered the first stings [sic] and arrows of outrageous fortune. To the smiling, bowing Japanese press Solly graciously admitted—"We gave 'em the game."

— Jim Brosnan

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 2, 1958⁶

Though he was on the planes and in the bullpen and at the cocktail parties, Jim Brosnan did not make a pitching appearance against the Japanese stars until November 3 in Osaka, when he pitched a perfect 10th inning after future congressman Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell almost lost the game in the ninth.⁷ Brosnan had pitched both in relief and as a starter in his three seasons with the Cubs after starting out in pro ball in 1947 as a 17-year-old in the Appalachian League.

After pitching the Cubs to an Opening Day victory over the Cardinals in April 1958 (over future teammate Mizell), Brosnan had been traded to St. Louis for Alvin Dark in mid-May, an event Dark "had considered a grave insult."⁸ That season all his appearances were as a starter. No longer would he spend ample time in the bullpen, alone with his thoughts and his pen. Instead, he would start all of his Cubs appearances and, beginning in May with the Cardinals, he was made a spot starter, finishing the season 11–8 with seven saves. Though a swingman, he still had time to keep writing, which was more and more at the forefront of his ambition.

Brosnan had spent close to two years in the Army in the early '50s, where he had discovered an aptitude for writing to go along with his lifelong love of music. After making it to the majors, he continued to pursue this avenue through short pieces that eventually led to a relationship with Bob Boyle, whom he met when Boyle visited the Cubs on assignment from *Time* magazine to write a piece about Philip K. Wrigley.⁹ Boyle, who also wrote for *Sports Illustrated*, encouraged Brosnan to submit a diary about his trade to the Cardinals, which was subsequently published in the July 21, 1958, issue of *SI* (titled "Now Pitching for St. Louis: ...The Rookie Psychiatrist").¹⁰ It was a revelation—a player thinking, recording, and publishing his thoughts on the game. No doubt it also ruffled a few feathers. After



Ticket stub to the final game of the tour.

AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

the success of "The Rookie Psychiatrist" and another piece, "Me and Hutch," Bob Creamer, an editor at *Sports Illustrated*, approached Brosnan to write a series of articles about the upcoming goodwill tour of Japan. Bob Broeg of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* subsequently learned of the agreement and offered Brosnan a chance to write a series of articles on the same topic, for which he would pay \$100 per dispatch.¹¹ Known as a pitcher, it was as a writer that Brosnan really wanted to be remembered.

Though intellectual pursuits were not generally associated with the life of a ballplayer, Brosnan's ambitions were not unprecedented. Throughout baseball history, there had been a few ballplayers, most notably Sol White and John Montgomery Ward, who were known to both play and write. There had been many books "authored" by players both well-known and otherwise, but they had been ghostwritten, usually by sportswriters such as Ford Frick. This includes *Pitching in a Pinch* by Christy Mathewson, ghostwritten by John Wheeler, which is considered one of the first "tell-all" baseball books.

Needless to say, baseball books were not taken seriously, with one exception: Ring Lardner, a respected sportswriter and friend of F. Scott Fitzgerald, wrote a series of short stories based on the "busher" Jack Keefe, as well as what is probably the first respectable baseball novel, *You Know Me Al*.¹² Other than Lardner's Keefe, baseball fiction was dominated by the all-American, goody two shoes, Frank Merriwell type, and aimed at bolstering the notion of heroism to boys across America.¹³ It wasn't until after World War II that the first serious group of baseball novels emerged. In 1952, Bernard Malamud, a master of the short story, published *The Natural*, a book as much about American myth and magic as about baseball. The long history of baseball literature up to that point, focused on perpetuating the myth-building essential to the culture, served as a perfect canvas for Malamud's allegorical Roy Hobbs.

The other significant baseball novel published at

roughly the same time, *The Southpaw* (1953), took a different approach. Author Mark Harris had written about baseball in essays and stories for a decade, with a perspective rooted in the realism of the game's place in American culture. His book proved to be a kind of anti-Malamud, and his protagonist the anti-Roy Hobbs. Henry "Author" Wiggen spoke in a vernacular much closer to the everyday speech heard on a ball field than was typically seen in print, and, in a way, harked back to the style popularized by Lardner's Jack Keefe.¹⁴

Jim Brosnan was Author Wiggen. Just as Wiggen was known as "Author," Brosnan was known as "The Professor." He saw himself as a writer as much as a pitcher, and he even looked the part, with his thick glasses and books under his arm. The two authors knew each other's work—Brosnan had reviewed Harris in an obscure journal called *Etcetera* back in the mid-'50s, a piece that had jump-started his own literary career.¹⁵ Harris would review *The Long Season* for the *New York Times* in 1960, praising Brosnan's gift to literature and baseball—a glimpse into the mind of the average ballplayer. Harris wrote: "Fortunately, however, [Brosnan's] enthusiasm for the game is at least equaled by his passion for observing, for listening and for recording who said what to whom and why in what bull-pen where, how the Cincinnati Reds fare at bridge, how the airline hostess responds to Mark Twain's literary criticism, what it feels like to be booed; the nature and extent of racial integration among big-league baseball players; the relationship between Team and Self. 'Carefully I preserve these artifacts of an expiring career.'" ¹⁶

Harris, the anti-Malamud, had written his books in the voice of such a player, and that writing had influenced Brosnan's voice—and, in a cyclical nature, so too had Brosnan's voice, that of "the thousands of baseball players not blessed with extraordinary gifts who will never knock at the door of Cooperstown," influenced Harris. In *The Long Season*, Harris sees the positive in the brainy Brosnan's "dwelling intimately upon the particular, tell[ing] us much we have never been able to know of the mute thousands."¹⁷

These similarities help explain Brosnan's "character." That character took shape first in his diaries, and then in the dispatches sent from Japan. "I had not been happy with the baseball books that I had read when I was a kid," he told an interviewer later in life. "I wrote about what interested me—what I overheard in the clubhouse.... The editors said, 'Keep doing what you're doing.'" ¹⁸

Sports Illustrated ended up passing on whatever Brosnan submitted to them after the tour, but the effort

resulted in another meeting with Creamer. Not only did Creamer provide "The Professor" with an impromptu journalism lesson, he proposed a meeting between Brosnan and a friend of his at Harper & Row. That meeting would eventually produce a contract and post-war baseball's first notable book by a player, *The Long Season*.¹⁹

"Initially, I was told to take out [the references to] martinis. Then I got a call from the top editor...and he said 'Ignore that last message. Put more martinis in.'" ²⁰

The *Post-Dispatch* was more than happy with the dispatches sent by Brosnan, and the published articles netted Brosnan over \$1,000 in extra pay. The first dispatch, published on October 13 and titled "'Eastward, Ho!' With Brosnan, Or, Getting Way Up With Birds," set the tone not only for the remaining articles, but for the diary Brosnan kept with the Cardinals during the '59 season, which would become *The Long Season*. It exemplified the style of the rest, a free-form, literate style influenced by jazz but grounded in the real observational elements cherished by Harris and Author Wiggen.

THE FIRST DISPATCH

In early October 1958, Brosnan was headed to Honolulu, writing from the plane about the long flight and the stomach-churning reality of a 28-hour-long, multi-time-zone day. He was already attempting to flex a sense of style. He began:

From one of the longest runways in the world, San Francisco, we took off on the longest trip of this or any other year. By sunrise on the tenth we gained four hours changing time zones and explaining to the stomach wha' happen in our 28-hour day.²¹

His claustrophobia related not only to a lengthy plane ride but to the celebrity and status that were the reason for that plane ride, inexorably tying the two together for the reader. And he lamented the insurance value of his life:

Gives a man a feeling of power to be worth more money dead than alive. Macabre, that describes this game.²²

He wrote of the "distractions"—the wives, yes, but especially the "stewardesses," even going so far as to describe one's outfit in detail, a segment demonstrating the kind of sexist overtones accepted as routine in the sports world of that time. He wrote, too, of the food, relating the size of the plane's kitchen and its propensity for putting out "sizzling steak sandwiches"

and breakfast. Still, with style, he remarked, “I mean this ship was big, man,” and piled on the self-deprecating humor: “Ignoring the champagne left over from the take-off party (man, what a tough way to make a buck) we prepared fresh morning coffee.”

Just as important as the cocktail parties was the Honolulu sunrise:

Down the winding stairway I went to the lounge to watch the sunrise. As a working ballplayer, I don't ordinarily cover sunrises, but I have seen some. This one was a first in one sense, however, an Oriental mirage perhaps, but I swore to myself that I was seeing a ring around the earth just above the horizon. Nothing but clouds, water and whales below, so I sat, in voiceless contemplation of the rising sun. (Fifteen years ago, I would have been shot for using the expression!)²³

Brosnan was aware that most of his teammates, as well as most of the Japanese All-Stars, had come up in the aftermath of World War II, and were slightly less encumbered than ballplayers of the previous generation by the weight of the war's prejudices, as well as the horrors of having participated. This was a new era dawning, and he saw clearly the hope that was at the heart of this diplomatic trip to Japan.

Yet other prejudices prevailed. Though Brosnan seems to avoid utilizing the racially insensitive language employed in headlines and coverage of the tour in the United States (for example, the *Post-Dispatch* headlines “Boyer Most Honorable Batter as Cards Beat Japanese in 10th” and “So-Sorry Cards Make Sad Sam at Home in Japan, Boot Game”), he was still a product of his time, employing tropes of women and Japanese ballplayers that would be perceived as insensitive today.²⁴

He concluded with a lament on lost bridge partners—Del Ennis and Billy Muffett, scheduled to make the trip but traded just before takeoff, were half of a four-man game rounded out by Larry Jackson. But the beauty before him, Larry, and, of course, the cocktail parties and receptions, replaced any reverie for the past life or routine of the season, and set the tone, not just for Brosnan and the team but for the reader, that the best was yet to come.

“The problem of finding a fourth was not our concern immediately, though. Molokai, the leper colony island, was on our left, Diamond Head just a few minutes away, and the scent of jasmine was being wafted skyward from the island of Oahu.”²⁵ The first three games were in Hawaii, against local stars and semiprofessionals led by Bob Turley, Lew Burdette, and Eddie Mathews,

who had accompanied the Cards up to the Hawaiian stops. Strong fall rain forced the cancellation of a game in Guam, but otherwise the Cardinals shut out the opposition before boarding the plane to Japan.²⁶

The Cardinals continued winning after arriving in Tokyo. However, the young squad of All-Stars from Japan's Central and Pacific leagues did not disappoint. Futoshi Nakanishi of the Nishitetsu Lions hit several towering homers, including one off Vinegar Bend Mizell and a grand slam off Bob Blaylock, which secured one of only two victories for the Japanese squad.²⁷ Kazuhisa “Iron Man” Inao pitched admirably considering he had come off a season during which he pitched 373 innings and nearly single-handedly won the Japan Series for the Lions, pitching in six games and securing victories in all four team wins. But it was the rookie Shigeo Nagashima who would be unanimously voted the best of the All-Stars by the touring Cardinals.²⁸ His clutch hitting, including an inside-the-park homer, and fine fielding at third base showcased not only the wonders of his own talent, but demonstrated to an international audience the level of skill to be found in the younger generation of Japanese pro ballplayers. He would go on to hit his famous “Sayonara Home Run” before the emperor the following year, and become known as “Mr. Baseball.”

Brosnan would write 11 further dispatches before the Cardinals headed home, describing the game and culture of Japan from a perspective only a player could represent. In the November 6 dispatch, he told of running into “Carl Hanta, a Nisei from Honolulu, with whom I played in the Texas League,” who would point out to Brosnan the “many differences not immediately evident” between baseball in Japan and in the United States.

“Carl played for one of the Japanese professional teams here, although he arrived too late this year to make the All-Japan nine. Did you know, he asked, that: ‘The average major league player in Japan makes about \$100 a month? That nobody goes home after the season ends? The players remain in the club home town to train for next season?...That the Number One pitcher in the league makes twice as much money as the Prime Minister? That the typical youngster in Japan would rather be the No. 1 pitcher than Prime Minister?’”²⁹

And as Brosnan educated American fans about the game, he continued to develop his style, peppering in jazz and humor:

Noro Morales—he's the jazz man, Cats—attended one of our games. He says, if I may try to quote:

'It was a gas, man. Those cats come on like they dig the up-beat, the down-beat and the off-beat. But dig the crazy infield. These cats are supposed to know how to sow the seed. And there it is, all skin, man! I mean it's bare, boy! And hey, they put you down with the long ball. Like, let's do the home-run bit. Like, Swingin' Stan the Man—let's swing, dads.' Which all means, I think, that the Japanese really look the part of pro baseball players; that there is no grass on the infield because of clay in the soil; that the Japanese All-Stars hit two home runs and the Cardinals hit none, and that Morales knows about Stan Musial.³⁰

His dispatches would bring to life both the unique excitement and painful boredom of a professional ballplayer on tour in another country in a way that the press corps couldn't. This included Joe Garagiola, who would later be critical of Brosnan's writing, reporting on the tour for KMOX.³¹ Garagiola, as well as many other players (including Joe Adcock, who, after hitting a home run off Brosnan in the wake of *The Long Season*, told Jim to "stick that in your book" as he rounded the bases), were upset by the reality reflected in Brosnan's writing.³² However, it was that reality that made his writing, including his dispatches from Japan, so important. They introduced a world of baseball to an American audience mostly unaware of the level of talent competing halfway across the world. Names like Nagashima and Kawakami, "The Big Buffalo" and Iron Man Inao. Exactly as Author Wiggen might.

GOTTA START SOMEPLACE

George Plimpton's "small ball" theory of sports literature suggests that "the smaller the ball, the more formidable the literature."³³ As an example, he cites Brosnan's writing and his insistence on realism. Known more for *Paper Lion*, as the founder of the *Paris Review*, and as a sullen New York Giants fan, Plimpton was what the Spanish call an *espontáneo*—a "haunted young man who starts moving down from his cheap seats toward the bullring...[to] run across the open sand"—in *Paper Lion* and his other sports books, including the baseball book *Out of My League*.³⁴ In a way, Brosnan was a kind of reverse *espontáneo*, moving from the "cheap seats" of the the bullpen to the "open sand" of the publishing world. The 1958 tour of Japan, which provided the Cardinals with a chance to travel and Brosnan a chance to once again prove his chops as a writer, served as a necessary building block in that process.

During the trip, several of the American pitchers were offered large contracts to stay and pitch in the



Futoshi Nakanishi



Shigeo Nagashima



Kazuhisa "Iron Man" Inao

Japanese pro leagues. Phil Paine and Bill Wight declined. The third Cardinal offered cash to stay was Jim Brosnan. He turned down the offer as well, thinking of his family. It was a good move.³⁵ His 1959 season would prove excellent fodder for *The Long Season*, paving the way not only for the publication of Plimpton's *Out of My League* in 1961, but easing the path for the success of baseball literature and its integration into American literature.

The publication of Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* a decade after *The Long Season* was rightly hailed as a watershed moment in sports history. That *Ball Four* owes a certain debt to Brosnan is evidenced not only by its publication, but by the similar (though more visceral) reaction to it from the baseball community. Brosnan, as Bouton would be, was shunned after *The Long Season* was published, called a "kookie beatnik" by Garagiola and "an intellectual meathead" by Frank Lane, the general manager of the Indians.³⁶ Brosnan's personification of the Author Wiggen character, as well as the influence Harris's writing had on his own, gave rise to his "tell-all," "from-the-pitcher's-point-of-view" and "espontáneo" articles in *Sports Illustrated* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The success of these resulted in his meetings with the eventual publishers of *The Long Season*.

Later in life he would correspond with Harris about his influence as well as Brosnan's own career as a writer of children's baseball books (in his words, "gotta start someplace") and sports pieces. In a letter dated January 2, 1968, he addressed Harris: "You once suggested I keep a complete list of my published writings. Have done so. For ten years' work the compendium now covers five pages: 52 magazine articles; 5 books; over 50 newspaper columns; a dozen reviews and essays; half a dozen re-prints; two prefaces and a pair of short stories."³⁷ It all started, though, with the Cardinals and Japan. ■

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An Epoch in Australian Baseball

Stanford University's Tour of 1928

Ray W. Nickson, PhD

“HOOORAY! The Yanks Are Coming,” ran one of the many enthusiastic headlines in the Australian press.¹ It was 1928, and in the preceding years, baseball had grown a small but steady following in Australia. Now, baseball authorities had, for the first time, invited an American team to tour for the express purpose of playing baseball.² Stanford University would come to Australia with its coach, Harry Wolter, to play a series of games against local teams. Australian newspapers proclaimed that it would “mark an epoch in Australian baseball history.”³

The Stanford tour, with its inclusion of an ex-major league ballplayer in the role of touring coach, not only served to raise the popularity of baseball in Australia but also the standard of play. The tour was a significant, yet under-recognized, milestone in the history of Australian baseball. It would mark two significant events in that history: the first international match between an Australian team and a dedicated American nine, and the first international intervarsity baseball game in Australia.⁴

THE EARLY HISTORY OF BASEBALL IN AUSTRALIA

By 1928, baseball had been played in Australia for more than 70 years. While American miners may have played the game in the gold fields of the Australian Gold Rush of 1851, the first recorded baseball game was played in Melbourne in 1855.⁵ The sporting landscape in the colony, however, favored team sports that allowed competition against the center of the empire, England.⁶ When Albert Goodwill Spalding's World Baseball Tour visited Australia in 1888–89, a significant amount of the news coverage revealed a local suspicion of baseball as a threat to cricket.⁷ Press condescension was common enough that derisively comparing baseball to the child's game of rounders was a media convention.⁸

Australian enthusiasts of baseball had persevered, however, and over the next three decades, the sport would grow in popularity and participation. John McGraw brought the Giants and White Sox to Australia during their 1913–14 world tour, which received con-

siderable interest Down Under. During the same period cricket solidified its position as the Australian national sport, so the perceived threat of baseball became less of a concern. In fact, cricket was instrumental in the growth of baseball in Australia: While cricket dominated in summer, the American game was played in the winter, often by cricketers. Some of Australia's pre-eminent international cricketers, such as W.H. Ponsford and Vic Richardson, were also keen baseballers. It was in these circumstances that the Australian Baseball Council invited the Stanford University team to Sydney to play a series of games against local and state teams and a national side in an effort to raise the profile of the sport.

THE 1928 STANFORD TOUR

The tour by Stanford University had been announced many months before the team's eventual arrival and was keenly anticipated in Australia. Sydney's leading daily newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, declared as early as January that “1928 promises to go down in the annals of baseball in Australia as one of the most progressive in the sport.”⁹ Baseball had witnessed a relative boom in participation in Australia during the 1920s. The sport had grown rapidly, with expanding city competitions, new junior associations, and the advent of teams in rural Australia evidence of its increased popularity.¹⁰ Given the recent growth in Australian baseball, local players, followers, the press, and the general public were keen to test how far the game and its players had developed relative to the United States.¹¹ The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that Australian baseball had “had no real test as to the standard attained by our players” and speculated, rather hopefully, that sufficient talent existed in Sydney alone for several teams “which would prove more than a match for American university and semi-professional teams.”¹² The value of observing and playing against a properly trained American team was widely recognized in Australia at the time. As one newspaper had noted, “Our players are practically self taught, and to meet a team fresh from the land where the ‘ball game’ is part of the

national life, should prove intensely interesting and instructive.”¹³

Why Stanford was selected is unclear from contemporary records. The Australian sporting community would have been familiar with the university, however, as Stanford had previously played against the Wallabies, Australia’s national Rugby Union team. Indeed, it is likely that Stanford’s profile as an educational and sporting institution was influential in its selection. Wolter, Stanford’s coach, was sufficiently well-known that Australian newspapers were aware of his professional record: Seven seasons of major league baseball for a variety of clubs, including the Yankees and Red Sox. In the season immediately before the tour, Stanford had finished with a 7–10 record, ending tied for third in the Pacific Coast Conference at 5–7.¹⁴ It was initially hoped that a Japanese team, drawn from the ranks of naval personnel on an anticipated ship’s visit, would also compete in a triangular international series.¹⁵ Those plans, however, did not eventuate.

The media interest in the tour was high. It was covered in newspapers across the country, from Sydney to Perth and in the remote rural towns in between. It was evident at the time that despite the increased popularity of baseball in Australia, regular international contests needed to be scheduled to enhance its profile.¹⁶ Thanks to the promotional efforts of Australian baseball authorities, the Stanford tour enjoyed much fanfare. Local businesses such as the Australian divisions of Kellogg’s and Studebaker supported the tour. The latter loaned six vehicles for a motorcade procession when the Stanford team arrived.¹⁷ Regrettably, the team’s arrival coincided with particularly rough

weather that delayed its ship. A large crowd had waited at Circular Quay for the ship to berth and the Westmead Boys Band entertained the onlookers, striking up “The Star-Spangled Banner” when the ship finally docked.¹⁸ The planned daytime motorcade through downtown Sydney instead took place at night, with significantly fewer observers on the street.¹⁹

The touring ballplayers were received at a formal civic reception attended by representatives of the federal, state, and local governments, as well as the US consul-general and Australian baseball officials.²⁰ The Stanford players’ sense of humor endeared them to their Australian hosts almost immediately: When the civic commissioner compared baseball to rounders in his formal welcome, a member of the Stanford entourage responded, “I am told this game of rounders is a girl’s game. Having seen your girls is there any chance of arranging a game?”²¹

In its first game, Stanford met a Victorian state team in front of 10,000 spectators.²² Victoria defeated Stanford, 5–3, but it was widely accepted that Stanford had not played to its capacity, having only arrived from a stormy sea voyage two days prior.²³ In that first encounter, important distinctions between American and Australian styles of play were clear. The *Sun* observed, “The Americans impressed with their fast and accurate throwing,” which was much quicker than the long-arm Australian cricket-style throw.²⁴ Similarly, the Americans employed a different, more efficient swing of the bat and hit harder than the Australians as a consequence.²⁵ The infield work of the Stanford men was also considered superior to the Victorians, despite the loss.²⁶ Other features of the game that were novel to the local audience were the “rooting” undertaken by the Stanford teammates and the placement of coaches at first and third bases.²⁷

Stanford’s loss to Victoria was to be its only one of the tour. In the second game, this time against a state side from South Australia, Stanford accumulated 26 runs while giving up only one. That the Stanford team had greater baseball wits was evident in the way it took advantage of South Australia’s deep outfield with short hits.²⁸ In the fifth inning alone, Stanford scored 12 runs.²⁹ The Americans amassed a total of 21 hits and their pitcher, Kern, struck out 11 South Australians.³⁰ South Australia was not helped in its efforts by the nine errors the team made, six more than Stanford committed. The American habit of “rooting” for

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While on tour in Australia, two groups of Americans met: the Ingenues jazz group and the Stanford baseball team. Photo by Sam Hood.

one's teammates—or to distract the opposition—continued to be of interest to the newspapers after the second game. *The Referee*, a leading weekly sports publication, noted that the “chattering by the players appears to be another sideline [in addition to ‘rooting’], and when the whole bunch gets going a cage full of parrots has nothing on them.”³¹

New South Wales was the next state team to play Stanford. A crowd of 5,000 eager fans had come to watch what “proved to be a fast and high-class game, brimful of clever base running, smart fielding and accurate throwing,” according to the *Kalgoorlie Miner*.³² Stanford scored first when a hit to left field by Maguire brought in Harder, and it added eight more runs by the seventh inning. New South Wales was shut out until the sixth before scoring four runs. The Australians managed a brief rally in the eighth when, with two outs, they scored three runs on a Texas Leaguer by Levy, which allowed Agnew and Guthrie to get home before Levy also scored on an erratic throw by Berg (Stanford's catcher) that sailed over the head of the Stanford second baseman, Garibaldi. Highlights of the game included Busch, Stanford's shortstop, being called out for running wide of the base path and Berg making four hits, including three doubles.³³

The three games against state teams had been a prelude to the most anticipated fixture on the schedule so far: the first game against an Australian national team. On Saturday, August 4, Australia played Stanford at the Agricultural Ground in Sydney in front of 15,000 fans.³⁴ The game was billed as “the most important fixture in the history of baseball in Australia” by the newspapers.³⁵ As with the previous games, the Stanford players were said to have thrilled the crowd with their big hits in batting practice.³⁶ Warming up on the playing field had evidently been unknown to Australian baseball: It received significant commentary for its novelty during the tour, and the papers encouraged Australians to adopt the practice as a lesson from the tour.

Stanford scored four runs in the first inning following erratic pitching by the favored local pitcher, Ford. The Americans added another two runs in the second and four more in the third, three of which followed a wild throw by Ford to Emmerick at first base. Australia replied with three runs of its own and Kern was quickly replaced by Lewis as the Stanford pitcher. The tactic of readily replacing pitchers was also a new feature of the game to the Australians, who stuck with Ford on the mound for far too long.³⁷ A readiness to replace pitchers, and always having a pitcher warm, were key lessons that the Australians would take from

the series.³⁸ As the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported, “There were many in the crowd, who saw their first baseball game, and they must surely have been convinced that baseball has attained an elevated sphere in the curriculum of Australian sport by reason of its intense interest, thrilling moments, quick movements, and clean play.”³⁹ The game had captured the imagination of the locals enough that the crowd was larger than the one at the St. George vs. University match in the popular Rugby League competition held the same day. This first international game was so successful, a leading weekly sports paper felt confident that “There is no reason why baseball, once the crowd has been educated up to its thrills, should not be one of the most popular sports in Australia.”⁴⁰

A series of lower-profile games was played before the second international game. The next was against a Sydney Metropolitans side of the best players from the local clubs. In adverse weather, the Metropolitans took an early lead, 2–0, after the second inning.⁴¹ For the remainder of the game, however, Stanford shut them out, and despite the promising start, the top players from Sydney's clubs lost, 12–2. The poor weather continued and when Stanford played Sydney University two days later, the *Sun* wrote, “The outfield was a quagmire, making play difficult.”⁴² That game, which Stanford won, 5–2, is notable for being the first ever international university baseball game played in Australia. In an effort to promote the game in the areas surrounding Sydney, the tour next moved to Wollongong, a town 52 miles to the south. The team, accompanied by the Sydney Metropolitans, traveled by motorcade to Wollongong, where they were greeted with a civic reception from the mayor and aldermen of the city.⁴³ Stanford won, 7–3, with Garibaldi and Harder both hitting home runs for the victors.

So far, the tour had generated significant interest and the second meeting between Australia and Stanford was keenly anticipated. The adverts that ran in the Sydney papers offered:

Baseball—As Played by Americans—Barracking!
Rooting! Brilliant Fielding! Snappy Throwing!
Combination Team Work! Big Hitting! Fade-away
Sliding! Excitement? Hear the Crowd Roar! Roar
With the Crowd! And Become a Fan.⁴⁴

Another 15,000 spectators were eager and the second international match would not disappoint them. Among the spectators was the governor of American Samoa, Captain S.V. Graham, who threw out the first pitch.⁴⁵ The game was a close contest and only decided

in extra innings. It was expected that the game would “go down in baseball history as one of the finest expositions ever produced by an Australian nine.”⁴⁶ The papers blamed the loss squarely on Agnew, the Australian second baseman, who collided with Levy at shortstop in an effort to field an easy fly ball by Garibaldi. The error permitted Wilton, the Stanford center fielder and captain, to dash home. Stanford won, 2–1, in 10 innings. It was perhaps a fitting victory for Wilton and Garibaldi, who between them got all of Stanford’s seven hits: Wilton went 4-for-4, including a triple.⁴⁷

The game was almost overshadowed by what Australians perceived as poor sportsmanship: warming up behind the batter when on deck. The papers were awash with criticism of what was conceived as an unsporting tactic.⁴⁸ As far away as Tasmania it was complained that “the object of this was presumably to detract attention of the pitcher.”⁴⁹ The *Truth* considered it so significant that its headline ran, “These Yanks Can Play ‘Ball—The Swinging Bat Tactics Disconcert the Home Siders.”⁵⁰ It was, the *Truth* claimed, “a practice new to Australia, and not sportsmanlike, according to our views of the game.”⁵¹ The crowds were apparently not shy in venting their disapproval. In many newspaper reports of the game, the “bat swinging” of the Stanford players received more coverage than the play on the field.

A combined Australian university side next played Stanford, losing, 31–5. The final international game between Stanford and Australia was played on Saturday, August 18, in front of 10,000 fans. The game was well balanced for much of play, but a four-run fourth inning for Stanford was decisive. In the fourth, Wilton, Garibaldi, and Busch loaded the bases with singles. A series of errors then allowed each to score before Berg came in for the fourth on another error.⁵² Stanford was the eventual victor, 7–0. The Australian newspapers credited Stanford with a hat trick—three successive wins in the international games. In the final game Harry Wolter earned significant praise from locals for providing coaching and instruction to the Australian players in a generous effort to improve the sport locally.⁵³ A final contest was held between Stanford and New South Wales on August 22. New South Wales was first at bat and scored three runs. Stanford leveled in the bottom of the same inning when Maguire hit the ball over the picket fence, scoring three.⁵⁴ The match remained close until the sixth inning, with New South Wales leading, 10–8. Stanford rallied in the late innings, however, and a series of New South Wales errors allowed the Americans to win their final game in Australia, 21–13.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

In addition to the milestones recorded during the tour—the first invitational tour of a baseball team to Australia, first international inter-varsity baseball game in Australia, first Australian nine to play a dedicated baseball team—the tour had a noticeable impact on the game in Australia. Although baseball had already been growing in popularity in Australia, the tour significantly raised its profile. The *Truth* noted that Stanford’s visit had given baseball “a decided fillip,” and the *Arrow* wrote that the various well-attended games had “given baseball the biggest boost it has had in the history of the game in Australia.”⁵⁶ These sentiments were echoed by newspapers across the country, but were particularly emphatic in Sydney, where most of the games had taken place: “Baseball in Sydney has experienced the biggest boost it has ever known by the visit of the Americans,” the *Sydney Mail*’s H.W. Turner wrote.⁵⁷ It was, so the press claimed, a much bigger boost to the game than the White Sox-Giants tour had been in 1914.⁵⁸

An increase in the profile of baseball following the tour led to an immediate increase in participation as well. In the following Southern Hemisphere summer competitions, there was an increase in players, teams, and clubs in Australia.⁵⁹ Importantly, this increased interest was sustained until the next winter season, in 1929, when participation grew again.⁶⁰ Beyond that, crowds also grew, with higher attendance at local club fixtures in the wake of the tour.⁶¹

The Stanford tour also had an immediate impact on the quality of baseball in Australia. The visitors had demonstrated numerous deficiencies in the way the locals played. Australians were reluctant to replace pitchers, more likely to protest at being relieved, and apparently less inclined to follow directions of their coaches than the visiting Americans were.⁶² The teamwork that Stanford displayed had impressed the Australians, and it was determined as a result that Australian baseballers lacked a sufficient level of that quality.⁶³ Australians also learned the value of having relief pitchers warm up in preparation for taking the mound, and better batting techniques, including dropping the habit of resting the bat on one’s shoulder when awaiting the pitch.⁶⁴ All these improvements were evident in the club games that followed. The *Sydney Morning Herald* observed just weeks after the departure of the Americans that “the tactics displayed by the Stanford University team were extensively adopted in nearly all the [local weekend] games.”⁶⁵ In Adelaide, those South Australians who had been in Sydney returned with improved knowledge of the

game, and Adelaide league games now featured the warming up of relief pitchers, the hook slide, and burnt cork under the eyes.⁶⁶

Harry Wolter, former major league ballplayer and Stanford's coach, had clearly demonstrated to Australians the need for quality coaching along American lines. During the tour, Wolter had offered to coach any club or school team that requested his assistance.⁶⁷ Wolter had given some coaching to juniors during his visit, but the opportunity was not seized by local clubs until the end of the tour.⁶⁸ One paper lamented that "a whole month of expert tutoring was thrown away—a chance that may not come again for years."⁶⁹ In fact, Australian baseball officials had become keenly aware of the need for an American coach and Wolter was enlisted as the Australian Baseball Council's representative in securing an American to assist local teams.⁷⁰ This proved a difficult task, as suitable candidates already had lucrative jobs, and the necessary inducement to bring them to Australia was more than local baseball organizations could afford.⁷¹ That there was no money for an American coach also reflects the unfortunate situation that Australian baseball authorities lost money on the tour.⁷² In fact, it was later discovered that the tour had been financed, in part, by funds stolen by an Australian baseball official from his employer.⁷³

The Stanford tour of 1928 was a watershed moment in Australian baseball history. It was the first real opportunity that Australian teams had to play against a dedicated amateur American team. Isolated from the developments that had taken place in American baseball, Australian ballplayers had been "self taught," and the example set by Stanford was highly educational.⁷⁴ Infield play, baserunning, batting style, pitching methods, tactics, and conditioning were all elements of the game that improved in Australia following the visit by Stanford, and the game became more popular. The press, which 30 years earlier had been suspicious and disparaging of baseball, was now enthusiastic and supportive of the game in Australia.⁷⁵ Following the popular success of the Stanford tour, a similar invitation would be extended to the Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club of Portland, Oregon, in 1929. But financial success would not follow popular success, and the momentum built by the Stanford tour was not sustained when future tours proved financially impossible. It is open to speculation, but it is likely that had similar tours been staged beyond the 1920s, baseball's popularity in Australia would have been greater. The interest generated in baseball by international games against Stanford demonstrated the value of such events. ■

Notes

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5. Bruce Mitchell, "Baseball in Australia: Two Tours and the Beginnings of Baseball in Australia," *Sporting Traditions* 7, no. 1 (1990): 2–24.; Joe Clark, *A History of Australian Baseball* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 5.
6. Australia was a colony until 1901, when the separate colonial authorities federated to become states in the Commonwealth of Australia.
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16. "Baseball: American Team Coming," *Sydney Mail*, July 4, 1928.
17. "Baseball—Stanford University Team—Warmly Welcomed in Sydney," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 27, 1928.
18. "Stanford—Baseballers Here—A Sturdy Bunch," *Sun*, July 27, 1928.
19. "Baseball—Stanford University Team—Warmly Welcomed in Sydney."
20. "Varsity Baseballers—Visit From U.S.A." *Evening News*, July 27, 1928.
21. "Rounders? 'Lead Us to the Girls'—*Baseball Men*," *Sun*, July 27, 1928.
22. "Americans Impress—Great Baseball Struggle—Stanford University—Crowd of 10,000 Watch the Play," *Sun*, July 28, 1928.
23. Clark, in his *A History of Australian Baseball*, states that Stanford lost 3–1 (51), but this is clearly refuted by contemporary media coverage of the game, which scored the contest at 5–3: "Attaboy Victoria! Lads From Land of Swat Fail to Get Round First Australian Diamond," *Truth*, July 29, 1928; "Five to Three—Victoria's Baseball Win," *Sun*, July 29, 1928; "Big Baseball—Stanford University Defeated—Crowd of 10,000 Watch Game," *Sunday Times*, July 29, 1928.
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26. "Good Sports—Stanford Players Lack of Practice," *Sun*, July 31, 1928.
27. "Vocal Aid to Baseball—The Science of Rooting," *Sun*, July 29, 1928.
28. "Big Baseball—Rep. Teams in Action—To-day's Games," *Sun*, July 30, 1928.
29. "Baseball—Win for America," *Register*, July 31, 1928.

30. Contemporary coverage was inconsistent in providing first names or even first initials for the various players. For consistency, only last names are used here.
31. "Biggest Baseball Carnival in History of Australia—Victorians Deliver the Goods—American Students Fall Down in Pinches—South Australians Chicagoed," *Referee*, August 1, 1928.
32. "Baseball Match—U.S.A. Defeats N.S.W." *Kalgoorlie Miner*, August 2, 1928.
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34. "First Test—Stanford Leads Australia—Baseball Attracts—15,000 People Watch International Game," *Sun*, August 4, 1928.
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37. "Baseball—Americans Win First Test—Stanford's Brilliant Play," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 6, 1928.
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50. "These Yanks Can Play Ball."
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52. "Baseball—Australia 'Whitewashed'—Stanford Wins Third Test," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 20, 1928.
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56. "Stanford Left a Lesson Behind Them—Gave Baseball a Big Local Boost—Visiting Manager to Negotiate for Coach for Australian Council," *Arrow*, August 24, 1928.
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58. Turner.
59. "Stanford's Visit Leaves Baseballers Happy," *Sporting Globe*, August 29, 1928, 3; "Pitchers Wanted;" "More Clubs—Summer Baseball Season—Rapid Progress—Close Matches Expected," *Sun*, October 10, 1928.
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67. Turner, "Stanford's Visit: An Appreciation."
68. "Stanford's Visit Leaves Baseballers Happy."
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70. "Coaching—Baseball Needs—Imported Trainer?"
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From Usenet Joke to Baseball Flashpoint

The Growth of “Three True Outcomes”

Diane Firstman

It all started as a lark. Back in the mid-1990s, during the Internet’s infancy, Usenet bulletin boards were the virtual water coolers we all gathered around to discuss our favorite topics. Over on the rec.sport.baseball board, Christina Kahrl and a bunch of like-minded individuals were marveling over the statistical quirks of Rob Deer. Deer had the unusual ability to not put the ball in play. At a time when about a quarter of all plate appearances ended in a walk, home run, or strikeout, Deer managed that outcome nearly half the time.¹

The members of the Usenet board organized a “Rob Deer Fan Club” and, as Kahrl says:

We basically trolled people over how this was a guy playing the game the right way, because he was generating runs and avoiding double plays. I wrote a silly Conan/Robert E. Howard sort of backstory about how “The Deer” was inspired by the “ur-Deer” (Gorman Thomas, of course), and since we were already steeping it in our semi-ridiculous absolute faith in our hero, I referred to his delivering “the Three True Outcomes.”²

Baseball Prospectus was the first major website to note the Three True Outcomes (TTO). In August 2000 on that site, Rany Jazayerli whimsically proclaimed:

The Revolution that will spread the Gospel of the Three True Outcomes to every man, woman and child on Earth.

What are the Three True Outcomes, you ask? They are:

- The Home Run, the weapon with which we fight the evil legions of Little Ball.
- The Strikeout, a symbol of our refusal to compromise.
- The Base on Balls, which brings balance to our cause.

Together, the Three True Outcomes distill the game to its essence, the battle of pitcher against hitter, free from the distractions of the defense, the distortion of foot speed or the corruption of managerial tactics like the bunt and his wicked brother, the hit-and-run.³

The next year, TTO got a further boost in prominence and an actual air of legitimacy when BP’s Voros McCracken wrote about seeking to determine what impact fielding had on pitching. His work referenced aspects of TTO, as components that the fielders had no control over:

The first thing I did was create something called “Defense Independent Pitching Stats.” DIPS are the representation of a pitcher’s stat line without any possible influence from the defense behind the pitcher. I calculated the various rates for walks, strikeouts, home runs, hit batsmen, etc. as a function of batters faced, and inserted them into the pitcher’s line.⁴

In the following years, BP’s Keith Woolner reported on the annual leaders in TTO percentage and noted when a player broke the record for highest percentage in a season. In 2004, Woolner introduced an update to those calculations, normalizing individual player rates based on major league averages.⁵

With each passing year, additional baseball websites dipped their toes into the TTO waters, reporting on the yearly leaders and/or trailers (most times without normalization to major league average for that season). This author applied TTO analysis on the team level in a post to her own baseball blog in 2012, providing a look at the teams from 1973 through 2011 with the highest and lowest TTO percentages relative to major league average. In so doing, it was discovered that a team’s TTO rate had very little impact on its overall record. There had been winning and losing teams on both sides of the TTO spectrum.⁶

In August 2017, during a season in which the TTO

rate in the majors would ultimately hit a record 33.5 percent, Michael Baumann of *The Ringer* offered up an immersive run-through of TTO's ever-increasing footprint on the game. The article was ominously titled "The End of Baseball As We Know It" and it proclaimed: "With the march of three true outcomes—walks, strikeouts, and home runs—the sport has been pushed to its efficient extreme. MLB has undergone a quiet revolution without anyone stopping to ask the question: Is this what we really want?" Baumann placed the TTO explosion within the context of the steroid era, the increasing height and weight of players, and the increasing velocity of pitchers.⁷

In this paper TTO growth will be examined and possible explanations for the upward trend will be presented.

HISTORICAL GROWTH IN TTO CATEGORIES

Babe Ruth set an incredible standard as a TTO leader during his career, compiling the ten highest all-time TTO rates relative to major league average, as shown in Table 1. For example, in 1920 the big-league TTO rate was 15.5 percent. Ruth's 46.1 figure nearly tripled that, and the nine other marks were also at least double the standard for the corresponding season.

Table 1. Top Ten TTO % Differences (all by Babe Ruth), By Season

Season	Ruth TTO%	MLB TTO%	Pct. Diff.
1920	46.1	15.5	+197.1
1923	43.6	16.2	+169.0
1921	41.1	15.4	+166.8
1927	41.4	16.0	+159.3
1926	41.0	16.1	+154.0
1922	40.1	15.9	+152.0
1924	39.5	15.6	+153.0
1933	41.3	16.8	+146.6
1928	40.6	16.6	+145.1
1932	39.6	17.4	+127.7

Table 2. Highest Single-Season TTO % Differences for Batting Title Qualifiers, By Decade

Decade	Season	Name	HR%	BB%	SO%	TTO%	MLB TTO%	Pct. Diff.
1910s	1919	Babe Ruth	5.4	18.6	10.7	34.7	15.8	+119
1920s	1920	Babe Ruth	8.8	24.4	13.0	46.1	15.5	+197
1930s	1933	Babe Ruth	5.9	19.8	15.7	41.3	16.8	+147
1940s	1941	Dolph Camilli	5.3	16.2	17.9	39.5	19.7	+100
1950s	1958	Mickey Mantle	6.4	19.7	18.3	44.5	24.0	+ 85
1960s	1963	Dave Nicholson	4.2	12.1	33.7	50.0	25.4	+ 97
1970s	1979	Gorman Thomas	6.7	14.7	26.2	47.6	23.1	+106
1980s	1987	Jack Clark	6.3	24.3	24.9	55.5	27.1	+104
1990s	1991	Rob Deer	4.6	16.5	32.5	53.6	26.0	+106
2000s	2007	Jack Cust	5.1	20.7	32.3	58.2	28.2	+106
2010s	2012	Adam Dunn	6.3	16.2	34.2	56.7	30.4	+ 86



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Dolph Camilli was the leading TTO hitter of the 1940s.

Table 2 shows the highest single-season TTO percentage difference for each decade. Ruth of course dominates the list, and we see the aforementioned Deer and Thomas. Dave Nicholson set a then-major league record with 175 strikeouts in 1963 as a part of his TTO stats.

As shown in Figure 1, Three True Outcomes made up no more than 20 percent of all plate appearances from 1913 through 1945. The one-quarter threshold was broken in 1961, and the 30 percent mark was eclipsed for the first time in 2012. The rate jumped considerably in each of the last three seasons, from 30.3 percent to 30.7 percent in 2015, 32.3 percent in 2016, and finally the record of 33.5 percent this past year.

Walk rates have remained relatively static over time, and while home run rates did hit a record 3.3 percent of plate appearances in 2017, they remain the smallest component of TTO.⁸ Figure 2 shows the rapid increase in strikeout rate across the majors, especially since the early 1990s. It is the increase in strikeouts that is driving the TTO explosion.

Major league baseball set a record with 21.6 percent of all plate appearances ending in a strikeout in 2017, and as Table 3 shows, the last ten years have seen a nearly 25 percent increase in the overall strikeout rate.

Table 3. Strikeout % in MLB, 2008–17

Year	K%
2008	17.5
2009	18.0
2010	18.5
2011	18.6
2012	19.8
2013	19.9
2014	20.4
2015	20.4
2016	21.1
2017	21.6

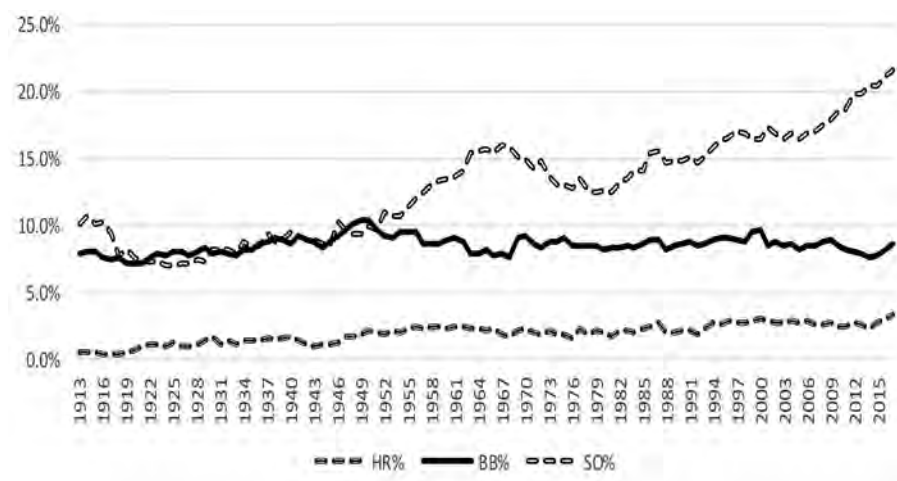
Figure 1. Three True Outcome rates have been rising steadily, especially in the last 25 years.

MLB Three True Outcome Percentage: 1913–2017



Figure 2. Strikeout-rate growth has outpaced the other two components in the Three True Outcomes, especially since the early 1990s.

MLB Homer, Walk and Strikeout Rates: 1913–2017



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Gorman Thomas, one of the earliest inspirations for the birth of Three True Outcomes in the general public.



Rob Deer had a 53.6 Three True Outcome percentage in 1991, and was another inspiration for the creation of the statistic.

REASONS FOR TTO GROWTH

With strikeouts being the largest component of TTO, it would make sense to examine the reasons for the increasing strikeout (and therefore TTO) rate. There are five main reasons.

REASON 1: March of the Relievers

The frequency of managers employing the strategy of “shortening” games—using seventh-inning relievers, setup men, lefty and righty specialists and the like to get the game to the closer—has risen sharply in the past decade. As shown in Table 4, relievers took part in 38 percent of all plate appearances (PA%) in 2017, compared to only 33 percent back in 2005.⁹

Table 4. Starter and Reliever % of Plate Appearances, with Strikeout and TTO rates, 2005–17

Year	Starters			Relievers		
	PA%	K%	TTO%	PA%	K%	TTO%
2005	67	16	26	33	18	30
2006	65	16	27	35	19	31
2007	65	16	27	35	19	31
2008	65	17	27	35	19	32
2009	65	17	28	35	19	32
2010	67	18	28	33	20	32
2011	67	18	28	33	21	32
2012	66	19	29	34	22	33
2013	66	19	29	34	22	33
2014	66	19	29	34	22	33
2015	65	19	29	35	22	33
2016	63	20	31	37	23	34
2017	62	21	32	38	23	36

This is important to the TTO discussion because relievers have higher strikeout rates than starters, going as far back as 1969.

REASON 2: Infusion of Youth in Game Brought with it a Free-Swinging Attitude

Table 5 shows the percentage of plate appearances given to each of four distinct age groups in the major leagues. The year 2004 was chosen as that was the most recent nadir in terms of the youngest group’s percentage of all plate appearances. “K Pct. Diff.” is the

difference between each group’s strikeout rate and the majors as a whole that season. For example, in 2004 the “Ages < = 25” group had a strikeout rate of 19.4 percent against a major league average of 16.9, for a “K Pct. Diff.” of 15 percent above average. Similarly, “TTO Pct. Diff.” is the difference between the group’s TTO percentage and the majors as a whole that season. In 2004 the “Ages < = 25” group had a 29.9 TTO percentage against a major league average of 28.4, and was therefore 5 percent higher ($29.9/28.4 = 105$ percent).

Since 2004, the percentage of plate appearances given to “youngsters” has risen by ten full points, offsetting a drop in that group’s strikeout-percentage difference from 15 percent above average to 8 above average. Notice that in 2017, the younger the group was, the higher the strikeout rate and TTO percentage. The prospects and/or youngest players coming into the big leagues are driving the rising strikeout rate, which in turn raises the current TTO rate.¹⁰

REASON 3: “Small Ball” Is Waning

In 2011, there were 1,667 sacrifice bunts. In 2017, that number was down 45 percent to 925. There were 4,540 stolen base attempts and 1,274 sacrifice flies in 2011. Six years later, those numbers were 3,461 and 1,168 respectively.¹¹ It appears teams no longer play for one run unless absolutely necessary. The “Earl Weaver special” of a three-run homer is the weapon of choice nowadays, and TTO is taking over.¹²

One look at an “expected runs matrix” should show why. Table 6 shows the 24 base-out states possible in an inning, along with the expected runs scored in each circumstance during 2017.¹³

For example, with no outs and a runner on first, one should expect to score 0.89 runs. That expectancy actually drops to 0.69 runs if you sacrifice bunt or otherwise “productively” move the runner to second while making an out.

More and more, teams are forsaking small ball and relying upon the long ball. Table 7 shows the percentage of runs scored via the home run since 2007. The 42.3 percent figure in 2017 is an all-time record.¹⁴

Table 5. Comparison of Strikeout and TTO Rates with % Differences, by Age Group in 2004 and 2017

Split	2004 (MLB 16.9 K%; 28.4 TTO%)					2017 (MLB 21.6 K%; 33.5 TTO%)				
	PA%	K%	K% Diff.	TTO%	TTO% Diff.	PA%	K%	K% Diff.	TTO%	TTO% Diff.
Ages <= 25	16.9	19.4	+15	29.9	+5	26.9	23.4	+8	35.1	+5
Ages 26–30	49.0	16.3	-4	27.4	-3	44.6	21.6	+/-0	33.2	-1
Ages 31–35	24.7	16.9	+/-0	29.1	+2	24.6	20.1	-7	32.5	-3
Ages 36+	9.3	15.3	-9	28.8	+2	4.0	19.6	-9	31.6	-6

Table 6. Expected Runs Matrix for MLB, 2017

Runners	0 outs	1 out	2 outs
---	0.52	0.29	0.11
1--	0.89	0.54	0.23
-2-	1.11	0.69	0.33
--3	1.36	0.93	0.38
12-	1.48	0.94	0.46
-23	1.95	1.34	0.60
1-3	1.73	1.19	0.51
123	2.32	1.59	0.73

Table 7. % of Runs Scored in MLB via Home Run, 2007–17

Year	HR as % of Runs
2007	34.2
2008	34.5
2008	35.5
2010	34.4
2011	34.4
2012	37.0
2013	35.4
2014	33.4
2010	37.3
2016	40.2
2017	42.3

This homer-happy thinking has been fueled by a dramatic increase in the percentage of fly balls that resulted in homers over the past few seasons. Table 8 shows that nearly 14 percent of all fly balls left the yard in 2017, a record since these data became available.¹⁵

Table 8. Homers as a % of Fly Balls, 2011–17

Seson	HR/FB
2011	9.7%
2012	11.3%
2013	10.5%
2014	9.5%
2015	11.4%
2016	12.8%
2017	13.7%

Fly balls traveled an average of 316 feet in 2015. For whatever reason (batters changing their launch angle, which will be discussed shortly, or baseballs being more lively, are two possibilities), that average jumped to 319 feet in 2016 and 321 feet in 2017.¹⁶ Those five additional feet turn some routine outs into hits or even homers. Even if the fly ball doesn't go out, it has become less of a pox on batters. In 2014 batters hit .212 on fly balls. That average grew to .251 in 2017.¹⁷ This leads into our next reason.

REASON 4: Advanced Analytics Have Made Launch Angle the “In” Thing

The 2015 introduction and growing use by teams of Statcast data, which tracks the movement of every ball and fielder in each park/game, has changed the way some players have approached hitting.¹⁸ Where once hitters were limited to video review and advanced scouting of pitcher tendencies, now they have almost instantaneous access to the exit velocity and launch angle of their batted balls.^{19,20}

A June 2017 article in the *Washington Post* went into great detail on this: “More batters are focusing not only on hitting the ball hard, but hitting the ball high into the air. The average launch angle—the angle at which the ball flies after being hit—rose from 10.5 degrees in 2015 to 11.5 degrees in 2016.” By May 21, 2017, the average launch angle was up to 12.8. Those two degrees may not sound like much, but they can make the difference between a ground ball and a line drive. “Balls hit with a high launch angle are more likely to result in a hit. Hit fast enough and at the right angle [generally over 95 miles per hour at an angle between 25 and 35 degrees], they become home runs.”²¹

The *Post* made Washington hometown hitter Daniel Murphy their example of a batter who adjusted his swing to hit the ball higher, noting that his “launch angle rose from **11.1 degrees** in 2015 to **16.6 degrees** in 2016” and “his batting average rose from **.281** in 2015 to **.347** in 2016. He also hit eleven more home runs.”²²

But when one swings hard and tries to hit the bottom half of the ball to generate loft, there will be an increased tendency to swing and miss, which brings us to the last reason.

Reason 5: The Strikeout Has Been Destigmatized

“I’ve quit trying to hit home runs every time I go to bat...From now on I’m just trying to keep from striking out. All I want to do is meet the ball. If I do that I’ll have a good year.”

— Mickey Mantle in April 1956²³

“Ralph Houk...has advised me to try choking up the bat when I’m up there left-handed and the pitcher has two strikes against me. I’m going to try it.”

— Mickey Mantle in January 1961²⁴

Back in the 1950s and ’60s, Mickey Mantle was frequently criticized for his high strikeout totals, despite a high batting average, immense power, and, as it turned out, all his best intentions. Table 9 shows how in nearly every season of his career, including his MVP

seasons of 1956, 1957, and 1962, Mantle far exceeded the major league strikeout rate (and consequently one-upped the league TTO rate also).²⁵

Table 9. MLB and Mickey Mantle's Strikeout and TTO rates with % Differences, 1951–68

Year	MLB SO%	MLB TTO%	Mantle SO%	Mantle TTO%	SO % Diff	TTO % Diff
1951	9.7	21.3	19.2	33.7	+97	+58
1952	10.9	22.0	17.7	33.4	+62	+52
1953	10.7	22.0	16.7	35.2	+56	+60
1954	10.7	22.2	16.4	36.3	+54	+63
1955	11.4	23.2	15.2	38.7	+34	+67
1956	12.1	23.9	15.2	40.3	+26	+69
1957	12.5	23.4	12.0	40.9	-4	+75
1958	13.0	24.0	18.3	44.5	+41	+85
1959	13.3	24.3	19.7	39.1	+48	+61
1960	13.5	24.6	19.4	42.9	+44	+74
1961	13.6	25.2	17.3	45.2	+27	+80
1962	14.1	25.3	15.5	45.8	+10	+81
1963	15.3	25.4	15.0	40.8	-2	+61
1964	15.6	25.7	18.0	41.6	+15	+62
1965	15.7	26.1	17.5	38.6	+11	+48
1966	15.5	25.4	19.3	39.7	+25	+56
1967	15.9	25.8	20.4	43.8	+28	+70
1968	15.8	25.1	17.7	40.4	+12	+61

Contrast that with today's players and environment:

"There's no doubt the pitchers throw harder now than when I first got to the league, but there is also a different mentality from players these days....They feel like if they strike out, it's not a big deal. I personally hate strikeouts....but that's my mentality. Yes, I see more homers and more strikeouts, but I guess that's, like, the new baseball."

— Carlos Beltran²⁶

Beltran made the majors in 1998. During that season, 23 batting title qualifiers ended the season with more walks than strikeouts.²⁷ Since 2012, there have been no more than five qualifying players in any season.²⁸

One need look no further than arguably the two best and most popular players in the game, Bryce Harper and Mike Trout, to witness the new world order of Strikeouts Are Okay. During his career, Harper has struck out 20.4 percent of the time, which coincidentally matches Mantle's worst season, but is just a hair below the major league average of 20.5 percent.²⁹ No one has suggested the five-time All-Star try cutting down his swing. Meanwhile, Trout struck out an

American League-leading 184 times in 2014, and still led the league in offensive WAR and won the MVP that year.³⁰ He also strikes out just above the major league average over his career (21.5 percent to 20.3 percent). There have been no reports of Mike Scioscia suggesting Trout choke up with two strikes against a tough righty.

Most recently, this past season, Aaron Judge became only the fifth rookie to qualify for the batting title while striking out in more than 30 percent of his plate appearances (Table 10).³¹ Note that all of these have occurred since 1995, and three of them have taken place in the last three seasons.

Table 10. Batting Title Qualifying Rookies with 30% Strikeout Rate in Season

Year	Player	K	PA	K%
2017	Aaron Judge	208	678	30.7
2015	Kris Bryant	199	650	30.6
1986	Pete Incaviglia	185	606	30.5
2015	Michael Taylor	158	511	30.9
1995	Benji Gil	147	454	32.4

Judge also set a TTO rookie record in 2017 with an amazing 57.1 percent of his plate appearances ending in a walk, strikeout, or homer. According to Nate Silver, Judge became only the eighth player to lead his league in all three TTO categories in the same year.³² Regardless of how voters felt about his TTO prowess, Judge earned the 2017 American League Rookie of the Year, and was a second-place finisher in AL Most Valuable Player balloting. Fans seemed more enamored with his rookie record 52 homers than concerned about his (also) rookie record 208 strikeouts, as he had the most popular jersey at MLBShop.com.³³

Judge's assault on the TTO record this past season was actually upstaged by Joey Gallo, who broke Jack Cust's 2007 record of 58.2 percent TTO. Gallo's 58.6 TTO percentage means that three of the top ten highest TTO rates occurred in 2017 (Table 11).

Table 11. Top Ten Individual Season TTO Rates of Batting Title Qualifiers, 1913–2017

Name	Season	TTO%
Joey Gallo	2017	58.6
Jack Cust	2007	58.2
Aaron Judge	2017	57.1
Jack Cust	2008	57.0
Mark McGwire	1998	56.8
Adam Dunn	2012	56.7
Jack Clark	1987	55.5
Mark Reynolds	2010	54.7
Ryan Howard	2007	54.5
Chris Davis	2017	53.8

IMPACT OF TTO ON TODAY'S GAME

Tickets sold to major league games have declined relatively steadily from a 2007 peak of 79.5 million to 2017's 72.7 million.³⁴ Reasons for this decline have included the hot-button phrase “pace of play,” as some believe that the increasing length of games (an average two hours and 49 minutes in 2005, which grew to three hours and eight minutes in 2017) has bored and/or deterred fans.³⁵

Some of this increase in game length can be attributed to the previously mentioned glut of relief appearances in today's game. Teams are using half a pitching appearance more on average per game in 2017 compared to 2005 (4.22 vs. 3.71). Additionally, pitches per plate appearance increased from 3.74 in 2005 to 3.89 in 2017.³⁶ The longer plate appearances extend into time between pitches also. As of mid-June 2017, players were taking 1.1 seconds more between pitches in 2017 than 2016, an unprecedented one-year jump in the 11 seasons such records have been available.³⁷ As for game length being driven upward by increased offense, you can't blame it on more batters coming to the plate, as the average plate appearances per game decreased slightly between from 2005 to 2017.³⁸

A natural question to ask is whether TTO outcomes are to blame for longer plate appearances. To answer that, one would need to figure out how many pitches on average it took to achieve each of the TTO events, versus all other plate-appearance outcomes. Table 12 shows the results of taking Baseball Reference Play Index data for 2005 and 2017 and splitting out the pitch counts for strikeouts, walks, homers, and all other events.³⁹ The table reveals that the TTO outcomes—especially walks and strikeouts (both above the overall average in pitches)—lead to longer at-bats. In fact, it took more pitches in 2017 to finish any kind of plate appearance. Those longer at-bats are part of the reason for longer games.

Even though the average number of pitches to achieve a strikeout has increased only slightly between 2005 and 2017, there were nearly ten thousand more

such events in 2017. An additional 46,473 pitches were thrown during strikeouts in 2017 compared to 2005. That works out to an average of 19 additional pitches per game, roughly one-half inning's worth.

THE FUTURE OF TTO

“Still we've only had one run scored that was manufactured. It's millennial. This is millennial baseball right now. You get up, you take a big swing, you strike out. You don't try to get the runners over very often. Nobody bunts. Nobody hit-and-runs. We're a team that has to get guys on and we got five hits. I mean, six runs and five hits is what you call efficiency, except if you lose.”

—Steve Garvey on Game Two of the 2017 World Series⁴⁰

Game Two of the 2017 World Series featured 19 strikeouts, eight homers, and eight walks amid 90 plate appearances.⁴¹ The Astros' 7–6 win over the Dodgers had 35 three-true-outcome events, which was apparently too much for former major leaguer Garvey.

Regardless of whether you call it “millennial baseball” or TTO, there doesn't appear to be enough of a groundswell within Major League Baseball or the Players Association themselves to change the direction toward more TTO. Pace of play initiatives have focused on intentional walks, mound visit durations, and time between pitches and pitching changes.

From the player's perspective, why shouldn't they adopt a TTO approach, given the increasing use of defensive shifts on the infield? You can see the impact of infield shifts on batting average on balls in play (BABIP) in Table 13. The normal BABIP in a season is right around .300. With shifts, balls on the ground resulted in a measly .237 BABIP in 2017—and that was the second highest figure in the last seven years.⁴² So why put the ball in play on the ground?

When you do put the ball in play, fielders are now as good as they've ever been, shifted or not. The .984 fielding average in the majors in 2017 was just below

Table 12. Pitches per Plate Appearance for Various Events in 2005 and 2017 (excluding zero-pitch intentional walks)

	2005			2017		
Outcome	Events	Tot. Pit.	Avg.	Events	Tot. Pit.	Avg.
SO	30,644	147,440	4.81	40,104	193,913	4.84
BB	15,207	83,723	5.51	15,083	86,224	5.72
HR	5,017	16,697	3.33	6,105	20,731	3.40
All other	135,424	448,306	3.31	124,003	423,776	3.42
Total	186,292	696,166	3.74	185,295	724,644	3.91

Table 13. BABIP on Groundballs Hit into Shifts, 2011–17

Season	PA	H	BABIP
2011	1,602	342	.213
2012	2,827	649	.230
2013	3,742	803	.215
2014	6,639	1,474	.222
2015	10,723	2,430	.227
2016	15,071	3,594	.238
2017	14,193	3,362	.237

the all-time high of .985 in 2013.⁴³ There has been no tangible increase in batting average on balls in play in the past 25 years.⁴⁴ There is little in the way of new incentives to put the ball in play on the ground, and with whispers of a livelier ball being used since the middle of 2015, homers and other extra-base hits are easier to come by if you adjust your launch angle.⁴⁵

With the rare exceptions of lowering the mound and reducing the strike zone in 1969, and the introduction of the designated hitter in 1973, baseball has not tinkered with the fundamental workings of the game in the past 50 years. Those changes were for the purposes of boosting offense and hopefully attendance along with them. If attendance continues to drop, baseball might be inclined to implement similar radical changes. Would MLB consider, for example, something as drastic as deadening the ball to reduce home runs? It's not that there is "too much offense" in the game right now; it's that the offensive strategies, on a "molecular" level, have dynamically changed the game flow. However, the TTO revolution, which started as an Internet goof and has become a reality due to the reasons addressed herein, is apparently here to stay. ■

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Baseball Championship Windows

How Long Are They?

Douglas Jordan, PhD

INTRODUCTION

It is not unusual to hear a sports fan or announcer say something like, “The window for this team is closing.” But what exactly does this expression mean? The general notion is that a team has a limited number of years when it can contend for a championship. Saying the window is closing implies that the team in question has already utilized some of those few years, and will only contend for a year or two more. Unstated, but also implied, is that if the team doesn’t win soon it will have to rebuild, and will therefore not contend for a substantial amount of time.

For example, in a blog post following the 2014 season, Andy Martino of the *New York Daily News* wrote, “In Los Angeles, they are already gossiping about changes, and in Washington, they probably should be. This is what happens when the two best teams in the league lose in the first round, reiterate old disappointments, and creep closer to the end of their championship windows.” Similarly, writing about the Royals in August 2016, Rustin Dodd of the *Kansas City Star* wrote, “The Royals’ core will remain intact for one more season, and club officials appear focused on maximizing the opportunities for another run in 2017. The window, they say, is still open.” These two quotations exemplify the widespread belief that championship windows are temporary, and teams that do not win before the window closes will not contend for many years.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the idea of championship windows analytically. Is the typical window a couple of years, five to six years, or longer than that? If we make a few assumptions, we can look at what baseball history says about how long teams have contended for championships.

WHY ARE THERE WINDOWS?

The concept of a championship window is based on the idea that a team needs a core of talented veteran players to contend. These players form the nucleus around which other less talented and/or experienced players are arrayed. But the core players, as a group,

can only be in their collective prime for a limited period before age takes its toll. Conventional wisdom says this will put a natural limit on how long any given group of players can compete for a championship. In addition, talented core players whose contracts expire during a team’s window may be lured away by generous offers from other teams. Martino says this explicitly in his blog post: “The Nats’ run is almost finished, with Jayson Werth nearly 36, Ryan Zimmerman breaking down, and the following core players set to be free agents after next season: Clippard, Zimmermann, Ian Desmond and Doug Fister.”

Martino’s argument is speculation about the future, but the Philadelphia Phillies provide a relatively recent example of the process in hindsight. The Phillies finished 12 games behind the Mets in 2006 before making five consecutive playoff appearances from 2007 to 2011. The team won the championship in 2008 but lost the World Series in 2009. They’d lost in the divisional round in 2007, they lost in the NLCS in 2010, and they lost in the divisional round again in 2011. The Phillies have failed to make the playoffs since then.

In hindsight, the team clearly had a five-year window to compete for a championship. Why did this window close? Because the core position players on the championship team, Jimmy Rollins (MVP in 2007), Ryan Howard (MVP in 2006), Chase Utley, and Pat Burrell, were past their primes or gone by 2012. This also happened with the key components of the pitching staff: Cole Hamels (2008 World Series MVP), Jamie Moyer, and Brad Lidge. This example seems to confirm the traditional wisdom. The window closed when core players got old or left. But is this typical? Is it reasonable to assume that a similar dynamic will result in a five-year window for most teams? This question is investigated by looking at championship windows throughout baseball history.

METHODOLOGY

The basic methodology employed is to examine how long championship windows have lasted historically. This study begins in 1903 and ends with 2016. Analysis

is done at the franchise level. This means, for example, that the results for the Philadelphia, Kansas City, and Oakland versions of the Athletics franchise are treated as one data set. All other teams that have relocated are treated similarly. Teams are referred to by their current name even if that name has a shorter history than another name. This means the data for the Nationals, for example, include the 36 years the team played as the Montreal Expos, and only 12 years as the Washington Nationals. Expansion franchises will obviously have far fewer years of data than franchises that have been extant since 1903.

But in order to look at championship windows historically, it is necessary to define what is meant (in hindsight) by a window. This is problematic, as there is no formal definition of a championship window. The specific rules used in this study are described in detail below, but the underlying philosophy is straightforward. A given year counts as part of a window if the team contends that year. The team doesn't have to win the World Series; it just has to be in contention.

The difficulty, of course, lies in specifying what it means to be in contention. The problem of defining contention is compounded by structural changes in baseball since 1903. Major League Baseball has evolved from a pair of single-division, eight-team leagues with only one playoff team from each league to one thirty-team association with two conferences (which still bear the historical designations of AL and NL). Each league has three five-team divisions with two wild-card teams that also make the playoffs. These changes in structure are dealt with in this article by having two slightly different definitions of contention for the periods 1903–68 and 1969–2016. The year 1969 is chosen as the dividing line because that is when baseball switched to two divisions within each league.

With this in mind, the specific rules used to decide if a given year is included in a championship window for the 1903–68 period are shown below. A year counts as part of a window (or starts a window) if the year meets any of the following conditions:

- 1) The team finishes in first or second place in its league.
- 2) The team finishes in third (or worse) place and five (or fewer) games behind.
- 3) The team wins 90 (or more) games.
- 4) Once established, a window stays open if there is a single down year that fails to qualify

under any of the previous three rules, but two consecutive non-competitive years closes an open window.

These rules require some elaboration. Teams are allowed to finish second, regardless of games behind during this period, because a second-place finish means the team was better than six (1903–60) or more (1961–68) other teams. Using only games behind to define contention might be misleading because some very good teams finished second, many games behind, when another team had an extraordinary season. For example, the Yankees appeared in every World Series between 1949 and 1958 except for 1954. That year, they finished eight games out of first place, so it would appear they were not in contention by that standard. However, the Yanks won 103 games in 1954, but they finished in second place because the Indians won an extraordinary 111 games. It would not be accurate to say that 1954 should not be included in a championship window under these circumstances.

Rule number two says the window stays open with a third-place finish if the team finishes five or fewer games out of first place. Using five games as the cutoff is somewhat arbitrary, but a team that finishes five games behind could have been two or three games behind going into the last week of the season and then lost a few games to finish five games back. That team was clearly in contention even if it finished in third place. The 90-win rule is included because it is possible for a team to not qualify under the first two rules while winning 90 or more games. For example, the 1963 Twins won 91 games and finished third, 13 games behind the Yankees. Even with the third-place finish, that's still a very good season and should count as a window year.

Finally, rule four is included because even good teams can have a bad year due to injury or uncharacteristic poor play. The window stays open if this happens for a single year, but the window is assumed to have closed if this happens in two consecutive years. An example of a single year not closing a window is the 1964 Dodgers, who finished in sixth place, 13 games out of first place. That poor year does not close the window between the team's championships in 1963 and 1965. An example of two consecutive years closing a window is the Cardinals' two down years in 1965 and '66, when they finished seventh, 16½ games back, and sixth, 12 games back, respectively. These two down years closed a window between the championships they won in 1964 and '67.

The rules defining a year that qualifies as part of a window after 1968 have to be modified because there

are fewer teams in each division starting in 1969. A second-place finish out of four, five, or six teams is not necessarily good enough to count as a contending year. The specific rules used to decide if a given year is included in a championship window for the 1969–2016 period are given below. As with the earlier period, any year that qualifies under any of the following rules counts as part of (or starts) a window.

- 1) The team finishes in first place or gets in the playoffs as a wild-card team.
- 2) The team finishes in second or third place and five (or fewer) games behind.
- 3) The team wins 87 (or more) games.
- 4) Once established, a window stays open if there is a single down year that fails to qualify under any of the previous three rules, but two consecutive non-competitive years closes an open window.

In this time period, 87 wins is used as a qualifying standard because, both before and after the switch to two wild-card teams in 2012, teams that won 87 games consistently finished within five games of playoff contention. The introduction of a second wild-card team in 2012 does raise an additional question: Should all teams that are within five games in the wild-card race be considered in contention? The problem is that some of the teams in that category have roughly .500 records. For example, in 2015, Houston was the second wild-card team in the AL with 86 wins. A team within five games of that mark would have finished at exactly .500 for the season. Is that good enough to be considered contending? Although this is another judgment call, these teams are not considered contending for purposes of this analysis. The general notion of in contention implies being an above average team. Being within five games of the last wild-card qualifier does not really meet that standard.

Using these rules, all major-league franchises were examined to see when each franchise had an open championship window historically. Any two consecutive years of being in contention opens a championship window and any two consecutive years of being out of contention closes a window. It is important to remember that having an open championship window and being in contention are not exactly the same thing because one down year does not close a window. For example, the 2013 Giants were a sub-.500 team (and

therefore not in contention) but their championship window remained open that year because they won the World Series in 2012 and 2014. All data were obtained from Baseball-Reference.com. The full win-loss records and other raw data used in this research are interesting in themselves, but are too voluminous to be included in this article. Just a small subset of the data for the National League from 1903 to 1920 is shown in Appendix 1 to exemplify the raw data used.

RESULTS

The complete data set in the form shown in Appendix 1 is aggregated in order to determine how long championship windows have been open historically. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The window lengths in these two tables are listed chronologically without specifying the years that window was open. For example, Appendix 1 shows that the Braves franchise's first window was three years long, from 1914 to 1916. The Cubs' first window lasted eight years, from 1904 until 1911. The first three in the Braves row and the first eight in the Cubs row of Table 1 show these window lengths without specifying when they occurred. Table 1 shows the complete results for the National League. Table 2 shows the results for the American League.

Table 1 reveals that every NL team has had at least one single-year contention event. This phrase means that there was a single year where the team contended, sandwiched between two (or more) years of non-contention. But for purposes of this analysis, the question is: Should a single-year contention event be considered a window? Although this is debatable, single-year contention events will not be considered a window in this analysis, because the concept of a window closing implies an already open window. Therefore, a single-year contention event cannot be considered a true window. In terms of this paper, this means that single-year contention events (all of the 1s in Tables 1 and 2) are not included in the calculation of the average length of windows or the number of windows for each team in both tables.

So what can we learn from the data? In terms of number of windows, it's not surprising that the expansion franchises have had fewer windows historically than the franchises that have been around since 1903. Among the latter, the Cardinals have had the most separate windows with 10, while the Phillies have had the fewest with three. The three longest windows are 22 years by the Giants (1917–38), 17 years by the Braves (1991–2007), and 16 years by the Dodgers (1970–85). The Giants have the longest average window

duration at 8.75 years, while the average window duration of the 1903 teams as a group is just over six years. The average window duration for the expansion teams is 3.7 years, and the overall NL average window

duration is 5.5 years. Seven of the NL franchises had windows that were still open after the 2016 season.

Four AL franchises (Red Sox, Tigers, Twins, and White Sox) are tied at seven for the most individual

Table 1. National League Historic Championship Windows

National League franchises extant in 1903	Individual championship window lengths in years												Number of 2-plus-year windows	Average window duration in years
Braves	3	1	8	1	2	17	4						5	6.80
Cardinals	6	3	11	1	2	2	4	2	3	1	7	7+?	10	4.70
Cubs	8	1	5	4	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2+?	6	3.83
Dodgers	1	1	1	3	11	8	16	4	4	8	4+?		8	7.25
Giants	12	22	5	1	10	1	3	2	8	8+?			8	8.75
Phillies	5	1	1	8	1	1	7						3	6.67
Pirates	7	1	1	6	2	1	1	3	1	10	3	3+?	7	4.86
Reds	1	2	1	2	1	1	4	13	1	8	1	1	4	5.50
Average of 1903 teams														6.02
NL Expansion franchises	First year													
Mets	1962	1	1	7	4	3	2+?						4	4.00
Brewers	1969	6	2	1	2	1							3	3.33
Nationals	1969	3	1	5	5+?								3	4.33
Padres	1969	1	1	3	3	1							2	3.00
Marlins	1993	1	1	1									0	
Rockies	1993	1	3										1	3.00
Diamondbacks	1998	4	4	1									2	4.00
Average of expansion teams														3.73
Overall NL average														5.51

*Average window length excludes single years, +? means the window was still open after the 2016 season

Table 2. American League Historic Championship Windows

American League franchises extant in 1903	Individual championship window lengths in years												Number of 2-plus-year windows	Average window duration in years
Athletics	12	8	8	1	8	8	3						6	7.83
Indians	3	4	1	1	9	1	8	3	4+?				6	5.17
Orioles	1	1	2	20	1	1	2	5+?					4	7.25
Red Sox	2	7	5	5	1	11	5	1	16	1+?			7	7.29
Tigers	5	2	1	4	1	4	1	1	6	8	9		7	5.43
Twins	2	1	2	4	1	9	1	2	2	9			7	4.29
White Sox	4	6	6	5	1	1	2	5	1	10			7	5.43
Yankees	3	1	24	18	15	20	1+?						5	16.00
Average of 1903 teams														7.02
NL Expansion franchises	First year													
Angels	1961	2	5	1	1	1	8	4+?					4	4.75
Rangers	1961	1	5	1	6	1	8+?						3	6.33
Astros	1962	3	1	10	1+?								3	6.50
Royals	1969	17	3+?										2	10.00
Blue Jays	1977	11	1	1	2+?								1	6.50
Mariners	1977	4	4	1	1								0	4.00
Rays	1998	6											2	6.00
Average of expansion teams														6.13
Overall AL average														6.80

*Average window length excludes single years, +? means window was still open after the 2016 season

windows. It's not too much of a surprise that the Yankees own the longest window at 24 years (1920–43). The Yankees and the Orioles are tied for the second-longest AL window at 20 years (1993–2012 and 1964–83 respectively). The Royals and the Blue Jays have the longest windows among expansion teams at 17 years (1973–89) and 11 years (1983–93) respectively. This is in stark contrast to the NL, where none of the expansion teams even has a single double-digit window. In terms of average window duration, the five windows that the Yankees have constructed have an impressive average duration of 16 years. The expansion Royals are second in the AL with an average window duration of 10 years. The overall average window duration for the AL is 6.8 years, compared with 5.5 years in the NL. Nine of the AL franchises had a window that was still open after the 2016 season. The overall average window length for the two leagues combined is 6.14 years. The overall median window length is exactly five years.

DISCUSSION

The overall average of 6.14 years can be considered the answer to the original question of how long championship windows stay open historically. This number conforms to conventional wisdom and appears to be a reasonable answer. However, further consideration casts some doubt on this comfortable conclusion. Even though this average window length seems plausible, there is considerable dispersion of the data. At the low end, there are 25 two-year windows, while the longest window lasted an astounding 24 years. Therefore, the overall distribution of the data is examined in order to better understand the dispersion of window lengths. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that almost 20 percent of windows last just two years, and one-third of all windows exist for just two or three years. Just under half of all windows last two, three, or four years. This means (given a median to average window length of five to six years) that almost half of all windows are shorter than average. So it's very common for windows to close sooner than five to six years. Just over 20 percent of windows exist for roughly the average of five, six, or seven years. However, in spite of the data being

skewed toward window lengths of four or fewer years, there are also a lot of longer windows. Over 30 percent of all windows exist for eight years or more, and about one-sixth of all windows last for 10 or more years.

What do these dispersion data tell us? They tell us that the average window length of six years could be a misleading statistic. For example, after the 2016 season, the Cleveland Indians had a window that had been open for four years. Utilizing the data in this paper, a baseball writer or commentator might argue that the window for the Indians would be closing soon since the average window length is just six years. Although this sounds like a reasonable argument, the data show that many windows exceed the average and that it is entirely possible that the Indians' window will last beyond the average length.

It should be noted that even though single-year contention events are not included in the data in Table 3, there are more of them than any other length of window. There are a total of 79 single-year contention events in Tables 1 and 2 and they make up about 37 percent of the 212 points in those two tables. This means that a previously non-contending team that suddenly has a season where it contends will only contend for a single year more than one-third of the time. This is a sobering statistic for fans of formerly poorly performing teams that have a surprisingly strong season. There's a good chance it won't last more than that one year. And, for informational purposes, even though single-year contending events have not been included in the previous discussion, the average championship-window length when single-year contention events are included in the data is 4.23 years, with a median length of exactly three years. These numbers are compared to an average of 6.14 years and median of five years when single-year contention events are excluded.

THE IMPACT OF HIGH PAYROLLS

The overall championship window length of 6.14 years includes all major league teams. However, high-payroll teams have an advantage over low-payroll teams in terms of construction and maintenance of competitive rosters. Therefore, we can hypothesize that high-payroll teams will have longer championship windows than

Table 3. Distribution of Window Lengths

Window length (yrs)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 or more
Number of times	25	19	20	14	8	6	16	4	21
Percent of total	18.8%	14.3%	15.0%	10.5%	6.0%	4.5%	12.0%	3.0%	15.8%
Cumulative Percentage	18.8%	33.1%	48.1%	58.6%	64.7%	69.2%	81.2%	84.2%	100.0%

low-payroll teams. The data set used in the previous analysis allows this hypothesis to be tested. But before the results of that analysis are presented, the high-payroll elephant in the room (the Yankees) must be discussed. The Yankees' average championship window length of 16 years is more than twice the average window length. Clearly, they are an outlier. If the Yankees are removed from the data set, the overall average championship-window length for the rest of baseball is 5.76 years. This is a 0.38-year or 6.2 percent reduction by the removal of just one team. Which number, 6.14 years or 5.76 years, is a better reflection of reality, given that a good argument can be made that the Yanks are now, and have historically been, a special case? This is a tough call because it is always dangerous to arbitrarily remove data from any data set. Therefore, the data will be presented with and without the Yankees to show both cases.

In order to determine if high-payroll teams have longer window lengths than low-payroll teams, it is necessary to define what is meant by high payroll. Since payroll data for one year are not necessarily indicative of longer-term spending trends, the average of the last 15 years of payroll data is used to determine the top ten teams in terms of payroll. Not surprisingly, the Yankees, Red Sox, and Dodgers have the three highest average payrolls over the last 15 years. The average championship window length for the top ten payroll teams is 6.81 years. Removing the Yankees, the average window length for the nine remaining teams is exactly six years. Although both of these numbers are higher than the similar number for all major league teams (6.14 years and 5.76 years respectively), the differences (especially without the Yankees) are not large enough to conclude that higher payroll teams have been able to consistently stay in contention better than low-payroll teams. Admittedly, this is a fairly simplistic way to look at this issue. An in-depth look at the question could be the subject of future research.

Given that the average championship window lasts five to six years, the question then becomes: How does a team keep a window open for 10 or more years? It's clearly not easy to do, but there is one common feature in all of the teams that have accomplished it. That feature is superior management. One early example of superior baseball management was John McGraw, who managed the New York Giants 1902–32. According to Leonard Koppett, "McGraw was exceptional in both his approach to the job, and the breadth of his influence." According to the championship window rules in this paper, the Giants' championship window was open for all but two of his 31 years managing the

club. How were the Giants able to do that? Koppett argues that McGraw had a fierce will to win and instilled that ethos in his ballclubs. This, combined with his excellent judgment regarding a player's capabilities, kept the Giants' window open for most of McGraw's tenure as manager.

All of the very long windows shown in Tables 1 and 2 were ultimately a product of excellent management. An entire paper could be written on each of those teams. And in fact, this is exactly what Mark Armour and Daniel Levitt do in their insightful book, *In Pursuit of Pennants*. Armour and Levitt argue, "Looking carefully, one can often identify differences between teams that consistently succeed and teams that struggle. Between evolving organizational frameworks and expanded or better sources of information, some teams have performed demonstrably better than others." Each chapter of their book is focused on an example of an owner, general manager, or field manager (or some combination of those three people and the people who worked with them) who constructed a team that had sustained success over many seasons. Interestingly, the source of competitive advantage for the teams with extended success has varied over time.

A few brief examples from the book suffice to make the point. Jacob Ruppert created the first truly professionally run baseball organization and filled it with quality personnel. The great Yankees teams of the 1920s and '30s were the result. Of course, Ruppert's deep pockets and willingness to spend money also contributed. Branch Rickey was the first person to develop and take advantage of an extensive farm system for both the St. Louis Cardinals and Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey also expertly exploited the formerly untapped pool of talented black players after Jackie Robinson's debut in 1947. The Big Red Machine was put together by Bob Howsam. Howsam's trading expertise brought many of the great players on those teams aboard. How did he make all those great trades? He (and his full staff) studied not only what the Reds needed, but the needs of every other team also. More recently, Billy Beane and Theo Epstein have been able to successfully exploit baseball analytics. Although the details vary, these are all examples of how superior management utilized improved organization and/or informational advantages that ultimately resulted in sustained success on the playing field.

CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis show that the average length of a championship window is about six years, with a median length of five years. These figures

conform to what is often anecdotally considered to be a team's championship window. However, the average masks a wide variation in window lengths. About half of all windows last two, three, or four years, while about one-sixth of all windows are 10 years or longer. The substantial number of long windows shows that championship windows don't have to close just because a core of star players is aging. It is usually a lack of adroit management, primarily a failure to consistently find and integrate younger talent into an established team, that causes windows to close. The authors of *In Pursuit of Pennants* summarize the issue very well when they write, "But to create a long-term successful organization, management must also discover and institutionalize a competitive advantage, either by creating or by responding to an inflection point in the way the business operates." ■

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Notes

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Appendix 1: National League Results for Franchises Extant in 1903

Franchise	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Braves												94a1	83f2	89f3				
Cardinals																		
Cubs		93f2	92f3	116b1	107a1	99a1	104f2	104b1	92f2							84b1		
Dodgers														94b1				93b1
Giants	84f2	106n1	105a1	96f2	82f4	98f2	92f3	91f2	99b1	103b1	101b1	84f2			98b1	71f2	87f2	86f2
Phillies											88f2	74f6	90b1	91f2	87f2			
Pirates	91b1	87n4	96f2	93f3	91f2	98f2	110a1			93f2								
Reds																	96a1	

LEGEND: wins/playoff success*/finish in division (or league)

*Letter designations: a=won WS, b=lost WS, f=failed to make playoffs, n=no playoffs

Relief Pitching Strategy

Past, Present, and Future?

Pete Palmer

The outlook wasn't brilliant for Our Hero. After a dozen years in the majors with some success, he was coming off a subpar year and had just been traded for three minor leaguers, who would remain so. Little did he know that along with his manager, he would change the way baseball was played. He would also pitch another dozen years, win an MVP and a Cy Young, and be elected to the Hall of Fame. This was Dennis Eckersley, traded in 1987 by the Cubs to the Oakland A's and manager Tony La Russa.

Eckersley was one of only 12 pitchers who had at least five years of 20 starts and five of 40 relief appearances. With 12 of each, Eck leads the list. Second was Rick Honeycutt (10 and 9), who would join Oakland later in the year and work in the same bullpen with Eckersley for seven years. Looking at their success and that of others, maybe more pitchers would have been able to do the same if given the chance. The list includes Gerry Staley, Ron Kline, Moe Drabowsky, Turk Farrell, and Ron Reed from the old days, Greg Swindell, Tom Gordon, Darren Oliver, Jeff Fassero, and Jamey Wright more recently. Only four pitchers have more seasons than Eckersley—Nolan Ryan with 27, Tommy John with 26, and Charlie Hough and Jim Kaat with 25.

WIN PROBABILITIES

I developed a stat called a true save opportunity. That is when the pitcher comes in with his team ahead, but their win probability is below 50 percent because of the opponent base-out situation. There have been

Dennis Eckersley was one of only 12 pitchers who had at least five years of 20 starts and five of 40 relief appearances.



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2,673 such situations since 1971. From 1971 through 1980, the team save leader was brought in 36 percent of the time. This number has been plummeting ever since: 23 percent in 1981–90, only 10 percent in 1991–2000, and 4.7 percent for 2001–17. So when the game is really on the line, the closer is hardly ever called on. In the last 17 years, there have been 934 of these. Only 31 were in the ninth inning. Most came in the sixth (258), seventh (284), and eighth (214). The first five innings only had 147. It is very difficult for a closer to get a true save when he nearly always comes in with the bases empty. This is not meant to redefine the save, just a way to look at a subset of them.

Table 1 below shows average yearly performance for the team leaders in saves, showing inning and score entering the game and how often the bases were empty.

Table 1. Average Yearly Performance for Team Leaders in Saves

Years	G	IP	<7	7	8	9	Behind	Tied	1–3	4	Empty
1946–50	31	61	8	6	8	7	15	4	8	2	15
1951–60	45	87	9	9	13	12	21	7	13	3	23
1961–70	56	91	7	12	20	18	22	11	19	4	30
1971–80	57	94	6	12	20	19	20	11	22	5	26
1981–90	58	83	3	8	23	25	13	10	29	7	32
1991–00	59	65	1	2	14	43	10	7	34	9	45
2001–10	62	64	1	2	11	50	9	8	37	10	53
2011–17	61	61	1	2	9	52	7	9	38	10	56

As you can see, the change in closer use happened very quickly. By 1991 it was virtually complete. It used to be common for a relief pitcher to throw 100 innings. From 1971 through 1989, the number was equal to about one for every two teams. From 1991 to 2000 there were 30. After that only five. Scott Proctor was the last, in 2006.

In the 1970s, several pitchers managed 100 or so innings a year without any problems, averaging about five days a year on the disabled list, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Pitchers With 100+ Innings, 1966–89

Pitcher	Range	Years	Innings	Days on DL
Pedro Borbon	1972–79	8	945	0
Bill Campbell	1974–85	12	1112	72
Clay Carroll	1966–77	12	1294.1	30
Rollie Fingers	1971–82	12	1331	0
Gene Garber	1973–87	15	1443	129
Rich Gossage	1974–85	11	1288	103
Sparky Lyle	1968–81	14	1298	0
Mike Marshall	1971–79	9	1106	168
Tug McGraw	1969–80	12	1160	102
Dale Murray	1974–83	10	875	36
Ron Perranoski	1961–71	10	1128	0
Dan Quisenberry	1980–89	10	997	0
Kent Tekulve	1976–88	13	1320	0

The fireman strategy of bringing in your best reliever when the game was on the line, often before the ninth inning—and not only when winning—would be changed. Now your best reliever would be brought in primarily to start the ninth inning with a lead of one to three runs, reducing his innings pitched by about a third.

But is it a good strategy? Dave Smith showed in his wonderful paper “The Myth of the Closer” a startling

fact: *The probability of a team winning the game with a lead going into the ninth inning has not changed in a hundred years!* This fact certainly suggests that the strategy is not working. I looked at data from 1911 to the present, separated by top and bottom of the ninth (See Table 3).

In Table 4, I split the data depending on whether the team leader in saves or someone else was pitching. The top line is for the closer, the second line for another pitcher, then the difference. With a one-run lead in the ninth, the visitor closer has about a 6 percent advantage over other pitchers, while the home closer has about a 4 percent advantage. With a two- or three-run lead, it is only about 2 percent. Each of these six situations happens about five times a year for a total of 30, meaning the closer might add about one win a year compared to other pitchers. The closer is in there about 70 percent of the time.

TOO MANY PITCHERS

Another effect of the modern closer strategy is the sheer number of pitchers on a team. According to an excellent article by Cliff Blau found at ballstat.com, the 25-player limit has been in effect more or less since 1910. The number of pitchers, however, has grown. The data on the World Series rosters in the *Elias Book of Baseball Records* show a team carried about eight pitchers in the teens and nine through 1940, then leveled off at 10. Snapshots of rosters since then have shown that by 2000 teams were pushing 11 pitchers on average, in 2010 it was up to 12, and in 2017 it was almost 13. The percent of debut players who were pitchers was around 45 percent into the '90s but has increased rapidly so that it's now almost 60 percent. So you could make an argument that there are about three pitchers on every team who wouldn't have been in the majors 20 years ago.

Table 3. Probability of Winning with a Lead Entering the 9th Inning

Years	Lead: Visitor – bottom of 9th					Lead: Home – top of 9th				
	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
1911–20	33.8	84.1	92.3	97.3	99.3	54.2	87.5	95.5	97.5	98.2
1921–30	32.4	77.5	90.1	95.2	97.1	54.3	84.8	93.3	97	99.3
1931–40	34.7	79.6	90.1	95	98.8	51.6	85.6	93.7	97.2	98.3
1941–50	35.5	80.9	90.3	95.3	98.8	51	86.5	93.2	97.2	99.5
1951–60	33.4	82.3	91.8	96.3	98.1	52.5	85.2	94.5	97.9	99.1
1961–70	34.9	81.4	91.8	96.6	99.5	51.4	86.5	94.1	97.9	99.3
1971–80	34.6	82.2	92.3	96.8	98.4	51	87.1	94	97.5	98.9
1981–90	33.3	81.6	93.1	96.9	98.4	52.6	87.4	94.5	98.2	98.9
1991–00	36.6	80.3	92.1	95.9	99	51.3	85.4	94.2	97.9	98.6
2001–10	33.1	81.9	91.5	96.8	98.4	52.9	86.8	94.9	98.7	99.2
2011–17	34.4	83.3	93.2	97.1	99	51.6	88	94.3	97.6	99.7

Table 4. Probability of Winning, Closer versus Non-Closer

Years		Lead: Visitor – bottom of 9th					Lead: Home – top of 9th				
		0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
1961–70	Closer	39.9	84.8	93.1	96.4	99.4	56.3	89	93.9	98.3	98.6
	Non-closer	33	80	91.2	96.6	99.5	49.8	85.6	94.1	97.8	99.4
	Difference	6.9	4.8	1.9	–0.2	–0.1	6.5	3.4	–0.2	0.5	–0.8
1971–80	Closer	36.9	84.3	95.1	97.3	98.5	54.6	89.3	93.9	97.2	99.2
	Non-closer	33.6	81.2	91.1	96.5	98.4	49.8	86.2	94	97.6	98.8
	Difference	3.3	3.1	4.0	0.8	0.1	4.8	3.1	–0.1	–0.4	0.4
1981–90	Closer	34.6	84.9	93.8	97.3	98.3	54.3	89	95.6	97.9	99.1
	Non-closer	32.8	78.4	92.5	96.7	98.4	52	85.9	93.7	98.3	98.9
	Difference	1.8	6.5	1.3	1.4	–0.1	2.4	3.1	1.9	–0.4	0.2
1991–00	Closer	38.8	81.9	93.1	96.2	98.8	53.5	86.5	95	98.1	98
	Non-closer	36.1	77	90	95.4	99	50.5	83	92.9	97.7	98.9
	Difference	2.7	4.9	3.1	0.8	–0.2	3.0	3.5	2.1	0.4	–0.9
2001–10	Closer	32.8	83.4	92.3	97.5	97.9	55	87.9	95.8	99	99.1
	Non-closer	33.2	76.9	89.4	95.1	98.8	51	83.3	92.5	97.8	99.3
	Difference	–0.4	6.5	2.9	2.4	1.1	4.0	4.6	2.7	1.2	–0.2
2011–17	Closer	35.4	85.7	94.8	97.3	99	51.9	89.8	95.1	98.3	99.5
	Non-closer	34.3	76.6	88.9	96.5	99	51.2	83.5	92	95.6	99.8
	Difference	1.1	9.1	5.9	0.8	0.0	0.7	6.3	2.9	2.7	–0.3

This increase in pitchers reduces the number of bench players by an equal amount. So in the '90s, 10 pitchers on a team would mean seven subs in the NL and six in the AL. Carrying 13 pitchers reduces those numbers to four and three. This cuts down on the number of moves a manager can make during the game in terms of pinch-hitters, pinch-runners, defensive replacements at other positions, and platooning.

The data for substitutions over the past four decades show a reduction in all categories, as shown in Table 5. The value of these substitutions could be the subject of another paper. However, the data show the average number of subs per team per year. The pinch-hit number is a hybrid because the NL has about three times as many since NL teams pinch-hit often for the pitcher. Numbers are adjusted for various work stoppages.

Table 5. Average Substitutions Per Team Per Year

Years	Fielders	Pinch-hitters	Pinch-runners
1981–90	233	211	40
1991–00	223	208	33
2001–10	196	188	30
2011–17	197	183	28

For platooning, thanks to Retrosheet box scores and event files, I tabulated the number of right-handed, left-handed, and switch-hitters vs. right- and left-handed starters by position for 1911 to the present. I measured the degree of platooning by taking the percentage of

left-handed batters for all positions against right-handed pitchers minus the percentage of left-handed batters vs. left-handed pitchers. Switch-hitters were ignored. Pitchers were not included. The measure started out slowly at 3 percent in 1911 but was up to 6 percent by 1920 and 8 percent for 1921–45. The period 1958–90 saw the peak of about 20 percent, which has declined to 14 percent today. The top team mark was 46 percent by the 1972 and '73 Tigers. The 1972 team platooned at six positions, with a 100 percent mark at second base (Dick McAuliffe and Tony Taylor), 90 percent at first base (Norm Cash and others), 70 percent in left field (Gates Brown and Willie Horton). Only Aurelio Rodriguez and Ed Brinkman escaped, batting right-handed in all games where they appeared as starters. George Stallings, manager of the 1914 Braves, often thought to be the father of platooning, had a high team mark for that era of 20 percent, but that figure has been surpassed many times since.

I identified a platooning situation if a left-handed batter had over 70 starts against right-handed pitching and a right-handed batter had over 30 starts against left-handed pitching. The first pair to meet this requirement was left-handed Dick Hoblitzell and right-handed Del Gainer at first base for the Red Sox in 1915–17. Strangely enough, the first NL pair was Casey Stengel and Jimmy Johnston, Dodgers right fielders in 1916. Casey remembered that well when he became Yankee manager in 1949. In 1981–90 there were eight pairs a year that met that criterion, while in 2011–17, there were only three.

The number of pitchers per game has skyrocketed. The first nine-inning game with 15 or more pitchers was in 1993. There were two more in the 1990s and about one a year through 2014. There have been 21 in 2015–17. The number of innings pitched by the starter has only gone down by about one since the 1930s, but the number of relievers per game has more than tripled, while individual relievers' innings per game have been cut in half. The number of starters going five or more innings really hasn't changed, but longer outings have been reduced dramatically. See Table 6.

LEFT/RIGHT FACTORS

Part of the current reliever strategy, besides saving the closer for the ninth inning, is to have a left- and right-handed set-up man to pitch the eighth, depending on who is coming to bat. Switching pitchers to get a platoon advantage is one of the reasons for the relief pitcher explosion. However, the platoon advantage is rather small and this strategy is probably overdone. A lefty batter's average is about 20 points lower vs. a lefty pitcher. Righty batters hit about 12 points higher vs. lefty pitchers. For OPS, it is 85 and 53. So in order to break even, a lefty pitcher has to face 38 percent left-handed batters, not including switch-hitters. Switch-batters have an OPS about six points higher vs. right-handed pitchers, so they are considered the same against either and not included. Most lefty non-closer relief pitchers face between 36 and 50 percent left-handed batters (not counting switch-hitters), which results in an edge of -1 to 17 OPS points. Righty pitchers need to face 62 percent righty batters to break even. Ten points of OPS is about 1.5 percent, which means a change in runs of about 3 percent. This would amount to one run for a typical 60-game reliever, or .15 on his earned run average. Righty relievers usually face between 69 and 72 percent righty batters. That means

they have a platoon advantage of 50 points on average, so their overall platoon advantage is higher than lefties.

"Leverage" is a term Tom Tango and I invented independently. It is the average percent change in win probability expected given the inning, score, and runners on base. The average value is around 3.6 percent. The lefty relievers above had a leverage value of 3.9 vs. left-handed batters and 3.3 vs. right-handed batters. This indicates the situations vs. left were slightly more crucial than those against right. Whatever advantage there is to switching pitchers because of handedness is greatly reduced by the fact that the new pitcher will end up facing quite a few opposite-side batters.

Going back to 1946, the batting splits were a little bit bigger, about 60 OPS points for righties and 110 for lefties. Randomness and real differences between batters attach a plus or minus value to those figures of 50 points for righties and 60 for lefties. Of the 1,121 players since 1946 with 3,000 or more at-bats, you would expect three batters to be beyond three standard deviations of the average split. There were actually six (see Table 7).

Backman just could not hit lefty pitchers batting right-handed. He actually tried batting lefty too late near the end of his career. Berkman, who was a lefty thrower, might have been better off not switching in the first place. Howard and Thome did much worse against same-side pitchers but they could still do damage. They would be the two examples (in over 70 years) of a major advantage for a pitching change. Ichiro actually does better against lefties, which is rare. Valentin tried batting lefty against left-handers for a couple of years.

RELIEF USAGE

I found 180 pitchers since 1960 with at least 180 games, fewer than two innings per game, fewer than

Table 6. Starter Innings Per Decade

Starter Innings								
Years	s-ip	r/g	r-ip	9	8	7	6	5
1911–20	7.34	0.59	2.68	.46	.62	.72	.78	.83
1921–30	7.00	0.80	2.32	.41	.55	.66	.74	.80
1931–40	6.91	0.90	2.18	.38	.52	.63	.73	.79
1941–50	6.85	1.00	2.04	.37	.50	.62	.72	.79
1951–60	6.48	1.30	1.85	.30	.41	.55	.67	.76
1961–70	6.40	1.55	1.63	.24	.35	.52	.66	.77
1971–80	6.49	1.64	1.71	.23	.36	.52	.68	.79
1981–90	6.21	1.72	1.56	.13	.25	.45	.64	.79
1991–00	6.02	2.34	1.22	.06	.17	.39	.63	.80
2001–10	5.88	2.76	1.09	.03	.10	.32	.61	.82
2008–17	5.83	2.98	1.03	.02	.08	.28	.60	0.83

Table 7. Batters Beyond Three Standard Deviations of the Average L/R Split

Player	Bats	Ops	Ops	Diff
		Vs L	Vs R	
Wally Backman	B	.460	.726	.266
Lance Berkman	B	.777	.995	.218
Frank Howard	R	.982	.779	.203
Ichiro Suzuki	L	.784	.748	.036
Jim Thome	L	.766	1.034	.268
Jose Valentin	B	.598	.826	.228



A look at the career leaders among relief pitchers in Player Win Average reveals Mariano Rivera to be in a class by himself.

25 percent finishes, and fewer than 25 percent saves for those finished. The split variation was 110 OPS points, plus or minus 60, for lefties and 60 OPS points, plus or minus 60, for righties. I found three beyond three standard deviations from the average split, where only one would be expected.

Table 8. Pitchers Beyond Three Standard Deviations from the Average Split

Player	Throws	Ops Vs L	Ops Vs R	Diff
Chad Bradford	R	.857	.585	.272
Brad Clontz	R	1.027	.612	.425
Steve Reed	R	.870	.626	.244

LOOGys (Lefty One-Out Guys) did not have enough appearances to generate a three-standard-deviation split but did generate a high difference. Randy Choate was the only pitcher to face over 60 percent lefties.

Table 9. LOOGy Splits

Player	Throws	Ops Vs L	Ops Vs R	Diff
Pedro Borbon Jr.	L	.626	.904	.278
Randy Choate	L	.551	.806	.255
Mike Myers	L	.635	.879	.244
Brian Shouse	L	.591	.865	.274

Table 10. ERA of Closers Relative to Days of Rest

Years	Days of Rest					3 con	1 ops	2 ops	p2	p3
	0	1	2	3						
1991–2000	2.87	3.28	3.45	3.46	2.68	.666	.670	25	10	
2001–10	3.02	3.13	3.17	3.34	2.92	.645	.660	15	5	
2011–17	2.91	2.86	2.87	2.67	2.97	.615	.625	8	2	

Closers seem to do pretty well when they pitch two days in a row. The table below shows earned-run average with zero to three days' rest and ERA in the third of three consecutive games. The OPS figures are for the first and second inning in a game. Closers pitched a third inning about 30 percent of the time through 1990. In the next three decades, the chances of pitching a third inning (p3) after already pitching two fell to 10, then 5 and now 2 percent. Second-inning percentages (p2) also went down.

A NEW STRATEGY

I developed a simulation between two identical teams, the only difference being the closer strategy. Rules for bringing in the closer for the first team, which mirror current practices, are:

- 60 percent in the ninth if ahead by 1 to 3 runs
- 30 percent in the ninth if ahead by 4 runs or tied in the top of the ninth

For the second:

- 60 percent of the time in the seventh or later if the leverage is 15 percent or higher
- 45 percent of the time in the eighth if tied or ahead by one run
- 30 percent of the time in the ninth if ahead by two runs
- 60 percent of the time if the ninth if tied or ahead by one run

Of course, a reliever can't come in without warming up, so there is some guesswork involved in when to get him ready, which could result in the situation getting better or worse in the meantime.

This resulted in about 72 closer innings for the first team and 120 for the second team, a big increase. However, in 1971–80 there were 50 relievers who pitched that much or more, so it is not a huge amount. But the strategy also added three wins for the second team. In the past three years, only 13 players have been better than three wins a year over average using my linear-weight method described in *Total Baseball* and *The ESPN Baseball Encyclopedia*. They are Mike Trout and

Joey Votto (7), Nolan Arenado and Clayton Kershaw (5), Jose Altuve, Jake Arrieta, Kris Bryant, John Donaldson, Paul Goldschmidt, Zack Greinke, Bryce Harper, Andrew Miller, Buster Posey, and Anthony Rizzo.

RELIEF METRICS

Player win average, invented by the Mills brothers in 1969, is a good way of measuring relief pitchers. You get charged with the change in team win probability before and after each event. Table 11 is a list of best seasons. Today's closers don't have much of a chance of getting an all-time ranking because they don't pitch enough innings. Zach Britton and Kenley Jansen had fine years, but few innings.

The same method for lifetime leaders, in Table 12, shows Mariano Rivera in a class by himself.

The Hall of Fame currently has six relievers: Hoffman, Gossage, Wilhelm, Fingers, Eckersley, and Bruce Sutter, who appears a bit below this list at 14.5. He was elected in his 13th year of eligibility, with the invention of the split-fingered fastball being his major achievement. Smith had a 15-year run at the Hall, with a peak of about 50 percent of the vote. He was the career leader in saves when he retired, but with the new inflated totals, his star has diminished. He lost one third of his support in the final four years. Rivera, of course, is a shoo-in. Papelbon retired in 2016. Nathan did not play in 2017 and officially retired after the

season. Both will probably suffer the fate of the others, who were all dropped their first year with less than 5 percent of the vote, except Wagner. He had a career ERA of 2.31, compared to Hoffman's 2.87, but he did not play quite as long. He is getting support at the 10 percent level in three elections, so his chances are slim. Wagner's last year, 2010, was his best, but he decided to retire anyway.

Gossage made a strong case that you couldn't compare relievers in his day with the current bunch because they hardly ever come in with runners on base or before the ninth inning, which of course was correct. He was able to convince some of the voters. His votes had maxed out at 44 percent after five years, but he made significant progress the next four years and went well over the limit to be elected in 2008. You can get a blown save by allowing a runner already on base when you enter the game to score, which of course is impossible if the bases are empty. The rules hadn't changed, but the usage had. Table 13 is a chart for Gossage and Hoffman, showing the percent by inning entering, score, and bases empty.

You cannot compare save percentage for pitchers

Table 11. Best Seasons in Player Win Average: Relief Pitchers

Player	Year	Wins	Player	Year	Wins
Willie Hernandez	1984	8.5	Tug McGraw	1972	6.2
John Hiller	1973	8.0	Aurelio Lopez	1979	6.2
Doug Corbett	1980	7.4	J.J. Putz	2007	6.1
Stu Miller	1965	7.2	Jose Mesa	1995	6.1
Rich Gossage	1975	6.8	Dick Radatz	1963	5.9
Eric Gagne	2003	6.7	Eric Gagne	2002	5.9
Dan Quisenberry	1980	6.6	Billy Wagner	1999	5.8
Troy Percival	1996	6.5	Trevor Hoffman	1996	5.7
Trevor Hoffman	1998	6.4	Lindy McDaniel	1970	5.7
Keith Foulke	2000	6.3	Kenley Jansen	2017	5.6
Zach Britton	2016	6.3	Joe Nathan	2004	5.6

Table 12. Lifetime Leaders in Player Win Average: Relief Pitchers

Player	Wins	Player	Wins
Mariano Rivera	55.5	Keith Foulke	20.1
Trevor Hoffman	36.2	Randy Myers	19.5
Rich Gossage	32.6	Rollie Fingers	19.5
Joe Nathan	30.1	Dan Quisenberry	19.1
Billy Wagner	27.9	John Wetteland	19.0
Jon Papelbon	26.3	Tom Gordon	18.9
Hoyt Wilhelm	24.5	Todd Jones	18.7
Tug McGraw	23.4	Lee Smith	18.7
Francisco Rodriguez	23.4	John Franco	18.2
Troy Percival	22.9	Armando Benitez	18.0
Stu Miller	20.4	Dennis Eckersley	17.8
Tom Henke	20.3	Arthur Rhodes	17.5



NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME LIBRARY, COOPERSTOWN, NY

After becoming vocal in the media about the difference between relief pitcher usage in his career and today, Rich "Goose" Gossage was inducted to the Hall of Fame in 2008, one of only six relievers in the Hall.

before 1990 to pitchers today. Most closers now are at around 90 percent, while before the '90s it was 75 percent. The highest ranking pitcher in save percentage for those with 50 or more saves who pitched mostly before 1990 is Smith, who ranks 61st. However, he had 43 percent of his games in the later period. Mudcat Grant, at number 78, is next. Gossage ranks 190th out of 225 pitchers at 73 percent, but not only did he have to worry about allowing runners already on base to score, he finished games less frequently since he was often brought in early. Hoffman finished 83 percent of his games, Gossage only 71 percent, which might have reduced his saves by 100. Middle relievers have lousy save percentages, not because they blow a lot of saves, but because they seldom get a chance at a successful one, so you have to put closers in a different category from other relievers. In 2017, team save leaders had an 87 save percentage, while the save percentage for all other relievers was only 44.

Most statistical measures of relief pitching are flawed. Saves are much too easy. Holds only count if you start out ahead. You don't have to finish the inning to get an inherited runner saved. So if you enter with two runners on base, walk a guy and leave, you get two inherited runners prevented from scoring. Looking at the best relief games in 2017 (0.2 wins or more using player win averages, 552 games), there were 232 saves, 98 wins, 89 holds, 1 loss, and 132 with nothing. Most of the unrewarded games were long stints with the score tied. Chris Devenski of the Astros had the best. He came on in the eighth inning on April 5 in a tie game against the Mariners and pitched four scoreless innings, through the 11th, worth .57 wins. The Astros won the game in the 13th.

Another flawed stat that applies to relievers and starters is outs per balls in play (OPBIP, see Table 14).

There are five things a pitcher can do to lower the batter in the hitting spectrum. If you turn a homer into an extra-base hit, your OPBIP goes up. If you turn an extra-base hit into a single, there is no effect. If you turn a single into an out, it goes down. If you turn an out into a strikeout, it goes up again. If you eliminate a walk, there is no effect again. We have good data on hard, medium, and easy batted balls back to 2003. Hard% is the percentage of hard-hit balls. A 17 percent increase in hard-hit balls led to a doubling of ERA in these data for starters from 2016, while OPBIP only went down 7 percent.

A hard-hit grounder is turned into an out only 48 percent of the time, a medium grounder 77 percent of the time. For fly balls, it's 51 percent for hard, 92 for medium. So the idea that a pitcher has no control over outs for balls in play is wrong. What is right is that OPBIP is not a good measure of pitching skill.

Relievers get an unfair break on ERA since the starter gets charged with runners he leaves on base, even though the reliever is partly responsible. In 2017, starters had an era of 4.49 and relievers had 4.15. Transferring 400 earned runs from start to relief would make them both 4.36. Starters left 2,752 baserunners to the relievers, of which 921 scored, all charged to the starters. However, the relievers were responsible for over half the runs, which would give them 513 more, making their ERA slightly higher than that of the starters. The scoring probabilities vary a bit from year to year. For 2017 the percentages were 38, 60, and 85 from first, second, and third with none out; 25, 40, and 65 with one out; and 12, 22, and 26 with 2 outs. Garry Gillette and I wrote a paper on what we called quality reliefs in which we recommended fractional runs be awarded. The first pitcher would be charged with the scoring potential when he left and the reliever would

Table 13. Gossage/Hoffman Comparison

Player	G	IP	<7	7	8	9+	Behind	Tied	123	4+	Empty
Gossage	965	1557	12	18	36	34	26	27	46	11	47
Hoffman	1034	1089	1	2	13	84	11	16	62	10	82

Table 14. OBPIP and Hard % Relative to ERA

ERA	n	opbip	hard%
<3.0	18	.721	28.9
3.0–3.5	30	.715	30.8
3–5.4.0	33	.707	31.6
4.0–4.5	32	.698	31.6
4.5–5.0	41	.689	31.8
5.0–5.5	21	.678	32.7
>5.5	56	.670	33.8

get what actually happened minus what was charged to the starter. This meant the reliever could actually get negative runs allowed. If he came in with the bases loaded and none out and did not allow a run, the starter would be charged 1.83 runs and the reliever would get minus 1.83. A quality relief was when your innings pitched were double your runs allowed using the fractional method.

I have a little aside that applies to Hoyt Wilhelm, one of the early great relievers. I noticed years ago that he had a high number of unearned runs charged to him. My hypothesis was that he benefited from passed balls, which led to unearned runs. I always thought that the knuckler should be charged with a wild pitch most of the time, since it is really his fault. Thanks to Retrosheet, we now have play by play of every game back into the 1940s, so I was able to calculate the passed-ball rate for nine career knuckleball pitchers. The overall average for passed balls is two-tenths of one percent per plate appearance. Most knuckleballers are about six times that, but Wilhelm was 15 times higher. If you wanted to find out what team Hoyt was on, all you had to do was look at the team with the most passed balls. The nine pitchers as a unit average about 87 percent of runs earned, compared to the normal 91 percent. This resulted in a lowering of ERA by about .18. Wilhelm had only 82 percent of his runs earned, amounting to a double benefit. Wild pitch rates for knucklers were about 25 percent higher than average.

MAKING THE MAJORS

If you want to make the major leagues, being a left-handed pitcher is a big advantage. Although only 10 percent of the population is left-handed, 28 percent of pitchers are lefties. Thus your odds are three and a half times better if you are lefty. So what you do is line up two lefties to be your parents. Two lefties have about 26 percent lefty kids, so you have gained another factor of 2.6. Then arrange to be born on September 1. Greg Spira discovered years ago that more players were born in certain months than others. It turns out that there is a straight line relationship, with August being

the highest, then around the calendar to July, which is the lowest. If you look at players born since 1960 in the USA, 572 were born in August and only 349 in July. I attributed that to being the oldest player on your Little League team. Little League used to determine players' age as of July 31. It changed that date to April 30 in 2006 and now it is August 31, so you have to keep that in mind. This gives you another factor of 1.4, making the total 12.7 times more likely if you play your cards right.

CONCLUSIONS

So, what do we conclude from all this? Was the revolution started by Eckersley and LaRussa in 1988 an effective one? I believe the current relief strategy is not productive because the closer is used too little and at the wrong times. There are too many pitchers per team, limiting the moves a manager can make in other areas. There is too much emphasis on left-right matchups, which give only a small advantage. It seems that getting the closer a lot of easy saves is more important than winning games, so a statistic is actually driving strategy. The manager makes many decisions that can be disputed. If everybody handles his closer the same way, then that is one fewer decision to be made that can be second-guessed. Perhaps that is the reason we are where we are today. I wonder if anyone will try to buck the trend. I hope they do. ■

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Seven Degrees of Separation?

Analyzing MLB Played-With Relationships, 1930–2016

Peter Uelkes, PhD

INTRODUCTION

This article reports on MLB “*played-with*” relationships for the time period 1930 through 2016. We define player A as having *played-with* player B if the two appeared in the same major league game for the same team. This doesn’t necessarily mean both players stood on the field at the same time. We also include cases where one player had already left the game when the other player entered.

This analysis uses event files as provided by Retrosheet.¹ These contain information on starting players as well as in-game substitutions. For most years prior to 1930, only starting players are available, so the analysis only goes back to the 1930 season. By processing the event files, a graph was built containing 13,298 players as nodes (vertices) and 831,835 *played-with* relationships as edges. We are then able to extend the *played-with* relationships by including paths from player A to player B via intermediate players.

To quantify this, we define the *distance* between players A and B as follows:

- $\text{distance}(A, B) = 0$: A player has distance 0 only to himself ($A = B$)
- $\text{distance}(A, B) = 1$: Players A and B *played-with* each other as defined above
- $\text{distance}(A, B) = 2$: Player A didn’t *play-with* player B, but there exists (at least one) player C who *played-with* A and *played-with* B (in different games)
- And so on. For example, for $\text{distance}(A, B) = 3$: Player A didn’t *play-with* player B, and there is no single player C who *played-with* both players A and B (in different games), but there exists (at least one) pair of players C and D, who *played-with* each other and one of whom *played-with* player A, the other with player B. In other words, there is a chain of three *played-with* steps to get from player A to player B.

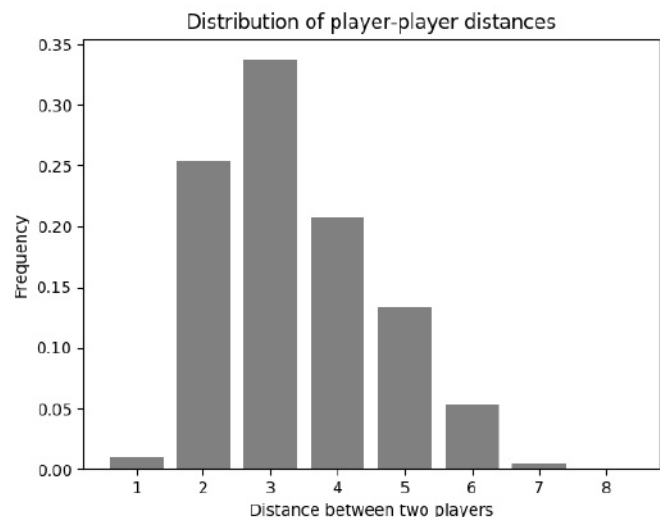
In the next step, distances for each pair of players were calculated using a standard algorithm from graph theory known as the Floyd-Warshall algorithm.² The purpose of this algorithm is to find the shortest path for each pair of nodes (vertices) in a graph. The length of the shortest path then gives the distance measure for each pair of players as defined above. The running time of the algorithm is proportional to the third power of the number of nodes (number of players in our case). There are faster algorithms for finding the shortest path between a specific pair of players or for one specific player to all others, but for this analysis, we need the distance measure for every pair of players, so Floyd-Warshall is the appropriate algorithm.

After running the algorithm on the data set, a number of interesting results can be extracted from the graph and its associated distances.

MAXIMUM DISTANCE

As a first result, we report the distribution of player-player distances for the complete data set as Figure 1.

Figure 1. Histogram of the distance between any two players in the data set. The x-axis represents the distance while the y-axis shows the respective relative frequency. Distance is as defined in the main text.



The histogram shows a value of three as the most common distance (i.e. as mode of the distribution). The maximum distance is seven. It's a remarkable result: For *any* pair of major league players in the time period 1930–2016, we are able to construct a *played-with* path of no more than seven steps. There is no pair of players that isn't connected via a *played-with* path!

Typically, a maximum-length path includes as one endpoint a player with very few major league appearances, a Moonlight Graham-type career. For example, one such path is:

- Owen Kahn *played-with* Rabbit Maranville for the Boston Braves vs. the Brooklyn Dodgers on May 24, 1930.
- Rabbit Maranville *played-with* Danny MacFayden for the Boston Braves vs. the Cincinnati Reds on June 17, 1935 (second game of doubleheader).
- Danny MacFayden *played-with* Mickey Vernon for the Washington Nationals vs. the Philadelphia Athletics on May 11, 1941.
- Mickey Vernon *played-with* Harmon Killebrew for the Washington Nationals vs. the New York Yankees on September 20, 1955 (second game of doubleheader).
- Harmon Killebrew *played-with* Jamie Quirk for the Kansas City Royals at the Texas Rangers on September 26, 1975.
- Jamie Quirk *played-with* Steve Finley for the Baltimore Orioles at the Toronto Blue Jays on September 29, 1989.
- Steve Finley *played-with* Robb Quinlan for the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim at the New York Mets on June 12, 2005.

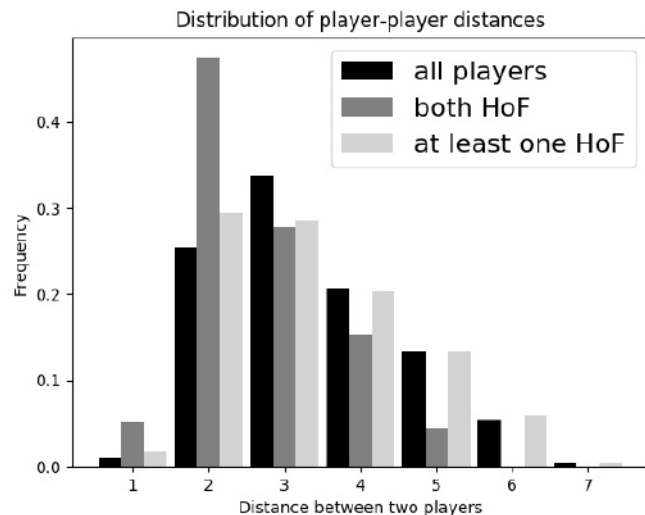
So the path from Owen Kahn to Robb Quinlan includes six intermediate players, two of whom (Killebrew and Maranville) are in the Hall of Fame. Of course, typically there are several or even many other paths of the same length between two endpoints, in this case, Kahn and Quinlan. Also, it should be noted that Hall of Famers typically have long careers (22 and 23 years for Killebrew and Maranville, respectively), so they play with a lot of other players and therefore act as “hubs” in the network of *played-with* connections. This is especially the case if they switched teams

repeatedly. Maranville, as a case in point, played for five different teams in his career—including the Boston Braves, whom he left after the 1920 season and returned to in 1929.

To further illustrate the difference between Hall of Famers and the bulk of other players, we show as Figure 2 a modified version of Figure 1. This time the data of Figure 1—all player pairs—are shown as black bars while pairs of players who are both in the Hall are shown as dark gray bars. Pairs in which at least one player is in the Hall are represented by light gray bars.

We clearly see that the distribution of pairs of players who were both Hall of Famers (“Both HoF”) is leaning to the left, toward lower distances, compared to the “All players” distribution. The weighted average distance between all players is 3.38, while for pairs of Hall of Famers it's 2.67. Hall of Famers have smaller average distances than the mean of all players.

Figure 2. Distribution of the distance between any two players in the data set. The x-axis represents the distance while the y-axis shows the respective relative frequency. Distance is as defined in the main text. Black bars represent all player pairs, dark gray bars represent pairs where both players are in the Hall of Fame (inducted as “Players” as defined at Baseball-Reference.com) and light gray bars represent pairs where at least one player is in the Hall.³



Returning to the length-7-path shown above, Robb Quinlan appeared in a fair number of major league games (458). Owen Kahn, on the other hand, appeared in only one. He entered the game on May 24, 1930, as a pinch-runner, scored his run, and never played in the major leagues again.

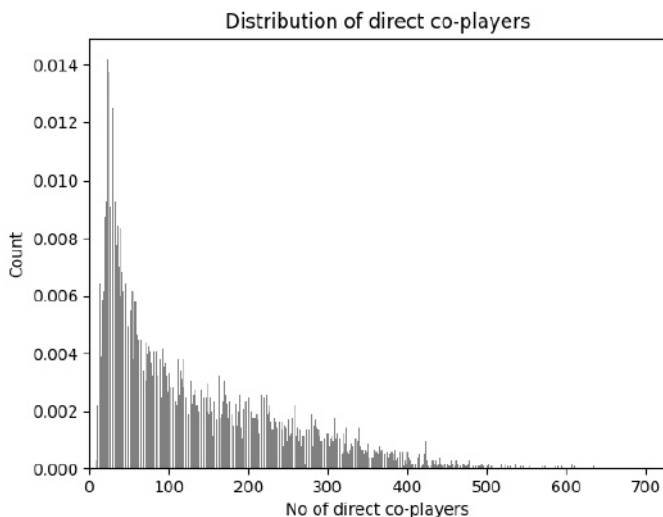
DIRECT CO-PLAYERS

We define a *direct co-player* for player A as any player who has a distance of one to player A, i.e. who *played-with* player A. First, we'll have a look at the overall distribution of the number of co-players per player. We restrict ourselves to players who debuted between 1930 and 2006 (instead of 2016) to eliminate noise from the partial-career data of the many players active in 2016 who debuted in the last decade.

Figure 3 shows a histogram of the number of co-players for each player.

We see a large peak for numbers of co-players below 100. The reason for that is the large number of players who only had a “cup of coffee” in the major leagues and therefore only had a relatively small number of co-players.

Figure 3. Histogram of the total number of co-players in a career for each player in the data set. The x-axis gives the number of direct co-players (i.e. players with distance = 1) while the y-axis shows the count of how often that number of co-players occurs in the data set.



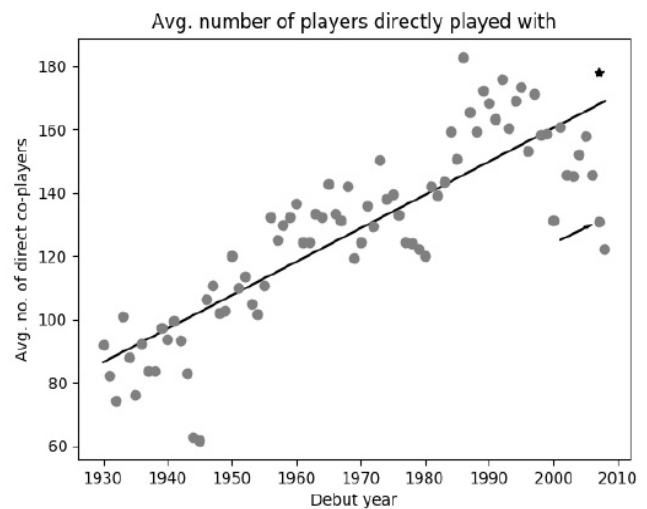
The highest entry is at 671 co-players (equivalent to about 27 full 25-man rosters). This entry belongs to Rickey Henderson, an inner-circle Hall of Famer who played in the majors for 25 seasons for nine different teams—including four separate stints with one of them, the Oakland A's. A few other players in the data set have in excess of 600 co-players: Matt Stairs, Terry Mulholland, Carlos Beltran, David Weathers, and La-Troy Hawkins. None of these players is active anymore (Beltran retired following the 2017 season), so none of them will match Rickey-being-Rickey.

At the low end of the distribution is a single player with only eight direct co-players in his career—eight

being the minimum possible number. He is Whitey Ock, who played only one game. Owen Kahn, who was mentioned in the previous section for having a distance of seven from Robb Quinlan, has 11 direct co-players from his lone big-league game. A relatively modern player near the low end is Bob Davidson, who played in one game in 1989, with 12 co-players.

Because of the expansion of the major leagues starting in the 1960s and greater mobility of players in the wake of free agency, there is reason to expect a trend of an increasing number of co-players with time. To make that explicit, we look at the mean number of co-players as a function of the debut season of the player in question. See Figure 4.

Figure 4. Mean number of direct co-players for a player who debuted in a specific year. The x-axis shows the debut year while the y-axis gives the mean (average) value of direct co-players, i.e. players with distance equal to one, for each player with that debut year. A regression line is shown that is fitted to the data points. The arrow indicates the uncorrected data point for the 2007 debut year while the asterisk shows the corresponding corrected data point. See main text for more information.



We see a clear upward trend, though with some season-to-season fluctuations. This is to be expected as the number of teams has grown via expansion. In addition, a sharp increase is seen in the 1980s with free agency coming into full effect, and therefore much greater mobility of players across teams. Also, a pronounced decline is visible during World War II, when rosters were much more stable than usual. Whether a stabilization takes place in the 2000s is not yet clear because many players from that period haven't finished their careers.

In order to get a handle on this, an analysis was done taking into account all Hall of Famers (inducted as “Players” as defined at Baseball-Reference.com) who debuted between 1930 and 1989 (so their complete careers are covered by the available data).³ It was then calculated how the number of their direct co-players evolved with the Hall of Famers’ respective age. Figure 5 shows some results for Hall of Famers debuting in four different decades.

Figure 5. Time evolution of the fraction of direct co-players as a function of the player’s age for Hall of Famers (elected as “Players”) who debuted in a given decade: 1930s (upper left panel), 1950s (upper right), 1970s (lower left) and 1980s (lower right). The x-axis shows the player’s age in years, the y-axis represents the fraction of direct co-players the player ended up with at the time of his retirement who had already directly played with him at that age.

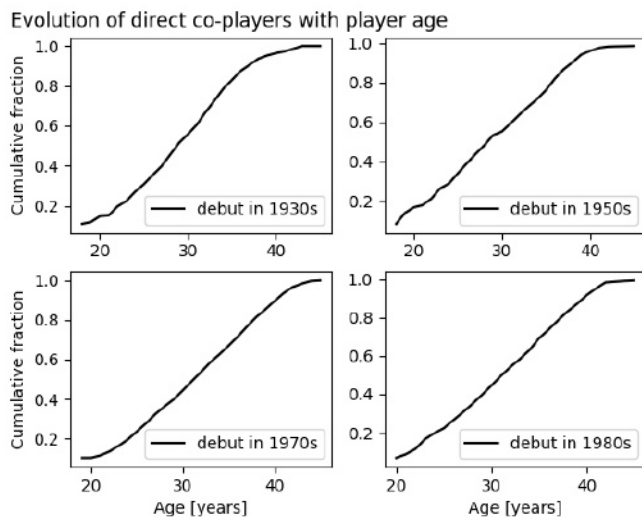


Figure 5 shows evolutions that are close to linear for the age bracket between about 20 and 40 years, i.e. the main part of a player’s career (few players play beyond age 40). It’s therefore, as a first approximation, possible to extrapolate the number of direct co-players for a given player age for an active player. A caveat applies here because the analysis represented in figure 5 was restricted to Hall of Famers (because of technical limitations, Retrosheet does not provide player birth year data, so the analysis software had to be extended to automatically fetch birth years from Baseball-Reference.com) and, of course, not all current players will end up in the Hall.

Keeping this in mind, an exemplary correction was done for players who debuted in 2007. For them, 10 years of major league playing time was represented by the available data set. If they didn’t play in 2016, they

were assumed to be retired (introducing a possible small error for players who weren’t retired but missed 2016 because of injury). If they were still active in 2016 and at most 40 years old, their number of direct-co players accumulated by then was corrected by an age-dependent factor that was taken from the lower right panel of figure 5. For example, if the player was 37 years old in 2016, his number of direct co-players was divided by 0.785, because that’s the fraction taken from the Hall of Famer analysis shown in figure 5.

Without this correction, the mean number of direct co-players for players debuting in 2007 was about 131 (see figure 4, data point indicated by arrow). With the correction, the number is about 178, which is closer to the regression line in figure 4 (see data point accompanied by an asterisk). This indicates, taking the rough correction into account, that the trend of an increasing number of co-players is still unbroken in recent years. Because the correction was done based on Hall of Famers’ careers, a certain overcorrection was to be expected because Hall of Famers typically have long careers.

HUBS AND OUTSIDERS

For every player, we took the mean value (average) of the distances to all other players in the data set. Let’s then define players with a large mean distance as *outsiders* and players with an especially small mean distance as *hubs*. So outsiders are players who are relatively isolated on the outskirts of the player connection graphs, while hubs are players who are central to the graph, with many other players “close by.”

The top 10 outsiders are:

Name	Debut Year	Mean Distance	Co-players
Owen Kahn	1930	5.168	11
Johnny Scalzi	1931	4.931	22
Walter Murphy	1931	4.903	15
Al Wright	1933	4.901	21
Bill Dreesen	1931	4.899	28
Gordon McNaughton	1932	4.894	20
Eddie Hunter	1933	4.885	11
Jim Spotts	1930	4.871	21
Buz Phillips	1930	4.863	29
Monk Sherlock	1930	4.861	29

These players all are situated at the early end of the data set, which automatically generates a relatively large distance to the (many) modern players. We’ve encountered Owen Kahn, who has the largest mean distance, already as one endpoint of a path with a distance of seven.

Now let's look at the top 10 hubs:

Name	Debut Year	Mean Distance	Co-players
Harold Baines	1980	2.439	546
Rich Gossage	1972	2.459	504
Julio Franco	1982	2.510	579
Jesse Orosco	1979	2.512	587
Phil Niekro	1964	2.519	369
Rickey Henderson	1979	2.530	671
Brian Downing	1973	2.532	360
Dennis Martinez	1976	2.533	354
Dave Winfield	1973	2.533	471
Rick Dempsey	1969	2.539	394

This table shows players with debut years between 1964 and 1982, during a period when major league baseball was expanding and free agency was coming into being. Even if we look at the 50 smallest mean distances, the most recent debut year is 1983 (Otis Nixon). For more modern players, the distance to the 1930-era players gets too large, bringing up the mean. In a sense, Harold Baines (22 years of service, five teams, including three separate stints with two of them) is the “best-connected” player in the data set.

VISUALIZATION

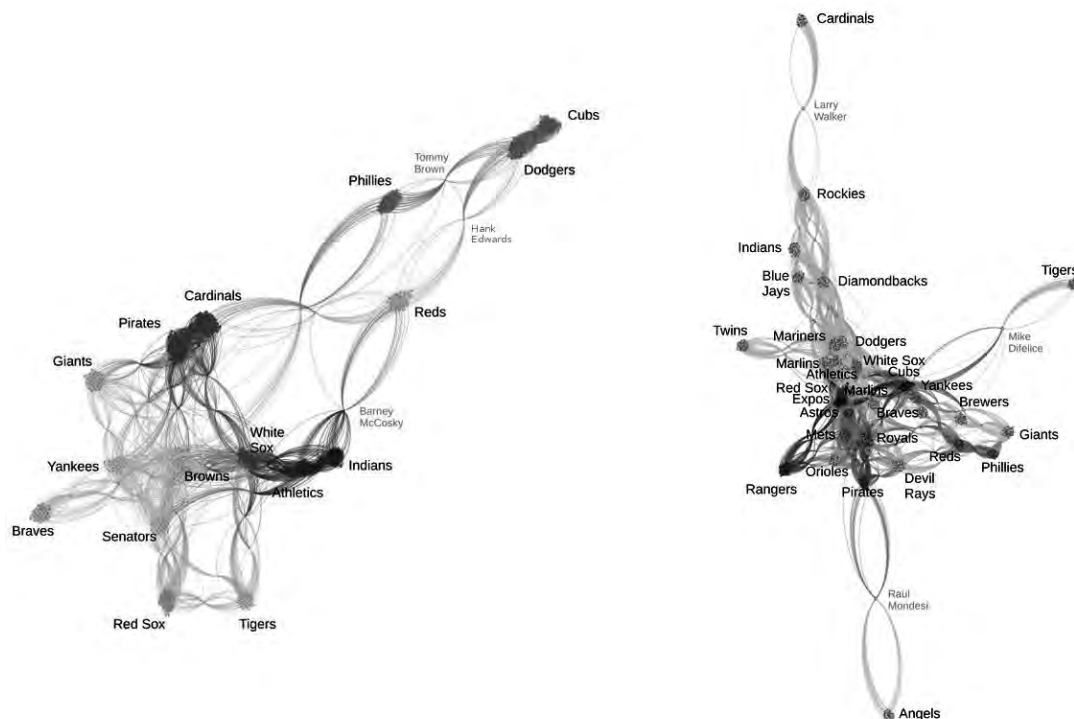
Once a player-connection graph is built, it is possible to visualize it by using a tool like Gephi.⁴ Of course, visualizing a graph with more than 13,000 nodes and more than 800,000 edges is a hopeless task. To make this tractable we created graphs for two particular seasons, 1951 and 2004. See Figure 6.

To create the visualization, the graph was loaded into the Gephi tool. The tool uses a “force atlas” method to create node-to-node distances.⁵ Also, a modularity analysis was done and nodes were shaded accordingly. We annotated the generated image with team names.

In a lighter font we annotated a few individual players' names. These are players who switched teams during the season and therefore connect the clusters of nodes (players) for different teams. These examples are, for the 1951 season:

- Barney McCosky was purchased by the Cincinnati Reds from the Philadelphia A's on May 4, 1951.
- Hank Edwards was selected off waivers by the Cincinnati Reds from the Brooklyn Dodgers on July 21, 1951.

Figure 6. Player connection graphs considering only games played in the 1951 (left panel) or 2004 (right panel) season. Players are shown as small dots while edges of the connection graph are shown as curve segments connecting the dots. The closer that players are clustered together, the smaller the distance between them. Teams are indicated, and their players are, of course, clustered together. A player switching teams midseason (player names in a lighter font), like Larry Walker in the 2004 graph, will connect two team clusters.



- Tommy Brown was traded by the Brooklyn Dodgers to the Philadelphia Phillies on June 8, 1951.

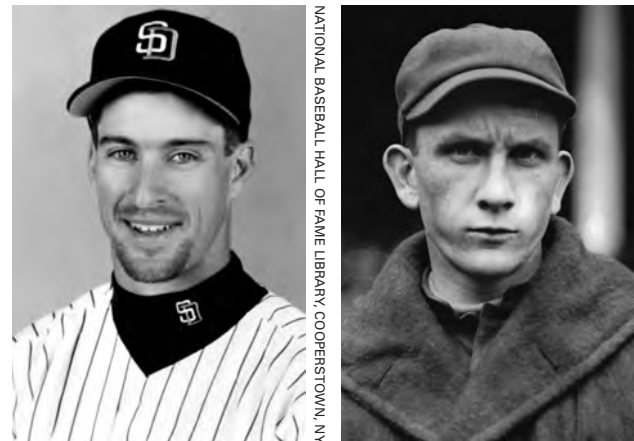
Two (or more) teams get clustered close together by the tool if there are strong, i.e. multiple, connections between them. One example is the Dodgers and Cubs, who exchanged multiple players via trade during the 1951 season. Another example is the 1951 Browns, who were involved in multiple player exchanges with several teams and so are right in the middle of the clustering.

The graph for the 2004 season looks more complex than the 1951 graph because there were more major league teams and players in the later season.

In the 2004 graph, we clearly see three teams that are only connected via one player to the bulk of the other teams:

- St. Louis Cardinals (acquired Larry Walker from the Rockies)
- Detroit Tigers (traded Mike Difelice to the Cubs)
- Anaheim Angels (signed Raul Mondesi as a free agent after he was released by the Pirates)

In general, the 2004 player connection graph is more “crowded” than the 1951 graph because of the higher mobility of players, i.e. more player exchanges between teams. This leads to relatively small *played-with* distances between numerous pairs of teams. In



Steve Finley (L) and Rabbit Maranville are connected by a played-with chain that includes Harmon Killebrew and Mickey Vernon.

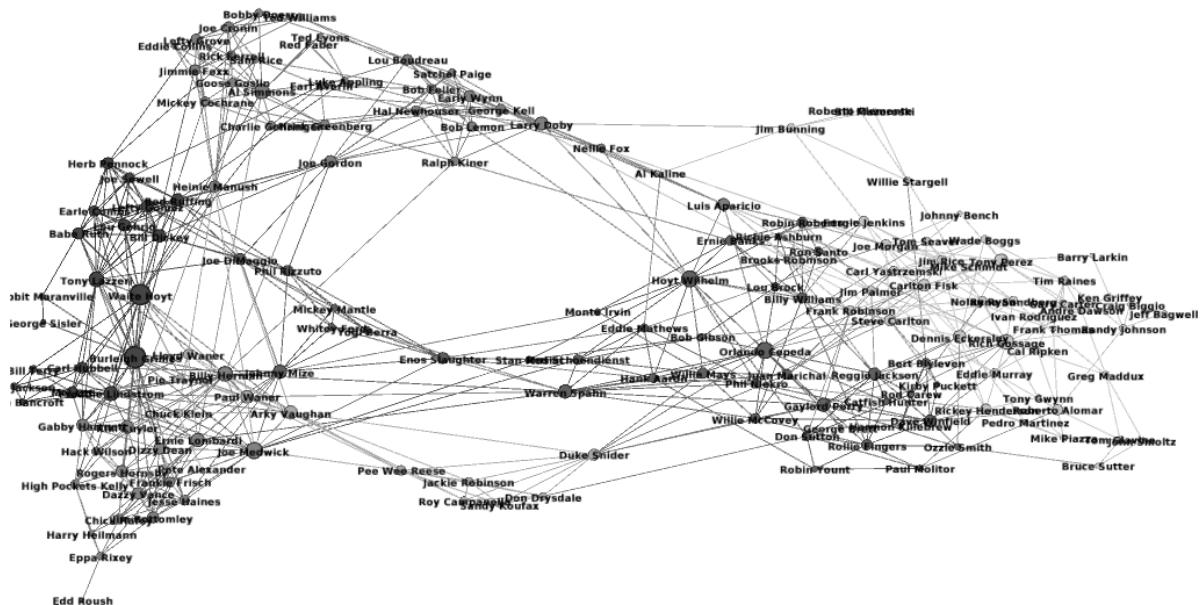
the end, more than half of the teams from the 2004 season are clustered so close together that it's barely possible to resolve them in the visualization.

So the visualization tool gives us a lot of insight into who played with whom and which teams were connected via in-season player exchanges.

As a further example, Figure 7 shows the connection graph for Hall of Fame players.

We see some clustering, which stems from teams with multiple Hall of Famers: for example, the Los Angeles Dodgers of the 1960s at bottom center, with Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale, Duke Snider et al. Also, there is a timeline-like component to the graph, with modern players such as Greg Maddux, Jeff Bagwell, and Tim Lincecum on the right and old-timers on the left.

Figure 7. Player connection graph for Hall of Famers, i.e. players who were inducted as “Players” into the Hall of Fame.



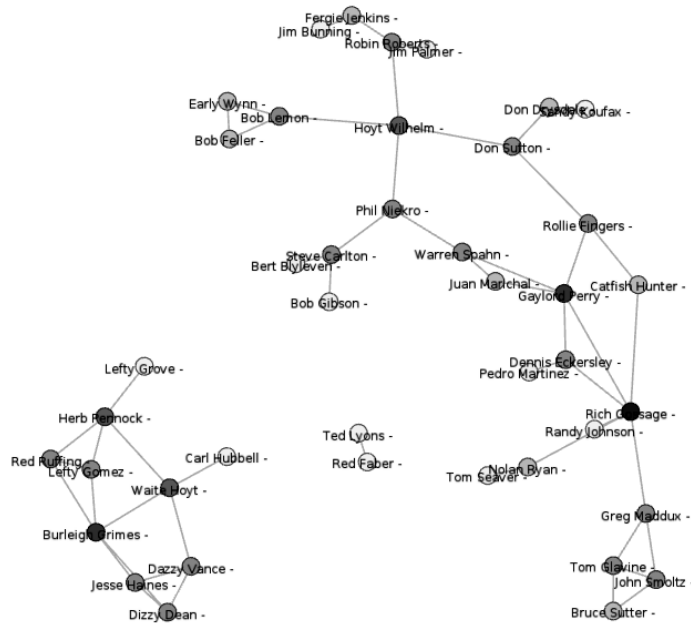
NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME LIBRARY, COOPERSTOWN, NY



Harmon Killebrew

The graph, even restricted only to Hall of Famers, is still quite crowded. So as a final illustration, the graph for Hall of Fame pitchers only is presented as Figure 8.

Figure 8. Player connection graph for Hall of Fame pitchers. Please note that Gephi draws connecting lines only for a certain threshold of “closeness,” meaning that, for example, Ted Lyons and Red Faber were not really isolated from the rest of the Hall of Fame pitchers.



SUMMARY

We presented a novel approach to analyzing major league player connections as defined in the *played-with* sense. In this way, we were able to track historical developments that impacted the structure of on-field personnel, such as expansion and free agency. By using appropriate tools, we presented intuitive visualizations of player connections for selected subsets of the data.

It would be interesting to extend the analysis back in time if more detailed game data (including in-game substitutions) became available for seasons prior to 1930. ■

Notes

1. www.retrosheet.org. The information used here was obtained free of charge from and is copyrighted by Retrosheet.
2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floyd-Warshall_algorithm.
3. www.baseball-reference.com/awards/hof.shtml.
4. Bastian M., Heymann S., Jacomy M. (2009). Gephi: An open source software for exploring and manipulating networks. International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media.
5. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force-directed_graph_drawing.

Hit Probability as a Function of Foul-Ball Accumulation

Jeffrey N. Howard, PhD

In a day and age when professional baseball has implemented countdown timers between innings, limited mound visits, and restricted batter movement away from the batter's box during at-bats—all in an effort to truncate drawn-out games—the foul ball remains untouched.¹ Despite some calls by fans for a rule change to curb the time foul balls expend in a game, the foul ball has an interesting tale to tell when one actually looks at the data.²

Foul balls are often portrayed as devalued events that merely slow down baseball games. However, despite its game-dragging “do-over” reputation, the foul-ball event can provide insight into the fatigue status of a pitcher while also functioning as a predictor of hitter success. This paper investigates historical Retrosheet major-league foul-ball event data from 1945 through 2015, to analyze the historical nature of foul-ball occurrence with respect to two states:

- [1] foul-ball accumulation when foul ball strikes occurred “inside-the-count” (ITC); and
- [2] foul-ball accumulation when foul balls occurred “outside the count” (OTC) and thus did not count as strikes.³

It is hypothesized that the foul ball as an event can predict hitting success, but that the probability of such success is dependent upon when foul balls occur with respect to the ball-strike count, and how many foul-ball events accumulate during an at-bat.

TYPES OF FOUL-BALL STRIKES

The role of the foul ball as a strike within the count is a logical place to start in assessing any value it might have strategically. William Juliano provides just such an analysis by assessing the role the foul ball plays as an indicator of batter success via the type of first-pitch strike that occurs in an at-bat. According to Juliano, the contrast between a swing-and-miss first strike and a looking first strike with respect to at-bat success is relatively meaningless; but not so for the foul ball

when contrasted to the other types of strikes on the measure of batter OPS. Batter OPS was elevated in a meaningful way when the first two strikes resulted from foul balls.⁴

However, the OPS is a multivariate combinatory statistic that looks at batter on-base percentage plus batter slugging percentage rather than simple batting average.⁵ As per Juliano's data, there is no significant difference in batting average between at-bats in which the first strike is a foul ball and those in which it's a swinging or called strike.⁶ Thus, the act of hitting a foul ball for the first strike does not provide conclusive data when it comes to predicting hitting success via batting average. Perhaps as a single-event occurrence, the first-strike foul ball is not a large enough sample of within-at-bat events to arrive at some predictive power. However, the *accumulation* of foul balls within an at-bat, and whether foul balls compose the two strikes for any at-bat, is a far better candidate to make a determination of batter success.

With respect to pitcher fatigue, the traditional assessment variables for replacing a pitcher early in a game differ from that of later innings. Early on, managers consider variables such as starter effectiveness and the need for bullpen conservation. In later innings, their thinking tends toward relative effectiveness of the starter and direct consideration of his replacement.⁷ These traditional pitcher-replacement considerations appear to be based more on hunches than on data-driven decision making.

Perhaps the most famous foul-ball sequence in baseball history was the Dodgers' Alex Cora's marathon 18-pitch, 14-foul plate appearance in 2004 that ended with a home run against Matt Clement of the Chicago Cubs.⁸ And while Cora's batting sequence may have provided a great deal of information on Clement's status (e.g. fatigue, pitch-location difficulty, etc.), as earlier mentioned, sample size across multiple batters would be far more predictive with respect to foul-ball accumulation than would a single at-bat sequence of monumental foul-ball proportion. The current paper puts forth the argument that the foul ball is a ubiquitous

data event that should garner more serious consideration in the pitching-change process. Foul balls are far more than simply a drag upon game flow. They are data-rich events that when assessed cumulatively and in tandem with knowledge of the historical data on hit probabilities, can provide valuable insight into pitcher fatigue and batter hit success.

CUMULATIVE FOUL BALL STATES: ITC vs OTC

In observing a foul ball in a game, there is a tendency to dismiss the occurrence as an irrelevant event—it's a ball out of play that's most often headed for the stands, and what reaction there is to the event is relegated to the excitement surrounding some fan acquiring a souvenir. Major league teams appear to take this "irrelevant event" perspective while failing to assess whether the event itself has some sort of informational value that might be gleaned for strategic advantage.

With respect to the game and its participants, the hidden strategic value of the foul ball is found within its role as an "indicator." That role is revealed in the present study via data showing its cumulative occurrence and its contribution to the strike count relative to the overall existing count for the batter. There are two such "indicator" states that arise with foul balls. The first is when fouls account for the first two strikes—known as the "inside-the-count" (ITC) state. The second, known as the "outside-the-count" (OTC) state, is when the first two strikes are made up of swings and misses, called strikes, or some combination of the two, with the accumulation of foul balls occurring after these two strikes have been acquired by the batter.

ASSUMPTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

First, it is necessary to clarify two assumptions with respect to the foul ball and a comparison of its occurrence as an ITC vs OTC event. The first is the assumption that the accumulation of two ITC foul-ball strikes is related to poor pitching (e.g. fatigue) and the second is that ITC swing-and-miss/looking strike combinations are due to good pitching. In addition, the hybrid two-strike count combination comprising one foul ball and one swinging or called strike is assumed neutral—it does not imply such accumulation of strikes is due to either good or poor pitching, since it's balanced and leans toward neither one. Due to this, these hybrid two-strike count combinations were not a focus of the investigation.

The primary research objective was to inquire about the probability that a hit will occur with respect to increasing foul-ball accumulation for [1] at-bat counts

having two strikes from swing-and-miss/called-strike combinations; or [2] at-bat counts with two strikes resulting from foul balls. Modes of getting to first base such as walks, intentional walks, hit-by-pitch, or catcher interference were not of interest. Thus it was hypothesized that: [1] *two-strike counts for at-bats where both strikes are foul balls would garner higher hit probabilities than would two-strike counts in at-bats where both strikes are swing-and-miss, called strikes, or some combination thereof; and [2] that hit probability would continue increasing as foul balls accumulate.*

METHOD

Seventy-one years of Retrosheet data 1945–2015 were analyzed to assess the incidence of ITC foul-ball patterns vs. OTC foul-ball patterns with respect to hit probabilities.⁹ MySQL was utilized as the collective database to which Retrosheet data were imported, after which data were parsed using SQL (Structured Query Language) syntax within HeidiSQL front-end software interface to retrieve relevant Retrosheet event data.¹⁰ The range of database queries addressed two-strike counts of 0–2, 1–2, 2–2, and 3–2 for at-bats with accumulated foul ball counts from 1 to 5, for both ITC and OTC batter states.

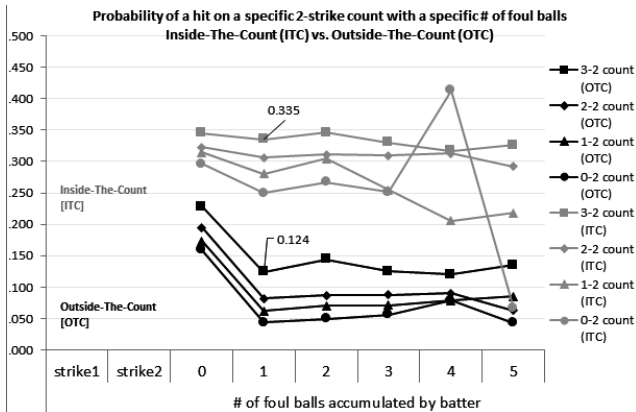
RESULTS

When looking at batter success as a function of accumulated foul balls across different counts, the OTC and ITC conditions demonstrate striking disparity with respect to batter success on a two-strike count. Figure 1 provides an overview of hit-success probabilities for both the OTC and ITC states. One of the most salient comparisons can be seen in Figure 1, where three non-strike foul balls have been accumulated within each of the OTC and ITC states—a contrast demonstrating a .211 hit success increase ($.335 - .124 = .211$) when the first two strikes of a hitter's count are both foul balls (ITC) as opposed to when the first two strikes are both swing-and-miss or called strikes (OTC). The comparison with the greatest disparity involves at-bats in which four foul balls have been accumulated on an 0–2 count—an OTC (.079) vs ITC (.413) difference of .334.

It is also worth noting the drastic drop-off in Figure 1 with respect to the accumulation of five foul-balls in the IC condition. The reason for such a dramatic drop in the ITC condition to .066 (as seen in Table 2) is that although Figure 1 indicates five foul balls have been accumulated, there have actually been *seven* foul balls accumulated—the first two foul balls counted as strikes, and then five more were accumulated after

the two fouls counting as strikes. This results in a dataset sample size issue; there is not enough historical data on seven foul balls accumulated over the course of an at-bat—where the at-bat results in a hit—to arrive at an adequate sample size.

Figure 1. Hit probabilities for ITC and OTC states as a function of foul-ball accumulation.



When viewing Table 2 data of the OTC and ITC conditions, one can see an obvious decrease in hit probabilities as the accumulation of foul-balls increases. For example, with zero foul balls accumulated in the 3–2 count ITC condition (.345), every subsequent probability value for foul-balls accumulated, except for one (two foul-balls accumulated = .346) is smaller than this associated zero foul-balls accumulated probability value of .345. This pattern is pervasive; it occurs across nearly all OTC and ITC conditions as foul-balls are accumulated.

One explanation for this unusual pattern is the systematic increasing “rarity” of foul-ball events. As foul balls are accumulated in any at-bat, the number of historical at-bats representing those foul ball-accumulations in the data gradually decreases. So, for example, once foul-ball accumulation in an at-bat equals four, there are fewer instances in the historical data where a hit occurred after the accumulation of four foul balls than there would be for at-bats where hits occurred after the accumulation of only one foul ball—simply because it is rarer to accumulate four foul-balls in an at-bat than it is to accumulate only one. Such occurrence in the historical data introduces distortion in the analyses due to sample size differences. These sample size distortions affect the probability calculations as sample size representations for various events decrease or increase. In addition, one has to also consider “batter fatigue” as foul balls accumulate. Such at-bats that “drag on” with ever-increasing numbers of foul-balls accumulating can mentally and physically drain

a batter, and thus may readily contribute to the decrease in probability of a hit for any at-bat where “X” number of foul-balls have occurred.

With respect to all foul ball accumulation states across all counts, the three-foul-ball accumulation at-bat was of particular interest for several reasons: [1] The frequency data for all counts within both the ITC and OTC states at the point of three foul balls accumulated were both tightly “clustered” and more evenly distributed so as to reflect a tighter range of within-state data variability; [2] there was clearly observable disparity between the ITC and OTC state hit probabilities at the point of three foul balls accumulated; and, most importantly, [3] the accumulation of three foul balls is not only more achievable as a realistic in-game scenario, the frequency count data as seen in Table 1 support this three foul-ball accumulation.

Table 1 presents the frequency tabulations for hitting success on two-strike counts within both ITC and OTC states coinciding with the accumulation of three foul balls. The Table 1 data yielded a significant Chi Square analysis result $\chi^2(3, N = 16,415) = 302.51, p < .00$ that subsequently rejects a null hypothesis of independence of events.

Table 1. Hit success frequency counts for all two-strike ITC vs OTC states (3 foul balls)

	3 foul balls accumulated			
	Hits on specific 2-strike count			
	0–2	1–2	2–2	3–2
ITC	1195	3268	4429	3814
OTC	173	678	1245	1613

Alex Cora had a marathon 18-pitch plate appearance against Matt Clement of the Chicago Cubs that included 14 foul balls and ended with a home run.



Table 2 provides the full range of probabilities for hit occurrences on various counts for all ITC and OTC states. The mean for all ITC counts in Table 2 is .291, and for all OTC counts is .102—the difference of which is .189. Perhaps most interesting is the hit disparity probabilities (Table 3), which demonstrate the magnitude of differences between the ITC and OTC states across the full range of two-strike counts.

DISCUSSION

While the ITC/OTC data display striking differences with respect to hit probability within different event states of the game, the accumulation of five or even four foul balls, outside of having already accumulated two foul-ball strikes, is a relatively rare condition. Although these data do demonstrate the outright probability of success in various situations, other plausible contributing factors and explanations toward such outcomes warrant consideration as well.

It is indeed possible that the big picture when it comes to hitter success as per ITC vs OTC states may be multivariate in nature—a synchronous occurrence of the ITC state for any two-strike count; specific inning and ball-strike count data; and known pitcher characteristics all working together. Thus, when it comes to arriving at a unique pitching fatigue indicator as an emergent property of these combinatory states, one must consider the weightings of other variables in the event sequence as plausible contributors at some level.

In addition to the revealing hit probabilities from this data for two-strike ITC states, if one were to use such data as a decision-making catalyst regarding pitcher fatigue, it may be necessary to also consider influential factors from the opposition, such as the literal ability of some batters to get themselves into such ITC foul-strike conditions, or type of pitch and unique pitching style combined with unique hitting style—all of which may be contributing factors when it comes to generating states of the ITC type. Pitchers who work hitters in certain ways might indeed be contributing in some way to a greater manifestation of the hitter ITC state.

The a priori manner in which a batter decides to approach a specific pitcher may also be important as a contributor to ITC/OTC state of success or failure. For example, the concept of batter persistence in maintaining an at-bat by consistently fouling off pitches may have greater weight as an at-bat preservation mechanism in certain situations—such as how the result of the last game of the season can carry quite a different level of importance than the result of the first game, or how a runner in scoring position during a tie game in the bottom of the ninth may elicit a far higher level of such persistence than at any other time.

Nevertheless, variables such as pitching style, type of pitch, or batter approach cannot take away from the fact that the ITC/OTC probabilities give clear indication as to what outcome one can anticipate for each state probabilistically. It simply remains to be seen how other elements of variability such as pitcher

characteristics, batter characteristics, game context and situation, or environmental factors contribute with respect to their weighting toward success or failure outcome in ITC or OTC states. Investigation of such variability and its influence is the next logical step in this research paradigm.

CONCLUSION

Despite its ubiquitous reputation as an impediment to game flow, the foul ball is a data-rich event that can serve as a valuable predictor in prelude to both hitter success and pitcher fatigue. The extended analysis of other factors—both random and fixed—in tandem with the current study could potentially aid in deriving predictive strategic tools (analogous to charts indicating

Table 2. Hit probabilities via accumulated foul balls

Count Pattern	Foul balls accumulated							
	Strike 1	Strike 2	0	1	2	3	4	5
3-2 OTC	C or SM	C or SM	.228	.124	.144	.125	.120	.135
2-2 OTC	C or SM	C or SM	.195	.082	.087	.088	.090	.063
1-2 OTC	C or SM	C or SM	.173	.062	.070	.071	.079	.085
0-2 OTC	C or SM	C or SM	.159	.044	.050	.056	.079	.043
3-2 ITC	F	F	.345	.335	.346	.330	.317	.326
2-2 ITC	F	F	.323	.306	.311	.309	.313	.292
1-2 ITC	F	F	.314	.280	.304	.255	.206	.218
0-2 ITC	F	F	.296	.250	.267	.251	.413	.066

Table 3. Hit probability differences for all two-strike counts (ITC state minus OTC state)

Hit probability differences: ITC minus OTC						
Count	Foul balls hit					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
3-2	.117	.211	.202	.205	.197	.191
2-2	.128	.224	.224	.221	.223	.229
1-2	.141	.218	.234	.184	.127	.133
0-2	.137	.206	.217	.195	.334	.023

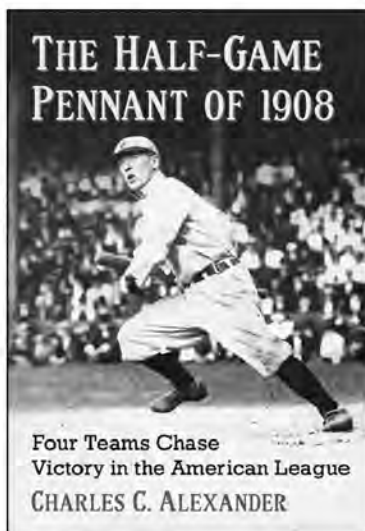
when to attempt two-point conversions in a football game) that would provide immediate assistance in game-driven decision-making processes. In addition, it remains to be seen if the foul ball itself will become some sort of victim to strategic change within the game of baseball. Ultimately, the present study reveals that the foul ball event, as a critical indicator of performance, should not be limited, pruned, or morphed under rules of the game, but rather capitalized upon strategically as a tool of foresight into human athletic performance. ■

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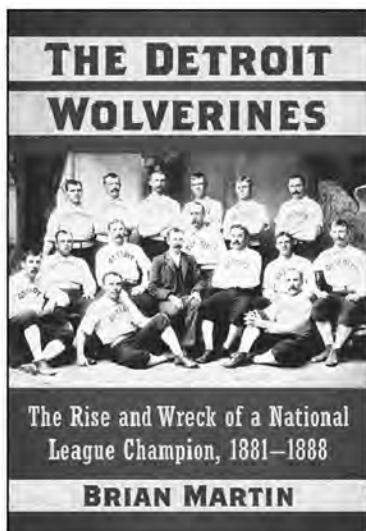


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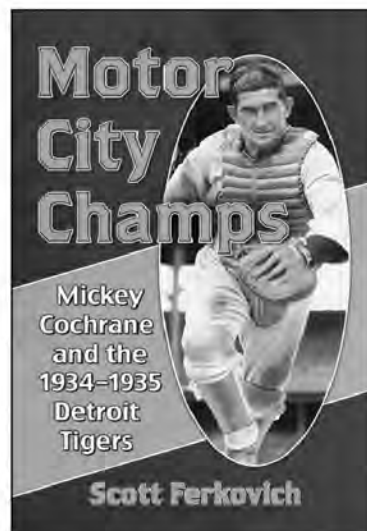
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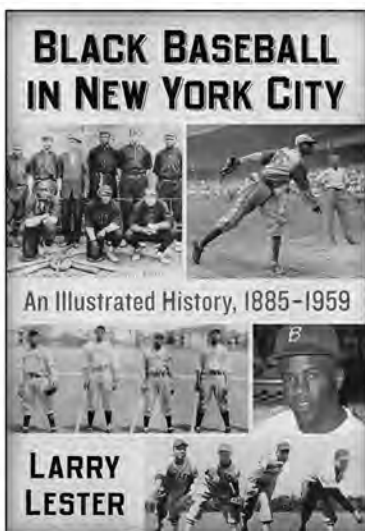
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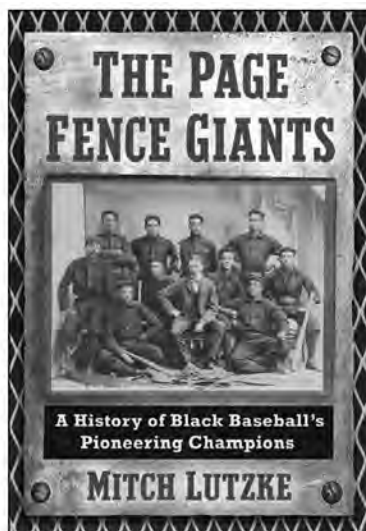
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Just Like a Big Leaguer

The Chicago Tribune Amateur Baseball Contest of 1915

Justin Mckinney

On May 23, 1915, something unprecedented happened in the history of major league baseball. On that day, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* announced a contest to find the three best amateur baseball players in Chicago. The prize for the three youngsters would be a chance to join each of Chicago's major league teams, the American League White Sox, the National League Cubs, and the Federal League Whales. The contest's origins, execution, and ultimate success were the result of a series of circumstances unique to Chicago in 1915, including the city's vibrant amateur baseball scene, the *Tribune's* active role as an ambassador of amateur and semipro baseball, and the heightened competition for talent and attention brought on by the team from the new Federal League.

Chicago was home to a large amateur baseball scene and the *Tribune* provided coverage and printed box scores from numerous semipro and amateur leagues each week. As an example, the August 10, 1914, issue included the box scores of 25 semipro and amateur games from around the city. The influence of the regular reportage on the city's baseball scene was commented on by Joe Tinker, manager of the Whales, who stated that the "amateur scores printed in *The Tribune* every Monday morning are the greatest boost ever given baseball."¹

It was this commitment to covering and promoting amateur baseball that provided the impetus for the contest. On February 2, sportswriter Harvey T. Woodruff reported on a meeting organized by the *Tribune* that brought together Chicago's amateur baseball leaders to discuss plans for boosting the game.² Despite the fact that Chicago was home to countless amateur and semipro teams, Woodruff lamented that only 5,000 fans had attended the national amateur title game the previous fall, while a crowd of an estimated 90,000 had attended one of the preliminary amateur contests in Cleveland.³ The newspaper saw that something needed to be done to promote the game and increase interest in amateur baseball.

The Chicago Tribune Amateur Contest was first announced on May 23 under the headline: "Here's

Chance to Become Sox, Cub, or Whale." Author Woodruff detailed the grand prize, in which the three winners would get the opportunity to travel on the respective teams' final road trips and "be a real member of the team for several weeks."⁴ Offering an authentic major league experience both on the field and off, Woodruff explained that the winners would be "actual players while they are with the club. They will occupy the same sleeping cars, quarreling about upper or lower berths, be assigned to rooms in hotels, eat with the players, wear a uniform in the field, and perhaps get a chance to act as substitute if any of the regulars are injured."⁵ Woodruff proclaimed that the contest prize is an "offer unparalleled, so far as known, either in baseball or the newspaper field."⁶

Equally unparalleled was the cooperation among all three of Chicago's major league teams. Woodruff acknowledged that the contest was only able to function through the "approval and sympathy" of President Charles H. Thomas of the Cubs, President Charles A. Comiskey of the White Sox, and President Charles Weeghman of the Whales. What would prompt three competing magnates to participate in this contest? In order to answer that question, it is worth examining the impact of the Federal League and the Chicago Whales upon baseball in 1915 in Chicago.

It is clear from looking at attendance figures for the Cubs and the White Sox that the Federal League's presence in Chicago had a drastic impact. The White Sox saw their attendance drop from 644,501 in 1913 to 469,290 in 1914 (the Whales' second year, and the first in which the Federal League competed as a "major" league), while the Cubs had it even worse: Their attendance was cut in half from 419,000 in 1913 to 202,516 in 1914.⁷ The newly formed Chi-Feds—who lacked a formal nickname in their first year and were also known as the Federals—meanwhile drew the most of any Federal League team, with 200,729, though the club's owner, Weeghman, later claimed a first-year attendance of 312,000.⁸

In addition to increased competition for Chicago's fans, there was an increase in competition for baseball



Joe Tinker was manager of the Federal League Whales when amateur Henry F. Rasmussen joined the team.

talent. On April 1, 1914, when the Federal League published its rosters, 59 major league players had defected to the new major league. Over the course of the 1914 and 1915 seasons, 172 players with AL or NL experience had appeared in the league. In the Federal League's two seasons as a major league, 286 different players appeared.⁹ Although many of the players who appeared in the Federal League were of questionable caliber, the fight for new baseball talent was clear.

So as the 1915 season began, all three of Chicago's major league teams were battling for fans and talent. Thus the participation of all three clubs in the *Tribune* Amateur Contest is not entirely surprising since the contest had the potential to be mutually beneficial to both the *Tribune* and the teams. The *Tribune* could provide a free and powerful platform for the clubs to locate new talent while giving them valuable ink. If the contest was a success, the newspaper would benefit from increased sales and notoriety, and the clubs would get new baseball talent and a possible uptick in fans.

The announcement on May 23 also provided the criteria by which players would be judged: on their baseball skill and deportment on the field, with the specific admonition that "no umpire baiters are going to be chosen."¹⁰ Only players under 21 years of age could enter. Woodruff noted that Tinker, Cubs manager Roger Bresnahan, and Ed Walsh of the White Sox all expressed interest in helping out with the contest.

As May ended, the contest had yet to take on a formal structure. The May 31 *Tribune* provided scouting reports for various players culled from across the city, with only the scouts' initials provided, so as to preserve their anonymity. At this point, however, there was no indication of what the next phase of the contest would be. The initial plan seems to have been for scouts to attend games and compile a list of players who would then be scouted further, but the *Tribune* soon recognized the folly of this plan. On June 6,

Woodruff reported that the *Tribune* had been "fairly swamped with ambitious youngsters, anxious to learn more of the details of the plan."¹¹ The response was so overwhelming that more scouts needed to be added and a cutout coupon was published, so that young players could formally enter the contest. There would be scheduled tryouts, which would include games between teams chosen from among the entrants. The three winners would come from a group of 40 finalists.

On June 8, more scouting reports were published that highlighted some of the strong play from around the city. Shortstop James Cerny of the Weisskopfs was compared by scout J.C. to Rabbit Maranville, while scout E.F.L. noted that third baseman McNerney's strong play for the Meteors meant that "Comiskey needn't worry about that third corner any longer."¹² In contrast to the rave reviews, scout A.G. was so disgusted by the umpire baiting and wrangling in a game between the Marines and Iolas that he left early, stating, "These fellows are out of it because of their tactics."¹³ On June 13, the first list of 42 entrants was published, ranging from 12-year-old O. Jones, a shortstop for Holy Grail, to 21-year-old M.C. Miller, a strapping 6-foot-2 pitcher for East Gary. Applicants from fraternal leagues, high school teams, and the sandlots were represented.

On June 22, former Chicago Colts star Jimmy Ryan was named as chief of scouts for the contest.¹⁴ Scouting reports continued to appear for various amateur games around the city and a contest closing date of July 15 was announced. On July 4, the first official tryout was announced for the following week with approximately 50 entrants. At seven o'clock in the morning on Sunday, July 11, the first tryout took place at Weeghman Park, home of the Whales. Luminaries such as Ryan, Tinker, Weeghman, American League utility umpire Clarence Eldridge, and members of the Whales were in attendance. Pants Rowland and Roger Bresnahan were unable to attend the tryout. Despite the tryouts not being open to the public, demand was so high that a crowd of 1,000 was eventually admitted by Weeghman. Heavy rains nearly canceled the tryouts, and of the 54 players scheduled to be tried out, only 30 or so were in attendance.

Of those who appeared in the initial tryouts, 10 were deemed worthy of moving on to the final round. The most notable of this first wave of aspirants was a future National League MVP. Robert O'Farrell Jr. was the 18-year-old catcher for Waukegan High School. In the tryouts, he had two hits, scored two runs, and had 13 putouts and one assist. In less than two months, he would make his major league debut with the Cubs.

O'Farrell was chosen as the first-string catcher and paired with another finalist, pitcher Johnny Simmons, who struck out 11 batters. O'Farrell was described as the best hitter of the lot and also impressed with his catching and throwing. Bob O'Farrell was so impressive that on July 25, he was signed by the Cubs at the behest of their manager, the legendary backstop Bresnahan.

When the final entry date for the contest passed on July 15, there were nearly 400 entrants from Chicago and its suburbs. The next tryouts took place on July 17 at the Chicago American Giants Park. Approximately 50 youngsters appeared at the tryouts and A.L. umpire Eldridge noted that the quality of player was lower than that of the first tryouts and that outfield stars were especially lacking.¹⁵ Perhaps this is the reason only five finalists were named.

Two more tryouts were scheduled for the next day, July 18, one in the morning at Comiskey Park and one in the afternoon at West Side Park, the Cubs' home field. The morning tryouts were canceled due to rain, to be rescheduled at a later date. The afternoon tryouts took place without a hitch. Lanky fireballer Henry F. Rasmussen was one of the standouts. Engel noted that Rasmussen showed a "world of speed," allowing only four "bingles" in nine innings of work, and also banging out a triple and a single.¹⁶ Diminutive shortstop James Cerny was described as a "second edition of Maranville," while two outfielders were finally selected, Robert Swenie and Frank Baker. First sacker Leo Gronow and catcher George Dowling, described as a "Bresnahan type," rounded out the six finalists from the tryout.

The next tryout was scheduled for West Side Park on July 24 but was canceled due to the tragic sinking of the SS *Eastland* on the Chicago River, which killed 844 passengers. The *Tribune* announced that the entire receipts from the final tryout scheduled on August 1 at Comiskey Park would be donated to benefit the relatives of those who lost their lives in the *Eastland* disaster.¹⁷ One of the eventual finalists, Charley Pechous of the Western Electric company team, narrowly missed boarding the SS *Eastland* after his family neglected to wake him in time to take the ship to a scheduled game in Michigan City.¹⁸ The following day saw two more tryouts, one at Weeghman Field and one at West Side Park. Over 100 players appeared that day and 14 more finalists were selected. Third baseman Julian Mee was one of the finalists, and Eldridge noted that he was one of five third-base playing brothers, including Tommy Mee, who had played in the infield (mostly at short) for the St. Louis Browns in 1910. Pechous disappointed with the bat, but demonstrated

his "usual flashy game" in the field and "showed his fielding superiority over all other infield candidates."¹⁹ Shortstop Johnny McKittrick was another standout selected for the finals.

The positive buzz generated by the tryouts and the O'Farrell signing was noted by the semipro Chicago City League. On July 29, an open letter from the 12 managers of the circuit, published in the *Tribune*, offered spots to the top 12 finalists who failed to land contest trips. The letter expressed the belief that the contest was "affording the amateur ball players of Chicago a great opportunity to progress in baseball" while also promoting "amateur and semi-professional baseball in Chicago."²⁰

That same day, the *Tribune* provided further details on how the winners would be selected. The four judges, Eldridge, Ryan, umpire Charles A. Reading, and Chicago semipro booster Frank McNichols, would utilize the so-called Chalmers system, used by the American and National leagues to select their Most Valuable Players. Each judge would create a ballot awarding 12 points to the best player, 11 to the next best, and so on down the list. The top three players would be selected for contest trips and the next 12 would get recommendations for the City League.

Going into the final weekend of the contest, 34 finalists had already been selected (35 minus Bob O'Farrell, who was ineligible after having signed with the Cubs). That left a potential six additional spots remaining. On July 31, a makeup tryout was scheduled for the July 24 session canceled by the *Eastland* disaster. Taking place at DePaul University, the tryouts would yield seven more finalists, bringing the field to 41 players for the August 1 finals.

On the eve of the finals, the *Tribune* commented on the overwhelming success of the tryouts thus far, noting that over 90 percent of the 400 applicants had participated and boldly proclaiming that no "sporting event for the prairie lot players has created as much interest."²¹ The attention garnered by the final contest spread to baseball's minor leagues as well. American Association president T. M. Chivington indicated that he would attend the finals at Comiskey Park in hopes of "finding material suitable for his league."²² He was given authorization by league managers to provide a list of prospects. Western League president Tip O'Neill, White Sox secretary Harry Grabiner, and former Cubs owner Charles W. Murphy also attended the August 1 finals.

The final tryouts took place in a doubleheader that allowed all 41 finalists ample chance to showcase their abilities. The judges selected three unanimous



Bob O'Farrell impressed scouts in the tryouts and was signed by the Cubs on July 25.

victors: third baseman Charley Pechous, pitcher Henry “Hans”/“Heine” Rasmussen, and shortstop John McKittrick. The 6-foot-5½-inch, 190-pound Rasmussen was picked to join the Federal League Whales amid some controversy over his age. The young giant promised to provide the appropriate documentation to show he was under 21 and joined the Whales for their road trip on August 3.²³ Pechous was selected for the Cubs based on his spectacular fielding, and McKittrick was slated to join the White Sox for their final road trip in September.

Rasmussen’s major league adventure garnered the most attention of the three. Almost immediately, he was cast as an overgrown man-child, having only started pitching the previous year and never having traveled east of Chicago nor having slept in a sleeping car before. After being tricked into taking the upper berth on the Whales’ train to Brooklyn, Rasmussen showed a modicum of self-awareness, proclaiming, “I’m no Ring Lardner busher” and boasting that he wouldn’t fall for any tricks.²⁴ His naiveté was further exposed when he downed three meals in one sitting, going into debt on his per diem and complaining that he was still hungry when he went to bed that night.

Manager Tinker commented on Rasmussen’s inexperience, noting, “The kid doesn’t know anything about pitching, but he certainly has a sweet delivery.... He seems willing and anxious to learn.”²⁵ Rasmussen continued to be the subject of his teammates’ jokes, but was noted to “take the attempted joking in the right spirit.”²⁶ Young Heine stated that he was hard to fool since he had “read all Ring Lardner’s busher stories.... If they want to get me they’ll have to spring some new stuff.”²⁷ Rasmussen’s exploits in New York City

appeared on August 10 under the headline “Tribune Amateur sees nothing new on Gay White Way.” Heine was not impressed by Broadway, saying, “We have all this stuff in Chicago.” The proud youngster was well aware of his newfound fame and volunteered to advise the *Tribune* of any noteworthy material regarding himself while expressing disappointment that he had only received two letters from girls since he’d left home.²⁸ It was later reported that Heine’s plea was met with one letter a day from a girl back in Chicago.²⁹

On August 11, Rasmussen entered the record books officially, as Tinker brought him in to face Newark in the eighth inning with the Whales down, 6–0. The nervous hurler was touched for two runs in his sole inning of work and struck out in his only at-bat. Regardless of his underwhelming results, the *Tribune* expressed that he showed a “dandy display of nerve” and was of the belief that he was a “real ball player.”³⁰ Tinker was cautiously optimistic: “If the big youngster sticks to the game he may make a headliner among the hurlers.”³¹ Rasmussen took the mound again for the second and last time on August 13, once again facing defending champion Newark. Displaying more cool than in his debut, Heine allowed one run in his sole inning of work. Rasmussen remained with the club for the remainder of their trip, drawing more attention for his coaching antics in an August 17 game against Baltimore, which resulted in a \$25 fine. He was released at the end of the road trip. Rasmussen signed on with the Cubs in mid-September but did not appear in another major league game. He played briefly with Terre Haute in the Central League the next year to end his professional career.

Infielder Pechous joined the Cubs on August 16 for an exhibition game in Toledo, where he went hitless but made several nice defensive plays. This would be Pechous’s only in-game experience with the Cubs in 1915. He finished the road trip and was offered a contract for \$1,800, but did not sign with the Cubs, choosing instead to finish school. In mid-September, however, he joined the Whales and made his major league debut at third base on September 14 against Baltimore. Pechous would appear in 18 games for the Whales, batting a dismal .176 but showing a solid glove. Pechous played for the Cubs in 1916–17 as a substitute and lasted another six seasons as a “good field-no hit” infielder in the American Association.

The third winner, McKittrick, joined the White Sox for their trip east in September. McKittrick did not appear in any games with the club, perhaps owing to the strength of the eventual 93-game winners. He signed with Terre Haute of the Central League in early

1916, but his career in professional baseball appears to consist of a stint in 1916 with the Johnsonburg Johnnies of the Interstate League.

Another *Tribune* contestant appeared in the majors that year: first baseman Joe Weiss, who also played for the Whales in September 1915. Weiss was declared ineligible for the contest because he had appeared with Green Bay of the Wisconsin-Illinois League in 1914. He would play in the minors into the early 1920s.

Of the nearly 400 contestants who entered the 1915 Chicago Tribune Amateur Contest, four played in the major leagues in 1915. Another contestant, Doug McWeeny (entering the contest as L. D. McWeeney), later pitched for the White Sox, Brooklyn Robins, and Cincinnati Reds. In addition, more than 30 participants played minor league baseball, with many being signed as a direct result of their participation in the contest.

The contest was held again in 1916, with nearly 600 entrants taking part in the summer-long tryouts. Five winners were drawn from a field of 83 finalists, with the Cubs and White Sox getting two players each and the fifth winner awarded the special Ban B. Johnson prize, which included a trip to that year's World Series to provide special reports for the *Tribune*. None of the five winners (John Simmons and Albert Hoffman joined the Cubs, Andrew Norman and Daniel F. Cunningham traveled with the White Sox, and John Berry won the Johnson prize) would appear in the majors.³² However, future major league stars Marty McManus and Johnny Mostil were among the year's contestants.³³ In addition, more than 20 of the entrants would play professional baseball in the coming years.

Just as the contest appeared set to become an institution, World War I brought the proceedings to a halt. The 1917 edition of the contest was announced, but on April 15, nine days after the United States declared war on Germany, the *Tribune* announced it would be canceled for the time being, so as not to interfere with the war effort. After all, the *Tribune* noted, the contest was targeted toward young, able-bodied men of the right age to serve in the military.³⁴ The newspaper said the contest would resume, better than ever, at a later date.

That later date never came. The war consumed the 1918 baseball season and had effects reaching into the shortened 1919. No announcement was made for a new contest, and it would never resume—for reasons that remain a mystery, though several possibilities can be ascertained. The recent on-field success

of the White Sox and Cubs, the 1917 World Series winners and 1918 National League champions, respectively, may have made both clubs leery about adding distractions to their pennant pursuits. The demise of the Federal League de-emphasized the competition both for the fans' attention and for baseball talent. Another factor to consider is the financial struggles of the 1917 and 1918 seasons stemming from the war, which left both of Chicago's ballclubs looking to cut any non-essential costs, including room and board for a young contest winner. Regardless of the reason, the Chicago Tribune Amateur Contest was dead.

The impact of the contest has largely been forgotten. The *Milwaukee Journal*, clearly inspired by the success of the *Tribune* contest, held a similarly structured competition in 1919. Players from the area competed in tryouts throughout the summer, with the winner getting a chance to join the American Association's Milwaukee Panthers. That contest's winner was Fred Klevenow, a 19-year-old catcher, who would end up playing several seasons in the minor leagues.³⁵ Several other contestants would also play minor league baseball.

In the 21st century, the Indian reality television show *Million Dollar Arm* embodied the spirit of the *Tribune* contest. The show sought to find potential baseball pitching talent among the country's cricket-playing population, offering a \$1 million prize to any cricket bowler who could pitch three balls at over 90 miles per hour. The contest winners, Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel, eventually signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates organization and would play in the minor leagues.³⁶

The bold and ambitious Chicago Tribune Amateur Contest had the potential to create a new avenue for player discovery, but unfortunately, world events and changes in the baseball world conspired to end the concept just as it was starting to gain traction. The legacy of the contest can be seen in the talent discovered. Four major league careers, however brief, began as a direct result of the contest, in addition to numerous minor league careers. Several other future major league players and many more future minor leaguers were contestants. As a source of talent discovery, the contest was low cost and low risk. As a means of promotion, it was ingenious and served the triple benefit of giving publicity to the newspaper while providing free advertising for Chicago's professional teams and galvanizing and garnering attention for the city's amateur baseball community. ■

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“When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It.”

Who Took the Cycle or Quasi-Cycle?

Herm Krabbenhoft

Choices... Decisions: A player has already connected for one double, one triple, and one homer in the game and needs only a simple single in his next plate appearance to achieve the cherished cycle—one of baseball’s rarest accomplishments and one that will inscribe his name permanently in the record books. If he comes through with a line drive that lands safely in the right-center field gap and bounds crisply and cleanly to the warning track—a sure double or possibly even a triple—should he stop at first base? Should he be content with a lusty single and claim the accolades for the cycle, or should he bypass the cycle and continue on to collect an extra-base-hit?

Because a baseball game “ain’t over ‘til it’s over” and because there “ain’t no ‘I’ in TEAM,” a player should always strive to maximize his progress toward scoring a run—irrefutably the most important statistic in baseball. Regardless of the score or game situation, a player whose goal is to help his team win should, when confronted by the “fork in the road” described above, always “take it” and not settle for a single.

There are *personal* consequences for a player making that choice. He passes up being recognized for eternity in baseball’s record books as one of the rare hitters of a cycle, whereas if he takes the double (or triple), he gets a fleeting “atta-boy”—even though a double (or a triple) is always more valuable than a single.

Shouldn’t there be some kind of enduring recognition for a player who connects for four long hits—with at least one homer, at least one triple, and at least one double—in a game? In a prior *Baseball Research Journal* article, I termed such a performance a “quasi-cycle.”¹ In the present article I focus on those players who encountered the “fork in the road.” Some chose the extra base hit while others stopped at first with an *offensive-indifference* single to complete the traditional cycle. This article considers cycles and quasi-cycles achieved during the post-Deadball Era, 1920 through 2017.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

According to Retrosheet, 255 cycles were hit 1920–2017.²

I have identified 73 quasi-cycles hit during the same period.³ The principal research procedure I followed began with generating two lists of players: (1) those players who completed their cycles with a single; and (2) those players who needed a single to complete their cycle—but instead stretched their fourth hit to a double or a triple. To compile these two lists, I examined the sequences of hits in the cycles and quasi-cycles. Most of this information can be found in the play-by-play (PBP) descriptions on Retrosheet. For the games for which the PBP information was not on Retrosheet, the requisite hit sequences were obtained from the game accounts presented in various newspaper articles. (Tables A-1 and A-2 in the Appendix, available on the SABR website, contain this hit-sequence information.) The final step was to examine the descriptions given in the pertinent newspaper accounts of the critical single, to ascertain the nature of the hit and how the hitter reacted to it. For example, was it a robust outfield gapper that could have been a double (or a triple) or was it a scratch infield hit—or something in between?

RESULTS

According to my research, 51 players completed their cycles with a single, 1920–2017. See Table 1 for the list of them (and see Table A-3 in the online appendix for complete details for each of these 51 cycles). By contrast, 16 players achieved a quasi-cycle by hitting a double or a triple instead. See Table 2.

DISCUSSION

As indicated in Note 2 in Table 1, the names of some of the players are shown in boldface. That’s because there are important and/or interesting aspects associated with their cycles which merit discussion. Let’s begin with cyclist Jeff Frye.

Jeff Frye – As shown in Table 1, fourteen of the cycle-singles were RBI singles. Only one of those cycle-singles knocked in a runner from *first* base—the one hit by Toronto’s Jeff Frye on August 17, 2001. Frye was the

Table 1. Players Who Singled to Complete Their Cycles (1920–2017)

Player	Team	Date (G)	RBI	Player	Team	Date (G)	RBI
George Burns	NYG	Sept. 17, 1920	—	Cesar Ceden0	HOU	August 09, 1976	1
George Sisler	SLB	August 13, 1921	1	Mike Hegan	MIL	Sept. 03, 1976	—
Ross Youngs	NYG	April 29, 1922	—	Bob Watson	HOU	June 24, 1977	1
Cy Williams	PHP	August 05, 1927	1	Keith Hernandez	NYM	July 04, 1985	—
Joe Cronin	WAS	Sept. 2, 1929 (1)	—	Mike Greenwell	BOS	Sept. 14, 1988	—
Mickey Cochrane	PHA	July 22, 1932	1	Kelly Gruber	TOR	April 16, 1989	1
Pinky Higgins	PHA	August 6, 1933	—	Andujar Ceden0	HOU	August 25, 1992	—
Jimmie Foxx	PHA	August 14, 1933	2	Scott Cooper	BOS	April 12, 1994	—
Babe Herman	CHC	Sept. 30, 1933	1	Dante Bichette	COL	June 10, 1998	1
Gee Walker	DET	April 20, 1937	—	Mike Lansing	COL	June 18, 2000	—
Sam Chapman	PHA	May 5, 1939	—	Jeff Frye	TOR	August 17, 2001	1
Arky Vaughan	PIT	July 19, 1939	1	Chad Moeller	MIL	April 27, 2004	—
Harry Danning	NYG	June 15, 1940	—	Daryle Ward	PIT	May 26, 2004	—
Bobby Doerr	BOS	May 17, 1944 (2)	—	Mark Teixeira	TEX	August 17, 2004	—
Wally Westlake	PIT	July 30, 1948	—	Jose Reyes	NYM	June 21, 2006	—
Jackie Robinson	BRK	August 29, 1948 (1)	—	Luke Scott	HOU	July 28, 2006	—
Hoot Evers	DET	Sept. 7, 1950	—	Fred Lewis	SFG	May 13, 2007	—
Larry Doby	CLE	June 4, 1952	—	Mark Ellis	OAK	June 4, 2007	—
Lee Walls	CHC	July 2, 1957	—	Aubrey Huff	BAL	June 29, 2007	—
Lou Clinton	BOS	July 13, 1962	—	Carlos Gomez	MIN	May 7, 2008	—
Jim Fregosi	LAA	July 28, 1964	1	Melvin Upton	TBR	October 02, 2009	1
Randy Hundley	CHC	August 11, 1966 (1)	—	Kelly Johnson	ARZ	Jul 23, 2010	—
Jim Fregosi	CAL	May 20, 1968	—	Adrian Beltre	TEX	August 24, 2012	—
Joe Torre	SLC	June 27, 1973	—	Freddy Freeman	ATL	June 15, 2016	—
Mike Phillips	NYM	June 25, 1976	—	Rajai Davis	CLE	July 2, 2016	—
Lyman Bostock	MIN	July 24, 1976	—	—	—	—	—

NOTES: (1) A parenthetical entry in the “Date” column gives the game of a double header. (2) Players whose names are shown in boldface indicates that important or interesting information is also provided in the Discussion Section. (3) The “RBI” column gives the number of runs batted in by the player’s cycle-single; see Table A-3 (in the Appendix) for additional details.

Table 2. 16 Batters Who Took a Quasi-Cycle Instead of a Cycle (1920–2016)

Player (Team)	Date (G)	OPP	I-0	Score Before	Bases	Hit	Score After	Final Score
Ty Cobb (DET)	5-08-1921	SLB*	9-1	7-16	X-X-X	D	7-16	8-16
George Sisler (SLB)	8-13-1921	DET*	7-2	2-2	X-X-X	D	2-2	7-4 (10)
Pinky Whitney (PHP)	7-30-1929	PIT*	7-1	7-5	1-X-X	T-1	8-5	13-5
Sammy West (SLB*)	8-05-1933	CWS	9-2	7-9	X-X-X	T	7-9	10-9 (12)
Wally Berger (BOB)	8-11-1935 (1)	BRK*	9-2	4-7	X-X-3	D-1	5-7	5-7
Grady Hatton (CIN*)	8-11-1947	PIT	6-2	6-2	1-X-X	D-1	7-2	8-3
Al Kaline (DET)	6-30-1956	KCA*	9-1	14-2	1-X-X	D	14-2	14-2
Hal Breeden (MON)	9-02-1973	PHP*	8-0	10-0	1-X-X	T-1	11-0	12-0
Willie Stargell (PIT*)	9-17-1973	NYM	6-2	8-3	X-2-X	D-1	9-3	10-3
Johnny Grubb (TEX)	8-08-1982 (2)	NYM*	9-1	4-8	1-X-X	D-1	5-8	5-8
Bob Horner (ATL*)	7-13-1985	PHP	8-0	11-5	1-X-X	D-1	12-5	13-5
Kevin Bass (HOU)	6-27-1987	SFG*	7-2	6-2	X-X-X	D	6-2	6-5
Darryl Strawberry (NYM)	8-16-1987	CHC*	8-1	20-9	X-X-X	D	20-9	23-10
Scott Cooper (BOS)	4-12-1994	KCR*	7-1	19-4	1-2-X	D-2	21-4	22-11
Dustin Pedroia (BOS)	7-02-2008	TBR*	8-2	4-7	X-2-X	D-1	5-7	6-7
Sam Fuld (TBR)	4-11-2011	BOS*	9-1	14-4	1-2-X	D-1	15-4	16-5

NOTES: (1) An asterisk with the team indicates that the game was played in their home park. (2) A parenthetical entry in the “Date” column gives the game of a double header. (3) The “I-0” column gives the inning and the number of outs at the time the player connected for his quasi-cycle. (4) The “Score Before” column gives the score just before the player connected for his quasi-cycle. (5) The “Bases” column gives the bases which were occupied just before the player connected for his quasi-cycle. (6) For the “Hit” column, D is for double and T is for triple; a number after the hit symbol gives the number of runs batted in. (7) The “Score After” column gives the score just after the player connected for his quasi-cycle. (8) The “Final Score” column gives the final score of the game. (8) Players whose names are shown in boldface indicates that important or interesting information is also provided in the Discussion Section.

second Blue Jay to achieve the feat. (The first, Kelly Gruber, will become important to our discussion shortly.) Frye came to bat in the bottom of the seventh inning with the Blue Jays leading the Rangers, 10–2. He’d already collected a second-inning triple (“when Texas Rangers right fielder Ricky Ledee misplayed his blooper, letting it bounce over his head”), a fifth-inning double (“when Ledee flailed helplessly at his hit”), and a sixth-inning roundtripper.⁴ With Homer Bush on first base with two outs in the seventh, Frye battled Texas hurler Kevin Foster to the limit before lining a full-count pitch into the gap in right-center field. It looked like a sure double and Bush easily sped all the way around the bases to home. But Frye, heeding the directions of first base coach Garth Iorg, stopped with a “single” to complete his cycle. Here are some of the comments made in the press about Frye’s “fork-in-the-road” cycle:

- “With the Toronto Blue Jays’ 11th run en route to the plate in last night’s 11–3 throttling of the Texas Rangers, Frye could have, perhaps should have, gone to second with what would have been an easy double into the gap in right-centre field. Instead the 34-year old journeyman infielder held up at first and became only the second Blue Jay to hit for the cycle.”⁵
- “I was looking at Garth and yelling, ‘What do I do? What do I do?’—and he goes ‘Stop! Stop!’,” Frye said. “And before I went up, I asked [coach] Cito Gaston what do I do if I hit a ball like that, and he said, ‘Stay on first. Tell them I told you to.’ So, if he says it’s all right, then it’s all right.”⁶
- “When he hit first base he asked me what he should do,” Iorg said. “I told him, ‘Stay right here.’”⁷
- “As far as Iorg and Jays manager Buck Martinez are concerned, there was nothing tainted about Frye’s feat with the bat. ‘It’s a cycle, that’s got nothing to do with it,’ Iorg said. ‘It (stopping) didn’t alter the game in any way.’ Added Martinez, ‘As one-sided as it was, it wasn’t a bad idea. It was a big boost to everybody. I don’t have any problems with it and I don’t think anybody in the park did.’”⁸
- “After he had his double I said, ‘All you need now is a homer and a single,’ and we both kind of laughed,” Martinez said. “Then he got the home run and we were all pulling for him when he came up that fourth time.”⁹
- Frye also said, “Bobby Jones [the Rangers third base coach] told me after I’d homered that if the score wasn’t close, and I had a chance, I should settle for a single. So, I figured with two coaches telling me that, it must be okay.”¹⁰
- Jays closer Billy Koch had joked with Frye before he hit his [sixth-inning] homer. “He said hit a home run next time and [then] bunt for a hit,” said Frye. “But I said, ‘You can’t bunt when you’re up by five runs.’” *Toronto Star* reporter Geoff Baker wrote, “That kind of adherence to baseball’s ‘unwritten rules’ went out the window by the seventh inning.”¹¹
- “I was hoping he’d cut it off,” Frye said of the despair he felt watching the ball scoot past Ledee and to the wall. Frye then added, “It’s something I’ll never forget.”¹²
- Blue Jays manager, Buck Martinez, said, “He’s such a professional; he didn’t know if it was appropriate to stop at that point, but the game was pretty one-sided. It’s a pretty unique opportunity to play nine years and have a chance for a cycle.”¹³
- Texas first baseman Rafael Palmeiro said, “The game was pretty much at hand for them, and everybody wanted it, so I don’t see a problem with it. He hit the ball into the gap, but I’m happy for him. It’s a little bit controversial, but he did it, and nobody can take it away from him.” Palmeiro added that he “would probably do the same thing in a similar situation.”¹⁴ (In his Hall-of-Fame-numbers career, Palmeiro did not hit for a cycle nor a quasi-cycle.)
- “If purists are troubled by Frye’s shrinking of a double into a single for the sake of a small piece of fame, he has company. When Gruber performed his feat against the Kansas City Royals at Exhibition Place, he also remained at first instead of legging out a double. ‘The game’s out of hand. What’s the point?’ Gruber said of Frye’s achievement. ‘Opportunities like that don’t come around too often. What the heck.’”¹⁵

Kelly Gruber – Here’s the story on Gruber’s feat, as reported in *The Sporting News*:

- “Gruber started his cycle with a solo homer off Floyd Bannister in the first inning and followed that with a two-run double in the second. Against

righthander Tom Gordon in the seventh, he hit a two-run triple. His sixth RBI came on his last hit, a bloop single off Jerry Don Gleaton in the eighth.”

- “In addition to the congratulatory handshakes he received from teammates upon completing the cycle, Gruber learned he faced a possible fine from the Jays’ kangaroo court. His last hit might have gone for a double under other circumstances, but Gruber stayed at first to get the single he needed [to complete the cycle]. ‘If it’s a tie game, sure I’ve got to try for it (a double),’ said Gruber. But with the Jays up by six runs at that point, he could afford to stay at first. However, reliever Tom Henke joked that Gruber’s actions could merit a fine. ‘It’s automatic,’ Henke said. ‘Stretching a double into a single was the way chief justice Mike Flanagan saw it.’”¹⁶

Here’s what Gruber had to say after his cycle-game, as reported in the *Kansas City Times*:

- “I put a lot of pressure on myself because I wanted that single,” Gruber said. In his game-account article, Dick Kaegel wrote, “Although Gruber might have had a chance of stretching the hit into a double, he reined in at first.” And Gruber added, “Any other time I might have tried for a double, but right then it didn’t mean much.”¹⁷
- Gruber looked back at his cycle in an article in the *Toronto Sun* and commented: “I have had a lot of fans tell me I should have been on second that day I hit mine,” Gruber said. “It was a hot day, the turf was spongy, really bouncy and I hit the ball up. I was so busy talking to it, telling it to get down for my single, that I just got to first when the ball hit (the turf),” Gruber said. “The outfielder jumped up and caught it on the bounce. Otherwise it’s over his head and I have to go to second. I could have gone and probably would have made it, but I didn’t. Everybody says you should have gone, but it’s such a great opportunity.”¹⁸
- With respect to Frye’s cycle, Gruber (who was at the game) was shouting out advice from just beside the Jays dugout. “I was screaming at him, ‘Stop! Don’t Go!’ And so was Garth. I wanted him to get it.”¹⁹

For 49 of the 51 players listed in Table 1, their “cycle-clinching singles” were ordinary run-of-the-mill one-base knocks—see Table A-3 in the appendix for all the

Kelly Gruber took the “fork-in-the-road” cycle on April 16, 1989, and faced a possible fine from the Jays’ kangaroo court for stretching a double into a single.



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details. Here is some “rest-of-the-story” information about some of the other Table 1 cycle-achieving players.

Mike Greenwell – In contrast to Gruber and Frye, here’s what Mike Greenwell of the Boston Red Sox said about his own cycle (September 14, 1988): “Somebody asked me jokingly if I hit one in the gap would I stop at first and take the single. I said no way; I’d be running to second and third or wherever I could get.” Fortunately for Greenwell, he dumped a clean-cut single into right field. “I didn’t have to make that decision.”²⁰ When Greenwell hit his cycle-single in the bottom of the eighth inning, the Sox were leading the Orioles by a single run, 4–3 (which turned out to be the final score).

Aubrey Huff – Aubrey Huff almost precluded himself from achieving the cycle. Moments before he smacked a bloop single into shallow center, he smashed a pitch inches foul down the third base line. If it had been fair, Huff could have easily reached second. Like Greenwell, he said he wouldn’t have stopped at first—even to complete the cycle. “In that situation, I’m going for two [bases],” Huff said. “I feel like you cheat the game if you stop at first. I wouldn’t even count that as a cycle.”²¹

Joe Torre – Joe Torre collected a cycle with the St. Louis Cardinals on June 27, 1973, in Pittsburgh. Torre had picked up the three extra-base hits needed in the first four innings, and he’d have at least two chances to get the simple single. But he grounded into an around-the-horn double play in the fifth and then grudgingly walked to lead off the eighth. At that point in the game, with the Cards leading the Pirates, 11–4, the likelihood of Torre getting another shot was slim. In the top of the ninth he’d only come up if two men reached base ahead of him. As described by *St. Louis*

Post-Dispatch writer Neal Russo, “Torre asked manager Red Schoendienst to give him the rest of the night off. Schoendienst refused. The first two men made out in the ninth, and Torre’s hopes looked dimly bleak. But then the next two Cardinals drew walks, which brought him to the plate...” and “he jumped on the opportunity with a chopper single past the mound.” After the game, Torre said, “You have to give Red an assist; I’m glad he ignored me. I didn’t think I’d ever hit for the cycle because I’m not a triples hitter. I was pressing like crazy for the single.” Russo then asked, “Would you have stopped at first on a cinch double if you had hit one in the ninth?” Torre’s response: “I might have. I’ve never come this close to hitting for the cycle.”²² Some other Torre comments were reported by Charley Feeney in the game-account article he wrote for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*: “It’s the first time I’ve ever hit for the cycle. I’m not exactly a triple man, you know. It would have been a kick, though, if a lousy single had kept me from getting it.”²³ And, in the article by Jeff Samuels for the *Pittsburgh Press*, Torre was quoted: “If I would have hit that last ball off the wall, I would have stopped at first base.” Torre, who clapped his hands all the way to the bag after getting his single, added, “It was a 3–1 pitch, and I sure wasn’t going to take another walk.”²⁴

Mike Hegan – Mike Hegan was also asked the “fork-in-the-road” question after he hit his cycle. The game was against the Detroit Tigers in the Motor City. Hegan smacked a two-run double in the first, a solo homer in the third, and a bases-loaded triple in the fourth. Mike Gonring of the *Milwaukee Journal* wrote: “Then in the sixth, fully aware that he needed a single to complete it, he hit a line drive to left that fell in. It looked for a moment as if he might go to second. ‘Not with my wheels,’ Hegan said later. And he stopped, the cycle completed.”²⁵ Gonring continued: “What would he

have done, somebody wondered, if he had hit what could have been an extra base hit? ‘I don’t know,’ Hegan said, laughing. ‘I guess I could have tripped or fallen down. I knew the fourth time up I had a chance to do it. I just wanted to make contact, to keep the ball in play. It wasn’t time for me to hit the ball out of the ballpark, with one out and nobody on.’” Hegan had two more plate appearances in the game—two chances to connect for another extra base hit and add a quasi-cycle to his collection. But one resulted in a walk, and in the other “he hit a fly ball to center, not too deep, not too shallow. The bases were loaded and the runners sprinted toward the plate, but the ball floated into the glove of center fielder Ron LeFlore [to end the inning].” And, here’s neat a tidbit included in the game story written by Lou Chapman of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*: “Hegan, who was obviously thrilled, said, ‘It was more so after I asked Henry Aaron [who did not play in the game] if he had ever done it. And he said no. So that gives me something on him.’”²⁶

Moving on now to those 16 players who bypassed the cycle, as shown in Table 2, three of them made it all the way to third with a triple, while the other 13 doubled. Here’s some additional information on those whose “fork-in-the-road” decision was the quasi-cycle.

George Sisler – In Detroit, on August 13, 1921, in the seventh inning with nobody on and two outs, Sisler smacked his second double—a drive to right field—to complete his quasi-cycle. With the score tied (2–2), it was important to get in scoring position, even though the next batter, Ken Williams, flied out to end the inning. There was still time left for Sisler to try for the cycle. In the ninth inning, with the Browns now leading by a 3–2 score, Sisler stepped into the batter’s box with Johnny Tobin on second base with two outs. He slapped a single to right field to bring home the runner. So, Gorgeous George accomplished both a quasi-cycle and a traditional cycle in the same game.

Sammy West – With the Browns trailing the White Sox, 9–7, in the bottom of the ninth on August 5, 1933, there were two outs and the bases were empty. West was the last hope for St. Louis. And West came through in the do-or-die challenge and belted the ball to center. Rather than stopping at first with a cycle for himself, he hustled all the way to third. He scored when the next batter was safe on an error. Two more singles produced the game-tying run. The Browns went on to win the game in the twelfth inning. And while there was no mention in the various St. Louis and Chicago newspapers about West having bypassed a



Jeff Frye, following the direction of his first base coach, stopped at first base and took the “fork-in-the-road” cycle on August 17, 2001.

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George Sisler took the "fork-in-the-road" quasi-cycle in the seventh inning on August 13, 1921, and then completed the traditional cycle in the ninth inning.

chance at the cycle, it was noted in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* that he did tie the modern major league mark for most long hits in a game (4). West had one more chance to complete the cycle—in the eleventh inning, with a runner on first (Lin Storti) and nobody out. West laid down a sacrifice bunt instead of swinging away.

Grady Hatton – While he decided to bypass the cycle when he doubled in the sixth inning (after having homered in the first, doubled in the third, and tripled in the fourth), he had no decision to make when he reached first base safely in the eighth inning with Bucky Walters on third base and Frankie Baumholtz on second base (after each had singled and Benny Zientara had laid down a sacrifice bunt). Hatton was given an intentional base on balls. That walk was not "as good as a hit."

Hal Breeden – Primarily a part-time player (mostly first base) with the Cubs and Expos 1971–75, Breeden had only one four-hit game in his career—his quasi-cycle game, on September 2, 1973. In that game he walloped a three-run homer in the first, struck out in the second, collected (as described in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*) "a looping hit which Phillies center fielder Del Unser misplayed into a triple" in the fourth, and smacked an RBI double in the sixth, thereby setting the stage for a nifty reverse-order-cycle. Then, as reported in *The Sporting News*, "Hal Breeden was about to leave the dugout for warmup swings prior to his fifth time at bat against the Phillies. The score was Expos 10, Phillies 0 in the top of the eighth. Breeden's first base platoon-mate, Mike Jorgensen, called him back and whispered, 'Listen Bo. Just hit the ball good and stop at first base. That'll give you the cycle.' And sure enough, he laced into a Barry Lersch serving for a tremendous drive which appeared to be headed out of the stadium. The ball hit against the fence, but

Breeden didn't stop at first. In fact, the Georgia strong boy didn't stop until he was at third base. 'I thought about stopping,' Breeden said, 'as I got to first. Then I figured I'd have to explain it to Gene (i.e., Montreal Manager Mauch). It was better to keep on running.'"²⁷

Bob Horner – The 1978 National League Rookie of the Year, Horner spent nine years with the Braves and one with the Cardinals. He had three four-hit games that were each one hit short of the cycle (including his quasi-cycle). In the other two games, the triple and the home run were the missing hits once each. With regard to his July 13, 1985, quasi-cycle game, Chris Mortensen (a staff writer for the *Atlanta Constitution*) mentioned to Horner that if he had stopped at first base on his eighth-inning double, he would have been the first Brave since 1910 to hit for the cycle. "I couldn't have done that," Horner said, shaking his head. "The ball rolled to the fence."²⁸

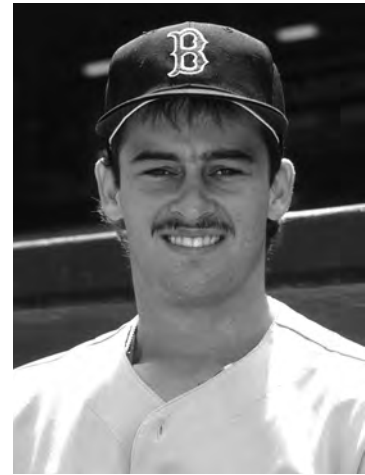
Kevin Bass – "Bass lights up Candlestick for Astros!" That was the Sports section headline in the *Houston Post* on June 28, 1987. The sub-headline was, "Houston right fielder gets 4 extra-base hits in 6–5 win over Giants." The game story by Ivy McLemore provided the following description:

Bass began his record-setting performance with with a two-run double in the first inning against Kelly Downs. In the third, Bass grounded a triple down the right field line. The Astros pulled away with three runs in the fifth on singles by Bill Doran and [Denny] Walling, a passed ball charged to catcher Bob Brenly and Bass's two-run homer into the right-field seats. "I really started thinking about the cycle after the triple in the third," Bass said. "And once I hit the home run, all I needed to do was dink one in for a single." The game's biggest mystery was solved in the seventh, when Bass went to the plate against left-hander Mark Davis, needing only a single for the cycle. For a moment it appeared as if the right pieces—and hits—would continue to fall into place for Bass. He lifted a weak fly to shallow left field, where Jeff Leonard lost a battle with the sun and had the ball drop in front of him. Bass trotted into second with his second double to cap off a four-hit performance. "You can't stop in a situation like that" Bass said. "You have to go. It's a neat thing to say you've hit for the cycle in the major leagues, but that's a goal a lot of players never reach."²⁹

In the game account presented in the *Houston Chronicle*, Bass was quoted: “After I hit the triple (in the third inning) I was thinking about the cycle. I guess the best way to do it is get the triple and homer out of the way early. That’s the hard part. If you get them, then you might dink one in somewhere. I did, but I dinked it too good, I guess. The cycle is something that’s a neat thing for the fans and for an individual.”³⁰

Darryl Strawberry – The 1983 NL Rookie of the Year, Strawberry played in the majors for 17 years, mostly with the New York Mets, but also with the Los Angeles Dodgers, San Francisco Giants, and New York Yankees. He fashioned two four-hit games and one five-hit game, each lacking just one hit for the cycle, including his quasi-cycle game. In both of the other games the triple was the missing hit. In his quasi-cycle game, August 16, 1987, Strawberry hit a double in the third inning, a home run in the fourth, and a triple in the sixth. Then, as described in *The Sporting News*, “With the Mets leading 20-9 in the eighth, Strawberry came to bat needing a single to complete the cycle. He hit a liner into the left field corner and [first base coach Bill] Robinson discreetly signaled for him to stop at first, but Strawberry charged on to second. ‘That was a double all the way,’ he said. ‘You can’t think about what you’ve done when you get a hit like that.’”³¹ Jack O’Connell has a similar account in the *New York Daily News*: “Strawberry hit a line drive past left fielder Brian Dayett and never hesitated rounding first, ignoring the cycle and getting another double. ‘Bill [Robinson] gave me the stop sign at first,’ Strawberry said, ‘but I was running all the way.’”³² Bob Klapisch wrote in the *New York Post*: “Darryl Strawberry almost hit for the cycle. All Strawberry needed was a single in his last at-bat, but he passed up the chance to stop at first when he doubled to left. ‘No, that’s not the way to play baseball,’ Strawberry said. ‘Bill [Robinson] wanted me to stop at first, but there was no way I was going to do that. That ball [hit to deep left] was a double. I didn’t even stop to think about it.’”³³ So, there’s a chasmic contrast between Strawberry’s quasi-cycle and Jeff Frye’s cycle, Frye obediently followed the first base coach’s directions and stopped at the initial sack with a single to complete the cycle, while Strawberry defiantly ran through the first base coach’s stop sign. Another interesting aspect of Strawberry’s quasi-cycle is that he did, in fact, have a safe one-base plate appearance—he walked in the first inning! Another example of a walk not being “as good as a hit.”

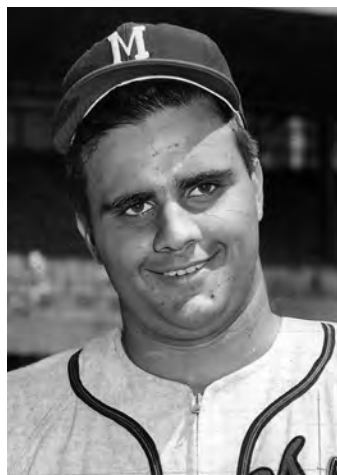
Mike Greenwell hit a single to complete his cycle on September 14, 1988. When asked if he had hit one in the gap, would he have stopped at first, he said, “No way; I’d be running to second and third or wherever I could get.”



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Scott Cooper – In his seven-year career in the majors (1990–95, 1997), mostly with the Boston Red Sox, the stars aligned only once, on April 12, 1994, permitting Cooper the opportunity to achieve both the quasi-cycle and the cycle in the same game. When he came to bat in the seventh inning, he only needed a single to complete his cycle. His first crack had come in the sixth inning. With the bases loaded and two outs, he was safe on a fielding error by Kansas City Royals shortstop Dave Howard. Then came his seventh-inning “fork-in-the-road.” With the Red Sox leading, 19–2, two on and one out, Cooper belted the ball to deep right field, driving home both Scott Fletcher and Tim Lincecum and taking second on a clean double, thereby passing up the cycle—but getting a quasi-cycle! However, he got another chance in the ninth. Leading off, he connected for a clean simple single to complete the cycle. Here’s what was reported in the *Kansas City Star* by Dick Kaegel: “Things got so bad [for Kansas City] that the Royals had shortstop Dave Howard pitch the final two innings, and it was against Howard that Cooper singled in the ninth, completing the cycle.” Cooper reportedly said, “Everybody on the bench was telling me, ‘You need a single. Lay one down.’” But with the Red Sox up, 22–8, he wasn’t about to bunt. “Howard threw me two nasty changes, but on 0–2 he came back with a fastball and I was able to hit it,” Cooper said.³⁴ Cooper’s fifth-inning triple was also special. He was credited with a triple after he was put out at the plate trying for an inside-the-park home run. Had he been safe at home, he would have missed out on both the quasi-cycle and the traditional cycle.

Dustin Pedroia – The recipient of the 2007 AL Rookie of the Year Award and the 2008 AL Most Valuable Player Award, Pedroia has spent his entire career with the Boston Red Sox. With respect to his quasi-cycle,



Joe Torre hit a ninth-inning single (a chopper past the mound) to complete his cycle on June 27, 1973. After the game Torre said, "If I would have hit that last ball off the wall, I would have stopped at first base."

which he achieved on July 2, 2008, Pedroia commented (as reported by Gordon Edes and Amalie Benjamin for the *Boston Globe*): "I was trying to go up there and hit the ball hard the last two times I got up. When I got back after I hit the double, guys were joking, 'You should have fallen down or something.' But I just play the game."³⁵

Sam Fuld – An eight-year player in the majors (2007, 2009–15) with four teams (Cubs, Rays, Athletics, and Twins), Fuld achieved his quasi-cycle on April 11, 2011. Here's what Michael Vega included in his game story for the *Boston Globe*: "Fuld stroked a pitch into left field but stretched it into a double. Asked if he considered stopping at first, Fuld replied, 'Thought about it a little bit, but only jokingly. If lead runner Brignac had tripped and fell he would have been the goat or whatever. You can't do that. That was a sheer double. I'll take those any day.'"³⁶

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In addition to the 16 players who responded with a repeat double or a duplicate triple when confronted with the "fork-in-the-road" choice of a cycle or quasi-cycle, six players earned the quasi-cycle by hitting a second home run—Lou Gehrig (July 29, 1930), Johnny Mize (July 3, 1939), Daryl Spencer (May 13, 1958), Hank Aaron (May 3, 1962), Larry Walker (May 21, 1996), and Carl Everett (August 29, 2000). Each of these second homers was an "in-the-seats" roundtripper. These batters had no choice but to run all the way around the bases. Of these six, only Gehrig and Mize were successful in hitting for the traditional cycle at some other time in their careers.

Sixty-five players have needed a single to claim the cherished cycle: the 51 listed in Table 1 plus 14 of the 16 players listed in Table 2 (excluding Sisler and Cooper

who are included in Table 1). As shown in Table A-3 in the appendix, 47 of the 65 players connected for an "ordinary one-base hit" which essentially obviated making a choice. Thus, these 47 players had to "settle" for a traditional cycle. The other 18 players belted gappers that afforded them the opportunity to choose either a long hit (double or triple) for a quasi-cycle or a "super-single" for the cycle. For 16 of these players—Cobb, Sisler, Whitney, West, Berger, Hatton, Kaline, Breedon, Stargell, Grubb, Horner, Bass, Strawberry, Cooper, Pedroia, and Fuld—the better choice was the extra-base hit and the resulting quasi-cycle. Indeed, for West, his quasi-cycle choice contributed significantly to a come-from-behind victory. Only three of these 16 players also achieved a classic cycle at another time—Sisler (twice, including his quasi-cycle game), Stargell, and Cooper (in his quasi-cycle game). For the other two players—Gruber and Frye, choosing the cycle over the quasi-cycle was the "better" choice, because each earned everlasting fame. As Rafael Palmeiro said about Frye's cycle, "It's a little bit controversial, but he did it, and nobody can take it away from him." There is no asterisk attached to it in the lists given in the various record books or websites. Curiously, in the entire history of the Toronto Blue Jays franchise, only two players have connected for a traditional cycle—Gruber and Frye, while no Toronto player has hit for a quasi-cycle.³⁷ ■

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. Herm KrabbenhofT, "Quasi-Cycles—Better Than Cycles?," *Baseball Research Journal* (46:2, Fall 2017) 107.
2. Retrosheet, "Games/People/Parks">"Achievements">"No-Hitters & Cycles." Accessed November 17, 2017.
3. As reported in Reference 1, there were 73 quasi-cycles during the 1920–2016 period. According to the information available from the "Play Index" on the Baseball-Reference website (accessed November 17, 2017), there were no quasi-cycles achieved in 2017.
4. Geoff Baker, "Frye Cycles to Jays Record," *Toronto Star*, August 18, 2001, C1.
5. Scott Burnside, "Frye Cooks Up a Night of Memories," *National Post* (Canada), August 18, 2001.

6. "Frye Pulls Up For Single, Gets Cycle," Associated Press, *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 2001 (Web site accessed April 30, 2017).
7. Mike Rutsey, "Very Good Frye-Day!," *Toronto Sun*, August 18, 2001, 56.
8. Mike Rutsey, "Very Good Frye-Day!," *Toronto Sun*, August 18, 2001, 56.
9. Mike Rutsey, "Very Good Frye-Day!," *Toronto Sun*, August 18, 2001, 56.
10. Jeff Blair, "Frye Recycles Memories," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, August 18, 2001.
11. Geoff Baker, "Frye Cycles to Jays Record," *Toronto Star*, August 18, 2001, C1.
12. Geoff Baker, "Frye Cycles to Jays Record," *Toronto Star*, August 18, 2001, C1.
13. "Frye Pulls Up For Single, Gets Cycle," Associated Press, *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 2001 (Web site accessed April 30, 2017).
14. "Jeff Frye Hits for Cycle," Associated Press, *seattlepi.com/sports*, August 17, 2001 (accessed April 30, 2017).
15. Scott Burnside, "Frye Cooks Up a Night of Memories," *National Post* (Canada), August 18, 2001.
16. "Gruber Rides Out Injury, Gets Jays' First Cycle," *The Sporting News*, May 1, 1989, 22.
17. Dick Kaegel, "Blue Jays 'Reduplicate' Royals Script," *Kansas City Times*, April 17, 1989, C1.
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19. Mike Gantner, "Gruber Thinks Back," *Toronto Sun*, August 18, 2001.
20. Bob Ryan, "Greenwell Savors Cycle," *Boston Globe*, September 15, 1988, 94.
21. Jeremy Bass, "Huff Third Player to Hit for Cycle in 2007," *MLB.com*, June 30, 2007 (accessed April 30, 2017).
22. Neal Russo, "Torre's Cycle Powers Cards," *Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis), June 28, 1973.
23. Charley Feeney, "Cardinals Stagger Pirates," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 28, 1973, 13.
24. Jeff Samuels, "Cards Wallop Pirates, 15-4," *Pittsburgh Press*, June 28, 1973, 40.
25. Mike Gonring, "Hegan Hot, So 'Bird' Not," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 4, 1976, 10.
26. Lou Chapman, "'Bird' Lays Egg; Hegan Scrambles It!," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 4, 1976.
27. Ian MacDonald, "Breedon, With Pounds Gone, Adds Heft to Expos' Attack," *The Sporting News*, September 22, 1973, 11.
28. Chris Mortensen, "Braves Overwhelm Phillies, 13-5," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 14, 1985. Bill Collins was the Braves player who accomplished the cycle in 1910. Two years after Horner bypassed the cycle by achieving his quasi-cycle, Albert Hall did hit for a traditional cycle for the Braves, becoming the first Atlanta player to achieve the feat.
29. Ivy McLemore, "Bass Lights Up Candlestick for Astros," *Houston Post*, June 28, 1987, C1.
30. Neil Hohlfeld, "Bass' Extra-Base Binge Fuels Astros," *Houston Chronicle*, June 28, 1987, Sports 1.
31. "Raines Joins the Cyclists," *The Sporting News*, August 24, 1987, 26.
32. Jack O'Connell, "Strawberry Socks 29th HR, Drives Home 5 in 23-10 Runaway," *New York Daily News*, August 16, 1987.
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37. Herm Krabbenhoft, "Quasi-Cycles—Better Than Cycles?," *Baseball Research Journal* ((46:2, Fall 2017)) 107.

“I Thought We Had a Roof”

Marlins All Wet After Opening Day Rain Delay Gaffe

Chad Osborne

Dee Gordon slipped as he accelerated out of the batter's box. The speedy Miami Marlins second baseman had just lain down a bunt in an effort to spark a late rally. His team trailed the Atlanta Braves, 2–1, in the eighth inning on Opening Day of the 2015 season.

Gordon, slowed by the slip, was thrown out at first by Atlanta pitcher Jim Johnson.

In the second inning, a surprise rain shower had drummed the ballpark and forced a brief delay, leaving players and fans scurrying for cover as Marlins Park got a soaking.

Blame Gordon's slip on the rain, right?

“Revisionist history would tell you that it's because it rained, that he slipped because it rained,” said then-Marlins President David Samson in a telephone interview on May 25, 2016. “I would tell you that it's possible he could have slipped on a sunny day. But, because it was a rain delay, it enabled people to draw that conclusion, including myself.”

It seems unlikely the area in front of home plate was still wet from the second inning shower. However, the field crew was not prepared for such an event. There was no accessible tarp to cover the infield.

Why should there be? Marlins Park had a retractable roof.

Marlins Park opened in April 2012. It features a sophisticated retractable roof designed to protect fans and players from Miami's sweltering summer heat and the pesky thunderstorms that often barrel through the city.

An announced crowd of 36,969 fans packed the park Opening Day, hoping to see the genesis of a winning season. It was 80 degrees at first pitch and mostly cloudy. Yet the forecast—it called only for a 20 percent chance of rain—looked promising for a beautiful day of baseball.¹

The Marlins kept the roof open.

In making such day-to-day decisions, Samson said he and others involved “look at temperature. We look at wind speed. We look at wind direction. We look at humidity, relative humidity and rain chance.”

All of this information was found on a weather app.

Six former Marlins All-Stars—Luis Castillo, Jeff Conine, Alex Gonzalez, Charles Johnson, Mike Lowell, and Carl Pavano—gathered on the field to throw the ceremonial first pitches. Minutes later, at 4:22 PM, Miami starting pitcher Henderson Alvarez ignited a cheer from the hometown crowd—those who arrived to the ballpark on time—when he forced Atlanta outfielder Eric Young to ground to second for the first out of the new season.²

Up next, Jace Peterson smacked the second pitch he saw from Alvarez to center field for a single. On his first pitch to Nick Markakis, Alvarez balked Peterson to second, moving the second baseman into scoring position.

Markakis, facing a 1–1 count, then singled to center, scoring Peterson for a 1–0 Atlanta lead.

Alvarez, perhaps feeling some Opening Day jitters, settled down to retire the next two batters, escaping further damage.

The Marlins failed to produce a baserunner in the bottom of the first, and Alvarez sailed through the top of the second.

In the bottom half of the inning, Atlanta starter Julio Teheran struck out Michael Morse swinging.

Marlins third baseman Martin Prado then came to the plate.

Dee Gordon slipped on an infield that never should have been rained on.



ARTURO PARDAL/AL III / FLICKR

With the count even at 1-1, spectators suddenly began to scramble as a dark, gray storm cloud above unleashed a steady rain onto the uncovered ballpark.

"It started raining and then raining harder, and I just remember thinking it's not going to rain harder, but then it rained even harder," Samson said. "And then I remember the umpires getting together and realizing that we were about to have a rain delay."

Home plate umpire Jeff Nelson confirmed Samson's fear.

"As the umpires waved the players off the field for what would be a 16-minute weather delay, the roof began its west-to-east slide," columnist Greg Cody wrote the next day in the *Miami Herald*. "You can't hurry love or a retractable roof, apparently, so the grounds crew scrambled to spread bags of glorified cat litter across a puddling infield as by agonizing degrees the motorized roof began leisurely to cover the field and sodden fans."³

The Marlins Park roof structure weighs 19 million pounds and closes in "between 11 and 15 minutes, depending on the wind," according to Samson, as it travels about 39 feet per minute.⁴

"It was extremely surreal when I realized we were going to have a rain delay in a retractable roof facility, and I was the one responsible," Samson said. "And it was Opening Day. I knew that the roof was open, and I didn't think the rain was coming."

Samson, as was critically noted in many media reports, used weather apps on his phone to track a storm

moving toward the Marlins Park vicinity. At the time, the team did not consult with meteorologists or weather services.

"I looked at three different weather apps, and I didn't think we were going to be impacted and neither did the people around me," he said in the phone interview. "And all of the sudden it started raining and then raining harder."

Meteorologist John Morales is "not a big fan of weather apps," he said, particularly when used to make decisions that can have an impact on so many people. One reason for his aversion, Morales explained, is those apps gather information from computer models and generally have little to no input from weather-predicting professionals.

"Here you are, trying to predict what the weather is going to be at Marlins Park, a specific point in Miami, and you're going to the [computer] cloud to retrieve a forecast from a global model," Morales said in a phone interview on January 18, 2017. "That [forecast] is looking at the entire planet and having it retrieve this one bit of information as to what the weather might be, whether it be tomorrow or the next hour, for that specific point in Miami. And more often than not you're going to be disappointed with what the app is going to give you."

Provided Miami's geographic location—just outside the tropical belt, "There is a lot of moisture and there tends to be a lot of instability in the atmosphere," Morales said.

"The air is often charged and ready to produce rain

showers, not necessarily in April for Opening Day," said the meteorologist, who consulted with the Marlins about game-day weather "a couple of ownerships ago," years before the team built a ballpark with a retractable roof. "But go a month forward into May, and showers, and thunderstorms too, can pop up almost out of nowhere."

Examining radar can show where a rain shower is located. "Radar is what's really out there," Morales said.

"Unfortunately, when you have a lack of expertise in the area, and unless you're a meteorologist...most people don't have the expertise in being able

ROBERTO COQUIS/FLICKR



Marlins Park, shown here with the roof open on April 4, 2012.

to interpret radar imagery. There's always that chance that you're going to miss or misinterpret which way a shower is moving.

"Sometimes you have to be in the know to really figure out how things are behaving," Morales continued. A "meteorologist would be looking at weather radar and be able to give them, at a minimum, the 15 minutes they need to close the roof."

On picturesque days that appear perfect for baseball, "There might be some isolated showers out there which might clip the park," Morales said. "And even though they're isolated, covering 10 or 20 percent of the area, which is not a lot, but if it happened to be in that 10 to 20 percent, then you're up the creek."

As soon as Samson realized the game was going into a weather delay, he called team owner Jeffrey Loria: "And it was a horrific phone call to make. I was sitting up in a suite, and he was sitting next to the dugout...in the rain."

Samson had been accustomed to making those calls when the Marlins played in an open-air stadium.

"That was an everyday thing," he recalled. "But in the new ballpark, it didn't even occur to us—that was year four in the new ballpark—and it had just never, ever occurred to either me or him that I would ever be making those calls again."

When Samson dialed the phone to Loria on that day, he recalled the owner saying, "I thought we had a roof."

"I said, 'I'm sorry,'" Samson said. "He hung up, and I hung up. And that was it.

"And I was very careful to avoid him for the next 24 to 48 hours," Samson said, laughing.

Once the roof closed and the field was prepped, play resumed. Prado stepped back into the batter's box and grounded out to the pitcher.

The Marlins pulled even in the bottom of the third when Gordon slapped a two-out single to left, scoring Alvarez, who had doubled on a line drive to deep left field. The Braves ended the inning, and further threats, when catcher Christian Bethancourt threw out Gordon attempting to steal second.

Miami again ran itself out of an inning in the fourth when Giancarlo Stanton, rounding second on a two-out Prado single, noticed no Atlanta player was covering third. And off he went. Left fielder Kelly Johnson took note and fired the ball to shortstop Andrelton Simmons, who adroitly moved to catch the ball and tag out Stanton.

"They were late to cover, so it had to be the perfect

throw," Stanton said. "It was right on there, and he still grabbed it and dove. So that can't happen."⁵

Leading off the top of the sixth, Young punched an Alvarez pitch up the middle and raced to second for a double. Peterson next placed a sacrifice bunt in front of the plate, and Young advanced to third. Continuing to play small ball, Markakis grounded to Gordon. The second baseman threw home in an attempt to nab Young, but the speedy runner beat the throw, giving the Braves a 2-1 advantage.

The Marlins roared back in their half of the seventh. Morse led off with a single to right. Prado followed with another single, and then another came from center fielder Marcell Ozuna. Three batters into the half inning, the bases were loaded with Marlins.

The situation led Braves manager Fredi Gonzalez to remove Teheran in favor of lefty Luis Avilan. The move proved to be a smart choice by the Atlanta skipper.

On a 1-1 count, Avilan forced catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia to ground weakly to third. Alberto Callaspo picked up the grounder and threw home to force out Morse. Bethancourt, the Braves catcher, then threw to first to nab Saltalamacchia for the double play.

Miami still had two base runners—Prado stood at third and Ozuna had moved to second—but the Braves could breathe a bit easier now with two outs.

Complete relief came when Jim Johnson induced Marlins shortstop Adeiny Hechavarria to pop up a 1-2 pitch foul down the first base line. Atlanta's Freddie Freeman parked under the ball and made the catch to record the third out.

The bottom of the seventh turned out to be the last gasp for the Marlins and their fans, who now sat in drier, more comfortable seats.

Gordon's attempt for a bunt single in the bottom of the eighth failed, partially because the speedster slipped on his first steps toward first base.

Blame it on the rain?

"We had some chances, had some opportunities," Miami manager Mike Redmond said. "We just didn't get that one big hit. But we ran into a couple of outs as well. But, that's baseball. We'll come back tomorrow and be ready to go."⁶

In the ninth, Stanton struck out swinging. So did Morse. Atlanta closer Jason Grilli threw two strikes past Prado before the third baseman lined out to second to end the game.

Final score: Braves 2, Marlins 1.

As a joke, some fans brought umbrellas or wore raincoats for game two of the series on Tuesday night, Samson recalled. "Whenever I was out in a restaurant

or giving a speech somewhere, people would walk up to me and tell me about their rain shoes that they now wear to the ballpark,” he said.

In the postgame press conference, Samson kept the moment light. He was quoted in the *Sun-Sentinel* saying, “The roof closed as quickly as I could get it closed, short of me pushing it. No. 1 in the manual we wrote is no matter what happens, don’t have a rain delay. So I sort of skipped to part 5, which is ‘predict the weather at your own peril.’”⁷

He also mentioned that rain had previously fallen on Marlins Park, but never enough to cause a delay. Still, it brings up the question: Why was there no tarp?

“We did have a tarp, but it was in a place not readily accessible. It’s near the field, but not on the field,” Samson said in the phone interview. “So, it would have been a difficult process to get the tarp put over the infield. And the reason I approved having the tarp in an out-of-the-way storage place is, I said there will never be an issue with rain because we have a roof.” ■

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Regular Season Showdowns

Stew Thornley

One game for the pennant: winner takes the flag. Tiebreaker playoffs have produced drama—rookie Gene Bearden shutting down the Red Sox on one day's rest in 1948 and Bobby Thomson hitting the most famous homer ever three years later—but these were the result of a tie at the end of the regularly scheduled season. A showdown game in the regular season has a strict definition, so strict that even the Minnesota at Boston game on the final day of the 1967 season doesn't qualify; although the winner of that game (the Red Sox) got a direct trip to the World Series, it still wasn't certain at the time. Only after Detroit was eliminated following the end of the Minnesota-Boston game was the pennant decided.

Few showdowns have been so serendipitous that the schedule brought the teams together at the end. Many pennants have been decided on the final game of the season, but rare has been the contest where either winner of the game went to the World Series or at least captured first place.

As great as the 1967 race was, 1908 produced two outstanding pennant races and the first two regular-season showdown games in the history of the major leagues.¹ Special circumstances diluted these: Not all the games were played out in the American League, as was common at that time, and a replay of a tie game in the National League was tacked on at the end—not a tiebreaker game such as in 1948, but not one that was on the original schedule.

The number of regular-season showdowns are too plentiful to count on Mordecai Brown's hand but not for Antonio Alfonseca.²

THE SHOWDOWNS

Tuesday, October 6, 1908—American League

Three teams were barreling to the end: Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit were close together into October and jockeying for position in the final week of the season. Cleveland was the first to stumble, splitting a double-header in St. Louis on Monday, October 5. Though they were only a half-game behind the leading Tigers and percentage points shy of the White Sox, even a win on Tuesday would leave the Naps short of the winner of the Detroit-Chicago game that day.

For the showdown in Chicago, Detroit had Bill Donovan on the mound. Frank Smith seemed the logical choice for the White Sox, but he was bypassed, possibly because of an ongoing feud with manager Fielder Jones. Known as the Piano Mover because of his furniture-moving prowess, the pitcher had acquired

Tuesday, October 6, 1908; Detroit Tigers 7, Chicago White Sox 0

Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	White Sox	AB	R	H	RBI
Matty McIntyre lf	5	2	2	0	Ed Hahn rf	3	0	0	0
Donie Bush ss	5	1	2	0	Fielder Jones cf	3	0	0	0
Sam Crawford cf	5	2	4	1	Frank Isbell 1b	4	0	0	0
Ty Cobb rf	4	1	2	2	Patsy Dougherty lf	4	0	0	0
Claude Rossman 1b	5	1	0	2	George Davis 2b	4	0	0	0
Germany Schaefer 3b	5	0	2	1	Freddy Parent ss	2	0	0	0
Ira Thomas c	4	0	0	0	Billy Sullivan c	3	0	1	0
Jerry Downs 2b	4	0	0	0	Lee Tannehill 3b	3	0	0	0
Wild Bill Donovan p	4	0	0	0	Doc White p	0	0	0	0
	41	7	12	6	Ed Walsh p	1	0	0	0
					Frank Smith p	2	0	1	0
						29	0	2	0

Detroit 410 000 002- 7 12 0 Hugh Jennings
 Chicago 000 000 000- 0 2 6 Fielder Jones
 E-Isbell 2, Walsh, Davis, Parent, Tannehill. LOB-Detroit 8, Chicago 5.
 2B-Crawford. 3B-Cobb. S-Cobb.

Pitching Summary	IP	H	R	BB	SO
Wild Bill Donovan (W 18-7)	9	2	0	3	9
Doc White (L 18-13)	.1	3	2	0	1
Ed Walsh	3.2	5	3	0	1
Frank Smith	5	4	2	0	4

U-Jack Sheridan, Tommy Connolly. T-1:50. A-25,000.

the name “Deserter” Smith for having left the White Sox during the season in a dispute with Jones and owner Charles Comiskey. “Apparently placing personal feelings ahead of other considerations, Jones chose Doc White to start, with just a day’s rest,” wrote David W. Anderson in *More than Merkle*.³

White lasted only four batters and was driven out after Ty Cobb drove in the first two runs of the game with a triple. Ed Walsh, who had pitched the day before, relieved, and the Tigers had two more runs by the time the top of the first was finished. Walsh allowed another run in pitching through the fourth. Smith finally got the call and went the rest of the way, giving up two runs in the ninth.

The game was effectively over before the White Sox even came to bat. Donovan scattered three walks and two singles in shutting out Chicago, 7–0.

In St. Louis, Cleveland beat the Browns, jumping the Naps past the White Sox into second place, but still a half-game behind Detroit. The disparity in number of games factored into the pennant finish. Detroit, with one decision short of the 154 scheduled, finished with a record of 90–63, ahead of the 90–64 Naps and 1½ ahead of Chicago.⁴

The Tigers left for home, awaiting a National League outcome that was even wilder than the one Detroit had just been involved in.

Thursday, October 8, 1908—National League

The National League also had a three-way race that season, involving New York, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. The showdown between the Giants and Cubs was loaded with controversy as the game was a makeup of a tie of possibly the most famous game ever played.

Merkle’s Boner on September 23 cost the Giants a win as Fred Merkle, with his failure to continue to second base on what appeared to be a game-ending single by Al Bridwell, was instead forced out, nullifying the run and ending the game at 1–1.

It wasn’t until the final week, as the Pirates were eliminated and the Giants had to stay alive with three wins over Boston, that the National League board of directors upheld the decision of umpire Hank O’Day to declare Merkle out in the September 23 game and the decision of league president Harry Pulliam to stand by the umpire.

When New York completed a three-game sweep over Boston on October 7, the Cubs were called back to the Polo Grounds—not a playoff but a replay of a tie game and a showdown to decide the pennant on Thursday, October 8.

Perhaps never before had there been such interest in seeing a baseball game. The gates were opened four hours before the first pitch and fans, some of whom had staked out spots in line the night before, poured

in. Two hours before the scheduled game time, the Polo Grounds was full; fans, with or without tickets, were denied entry. Some tried scaling fences; others found high spots in the area that afforded even a partial view of the field. One fan, Henry McBride, had a spot on a pillar on the elevated station beyond center field. However, McBride got so excited when the Giants took a 1–0 lead in the last of the first that he lost his balance and fell to his death on cobblestones 25 feet below. His vacated spot was quickly filled.⁵

The Giants threatened to add to their lead, but Chicago’s Three-Fingered Brown relieved starter Jack Pfiester, quelled the rally, and held them without another run until the seventh. Meanwhile, the Cubs roughed up New York ace Christy Mathewson for four runs and held on for a 4–2 win and the

Thursday, October 8, 1908; Chicago Cubs 4, New York Giants 2

Cubs	AB	R	H	RBI	Giants	AB	R	H	RBI
Jimmy Sheckard lf	4	0	0	0	Fred Tenney 1b	2	1	1	1
Johnny Evers 2b	3	1	1	0	Buck Herzog 2b	3	0	0	0
Frank Schulte rf	4	1	2	1	Roger Bresnahan c	4	0	1	0
Frank Chance 1b	4	0	3	2	Mike Donlin rf	4	0	1	1
Harry Steinfeldt 3b	4	0	1	0	Cy Seymour cf	3	0	0	0
Solly Hofman cf	0	0	0	0	Art Devlin 3b	4	1	1	0
Del Howard ph-cf	4	0	0	0	Moose McCormick lf	4	0	1	0
Joe Tinker ss	4	1	1	0	Al Bridwell ss	3	0	0	0
Johnny Kling c	3	1	1	1	Christy Mathewson p	2	0	0	0
Jack Pfiester p	0	0	0	0	Larry Doyle ph	1	0	0	0
Mordecai Brown p	2	0	0	0	Hooks Wiltse p	0	0	0	0
	32	4	9	4		30	2	5	2

Chicago 004 000 000- 4 9 0 Frank Chance
New York 100 000 100- 2 5 0 John McGraw
DP-Chicago 1, New York 1. LOB-Chicago 3, New York 6. 2B-Donlin, Schulte, Chance, Evers.
3B-Tinker. CS-Chance. S-Brown. SF-Tenney.

Pitching Summary

	IP	H	R	BB	SO
Jack Pfiester	.2	1	1	2	1
Mordecai Brown (W 29–9)	8.1	4	1	1	1
Christy Mathewson (L 37–11)	7	7	4	1	7
Hooks Wiltse	2	2	0	0	2
HBP-By Pfiester (Tenney). U-Jim Johnstone, Bill Klem. T-1:40. A-40,000.					

National League pennant. The Cubs went on to win the World Series for the second straight year, their last world title for more than 100 years.

Sunday, October 3, 1915—Federal League

As was the case in the American League in 1908, a showdown game in the Federal League came down to an uneven situation because of games that weren't made up. And one that was made up created a controversy of its own.

The final games of the 1915 season involved a three-way race between the St. Louis Terriers, Chicago Whales, and Pittsburgh Rebels.

The Whales closed their season against the Rebels, first in Pittsburgh and then in Chicago. On Friday, October 1, the game in Pittsburgh was rained out, leaving the Rebels in first place by a half-game over St. Louis and 1½ games over Chicago.

Federal League president James Gilmore, a Chicago native and friend of Whales owner Charles Weeghman, ordered that the rainout in Pittsburgh would have to be made up as part of a Sunday doubleheader in Chicago. Dan Levitt, author of *The Battle That Forged Modern Baseball: The Federal League Challenge and Its Legacy*, said it was Charles Weeghman who suggested the make-up game in Chicago. "Pittsburgh naturally opposed this proposition," Levitt wrote, "but

Gilmore sided with his Chicago pal. He ruled that if Pittsburgh did not play a doubleheader, he would rule both games forfeit."⁶

On top of that, in Pittsburgh, the Whales then swept a Saturday doubleheader from the Rebels to move a half-game in front of them. St. Louis lost to Kansas City and also was a half-game out but was percentage points behind Pittsburgh. The Terriers, with one game scheduled on the final day, were out of the race; they could pass either the Whales or the Rebels—but not both.

The Whales and Rebels headed for Chicago for a doubleheader on the final day of the season on Sunday, October 3. In the first game, Chicago carried a 4–1 lead into the ninth but a misplayed fly ball allowed the Rebels to tie the game and then win in the 11th inning.

The pennant came down to the second game, which started at 4:11PM and almost assuredly would be an abbreviated game. Umpire Bill Brennan asked the time of sundown, which was 5:24, and said he would stop the game at that time.⁷

The game was scoreless until the bottom of the sixth when Max Flack's two-out double scored Mike Doolin from third. The Whales scored two more for a 3–0 lead and then put down the Rebels in the top of the seventh. The time was 5:25, and Brennan announced the game over.

The Rebels dropped to third place, a half-game behind Chicago and St. Louis. The win put the Whales, at 86–66, a fraction of a percentage point ahead of the 87–67 Terriers. (The margin was .0008544.) Had outfielders Rebel Oakes and Cy Rheam been able to track down Flack's drive, as they almost did, the game likely would have ended in a tie, which would have left the Pittsburgh in first place, percentage points in front of St. Louis.

Instead, darkness ended the Pittsburgh chances and the history of the Federal League, which did not return in 1916.

Whales president Charles Weeghman hadn't had enough as he sought to get into the city series with the Cubs and White Sox, and then challenged the Boston Red Sox and Philadelphia Phillies to play the winner of their World Series. The *Chicago Tribune* reported, "After this Mr. Weeghman will

Sunday, October 3, 1915; Chicago Whales 3, Pittsburgh Rebels 0, 6½ innings (Second game of doubleheader)

Pittsburgh	AB	R	H	RBI	Chicago	AB	R	H	RBI
Marty Berghammer ss	3	0	0	0	Rollie Zeider 2b	3	0	0	0
Al Wickland lf	2	0	0	0	Max Flack rf	3	1	1	1
Ed Lennox ph	1	0	0	0	Dutch Zwilling cf	3	1	1	1
Rebel Oakes cf	3	0	0	0	Art Wilson c	3	0	1	1
Ed Konetchy 1b	3	0	1	0	Charlie Pechous 3b	3	0	2	0
Cy Rheam rf	2	0	0	0	Les Mann lf	3	0	0	0
Mike Mowrey 3b	2	0	1	0	Joe Weiss 1b	1	0	0	0
Steve Yerkes 2b	1	0	0	0	William Fischer ph	1	0	0	0
Claude Berry c	1	0	0	0	Fred Beck 1b	0	0	0	0
Elmer Knetzer p	2	0	0	0	Mickey Doolin ss	2	1	2	0
Frank Allen p	0	0	0	0	Bill Bailey p	1	0	0	0
	21	0	2	0		23	3	7	3
Pittsburgh	000	000	0-	0	2	0	Rebel Oakes		
Chicago	000	003	-	3	7	1	Joe Tinker		

Called by darkness after 6½ innings

E-Weiss. LOB-Pittsburgh 3, Chicago 1. 2B-Flack, Zwilling. SB-Doolin. S-Bailey.

Pitching Summary	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Elmer Knetzer (L 18-15)	5.2	7	3	3	0	2
Frank Allen	.1	0	0	0	0	0
Bill Bailey (W 9-20)	7	2	0	0	1	8
U-Bill Brennan, Jim Johnstone. T-1:14. A-34,212.						

just sit back and claim the world title by default, for there isn't a chance of his cutting in on the big show and the big coin."⁸

Sunday, October 2, 1949—American League

The Boston Red Sox came to New York for a season-ending weekend series holding a one-game lead over the Yankees. In the Saturday game Joe DiMaggio—returning after a two-week absence because of pneumonia⁹—sparked a comeback with hits in consecutive innings, and Johnny Lindell broke a 4-4 tie with an eighth-inning home run to create a showdown game on Sunday.

In the finale, Ellis Kinder—looking for his 14th straight win and 24th of the season—pitched for Boston and gave up only a first-inning run over seven innings, despite a late night, according to David Halberstam in *Summer of '49*.¹⁰ That run—on a lead-off triple by Phil Rizzuto and a run-scoring ground out by Tommy

Henrich—held up as New York's Vic Raschi kept the Red Sox from crossing the plate.

With Boston down, 1-0, in the eighth, manager Joe McCarthy sent Tom Wright up to hit for Kinder and then had Mel Parnell relieve in the bottom of the inning. Parnell, who had started the Saturday game, gave up a lead-off homer to Henrich, and the Yankees added three more to carry a 5-0 lead into the ninth. Kinder was furious about being lifted and on the train back to Boston, "apparently quite drunk, [he] sharply criticized his manager," according to Mark Armour in his biographical sketch of Kinder.¹¹

The Red Sox had two on with one out in the ninth when Bobby Doerr drove a triple beyond DiMaggio in center. DiMaggio, recognizing that he was hurting the Yankees by playing in his weakened condition, called time and took himself out of the game. The fans, recognizing why he was doing this, gave DiMaggio an ovation as he ran off the field.¹²

One out later, Billy Goodman singled home Doerr, but Birdie Tebbetts fouled out to end the game and send the Yankees to the World Series, the first of five straight they would win.

Sunday, October 4, 1982—American League East Division

Earl Weaver's final season as manager of the Baltimore Orioles didn't figure to be a championship year.¹³ On August 22 the Orioles were in third place, 7½ games behind the East-Division-leading Milwaukee Brewers.

A hot month, however, brought the Orioles to within three games of the Brewers as Milwaukee came in for a season-ending four-game series. Baltimore's doubleheader sweep on Friday and an 11-3 win on Saturday deadlocked the teams for first place with the deciding game on Sunday, October 3.

The starters were future Hall of Famers—Don Sutton for Milwaukee and Jim Palmer for Baltimore. Another Cooperstown-bound star quickly put the Brewers ahead to stay. Robin Yount, the second batter of the game, homered. Yount, who would be voted the American

Sunday, October 2, 1949; New York Yankees 5, Boston Red Sox 3

Yankees	AB	R	H	RBI	Red Sox	AB	R	H	RBI
Dom DiMaggio cf	4	0	0	0	Phil Rizzuto ss	4	1	2	0
Johnny Pesky 3b	3	0	0	0	Tommy Henrich 1b	3	1	1	2
Ted Williams lf	2	1	0	0	Yogi Berra c	4	0	1	0
Vern Stephens ss	4	1	1	0	Joe DiMaggio cf	4	0	1	0
Bobby Doerr 2b	4	1	2	2	Gene Woodling lf	0	0	0	0
Al Zarilla rf	4	0	1	0	Johnny Lindell lf	2	0	1	0
Billy Goodman 1b	3	0	1	1	Hank Bauer pr-lf-rf	0	1	0	0
Birdie Tebbetts c	4	0	0	0	Billy Johnson 3b	4	1	2	0
Ellis Kinder p	2	0	0	0	Cliff Mapes rf-cf	3	1	0	0
Tom Wright ph	0	0	0	0	Jerry Coleman 2b	4	0	1	3
Mel Parnell p	0	0	0	0	Vic Raschi p	3	0	0	0
Tex Hughson p	0	0	0	0					
	30	3	5	3		31	5	9	5

Boston 000 000 003- 3~ 5 1 Joe McCarthy
New York 100 000 04x- 5 9 0 Casey Stengel
E-Williams. DP-Boston 1, New York 2. LOB-Boston 5, New York 6. 2B-Coleman. 3B-Rizzuto, J. DiMaggio, Doerr. HR-Henrich (24). SB-Goodman, Lindell.

Pitching Summary

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Ellis Kinder (L 23-6)	7	4	1	1	3	5
Mel Parnell	0	2	1	1	0	0
Tex Hughson	1	3	3	3	1	0
Vic Raschi (W 21-10)	9	5	3	3	5	4

Parnell faced two batters in the eighth.

WP-Raschi. PB-Berra. U-Cal Hubbard, Ed Rommel, Charlie Berry, Bill Summers, Jim Honochick, Ed Hurley. T-2:30. A-68,055.

NOTE ON UMPIRES: Because of the importance of the series, the American League assigned additional umpires for the final two games between the Yankees and Red Sox. Six umpires were the norm by this time in the World Series; however, even in a one-game pennant playoff the year before, between Cleveland and Boston, the American League didn't deem the game worthy of additional umpires. To have the foul-line umpires in the 1949 games, the American League pulled Jim Honochick and Ed Hurley from Bill Grieve's crew in Washington, leaving Grieve and Joe Paparella to handle the season-ending series between the Athletics and Nationals by themselves.

Sunday, October 4, 1982; Milwaukee 10, Baltimore 2

Brewers	AB	R	H	RBI	Orioles	AB	R	H	RBI
Paul Molitor 3b	5	1	1	1	Al Bumbry cf	3	0	1	0
Robin Yount ss	4	4	3	2	John Shelby ph	1	0	1	0
Cecil Cooper 1b	5	2	2	3	Glenn Gulliver 3b	4	1	2	1
Ted Simmons c	3	1	2	2	Dan Ford ph	1	0	0	0
Ben Oglivie lf	5	0	1	1	Ken Singleton dh	3	0	0	0
Gorman Thomas cf	3	1	0	0	Benny Ayala ph	1	0	0	0
Roy Howell dh	2	0	0	1	Eddie Murray 1b	4	0	1	0
Don Money ph-dh	2	0	1	0	John Lowenstein lf	3	1	1	0
Marshall Edwards pr	0	1	0	0	Gary Roenicke ph	1	0	0	0
Charlie Moore rf	4	0	1	0	Jim Dwyer rf	3	0	1	0
Ed Romero 2b	4	0	0	0	Cal Ripken ss	4	0	0	0
	37	10	11	10	Rick Dempsey c	3	0	2	0
					Terry Crowley ph	1	0	1	1
					Mike Young pr	0	0	0	0
					Lenn Sakata 2b	0	0	0	0
					Rich Dauer 2b	3	0	0	0
					Joe Nolan ph-c	1	0	0	0
						36	2	10	2

Milwaukee 111 001 015- 10 11 1 Harvey Kuenn

Baltimore 001 000 010- 2 10 1 Earl Weaver

E-Molitor, Palmer. DP-Baltimore 1. LOB-Milwaukee 4, Baltimore 12. 2B-Money, Cooper.

3B-Yount. HR-Yount 2 (29), Gulliver (1), Cooper (32), Simmons (23).

Pitching Summary	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Don Sutton (W 4-1)	8	8	2	2	5	3
Bob McClure	1	2	0	0	0	0
Jim Palmer (L 15-5)	5	4	4	3	3	0
Tippy Martinez	2.2	3	1	1	0	1
Dennis Martinez	1	2	3	3	0	1
Mike Flanagan	.1	2	2	2	0	1

Palmer faced two batters in the sixth.

HBP-By D. Martinez (Yount). U-Don Denkinger, Jim Evans, Larry Barnett, Rich Garcia.

T-3:11. A-51,642.

League Most Valuable Player for that season, homered again in the third, and the Brewers had a 3-0 lead.

Sutton pitched eight strong innings, and Milwaukee had a 5-2 lead going into the ninth when they padded the margin with five more runs for a 10-2 win. As the Brewers celebrated their trip to the playoffs and eventually the World Series, fans at Memorial Stadium cheered for Weaver, who came to the top of the dugout steps and waved to the crowd.

Since Then...

The Brewers-Orioles game was the last showdown game during the period that only first-place teams could advance toward the championship. In 1994 leagues were divided into three divisions, with each champion plus a wild-card team moving on.

Two showdown games in a battle for first place have occurred since then:

- September 29, 1996—San Diego beat the Los Angeles Dodgers, 2-0, in 11 innings.
- October 3, 2012—Oakland beat Texas, 12-5

However, in both cases the loser made the playoffs as the wild-card team. No showdown games have been played for a wild-card spot. Never again will we have a 1908 or 1949 finish, with the winning team heading directly to the World Series. Any meaningful showdown games will have to be among teams that do not have the top records in the league. Baseball changes. We may miss what's gone but at least we can revel in its history. ■

Notes

1. The recognized major leagues are the National Association (although that is often disputed but irrelevant since no showdown games occurred), National League, American Association, Players' League, American League, and Federal League. The author recognizes that various Negro Leagues should be considered major, as well, although the difficulty of determining any showdown games in these leagues has caused him to look at only white or integrated leagues.
2. In case an explanation is needed, Mordecai Brown had three fingers on his right hand (hence the nickname "Three-Fingered"), and Antonio Alfonseca has six fingers on each hand.
3. David W. Anderson, *More than Merkle: A History of the Best and Most Exciting Baseball Season in Human History*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000, 189.
4. In *More than Merkle* (page xix.), David Anderson wrote, "Cleveland finished a half game behind the Tigers behind the Tigers because of a quirk of the weather and in the rules. League officials ruled that the Naps had finished their season and Detroit was not obligated to play a game that had been rained out. As a result of this outcome, in later years teams in contention were required to play any game that had a bearing on the pennant race."
5. Stew Thornley, *Land of the Giants: New York's Polo Grounds*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, 58-60. Other sources: "Giants Bow to Bitter Defeat" *New-York Tribune*, Friday, October 9, 1908, 1; "As Seen From Coogan's Bluff: Thousands Watch Corner of Playing Field and Enjoy Baseball Atmosphere," *New-York Tribune*, October 9, 1908, 5; "Forty Thousand See Giants' Hope for Pennant Die," *The World*, October 9, 1908, 1; "Jam at the Gates: Spectator Killed," *The World*, October 9, 1908, 2; "The Cubs Win the Pennant," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1908, 2; "Up on Coogan's Bluff: Four Hours with the Unseeing but Anxiously Listening Thousands" by W. J. Lampton, and "How Joy's Mirage Turned to Gloom," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1908, 2.
6. Daniel R. Levitt, *The Battle That Forged Modern Baseball: The Federal League Challenge and Its Legacy*. Lanham, Maryland: Ivan R. Dee, 2012, 219.
7. "Whales Win Pennant as 34,000 Fans Cheer" by J.J. Alcock, *Chicago Tribune*, Monday, October 4, 2017, 13.
8. "Weeghman to Challenge for the World's Title," *Chicago Tribune*, Monday, October 4, 2017, 13.
9. DiMaggio had missed the first part of the season with lingering problems with bone spurs, and his late-season absence was attributed to pneumonia by Lawrence Baldassaro in his article on DiMaggio for the SABR BioProject (<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/a48f1830>) and by Halberstam in *Summer of '49* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.) An article, "Gloom Pervades Yankee Quarters But Stengel Looks for Triumph," on page 16 of the October 1, 1949, *The New York Times* said DiMaggio was "recovering from a virus infection that felled him Sept. 18."
10. Halberstam, David, *Summer of '49*, 44. Halberstam cited Kinder's roommate, Joe Dobson, that Kinder got to his room at 4AM, "quite drunk, with a lady friend Dobson had never seen before."
11. "Ellis Kinder" by Mark Armour, SABR BioProject: <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/4838dc23>.
12. "Yanks Whip Red Sox in Season Finale to Win 16th American League Pennant" by John Drebing, *The New York Times*, Monday, October 3, 1949, 21.
13. Weaver, of course, returned and managed Baltimore in 1986 and 1987, but he announced his retirement in 1982 and stepped aside for Joe Altobelli, who led the Orioles to the world championship the

The Impact of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Collective Bargaining Agreements

Michael Hauptert and Kenneth Winter

In baseball no team can be successful unless its competitors also survive and prosper sufficiently so that the differences in the quality of play among teams is not too great.¹

INTRODUCTION

In July 2000 the *Report of the Independent Members of the Commissioner's Blue Ribbon Panel on Baseball Economics* (BRP) was released. The members concluded that large and growing revenue disparities existed, which in turn led to chronic competitive imbalance among teams, and that the problem worsened after the 1994 strike.

The independent members were a truly impressive group, including former Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell, former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul A. Volcker, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist George F. Will, and economist Richard C. Levin, president of Yale University. At least two of them have a reputation for notable independence. Volcker was the chair of the Fed for two intense terms. Will was notable as a conservative commentator who supported Nixon's impeachment.² In addition, there were representatives of 11 clubs on the full committee.

Not since the Celler report, generated during the anti-monopoly hearings of the 1950s, had baseball been under such intense scrutiny for its off-the-field practices.³ A decade earlier, another study by a group established by the Collective Bargaining Agreement between Major League Baseball and the players had been untroubled by competitive balance. In fact, part of the BRP's mission was to "determine whether the level of competitive balance since the report of the Joint Economic Study Committee in 1992 is markedly different than that observed during earlier periods."⁴

The BRP concluded that the level of competitive balance was markedly different from recent years. It determined that competitive balance was impaired by structural characteristics and made several specific recommendations for economic changes in MLB.⁵

Our intention is neither to debate nor validate the conclusions of the BRP, but rather to focus on the

outcomes of the BRP's recommendations. Although much of the commentary focused on peripheral parts of the report, the real test of the BRP report is its influence on actual events. With the recent retirement of Bud Selig, it is a good time to assess the outcome of one of his signature accomplishments as commissioner. There are two critical questions that need to be asked in order to fully analyze the BRP. First, did it influence collective bargaining agreements? And second, did those collective bargaining agreements lead to changes in the competitive balance of MLB? In this essay, we seek to answer the first question. The second is more complicated and will be the subject of future research.

We present data that generally support an affirmative answer to the first question. We conclude that while the panel was ineffective in limiting the growth of extraordinarily large payrolls, it was successful at supporting other teams. Therefore, the BRP is part of the reason that MLB appears to be more competitive now than during the era the panel studied.

THE PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BLUE RIBBON PANEL

The purpose of the BRP starts with the title of the report: "*The Report of the Independent Members of the Commissioner's Blue Ribbon Panel on Baseball Economics*" [emphasis added]. Unlike the previous report that came out of the CBA, this one came from the commissioner, and was tailored for the owners. Indeed, 12 team owners, representing 11 teams, were members of the panel, and the report, while made public, was intended for MLB management. Actually, the recommendations of the report were the only part that was made public. None of the data used in the analysis by the committee were publicized, making it impossible for scholars to fully analyze the findings made by the committee.

There are two levels of focus for the report. The first is a decision on whether there is a problem with competitive balance. The second is the set of recommendations to correct the problem, if found. The panel provided an answer to the competitive balance

question on the first page of its report (emphasis in the original):

- a. **Large and growing revenue disparities exist** and are causing problems of chronic competitive imbalance.
- b. **These problems have become substantially worse** during the five complete seasons since the strike-shortened season of 1994, and seem likely to remain severe unless Major League Baseball (“MLB”) undertakes remedial actions proportional to the problem.
- c. **The limited revenue sharing and payroll tax that were approved as part of MLB’s 1996 Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Major League Baseball Players Association (“MLBPA”) have produced neither the intended moderating of payroll disparities nor improved competitive balance.** Some low-revenue clubs, believing the amount of their proceeds from revenue sharing insufficient to enable them to become competitive, used those proceeds to become modestly profitable.⁶

In this essay, we are not addressing the issue of whether the panel was correct in its analysis of competitive balance. We will take the report at its word, and instead focus on the recommendations in its report, and to what extent they were enacted. Much of the commentary about the panel’s work centered on the issue of profits, which are discussed in the report but do not play a significant part in the recommendations issued. The profits reported might be subject to disagreement, but they are not the cause of the recommendations. In addition, chasing after profit data is a fool’s errand because profits can vary tremendously from year to year and team to team, even with similar revenues. Profits can be affected by subsidiary businesses, owner salaries and perks, and a variety of perfectly legal accounting rules that can be used to shift profits among units of a business and across time. And as closely guarded as MLB revenue data are, reliable profit data are nearly impossible to come by. Revenues are much less susceptible to manipulation, and can at least be approximated.⁷

Although there are many revenue streams for an MLB team, estimating revenue is not particularly complicated. Ticket prices and quantities sold are readily available, concession revenue is usually easy to estimate, there are payments from MLB, broadcasting revenue is specified in the contract and paid to the team, and there is advertising revenue, also usually

fairly straightforward.⁸ Some teams have complex agreements with irregular cash payments, but by and large, revenue is much easier to determine than expenses and profits.

DOMINANCE OF LARGE PAYROLL TEAMS 1995–99

The first set of conclusions reached by the panel will be considered in order. Are there large and growing revenue disparities and are they causing chronic competitive imbalance? As noted, we accept the report’s findings on competitive balance. It presents convincing evidence that there are large and growing revenue disparities. Local revenues are growing at a healthy rate for all clubs, but the low-revenue clubs started from a smaller base and, even though their revenues may be growing at the same rate as the high-revenue clubs, they fall further behind in total revenue earned. For example, between 1991 and 2001 local broadcast revenue for both the Kansas City Royals and the Los Angeles Dodgers increased by 50 percent. In 1991 the Royals earned \$5 million from local broadcast revenue, while the Dodgers earned \$15.7 million, a \$10.7 million gap. In 2001 that gap had grown to \$16 million. As long as local revenues continue to increase at similar rates, the high-revenue clubs will increase their advantage over the low-revenue clubs.

In 1990 the gap between the top and bottom clubs in total revenue was \$64 million. By 2001 it had ballooned to \$138.5 million. During the 1990s total revenue for the top-ranked club grew by 96.3 percent while total revenue for the bottom-ranked club grew by 58.5 percent. In that same time span, the gap between the top and bottom payrolls grew from \$14.3 million to \$77.3 million.

We assume that the Blue Ribbon Panel was correct in identifying a chronic competitive imbalance problem. Our interest is in investigating the recommendations it made to address the imbalance, and in determining whether they were carried out, and with what result. The report concluded that competitive imbalance was a function of revenue disparities among clubs, which led to payroll imbalances. Hence, its recommendations tended to address these issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Blue Ribbon Panel proposed the following recommendations to address the competitive imbalance:

- a. MLB should share at least 40 percent and perhaps as much as 50 percent of all local revenues, after local ballpark expenses are deducted, under a straight pool plan.

- b. MLB should levy a 50 percent competitive balance tax on club payrolls that are above \$84 million.
- c. MLB should use unequal distribution of new Central Fund revenue to improve competitive balance, creating a “Commissioner’s Pool” that is allocated to assist low-revenue clubs in meeting a minimum club payroll of \$40 million.
- d. MLB should conduct an annual competitive balance draft of players.
- e. MLB should reform the Rule 4 draft process.
- f. MLB should utilize strategic franchise relocations when necessary to address the competitive issues facing the game.
- g. MLB should expand its initiatives to develop and promote the game domestically and internationally.⁹

In addition, the panel concluded that adopting its recommendations would eliminate the need for contraction. Interestingly, just one year later, Commissioner Selig proposed a plan that would contract MLB by eliminating the Minnesota Twins and Oakland A’s. Obviously, the plan was not carried out, but one of the two franchises proposed for elimination, the Minnesota Twins, did get a new stadium.

Items (d) and (e) have not been implemented. Therefore, our analysis will focus on the remaining five recommendations as well as the recommendation not to consider contraction. MLB adopted the last two rec-

ommendations on the list and ultimately abandoned its contraction plan. These are much less significant than the first three, so we will deal with them first.

On contraction and relocating franchises to address competitive balance issues: The Selig proposal to contract two teams was controversial and led to legal action on multiple fronts. Selig and Jeffrey Loria, then the Expos’ owner and soon to be the owner of the Marlins, were sued for racketeering (eventually settling out of court) and Minneapolis won a temporary restraining order that forced the Twins to honor their lease and play the 2002 season in the Metrodome.¹⁰ Before the year was out the players and owners reached a new labor agreement and an extension of the Metrodome lease.¹¹ In 2010, the Twins moved to Target Field, their new stadium a short distance away.

Contraction did not occur. Instead, strategic relocation was MLB’s answer to contraction. Although it was only used once, the move of the sagging Montreal franchise to Washington, DC in 2005 has been a great success so far.

On expanding initiatives to develop and promote the game domestically and internationally: MLB has allocated resources to develop and promote the game domestically and internationally. This has been funded, at least in part, by the proceeds of the competitive balance tax. The tax, also known as the luxury tax, has developed over the years both in the way it has been implemented and used (Table 1). The tax threshold, i.e. the minimum payroll at which teams must pay into the competitive balance tax fund, has grown from

Table 1. Competitive Balance Levers by Contract

Lever		1997–99	2003–06	2007–11	2012–16
Luxury/Competitive Balance Payroll Tax	Tax threshold	Midpoint between 5th and 6th highest payroll	\$117 - \$136.5	\$148 - \$178	\$178 – \$189
	Tax rate	34%	22.5–40%	22.5–50%	20–50%
	Use of tax	Revenue sharing	Benefits, growth	Fringes, growth	Fringes, growth, pensions
Revenue Sharing		20% NLR	34% NLR base plus central fund (7% based on relative local revenue)	31% NLR base plus central fund (unequal distribution)	48% of NLR (distribution tilted towards low-revenue clubs)
Unequal Distribution of Central Fund		None	\$10 @ Commissioner’s discretion; From MLB Central Fund		\$15 @ Commissioner’s discretion; From MLB Central Fund

NOTES: All dollar figures are in millions. NLR = net local revenue. There was no competitive balance tax from 2000–02.

\$51 million to \$189 million and the rate at which offenders are taxed has waxed and waned between 20 and 50 percent, depending on how much and how often the threshold has been exceeded.¹² Since 2003, one-quarter of the total amount collected has been directed toward the industry growth fund, dedicated toward promoting baseball in countries where organized baseball is not currently played.¹³

On sharing 40–50 percent of local revenues: We now turn to the first three recommendations, which are deserving of more attention because they are the big-money items. The biggest of these recommendations was for enhanced revenue sharing with an appropriate minimum club salary consistent with the proposal for the competitive balance tax.¹⁴

The CBA largely reflects the report’s proposal.¹⁵ The BRP recommended a straight pool revenue sharing plan instead of the split-pool plan because “some of the middle market clubs face a higher marginal tax rate than the highest revenue clubs.”¹⁶ The CBA provides for revenue sharing, though not a straight pool sharing plan, and not to the degree suggested by the panel. The CBA has addressed the issue by creating revenue sharing performance factors (Table 2). The performance factors are a function of market size, where market size is defined not by population, but total revenues. The calculation is more complex than we need to go into, but it results in higher-revenue teams paying more into the pool than they receive, and lower-revenue teams taking more out of the pool than

they contribute. For example, in 2013 the Yankees, who led all MLB franchises with \$461 million in total revenues as well as payroll (\$229 million), had a factor of 27.1 while the Twins, Cardinals, and Mariners had zero and the Royals, with total revenues of \$178 million (lower than all but the Marlins—more on them later) had a factor of –9.1. This means the Yankees paid 27.1 percent of the fund, the Royals received 9.1 percent of the fund, and the Twins, Cardinals, and Mariners neither lost nor gained. Since the panel supported unequal distribution of central fund revenues, this tweak to its proposal seems to satisfy that suggestion.

The issue to note concerning this plan is that it is based on revenues, not market size. Focusing on revenues tends to penalize successful teams and support unsuccessful teams. By “success,” we mean the ability to generate revenues, which is a primary goal of any business. The Yankees and the Mets, and the Cubs and the White Sox, share the same markets, but Table 2 shows that the National League team is more financially successful in Chicago while the American League team is more financially successful in New York.¹⁷ The result is that the Yankees contributed nearly three times as much to the revenue sharing pool as did the Mets, while the White Sox contributed less than a quarter as much as the Cubs, even though they share markets.

On levying a 50 percent competitive balance tax on payrolls above \$84 million: MLB adopted a competi-

tive balance tax, but not the one recommended by the BRP. As Table 3 indicates, the original luxury tax in 1997–99 raised an average of \$11 million per year. The observation that the Orioles paid the most in taxes during that period while making the playoffs only once and winning only one playoff series reminds us that payroll without baseball acumen is not a recipe for success. These tax revenues were redistributed to teams like revenue sharing, with no restrictions on how they would be used by the teams that received them.

The panel’s report recommended an enhanced tax combined with a minimum payroll for teams sharing in the payout. They specifically rejected the floating threshold (the midpoint between the fifth and sixth highest payroll) used in the first version of the tax because higher spending led to a higher threshold and the threshold was determined by the spending behavior of the fifth highest-spending team, making it difficult for teams to control their tax obligations.¹⁸ Therefore,

Table 2: 2013 Revenue Sharing Performance Factor

Payer	Factor	Neutral	Factor	Payee	Factor
Yankees	27.1	Twins	0.0	Tigers	–2.6
Red Sox	18.6	Mariners	0.0	Braves	–3.2
Cubs	13.0	Cardinals	0.0	Rockies	–4.1
Mets	10.1			Nationals	–4.1
Phillies	8.4			Orioles	–4.3
Dodgers	8.0			Marlins	–5.6
Giants	4.7			Diamondbacks	–5.9
Rangers	3.3			Reds	–6.1
Angels	3.2			Brewers	–6.7
White Sox	2.9			Indians	–7.0
Astros	0.7			Athletics	–7.8
				Padres	–8.1
				Blue Jays	–8.3
				Rays	–8.4
				Pirates	–8.6
				Royals	–9.1

SOURCE: 2012 Collective Bargaining Agreement, page 122.

Table 3. Competitive Balance Tax (Luxury Tax) 1997–99

	1997	1998	1999	Totals
Dodgers		\$49,593	\$5,150,000	\$5,199,593
Yankees	\$4,431,180	\$684,390	\$4,250,000	\$9,365,570
Orioles	\$4,030,228	\$3,138,621	\$4,070,000	\$11,238,849
Indians	\$2,065,496			\$2,065,496
Braves	\$1,299,957	\$495,625	\$772,000	\$2,567,582
Marlins	\$139,607			\$139,607
Mets			\$525,000	\$525,000
Red Sox		\$2,184,734		\$2,184,734
TOTALS	\$11,966,468	\$6,552,963	\$14,767,000	\$33,286,431

SOURCE: bizofbaseball.com

they recommended a 50 percent enhanced competitive balance tax on payrolls above \$84 million, which was approximately the 1999 threshold that resulted from the 1996 Basic Agreement luxury tax.¹⁹ The proposal called for a constant \$84 million threshold. Significantly, only teams with a minimum payroll of \$40 million would be eligible to share the proceeds of the taxes collected. So while a minimum payroll was not implemented, incentives were put in place to encourage teams to observe the suggested minimum payroll.

The CBAs since then, beginning with the one that went into effect in 2003, have all had a competitive balance tax, but not the one the panel envisioned (Table 1). Although the rates have grown to 50 percent in some cases, the threshold has floated up dramatically and the funds have not been distributed directly to the teams, though they do benefit them. About one-quarter of the proceeds go toward initiatives to develop baseball here and abroad (the aforementioned Industry Growth Fund), and the 2007 CBA mandated that the

rest be used to fund benefits to players, as provided in the Major League Baseball Players Benefit Plan Agreements.²⁰ Obviously, the tax revenues indirectly benefit teams because they are used to cover a cost that the teams would otherwise be required to pay out of their own revenues.

The competitive balance tax has essentially become a tax on the Yankees, though of late the Dodgers have become the largest contributors to the fund (Table 4). Since the fixed threshold debuted in 2003, the Yankees have paid 68 percent of the \$477 million in taxes collected. The Dodgers have paid 24 percent, all within the last four years. The Red Sox run a distant third, accounting for 5.3 percent, and the Angels, Tigers, Giants, and Cubs have split the remaining 3 percent.

To summarize, the panel recommendations for a competitive balance tax were generally ignored except for the name. The fixed threshold of \$84 million was not adopted, the high tax rate was only adopted for teams exceeding the threshold repeatedly, the funds were not distributed like revenue sharing, and the minimum payroll was not adopted. Some of the funds were, however, used to popularize the game.

On using the new Central Fund revenue to improve competitive balance, creating a “Commissioner’s Pool” to assist low-revenue clubs in meeting a minimum payroll of \$40 million: Giving authority to the commissioner to allow unequal distribution of the central pool seemed like a recommendation that was destined to be stillborn. Would the teams trust the

Table 4: Competitive Balance Tax 2003–12

	Yankees	Red Sox	Angels	Tigers	Giants	Cubs	Dodgers	Total
2016	\$27.4	\$4.5		\$4.0	\$3.4	\$3.0	\$31.8	\$74.1
2015	\$26.1	\$1.9			\$1.3		\$43.7	\$73.0
2014	\$18.3						\$26.6	\$44.9
2013	\$28.1						\$11.4	\$39.5
2012	\$18.9							\$18.9
2011	\$13.9	\$3.4						\$17.3
2010	\$18.0	\$1.5						\$19.5
2009	\$25.7							\$25.7
2008	\$26.9			\$1.3				\$28.2
2007	\$23.9	\$6.1						\$30.0
2006	\$26.0	\$0.5						\$26.5
2005	\$34.1	\$4.1						\$38.2
2004	\$26.0	\$3.1	\$0.9					\$30.0
2003	\$11.8							\$11.8
Totals	\$325.1	\$25.1	\$0.9	\$5.3	\$4.7	\$3.0	\$113.5	\$477.6

All dollar values in millions.

SOURCE: bizofbaseball.com

commissioner? “Perhaps” would be an optimistic answer. Would the MLBPA trust the commissioner? The only two possible answers at the time seemed to be “no” and “absolutely not.” Yet the first new CBA (2003) after the report created a discretionary fund of \$10 million.²¹ The Commissioner’s Discretionary Fund grew by 50 percent in 2012.²²

The report had a big impact on this CBA outcome, despite the fact that Commissioner Selig was not a beloved figure at the time. Baseball analyst Jeff Sullivan spoke for many when he described this part of the 2012 CBA as “the Commissioner’s discretionary (i.e., slush) fund.”²³ The evidence we have suggests the commissioner has used his discretion reasonably, due in no small part to the negotiating success of the MLBPA in establishing the parameters within which he can operate. He was given discretionary responsibility, and, based in part on his decisions, the players agreed to the fund’s increase in the 2012 CBA. The language regarding minimum payroll of \$40 million did not make it into the 2012 CBA. Presumably, the commissioner could use his discretionary funds to help low payroll teams boost their payroll, since the distribution process required teams to indicate their planned uses for the distributed funds, but the commissioner was not restricted in his use of the funds in this way, nor was he required to use them to boost payrolls.

THE PROBLEM OF INTENTIONALLY UNCOMPETITIVE TEAMS

As Simon Rottenberg noted more than 60 years ago, the health of MLB (and for that matter any other professional sports league) depends on competition, hence the focus on the competitive balance issue.²⁴ A major league team that loses only 30 games a year hurts the league as much as a team that wins only 30 games a year. The problem is that the financial structure of MLB is such that it may be more profitable to be uncompetitive than to try to build a winning club. The report concluded that low revenue clubs have used revenue sharing funds to become modestly profitable rather than competitive.²⁵ As Red Sox owner John Henry complained to the *Boston Globe* in 2010, “Over a billion dollars has been paid to seven chronically uncompetitive teams, five of whom have had baseball’s highest operating profits. Who, except these teams, can think this is a good idea?”²⁶

The Marlins have become the poster child for this dispute. In the 2012 CBA they were the only team to be singled out by name: “For purposes of the Base Plan in the 2012 Revenue Sharing Year only, the Miami Marlins’ Net Local Revenue will be \$100 million.”²⁷ The Marlins responded in November 2012 by send-

ing Jose Reyes, Josh Johnson, Mark Buehrle, John Buck, and Emilio Bonifacio, along with their \$180 million in contracts, to the Blue Jays. The following July, they sent Ricky Nolasco (at \$11 million their highest paid player by a factor of four) to the Dodgers. They shed nearly 80 percent of their payroll in eight months but won only seven fewer games in 2013 than they had with their substantially higher payroll (7th highest in MLB) in 2012.

This seems like an obvious abuse of the intent of the revenue sharing plan, but the problem with that analysis is in assessing intent. Almost any team with a poor record and a low payroll could be charged with putting profits before performance. Revenue sharing has made baseball susceptible to teams that want to create profits without creating a winning team. Previous research suggests that teams that perform poorly on the field often fare better financially than competitive teams.²⁸ The problem is that poor current performance may belie better outcomes in the future. The Pirates, Cubs, and Astros are recent examples of teams becoming successful cheaply by developing their own players and largely staying out of the free agent market.

The timing issue is about the baseball acumen involved. Back when the Rays were the Devil Rays they were accused of Marlinesque manipulations. But from 2008 to 2013, following an ownership change, the Rays were a competitive team after having been a bottom dweller for their first 10 years. During the six-year span beginning in 2008, they were in the playoffs four times, won two playoff series plus a wild-card game, appeared in the 2008 World Series, and had a winning record each year. These accomplishments came while the Rays were in the bottom payroll quartile five times and the third payroll quartile once.

In previous research focusing on the financial documents for 2007–09 disclosed by Deadspin, Winter and Hupert noted that the “win rank for the Pirates... was never higher than their salary rank, bringing their baseball acumen into question.”²⁹ They noted that Pittsburgh earned a profit of nearly \$30 million during that period, which was more than the highly competitive Angels earned. The Pirates seemed to be another case of milking profits from an intentionally uncompetitive team. Yet in 2013, not even five years removed from Deadspin infamy, the Pirates had the third best record in the NL and the 27th highest payroll. They then appeared in the playoffs for three consecutive years, although they did not win a series. So in 2009 were the Pirates lacking baseball acumen, intentionally uncompetitive, or strategically building for the future?

In 2012 the Astros' payroll was \$61 million and they won 55 games. In 2013 their payroll was slashed to \$22 million, less than Alex Rodriguez's salary for that year, and they won 51 games. It looked like a short-term profit-maximizing move, but in 2015 the Astros won the wild-card playoff with a payroll of \$71 million, which exceeded only the Marlins' payroll of \$68 million. And in 2016 their payroll leaped to \$102 million but was still in the bottom half of the league. While they missed the playoffs, they once again had a winning record.

Clearly, there is an opportunity for low cost baseball success. It is equally clear that there is an opportunity for low cost economic success without an interest in baseball success. It will take judgment to determine the difference. Rule-based systems would cause clubs to live by the letter of the rule, though MLB appears to have used good judgment in punishing the Marlins and ignoring the Astros. While the Marlins increased their payroll each year from 2013 (\$36.3 million) to 2016 (\$125.4 million), their rank was 29th, 29th, 30th, and 25th out of 30 teams in those four years, and they finished each season with a losing record. Meanwhile, the Astros rebuilt their club and increased their payroll and improved their on-field performance as well.

The 2007 CBA provided for a limited opportunity for actions against revenue sharing recipient scofflaws, and that opportunity was vague and uncertain: "Each Club shall use its revenue sharing receipts (from the Base Plan, the Central Fund Component and the Commissioner's Discretionary Fund) in an effort to improve its performance on the field."³⁰ The actions that could be taken in response were equally unspecified: "[T]he Commissioner may impose penalties on any Club that violates this obligation."³¹ Of interest is the verb *may* rather than *will*. It allows the commissioner a great deal of latitude. For example, should first-time offenders go unpunished? What about teams that increase their payroll but not their performance? And what about teams that do the opposite? Should they all be treated equally? The commissioner has discretion. The players have no direct say in the matter. We are fans of rule-based systems, but it appears that discretion is appropriate in this area and the commissioner has wielded his well.

Besides singling out the Marlins for specialized 2012 revenue sharing, the 2012 CBA beefed up the opportunity for either MLB or the Players Association to take action.³² Section 5 of the 2012 CBA is much more specific than its 2007 counterpart. Certain actions, such as payment of acquisition debt, are declared inconsistent with the obligation to field a competitive team. The commissioner has the opportunity to require a team to submit competitive effort plans and pro forma financial

statements. Requiring clubs to submit a rationale rather than conform to rules makes sense. The Players Association is also given a voice. If a team's actual payroll is less than or equal to 125 percent of its revenue sharing receipts in a given year, then in a grievance procedure the team has the burden of establishing that its use of revenue sharing receipts was appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

The Blue Ribbon Panel's report had a substantial impact on the financial structure of baseball. In a simple counting, five of the seven proposals were adopted in the CBA agreements. From a quantitative point of view, these were the big numbers in revenue sharing. It has shored up the payrolls for the smaller and medium market teams and improved their ability to compete more regularly.

The recommendations led to the commissioner getting discretion in dealing with clubs that are trying to profit by fielding a non-competitive team. An examination of the history of low payroll clubs shows that discretion is necessary, and it appears that the commissioner has wielded such discretion in an appropriate manner.

The one failure of MLB and the panel has been their goal to constrain the spending of the large-revenue-market teams. The top three payrolls are a larger percentage of the total than they were when the panel identified the dollar gap as a major problem, and the dollar gap at the top is larger than ever.

The report's recommendations were generally reflected in the CBAs of 2003, 2007, and 2012. Did they improve competitive balance in MLB? While we will address this question in more detail in later research, it does appear that by some measures, competitive balance improved in the new century. The problem is that the trend starts in 2000, before any of the recommendations were initiated. The panel should get some of the credit for shoring up the smaller teams, but the management of those achieving success on the cheap and those creating very expensive failures are part of the story. As a result, while revenue sharing has certainly enhanced the economic performance of the small revenue teams, it is not clear that it has helped them become more competitive on the field. ■

Notes

1. Simon Rottenberg "The Baseball Players' Labor Market," *Journal of Political Economy* 64, no. 3 (June 1956), 242–58.
2. Will was a minority stockholder in the Baltimore Orioles at the time of the BRP.
3. House Committee on the Judiciary, Organized Baseball, 82nd Congress, 1st Session (1951).

4. Richard C. Levin, George J. Mitchell, Paul A. Volcker, and George F. Will, "The Report of the Independent Members of the Commissioner's Blue Ribbon Panel on Baseball Economics," July 2000. (Hereafter *BRP*). The joint study committee was established by the 1990 CBA.
5. *BRP*, 53.
6. *BRP*, 1.
7. Most of the complex transactions like stadiums, multiple year contracts with bonuses, and owner and executive compensation are on the expense side of the ledger, and they provide the opportunity for unusual results or manipulation of profits over time and across businesses.
8. Computation of the payments from MLB to an individual team is a complex transaction, but the amount of the payment is not complex.
9. *BRP*, 46.
10. Murray Chass, "A Group's Racketeering Suit Brings Baseball to Full Bristle," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2002; Dave Joseph, "Keep an Eye on Selig, Loria," *Sun Sentinel*, July 17, 2002; Francie Grace, "Racketeering Suit Names Baseball Execs," Reuters, July 17, 2002; Sarah Talalay, "Suit Against Marlins' Loria Put on Hold Pending Arbitration Ruling," *Sun Sentinel*, November 16, 2002.
11. Brian Murphy, "Contraction nearly stole Twins baseball from Minnesota," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 10, 2014.
12. For example, in the 2012 CBA, a team that did not exceed the threshold in the previous year, but does in the current year, paid a tax rate of 17.5 percent on the amount of the payroll in excess of the current threshold (which increased from \$178 million to \$189 million over the life of the CBA). For each consecutive year that a team exceeds the threshold, the tax rate rises. It is 30 percent in the second year, then 40 percent for the third consecutive year exceeding the threshold, and finally 50 percent for four or more years of consecutive payrolls in excess of the threshold. If a team falls below the threshold, that accounting starts over if they once more exceed it.
13. Major League Baseball Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2002, 99–100 (Hereafter *CBA*).
14. *BRP*, 39.
15. *CBA*, 2012, 121.
16. *BRP*, 38.
17. A higher performance factor means a team generated higher total revenues.
18. The floating threshold was set at the midpoint between the fifth and sixth highest payroll teams. So if the top four teams each spent \$200 million on payroll but the fifth and sixth highest spent \$190 and \$110 million, then the threshold would be set at \$140. But if the fifth highest spending team cut its payroll to \$110 million, then the threshold would fall to \$110 million. Through no action of its own, a team would see its tax obligation increase.
19. *BRP*, 39.
20. *CBA*, 2007, 103.
21. *CBA*, 2002, 103, 107.
22. *CBA*, 2012, 123.
23. Jeff Sullivan, "Your Complete Summary Of MLB's New CBA," *SBNation*, November 23, 2011, <https://www.sbnation.com/2011/11/23/2581637/major-league-baseball-cba-labor-agreement>.
24. Rottenberg "The Baseball Players' Labor Market." See the quote at the beginning of the paper.
25. *BRP*, 1.
26. Maury Brown, "Revenue Sharing Is Making an Impact," *Baseball America*, March 2, 2010, <http://www.baseballamerica.com/today/majors/season-preview/2010/269597.html>.
27. *CBA*, 2012, 121.
28. Ken Winter and Michael J. Hauptert, "MLB Leaks Financial Statements: A Factual Analysis," in *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture*, 2011–12, William M. Simons, ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2013).
29. Winter and Hauptert, 106.
30. *CBA*, 2007, 112.
31. *CBA*, 2007, 112.
32. *CBA*, 2012, 130–31.

How Bases on Balls Were Scored: 1864–88

Richard Hershberger

Baseball-Reference.com includes “A note about statistics from 1887 and 1876,” signed in 2001 by Sean Forman. In it, the inimitable site founder explained:

1887—During this year, Major League Baseball and the guides reporting on that season decided that a walk was equivalent to a hit. This was the only season in which this was true. *Total Baseball* and other encyclopedias have at times decided to honor, and at other times decided not to honor this scorekeeping method of the time and compute a player’s batting average with walks as hits and at bats for that season. I had originally decided to go along, but now have changed my mind and have changed back to the standard method of computing batting averages and other stats.

1876—Additionally, TB has at times recognized the convention that a walk was a charged at bat in 1876, so a player with four walks in four plate appearances will be credited with an 0 for 4 batting. I have decided to backtrack on this as well and restore the stats to as they were previously.¹

Forman’s note raises an important question: What were they thinking? In 1876 a base on balls is charged against a batter’s average, then 11 years later it is credited to the average, with the modern practice followed in between. This seems inscrutable.

These anomalies were the manifestation of a decades-long discussion on how to think about the base on balls. This discussion only affected averages those two years, but continued beneath the surface in the intervening years, finally arriving at the modern conclusion in 1888. The subject was closed for decades afterward, until it was reopened in the form of on-base percentage.

THREE EARLY SCORERS

Three individuals have roles to play in this story. The

first is Henry Chadwick, the Hall of Fame journalist. He rose to prominence during the Civil War and spent the later 1860s and ’70s as the premier baseball journalist and writer of numerous baseball guide books. He took a particular interest in scoring and statistics. The use of the letter K to denote strikeouts is a direct survival of his scoring method.² Even as his influence waned in the 1870s, his opinions on scoring were widely respected.

The second individual is Nicholas Young. He was a major presence from the 1870s into the 20th century. In 1871, as secretary of the Olympic Club of Washington, he proposed what turned into the founding meeting of the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players, the first professional organization.³ When the National League was founded in 1876 he was appointed league secretary. He added the office of National League president in 1885 and remained the NL president and secretary until his retirement in 1902. His duties as secretary under the NL constitution included the preparation of “a tabular statement of the games won and lost by each club.”⁴ The strict requirement was merely for the final standings, but Young chose to interpret his mandate broadly by preparing and publishing a collection of statistical analyses. His opinions of what statistics to compile were accepted as the de facto standard.⁵

The third individual is less well known today: Alfred Wright. He was the baseball editor for the Philadelphia *Sunday Mercury* in the late 1860s and ’70s, as well as the official scorer of the Athletic Club of Philadelphia. He also was said to have a remarkable memory for records, able to “give scores and dates of games played between first-class clubs since the game has become popular,” making him baseball’s earliest known trivia maven.⁶ He kept the most detailed record of any club scorer, was forward thinking in what records should be kept and how they should be analyzed, and used his newspaper position to put his ideas into practical form. Close examination of the *Sunday Mercury*’s annual compilation of the club’s records in the late 1860s and early ’70s shows innovations that would later become standard.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BATTING AVERAGE

Baseball statistics arose in the 1850s. The basic offensive calculation was always understood to be an average: a fraction with a numerator and a denominator. This was widely understood because that discussion had already taken place in the context of cricket. Early baseball statistics were directly borrowed from cricket. The question was what values would constitute the numerator and denominator?

The early box scores recorded just two items for each player: hands lost (i.e. outs) and runs. Both were used for early averages. *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* for 1862 includes statistics for players in prominent clubs. The tables include games played, hands lost and runs, along with averages of hands lost per game and runs per game (recording the quotient as an integer and a remainder, just as schoolchildren are taught division to this day).⁷ *Beadle's* would publish both averages through its 1869 edition, but in the meantime two developments made this obsolete: Outs per game dropped out of widespread use as its limitations became obvious, such as penalizing a player put out on a force play, and it became clear that runs per game was not a useful measure.

The original runs per game standard was copied directly from cricket. The structure of cricket is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that runs per game is a much more reasonable standard in cricket than it is in baseball. Among other differences, cricket lacks the concept of the base hit, that is, an intermediate goal for the batter beyond mere survival that does not necessarily result in an immediate run.

An aside: Baseball statistics could have explored outs per game. The modern insight behind OBP is that the batter's goal is to not make an out. If he and enough of his teammates successfully avoid making outs, the scoring of runs will take care of itself. This insight would have lent itself to the outs-per-game average. Add the concept of the fielder's choice and a version of outs per game might have formed the basis for offensive averages, and the rest of this story would have been very different. But Chadwick took this in a different direction, abandoning outs per game and instead adopting the runs-per-game average by changing the numerator.

His first experiment was with what we now call slugging average. He realized that runs scored was a flawed standard because a player's score depended on the actions of his teammates. He offered a better standard:

The true estimate of a batting score...is the number of bases made on hits. Thus, a player

making his 1st base twice, his 2d once and his 3d once, and getting home but once, thereby being left four times and scoring but one run, makes a better score than the player who makes his 1st base four times by his hits, and yet gets home every time by the good batting of the players following him. The score of batting never tells the truth, as one man may be credited with six runs who get his base twice or three times on miss-catches or wild throws, while another player may be credited with but one run and may have made his base each time by clean hits and yet have been left.⁸

Chadwick soon dropped total bases made in favor of "first base hits." He did not mean singles, as this is sometimes misinterpreted. Rather, it was the number of times that the batter hit the ball and reached at least first base, without reference to any additional bases. "First base hits" came to be shortened to "base hits" or simply "hits." It wasn't quite the modern rule since the fielder's choice was not yet factored in, but it was the same idea as the modern base hit. He favored the first base hit over total bases made because the fielding of the day was too erratic to reliably assign credit:

There can be no mistake about the question of a batsman's making his first base, that is, whether by effective batting, or by errors in the field, such as muffing a ball, dropping a fly ball, or throwing badly to the bases, whereas a man may reach his second or third base, or even get home, through errors of judgment in the outfield in throwing the ball to the wrong man, or in not properly estimating the height of the ball, &c — errors which do not come under the same category as those by which a batsman makes his first base.⁹

In other words, too many extra-base hits resulted from what could unkindly be called "Little League plays," even if they didn't involve errors in the strict sense of an errant throw or a muffed catch. Modern players train in best practices of where fielders should go in any situation and where the ball should be thrown. The more thoughtful players were working out what these best practices were, but the play of even the best clubs in 1867 was erratic by modern standards. Rather than attempting to assign a value to such hits, it was better to stick to the more straightforward question of whether the batter reached first on a hit or an error.

The new scheme carried with it a new role for errors. Scoring errors was not itself new. Scorers had intermittently noted fielders' missed catches since the late 1850s. These early examples had, however, no broader significance. They were reportorial harrumphs directed at the erring players. Chadwick instituted his new regime of considering bases made, whether first or total bases, by adding a column to the box score for first base hits (initially abbreviated B and later 1B) in addition to the old runs and outs. It was apparent that in some cases the batter made his base(s) not through his own efforts but due to fielding errors. It didn't seem right to credit the batter for these errors. As the *New York Clipper* advised in 1869, the "first base hits" column included only those made on "clean hits":

In making up a score at the close of the match the record should be as follows:—Name of player, total number of times the first base was made by clean hits, total bases so made, left on bases after clean hits, and the number of times the first base has been made on errors, which include called balls, wild throws, dropped fly balls, muffed balls and bases made by the ball thrown to other bases to put out players forced off by poor hits.¹⁰

This scheme was in fact more elaborate than as yet appeared in practice, but even in the simpler form used, there were enough data to calculate the batting average. What mattered for that was to not assign undeserved credit to the batter. First base reached on clean hits filled this need. Those reached on errors did not enter into the calculation.

This was a quietly radical change in the role of the scorer. He no longer merely recorded events. He now sat in judgment of the players, with his decisions affecting subsequent assessments of their abilities. This was a huge new responsibility. Chadwick's decision to favor first base hits over total hits was an attempt to minimize this new role, only slightly lessening the impact of the change.

Chadwick started including first base hits in box scores and other scorers started copying him. By 1869 the practice was widespread enough that Chadwick had the data to calculate batting averages in the 1870 edition of *Beadle's* as first base hits per game.¹¹ He also inspired Alfred Wright to experiment with more elaborate record keeping. Wright's box scores and end-of-season compilations had previously included only the conventional items. Then, in the November 22, 1868, issue of the Philadelphia *Sunday Mercury*, he

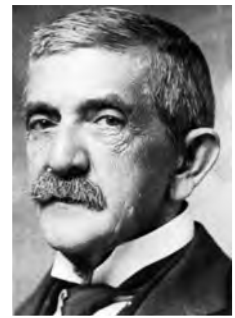
came out with a season record of the Athletic Club that was downright baroque. It included as separate items the various ways a player could be put out, the corresponding ways that a fielder could put a player out, and various miscellaneous data such as times left on base and home runs.¹² No other club published anything like this as early as 1868. Wright didn't seem to have any clear idea of what to do with all this information. The only analysis was the conventional averages of outs per game and runs per game. But he clearly sensed that there was a use for these additional data and he kept playing with them.

The breakout year for using first base hits to calculate batting average was 1869. Wright's end-of-season compilation in the November 28, 1869, Philadelphia *Sunday Mercury* develops the data some more. He includes, in addition to the conventional averages, "Average Times Bases on Clean Hits" and "Average Number of Total Bases on Clean Hits." In other words: batting average and slugging average (which he had fewer qualms about than did Chadwick). His data also included a novel entry: "Total Number of Times at the Bat." Other top clubs copied Wright's extensive data collection and his leap to a new form of batting average.¹³

Wright in 1869 still used games played as the denominator but scorers now had the tools necessary for the modern denominator. This leap was suggested in 1871 by Hervie Dobson, a correspondent for the *New York Clipper*:

According to a man's chances, so should his record be. Every time he goes to the bat he either has an out, a run, or is left on his base. If he does not go out he makes his base, either by his own merit or by an error of some fielder. Now his merit column is found in "times first base on clean hits," and his average is found by dividing his total "times first base on clean hits" by his total number of times he went to the bat. Then what is true of one player is true of all, no matter what the striking order.¹⁴

No one did anything with the idea at first and it is not clear that anyone even took notice of Dobson's proposal. The leap was finally made in 1874 by several clubs, using batting average in its modern form.¹⁵



Nicholas Young

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Chadwick still had to use the older form of averages in the *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player*. Not every scorer was up to date, so complete data weren't available, but the advantage of using at-bats rather than games played was obvious and the trend favoring this advanced statistic was clear.

By 1876 every club in the new National League was calculating batting averages as first base hits per at-bat. This was made quasi-official by Nicholas Young. He issued an annual league book, beginning in 1877. This was mostly intended for internal use. It included not only the playing rules but also business documents such as the league constitution and minutes of its meetings. And he appended a statistical record of the previous year.¹⁶ These statistics were disseminated in the sporting press, making them the consensus standard.

SCORING BASES ON BALLS, 1864–76

How did bases on balls fit into these developments? Poorly. Bases on balls were not an original feature of baseball. The early game was conceived as being about fielding and throwing and running. Batting was merely how the process got started. The pitcher's role was to deliver the ball where the batter could hit it. The batter's role was to hit it, at which point the fun began. As baseball grew more competitive, clubs started gaming the system. Pitchers started throwing the ball as fast as they could, often sacrificing control for speed. The rules required the pitcher to deliver the ball "for the striker" but originally with no penalty for failure. The base on balls was added in 1864 to address this absence. The umpire was empowered to call a ball should the pitcher, after due warning, persist in pitching unfair balls. Should the pitcher refuse to be recalled to his duty, the umpire could call a second and then a third ball. Upon the umpire calling three balls, the batter was given first base.¹⁷

Such was the theory. In practice, the innovation was widely considered strange, umpires were reluctant to embrace their expanded role, and the new rule was mostly ignored. Chadwick was an early advocate of the rule and devoted much ink to wheedling umpires to enforcing it. For two years, the rule was nearly a dead letter. Finally, in 1866, Chadwick's efforts paid off and some umpires began calling balls. The rule was still thought unnatural and some batters were reluctant to take first base, so walks remained rare.¹⁸ Chadwick, in his role as chairman of the rules committee, made the language of the rule ever more imperative on the umpire, with limited success. The rules makers finally took the extreme measure of changing the rule to nine

balls for a walk in 1875. At that point, calling a ball was a small enough penalty that umpires were willing to do it. This was followed by a gradual reduction in the number of balls needed for a walk in reaction to improvements in pitching—overhand delivery and curveballs. The modern number was finally reached with the 1889 season.¹⁹ Pitchers gave up under one walk per game through most of the 1870s, with the number gradually rising in the 1880s to the modern level of about three a game.

Batting average in its primitive form of runs per game predated bases on balls. Even once bases on balls entered the game their rarity resulted in little pressure to consider how they should be integrated into batting average. Tacit consensus took the place of discussion. The one thing that everyone agreed about concerning walks was that they were errors by the pitcher. His job, after all, was to put the ball over the plate. Failure in this simple task was considered much like any other throwing error. The only way they were treated differently was that they were not usually tabulated in the main box score, but relegated to the summary.²⁰

This finally brings us to the 1876 rule, which counted walks as errors and therefore hurt the batters' averages. It is not strictly true that this was the rule, as true official scoring rules had not yet been enacted. Nor was it strictly speaking a change from earlier practice. Walks had never counted in the numerator of the batting average. When the denominator was games played, walks were a lost opportunity for a hit in the same way as were errors. The change was that when the denominator was games played, the occasional base on balls was barely noticeable in the average. With the denominator now at-bats, the effect of bases on balls on the batter's average was more apparent.

SCORING BASES ON BALLS, 1877–86

The National League introduced official scoring rules for 1877, defining the data official scorers were required to report to the league. These data were to be tabulated in seven columns. The first column listed for each player "the number of times he has been at bat during the game." This codified the "at bat" statistic that was already established practice, but with one change: "Any time or times where the player has been sent to base on called balls shall not be included in this column." This was a remarkable conceptual leap, transforming "at bat" from a straightforward description into a term of art. The change was enacted with remarkably little discussion. It seems to have helped that few understood it. Lewis Meacham, a baseball reporter present at the meeting, wrote:

One of the most amusing features of the session was the utter and blank amazement and despair with which the most practical of the Managers listened to the above [scoring rules], without the dimmest idea what it was all about.²¹

Meacham does not tell us who suggested the idea, but Nicholas Young is a good guess, being present, in a position to make the proposal, and being the individual most directly interested in the topic. (It certainly was not Chadwick, who was not present and who was on poor terms with the National League in its early years.) Not until a month later did anyone think to explain the new rule, giving the reasons we would expect:

One of the papers which object to the League system of scoring, asks why a “time at bat” should not be given when a player is sent to base on called balls. The answer is simple: Because, if the umpiring is correct, he didn’t have his proper opportunity to hit the ball, and inasmuch as the time at bat has a tendency to lessen the player’s score, it would be unfair to give it to him unless you also gave him a chance to increase his score of clean hits.²²

This new definition of the “at bat” set the standard for considering bases on balls. They were omitted from batting average entirely, neither contributing to nor deducting from a batter’s average. It did not follow, however, that bases on balls were no longer regarded as errors. Rather, they were counted as errors that were not included in the batting average. The question over the next decade was how exactly to treat them when assessing pitchers as fielders. Were bases on balls errors the same as any other, so far as the pitcher was concerned, or were they a category distinct from other errors?

The 1877 rules did not explicitly address this question. Errors had their own column in the tabulation, defined as “each misplay which allows the striker or base runner to make one or more bases when perfect play would have insured his being put out.” Young interpreted that in his record for the year as treating bases on balls as any other error and noted this on the blank score sheets distributed to official scorers.²³ Young’s season record for 1877 did not include a separate category for bases on balls, but it nonetheless pointed the way. He separated wild pitches from fielding errors in the pitchers’ records and passed balls from fielding errors in those of the catchers.

This logic was extended in the 1880 rules to bases

on balls. The rule that year approached errors from the opposite direction. There was no error column, but it was implied. The fielding record had previously listed outs made, assists, and errors. Now it had outs made, assists, and chances offered. Chances offered was simply the sum of a fielder’s outs, assists, and errors. Errors could still be determined, but now required arithmetic. The definition of chances offered explicitly excluded called balls, passed balls, and wild pitches. These three came to be known as “battery errors” and the 1880 rules recognized that they were a different sort of error from fielding errors, and counted them separately. They were still recorded but were to be relegated to the summary rather than tabulated in the box score proper.²⁴

This was a controversial change. Many reporters and scorers didn’t understand the point. The result was a back and forth debate, with one faction controlling the rules one year and the other the next. Bases on balls were put back in the error column for 1883. Wild pitches and passed balls joined them for 1885, only to be removed again for 1886. The decade of 1877–86 turns out to be less modern than it superficially appears. It was modern in that there was a consensus that bases on balls should not count against the batter’s average, but there was no agreement on how they should be assessed against the pitcher.

SCORING BASES ON BALLS 1887–88

The 1887 season would see something entirely new: bases on balls scored as hits. This was a notable year in the development of the rules. The National League and American Association determined for the first time to appoint a joint committee to amend the rules for both organizations. Even more remarkably, they invited the players to submit suggestions to their meeting in the fall of 1886. Most remarkable of all, they took the suggestions seriously.²⁵

The nascent Brotherhood of Professional Ball Players had been proclaimed the previous August. The invitation to suggest rule amendments was a golden opportunity, both for its own sake and as good publicity. They held a meeting that November to draft a set of proposals. The most lasting idea to come out of this meeting was the modern pitching delivery rule, specifically the set position. Scoring a base on balls as a hit came out of the same meeting:

A base hit should be scored for a base on balls; this would reward the batter and *properly* punish the pitcher; it would remove the cause of much internal dissension between the captain and players and would avoid the tiresome exhibition

of pitchers giving bases on balls to save their records.²⁶

There was a new idea here: that working the count for a walk merited reward. The idea of working the count was not new, but earlier it had not met with approval, as seen in this report from 1870:

When [Forest City] had bravely crept ahead of the Brooklynites [i.e. the Atlantics], the latter resorted to the mean, barefaced dodge of waiting—taking advantage of the reprehensible leniency of the umpire—to worry the pitcher or get a base on...balls.²⁷

The strategy was gradually accepted over the following years. When, in the spring of 1886, Harry Wright coached his players to “take every chance at the bat by waiting for a good ball or secure the base on balls,” it was reported with no hint of disapproval, as it clearly was smart baseball.²⁸ From there, it was a natural step to reward the batter for his smart play, and the joint rules committee accepted the players’ idea, counting a base on balls as both a hit and an at-bat.²⁹

There was, of course, the inevitable opposition. The Boston baseball reporters, who were prone to collective contrarianism, were particularly vocal:

The great objection to this rule is the gross deception that it entails in the score. The score is arranged for the convenience of the public, that it may see as nearly as possible, and as correctly, just how the game was played and what each man did. If a man is credited in the score with making three hits, in order to see just what he actually did, the reader must consult the summary and subtract the number of times he got his base on balls to get at the real batting. Take that Athletic player who in one week this season led his nine in batting, having made four base hits according to the score, but in reality he didn’t make any hits in the week but got his base four times on balls. How ridiculous! It is a shame that the public is compelled to submit to such an imposition.³⁰

The critique was two-fold. The idea that a base on balls was the same accomplishment as a hit was disputed. Nor, it turned out, was there universal acceptance that working the count for a walk was desirable as this argument in *Sporting Life* makes clear:

That lying perjurer, the base-on-ball-base-hit, is seriously injuring the game with patrons. The invitation given to the batsman by the four-strike-five-ball business to tiresomely wait for a base on balls and be credited with a base hit is wearying spectators and prolonging the game and bringing censure on the umpire. *It is making record players.* In the last Athletic game one player, Davis, who seldom can hit a ball anyway, and that day couldn’t touch it with a boxing glove, had a batting (?) average of .600, while Griffin, a hard hitter and an emergency batter, too, who banged the ball all over the lot when bases were full, had a batting record for all this of .400, two hundred per cent. less than the man who tired out spectators, and yet readers of that score in other cities were probably saying to themselves—“What a slugger that Davis is.”³¹



Harry Wright

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The rule was kept in place through the season of 1887 despite a movement for its immediate repeal. There was a steady stream of complaints throughout the season leading up to the rules committee’s meeting in the fall. Chadwick (past his prime, but still influential in scoring matters) finally came out against the rule, arguing on the basis of the purity of the statistical record:

One result of the adoption of this exceptional rule has been to play havoc with the batting averages, which it has made utterly useless as a criterion of batting skill. It has also materially interfered with the value of the pitching averages. In fact, it has destroyed the usefulness of the averages in question as a basis of estimating the relative skill of batsmen and pitchers.³²

Batting average had taken its modern form a decade earlier, and by 1887 what numbers constituted a good or a bad batting average were established in the public mind. Meddling with this was confusing, and just seemed wrong. The rule was changed back for 1888, with bases on balls counted as errors but not as at-bats.

This proved unsatisfactory thanks to another innovation: the earned run. The idea of distinguishing between earned and unearned runs was not new. It

went back at least to 1871. Here is an early discussion of what constituted earned and unearned runs:

The difference between runs which are earned and those which are not is as follows:—If the first striker is missed on the fly, the second gets his base on a wild throw, and the third by a ball muffed by the fielders, then the batting nine escape a whitewash, and if any runs are afterwards scored, no matter if obtained by base hits, no run is earned. But if the first striker makes a base hit, and the second makes a three base hit, and the next three are out on foul balls, one run is earned.³³

This clearly was not definitive, and the topic was regularly discussed in later years. This discussion, however, was unofficial. The official rules did not distinguish earned from unearned runs until 1888. Having an official definition to disagree with wonderfully focused sportswriters' attention. The rule as implemented presented an especially irresistible target: An earned run was defined as one unaided by errors, with the explicit exception that "bases on balls though summarized as errors, shall be credited as factors in earned runs."

This contradiction was met with widespread outrage. The whole point of an earned run is that it is achieved without benefitting from an error. It seemed obvious nonsense to turn around and include runs achieved from bases on balls. *Sporting Life* editorially characterized this as "ridiculous," and was far from alone in this assessment.³⁴

The problem was a lack of clarity about the purpose of the distinction between earned and unearned runs, and difficulty integrating the ideology of earned runs with the ideology of bases on balls. Was earned runs an offensive statistic meant to determine whether to assign credit to the batting side? Or was it a defensive, pitching statistic meant to determine whether to assign blame to the pitcher? It seems to have been originally conceived as an offensive stat, but came to be seen also as a defensive stat by 1879, when Chadwick—using italics to stress his point—wrote: "*There is but one true estimate of a pitcher's excellence in playing the position, and that is in the number of earned runs charged against him.*"³⁵

These two conceptions existed side by side through the 1880s, leading to the disconnect. If earned runs are an offensive statistic, and if a base on balls is an error by the pitcher rather than an accomplishment by the batter, then it would make no sense to credit the

offense with an earned run off a base on balls. If earned runs are a defensive statistic designed to assess whether to assign blame to the pitcher, then it would make no sense to exclude runs obtained from the pitcher's inability to throw strikes.

The decision to include bases on balls in earned runs was an implicit declaration that earned runs were a defensive statistic. This was not universally understood, much less accepted. Confusion and outrage were inevitable. Something had to give. The rules committee held a mail ballot and voted to remove bases on balls from the error column, relegating them to the summary alone. It took some time for everyone to internalize the system. As late as 1889 no less a person than Nicholas Young was confused, claiming in an interpretation entirely unsupported by the text of the rule that bases on balls were not counted in earned runs.³⁶ People eventually figured it out, and the rule has remained substantially unchanged since.

CONCLUSION

There is a temptation to regard the "traditional stats" as obvious, in contrast to modern "advanced stats." Both sides in the advanced stats discussion tend to fall into this trap, treating "obvious" either as virtuous or as naive. In fact, the traditional statistics are anything but obvious, other than through long familiarity. They were the product of extensive discussions spanning decades, and involving close observers of the game. More recent discussions often reprise older debates. We have seen how Chadwick considered and rejected slugging average in the 1860s, and the 1887 batting average rule is immediately recognizable today as on-base average. They didn't always reach the best conclusion—Chadwick was probably right to reject slugging average, given the conditions of the day, but in retrospect, they probably should have stuck with on-base average-style batting average. But, right or wrong, they were not merely settling for an obvious answer. ■

Notes

1. Sean Forman, "A note about statistics from 1887 and 1876," December 2, 2001, <https://www.baseball-reference.com/about/note76-87.shtml>
2. Henry Chadwick, *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* (1862), (New York: Beadle & Co., 1862). Chadwick's reason for using K rather than S is unclear. The explanation typically offered is that he needed S for some other purpose, usually either a sacrifice or a single. Neither stands up to scrutiny. Sacrifices weren't scored until decades later. Avoiding confusion with singles is more plausible, but the early scoring method recorded how players were put out, not, for the most part, how they avoided this fate. "H.R." for home runs was the exception, but no provision was made for recording singles, doubles or triples, and the letter S was not used in the early system. The only explanation Chadwick offers is that "we use

- the first letter in the words Home, Fly, and Tip, and the last in Bound, Foul and Struck, and the first three letters of the alphabet for the first three bases.”
3. “The Coming Season: The Professionals Ready for Business,” *Sunday Mercury* (New York), March 5, 1871.
4. National League Constitution for 1876, Article XII, Sec. 5.
5. Young’s statistical tables were published by many newspapers. They can also be found in the annual *Spalding Guides* starting with 1877.
6. *Sunday Republic* (Philadelphia), June 25, 1871.
7. Chadwick, *Beadle’s Dime Base-Ball Player* (1862).
8. [Chadwick?] “To Correspondents,” *New York Clipper*, November 24, 1866.
9. Chadwick, “The True Test of Batting,” *Ball Player’s Chronicle*, September 19, 1867.
10. “On Scoring In Base Ball,” *New York Clipper*, February 20, 1869. For early notes of missed catches, see, e.g., the summary to the box score of the game of August 10, 1859: [Chadwick], “Knickerbocker vs. Empire” *New York Clipper*, August 27, 1859. The first base hit column debuted in the box score for the Athletic of Philadelphia vs. the Union of Morrisania game of August 19, 1867: [Chadwick], “The Athletic Club Matches in Brooklyn,” *Ball Players Chronicle*, August 22, 1867.
11. Chadwick, *Beadle’s Dime Base-Ball Player* (1870).
12. *Sunday Mercury* (Philadelphia), November 22, 1868. The ways a player could be put out were: fly ball; foul fly ball; foul bound ball (i.e. foul ball caught on the first bounce, which at that time was an out); at first base; at second base; at third base; at home base; run out between bases; and struck out.
13. The Atlantic Club’s averages are in “Review of the Season of 1869. Its Victories and Defeats,” *New York Clipper*, December 11, 1869; and the Unions of Lansingburgh’s in “Review of the Season of 1869. Its Victories and Defeats,” *New York Clipper*, December 18, 1869.
14. “The Professional Club Secretaries’ Meeting,” *New York Clipper* March 11, 1871.
15. The Athletics in the Philadelphia *Sunday Mercury*, December 6, 1874; the Bostons in the Philadelphia *Sunday Mercury*, November 29, 1874; the Hartfords in “The Hartford Club Record,” *New York Clipper*, December 12, 1874.
16. Constitution and Playing Rules of the National League of Professional Base Ball Clubs, (Chicago: A. G. Spalding & Bro., 1877). And following years.
17. For a good summary of these developments, see: Peter Morris, *A Game of Inches: The Stories Behind the Innovations That Shaped Baseball*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006).
18. See, for example, accounts of the Union of Morrisania vs. Surprise May 19, 1866, game in the *New York Sunday Mercury*, May 27, 1866; and Eureka of Newark vs. Union of Morrisania June 12, 1866, in the *New York Sunday Mercury*, June 17, 1866.
19. Richard Hershberger, “When Did Umpires Start Calling Balls and Strikes?” Protoball, July 2014. http://protoball.org/Called_Pitches.
20. Chadwick, “On Scoring In Base Ball.”
21. “Pastimes: Convention of Base-Ball Managers at Cleveland,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 10, 1876.
22. “Hop-Scotch: The Curling Tournament at Lincoln Park, with an Outline of the Game,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1877. Note that the *Tribune* often covered a variety of sports in a single column, like a modern “Digest” or “Roundup” column, and stacked many headlines on top of the piece. Citations for such columns are for the top headline.
23. “Pastimes: Opening Game of the Chicago Ball Season,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 22, 1877.
24. Constitution and Playing Rules, 1880
25. “The Joint Rules Committee Appointed,” *Sporting Life*, June 23, 1886; “A Great Week. Three Important Meetings to be Held,” *Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886.
26. J. F. B., “The Players: The Meeting of Their Executive Council,” *Sporting Life*, November 17, 1886.
27. “The National Game. Forest City, of Rockford, Ill., vs. Atlantic, of Brooklyn—The Atlantics Whipped,” *New York Herald*, June 1, 1870.
28. “The Local Championship: The Philadelphia Club an Easy Winner,” *Sporting Life*, April 21, 1886.
29. O. P. Caylor, “New Rules. Radical Changes by the Joint Committee. The Game to be Almost Revolutionized in Pitching and Batting,” *Sporting Life*, November 24, 1886.
30. Unidentified Boston correspondent, “Base Ball. All the News About the Players and the Clubs,” *Times* (Philadelphia), April 10, 1887.
31. Albert Mott [T. T. T., pseud.], “From Baltimore: Kilroy’s Wonderful Work Against the Athletics,” *Sporting Life*, April 27, 1887.
32. Chadwick, “Chadwick’s Chat: The Old Man’s Estimation of the World’s Championship Series,” *Sporting Life*, October 26, 1887.
33. [Chadwick?], “To Correspondents,” *New York Clipper*, August 5, 1871.
34. [Francis Richter], “Results,” *Sporting Life*, November 23, 1887.
35. [Chadwick], “The Professional Season of 1878,” *New York Clipper*, January 11, 1879.
36. R. M. Larner, “Washington Whispers,” *Sporting Life* May 15, 1889.

Was Keeler the First to Record Four 5-Hit Games in a Season During the Nineteenth Century?

Brian Marshall

The feat of collecting five or more hits in a single game was rare enough, even for baseball in the nineteenth century, but when one player managed to do it in four separate games during a single season, that was one of the rarest accomplishments in the history of baseball. In fact, it was so rare that it was only accomplished once: According to at least three record books, Willie Keeler had four five-hit games in 1897.¹

This piece will provide a short discussion of career five-hit games, introduce the names of two other players who should be included on the list, and bring the reader's attention to a discrepancy that exists regarding Keeler's season totals for at-bats and hits.

WILLIE KEELER 5-HIT GAME ANALYSIS

Keeler's 1897 season included a 44-game hit streak that began with the first game of the season.² While most record books credit him that year as the only player to get five or more hits in a game four times, the 1898 *Reach Guide* only credited him with three such games on page 35, devoted to "Individual Batting Feats."³ Meanwhile, the Information Concepts Incorporated (ICI) game-by-game spreadsheets for Willie Keeler in 1897 only showed two five-hit games.⁴ The plot thickens. See Table 1.

Which was it: two, three, or four? The fact that three separate, credible sources had different answers is

something of a head-scratcher. I consulted my own files, which included electronic copies of various newspapers as well as box scores—created by me—for every game played by Keeler's Baltimore Orioles in 1897.

The four five-hit games that "Little Willie," as he was called by the *Sporting Life*, was credited with by multiple sources were as follows: July 17 at Chicago Colts, August 14 at Philadelphia Phillies, September 3 vs. St. Louis Browns, and the first game of a double-header September 6 vs. Pittsburgh Pirates.⁵ In order to research the claim of these four five-hit games, I looked at the 1898 *Reach Guide* and the ICI game-by-game data sheets for Keeler in 1897, as well as the following publications:

- Three Baltimore newspapers: the *American*, *Sun*, and *Herald*.
- At least one newspaper from the city of the opposing team.
- *The Sporting News*, *Sporting Life*, and *New York Clipper*.
- Miscellaneous newspapers as detailed below.

The *Baltimore American*, *Baltimore Sun*, and *Baltimore Herald* all included box scores in their game coverage, while the *Baltimore World* only provided minimal coverage that typically did not include a box score.

The information for the first game, July 17 at Chicago, is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. 1897 Record Books

Source	Date 1	Date 2	Date 3	Date 4
1. <i>One for the Book</i>	Jul 17	Aug 14	Sept 3	Sept 6 (1)
2. 1898 <i>Reach Guide</i>	not listed	Aug 14	Sept 3	Sept 6 (1)
3. ICI Game Sheets	not listed	Aug 14	not listed	Sept 6 (1)

Table 2. Keeler Five-Hit Game on July 17, 1897

Opponent	at Chicago Colts	AB	Hits
Resources	ICI	7	4
	<i>Baltimore American</i>	7	5
	<i>Baltimore Herald</i>	7	5
	<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	7	5
	<i>Chicago Daily Tribune</i>	7	4
	<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	7	6
	<i>Sporting Life</i>	7	5
	<i>The Sporting News</i>	NA	5
	<i>Reach Guide</i>	NA	NA
	<i>New York Clipper</i>	7	5

The data, where available, are listed for each of the resources. In this case, nine of the 10 resources contained at least hits data. The majority of sources credited Keeler with five or more hits, though two sources—the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, from the home team’s city, and ICI—indicate that he had only four.⁶ The box score in the *Tribune* showed that Keeler reached base on an error. According to the *Baltimore Herald*: “Corbett opened the fifth with a bunt, McGraw hit safely. Keeler bunted to third and Everitt threw wild to first, Corbett and McGraw scoring and Keeler going to third.”⁷

This is exactly the sort of hit Keeler was known for. The play was scored as an error by a Chicago scorer and a hit by the Baltimore scorer, hence the discrepancy in the box scores. According to the scoring rules, the play should have been scored as a hit.⁸ Everitt appears to have been hurried in his effort to field the ball and air-mailed the throw. We can’t know if Everitt might have been able to throw Keeler out if he hadn’t thrown wild to first, nor if it should have been scored a hit, but at the time, Keeler was well established as a “scientific hitter,” and it was well within his skill set to beat out a bunt.⁹ As further validation of July 17 as a five-hit game for Keeler, a short article, dated August 9, in the August 21 issue of *Sporting Life* listed the players with five or more hits in a game to that point and Keeler was credited with one such performance.¹⁰

The information for Keeler’s second five-hit game, an extra-inning game on August 14, 1897, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Keeler Five-Hit Game on August 14, 1897; 10 Innings

		AB	Hits
Opponent	at Philadelphia Phillies		
Resources	ICI	5	5
	<i>Baltimore American</i>	5	5
	<i>Baltimore Herald</i>	5	5
	<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	6	5
	<i>Philadelphia Record</i>	6	5
	<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	5	5
	<i>Detroit Free Press</i>	5	5
	<i>Sporting Life</i>	6	5
	<i>The Sporting News</i>	NA	5
	<i>Reach Guide</i>	NA	5
	<i>New York Clipper</i>	6	5

Table 3 indicates that each of the sources credited Keeler with five hits, although there is disagreement about how many at-bats he had. Four sources, one of them the *Baltimore Sun*, show Keeler with six at-bats rather than five.¹¹ It wasn’t uncommon for box scores in different newspapers to vary in this way. All sources

agree that Keeler had five hits, but it is interesting that the at-bats vary since there isn’t any indication Keeler had a sacrifice hit, walked, or was hit by a pitch. According to the box score, though, he must have batted six times because Hughie Jennings, who batted second, after Keeler, had four at-bats as well as two sacrifice hits for a total of six plate appearances, and Joe Kelley, who batted third, had five at-bats and one sacrifice hit. Keeler must have had six plate appearances, and may have had six at-bats.

Keeler’s third game with five or more hits, on September 3, 1897, is represented in Table 4.

Table 4. Keeler Six-Hit Game on September 3, 1897

		AB	Hits
Opponent	St. Louis Browns Baltimore home game		
Resources	ICI	6	4
	<i>Baltimore American</i>	6	4
	<i>Baltimore Herald</i>	6	5
	<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	6	4
	<i>St. Louis Globe Democrat</i>	6	6
	<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	6	6
	<i>Sporting Life</i>	6	6
	<i>The Sporting News</i>	NA	6
	<i>Reach Guide</i>	NA	6
	<i>New York Clipper</i>	6	6

Again, the resources have conflicting information, with Keeler’s hit total ranging from four to six, though seven of the 10 have him with at least five. The at-bat total is consistent where it’s provided. Keeler wasn’t the only Oriole to collect six hits on September 3. His teammate Jack Doyle did it too, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Doyle Six-Hit Game on September 3, 1897

		AB	Hits
Opponent	St. Louis Browns		
Resources	ICI	6	6
	<i>Baltimore American</i>	6	6
	<i>Baltimore Herald</i>	6	6
	<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	6	6
	<i>St. Louis Globe Democrat</i>	6	6
	<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	6	6
	<i>Sporting Life</i>	6	6
	<i>The Sporting News</i>	NA	6
	<i>Reach Guide</i>	NA	6
	<i>New York Clipper</i>	6	6

The consistency of the Doyle data compared with the inconsistency of the Keeler data may have stemmed from the difference in the two players’ hitting techniques. Keeler’s hits were often of the type that forced

the fielder to hurry the process of both fielding and throwing. That increased the likelihood the play would be muffed. The scorer was then forced to decide between scoring the play as a hit or an error. As with the July 17 game, there was mention in the *Baltimore Sun* that Keeler may have reached first base because of a “fumble” by an infielder:

Reitz opened the second inning with a hit, and, with Robinson, played the run-and-hit neatly. Corbett forced Robinson but Reitz scored. McGraw doubled. Cross’ fumble of Keeler’s grounder allowed Corbett to score. Jennings’ grounder also went through Cross and McGraw scored. Kelley’s double scored Keeler and Jennings, who had just previously made a double steal. Stenzel flied to Harley, but Kelley scored on Doyle’s hit. Reitz flied to Turner.¹²

It’s odd that two of the Baltimore newspapers and the ICI folks credited Keeler with only four hits, considering that at least two publications at the time credited him with six and that virtually every list of six-hit performances published in later years includes Keeler’s September 3 game.¹³ And that’s not to mention Keeler and Doyle commonly credited as being the only two players to have six hits in the same game, teammates or not.¹⁴

The last of the four games was the first game of a doubleheader played on September 6, 1897. The information is in Table 6.

Table 6. Keeler Five-Hit Game on September 6 (1), 1897

		AB	Hits
Opponent	Pittsburgh Pirates		
Resources	ICI	5	5
	<i>Baltimore American</i>	5	5
	<i>Baltimore Herald</i>	5	5
	<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	5	5
	<i>Pittsburgh Chronicle Telegraph</i>	5	4
	<i>Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette</i>	NA	5
	<i>Pittsburgh Dispatch</i>	NA	5
	<i>Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch</i>	NA	5
	<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	5	5
	<i>Sporting Life</i>	5	5
	<i>The Sporting News</i>	NA	5
	<i>Reach Guide</i>	NA	5
	<i>New York Clipper</i>	5	5

It is clear to see that all of the references except one indicated that Keeler had five hits and that all references that listed at-bats credited him with five. The *Pittsburgh Chronicle Telegraph* was the only source that

This photo of Keeler was taken by Charles Conlon after Keeler retired from playing and took a coaching job with the Brooklyn Superbas in 1912.



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showed Keeler with four hits rather than five, and as the reader may guess, it had to do with the assignment of an error for one of Keeler’s hits. The date for this game, September 6, is incorrectly listed as September 5 on page 35 of the 1898 *Reach Guide*. The Baltimore Orioles did not play a game on September 5.

THE OFFICIAL BATTING AVERAGES FOR 1897

At the end of the 1897 season, not everyone was in agreement with Keeler’s “fat” batting average, as it was referred to in a *Sporting Life* article that also alluded to a scoring bias:

Frank Houseman, of St. Louis, is home for the winter. Frank has little to say about the Browns, but has much ridicule for the other teams, and wild kicks against the fat average of Billy Keeler. “In Baltimore one day,” says Frank, “I saw Keeler hoist two flies to left, and Dan Lally muffed them both. Then he hit one to third, and Hartman, after fumbling, threw wild to first. Then he made one good single. Next morning—four hits in the Baltimore papers. Oh, they don’t do a thing for their hitters down there.”¹⁵

An article in *Sporting Life* discussed the accuracy of batting averages and mentioned the work of league executive N.E. Young and his son Robert:

There is little chance for error to creep into official figures after they reach headquarters. Mr. Young and son, Robert, are expert accountants, and as one proves the other’s work mistakes are rare indeed.¹⁶

A *Baltimore American* article also mentioned the Youngs:

President Young's son, Robert, is in the midst of the hardest task that his position imposes—figuring up the averages of the major league players.¹⁷

The Sporting News had the following to say about Keeler's 1897 batting statistics:

The official league base ball figures, compiled by Secretary N.E. Young, give the fine young batsman of the Baltimore Club, William H. Keeler, a higher batting percentage than was accorded him by unofficial competants [sic]. He batted .432 this past season, which means that he made 43 hits for every 100 times at bat. This is batting a little better than two hits every five times at bat, a very fine performance.¹⁸

It would be interesting to see the game-by-game numbers Young's son, Robert, had in front of him when he compiled the "official" batting average for Willie Keeler in 1897.

My research has identified at least one other NL player who had at least five hits in a game four times in a season during the nineteenth century. Sam Thompson of the Detroit Wolverines did it in 1887, predating Keeler's performance by 10 years. Thompson had five or more hits on May 16 at the Philadelphia Quakers; June 10 vs. the Indianapolis Hoosiers; July 25 vs. the Chicago White Stockings; and September 23 vs. the New York Giants. In addition, he may have done it on August 9 against the Washington Nationals at home, but the *Washington Post* and *New York Clipper* both credited him with only four hits.¹⁹

One more name should be added to the list of those who accomplished the feat: Tip O'Neill of the St. Louis Browns. O'Neill's performance also occurred in 1887, although it was in the American Association. His games with five or more hits were: April 30 vs. Cleveland; August 24 vs. the Baltimore Orioles; September 2 at the Metropolitans; and September 7 at Brooklyn. Since both the Thompson and O'Neill performances were in 1887, when bases on balls were typically included in the hit column, I only considered "actual" hits in each case. Those can be found in the *New York Clipper* box scores because the *Clipper*, unlike most other publications, didn't go along with counting bases on balls as hits.²⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The data presented in this analysis lean heavily in support of the proposition that Willie Keeler did have four games during the 1897 season in which he had

five or more hits. The majority, and in one case all, of the contemporary sources for each of the four games supports Keeler's achievement being genuine, as do several record books.

My analysis identified scoring discrepancies in both at-bats and hits, and I suspect that given the nature of fielding at the time, many of the plays could have been scored as errors. I also suspect that while many scorers interpreted the rules properly, home-team bias existed. It would be interesting to have some insight into the thought process that went into ICI's compilation of its game-by-game batting data for Keeler in 1897. I'm quite sure, given the box-score discrepancies, that the ICI folks also had to make decisions about which data they believed were the most correct. Unfortunately, ICI did not provide notes that detailed its process of data qualification or listed the resources it used.

We can see how ICI was prone to errors if we consider the home run it credited to Keeler for the July 11, 1897, game against the St. Louis Browns.²¹ I've reviewed game accounts and box scores from many sources for that game and have yet to see one that credits Keeler with a home run. The game was played in St. Louis and there was a Baltimore home run, but it was hit by Jake Stenzel, not Keeler. Stenzel also hit a triple in the game. Many Eastern newspapers of the time, including those in Baltimore, the *Sporting Life*, and the *New York Clipper*, did a strange thing: They didn't list "three base hits" below the box score, only "two base hits" and "home runs." Interestingly the newspapers for Western teams did list "three base hits." Stenzel went 4-for-5 and hit for the cycle in that July 11 game, but it might have been missed depending on the newspaper a person had access to. ICI correctly credited Stenzel with hitting for the cycle on July 11, 1897, which shows that the source(s) the ICI folks were using included "three base hits."

Research into Keeler's performance has also identified two other names, Sam Thompson and Tip O'Neill, that should be added to the list of those who managed to have five or more hits in a game four times in one season.

GENERAL NOTES ABOUT FIVE-HIT GAME PERFORMANCES

The research for this analysis also identified an error in the number of career five-hit games credited to an individual. The 2016 *Elias Book of Baseball Records* indicates that Ty Cobb holds the lifetime record with 14 such games. My research indicates that Cap Anson had at least 16 games in his NL career with five or more hits. I have documented, to date, over 2,000 discrete

four-plus-hit performances by an individual in the NL during the nineteenth century. The list, a living document that is constantly changing as new information is uncovered, includes nearly 400 five-hit performances. Anson had at least 50 games with exactly four hits to go along with his 16 five-hit games, for a total of at least 66 career games with four hits or more.²²

Prior to the writing of this article, the general thinking, per the information contained in the record books identified in this article, was that Keeler in the NL and Cobb in the AL were the first two players to have five hits in a single game on four separate occasions during a single season. We now know there were at least two other players, one in the NL and one in the AA, who had four five-hit games 10 years prior to Keeler's performance. (A comparison of the five-hit games of Sam Thompson, Tip O'Neill, Willie Keeler, and Ty Cobb may be found in Appendix 1.)

The research for this article is an excellent example of the data discrepancies a researcher encounters when studying nineteenth-century baseball. The researcher has to be wary of conflicting information, and a box score should not be considered gospel unless it is the only box score that exists for a given game. Quite often, once multiple sources have been reviewed, some interpretation is required in order to better identify the correct data. The more game accounts, box scores, game notes, and data researchers have at their fingertips the better, but it can still be a bit of a crapshoot. It is for these very reasons that researching nineteenth-century baseball can be challenging, but also rewarding. ■

The author presented some of this material at the SABR Nineteenth Century Baseball Conference at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown on April 17, 2015.

Appendix 1.

Table 6. Player Comparison of 5-Plus-Hit Games

PLAYER	Thompson	O'Neill	Keeler	Cobb
LEAGUE	NL	AA	NL	AL
SEASON	1887	1887	1897	1922
Category				
Number of 5 Hit Games	4 (5)	4	3	4
Number of 6 Hit Games	0	0	1	0
Most in One Month	1	2 (Sept)	2 (Sept)	3 (July)
<Nine Inning Games	1	2	0	0
Nine Inning Games	3 (4)	2	3	4
>Nine Inning Games	0	0	1	0

Notes

1. Leonard Getelson, *One for the Book: All-Time Baseball Records* (St. Louis: Charles C. Spink & Son, 1963); Seymour Siwoff, ed., *The Book of Baseball Records* (New York: Seymour Siwoff, 1982); Siwoff, ed., *The Elias Book of Baseball Records* (New York: Seymour Siwoff, 2016). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the feat has been accomplished by Ty Cobb in 1922, Stan Musial in 1948, Tony Gwynn in 1993, and Ichiro Suzuki in 2004.
2. Keeler had a hit in the last game of the 1896 season, so his hit streak can be considered to be 45 games.
3. A. J. Reach, *Reach's Official Base Ball Guide for 1898* (Philadelphia: A. J. Reach, 1898, reprinted by Horton Publishing, 1990).
4. *The Baseball Encyclopedia: The Complete and Official Record of Major League Baseball* (New York: Macmillan, 1969). David Nef was the man behind ICI. Its research and data formed the basis for the *Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia* of 1969.
5. "Little Willie: Some Facts About a Great Ballplayer," *Sporting Life*, July 3, 1897.
6. "Champions Slaughter the Colts," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 18, 1897.
7. "Champs Hit For Keeps," *Baltimore Herald*, Sunday, July 18, 1897.
8. Reach, *Reach's Official Base Ball Guide for 1897*. Rule 71: Scoring, Section 3 (under Batting) reads that a base hit should be scored "when a hit ball is hit so sharply to an Infielder that he cannot handle it in time to put out the Batsman" or "when a hit ball is hit so slowly toward a Fielder that he cannot handle it in time to put out the Batsman."
9. "Little Willie."
10. "Anson's Five Hits," *Sporting Life*, August 21, 1897.
11. "Won From Philadelphia," *Baltimore Sun*, August 16, 1897.
12. "Browns Overwhelmed," *Baltimore Sun*, September 4, 1897.
13. George L. Moreland, *Balldom: The Britannica of Baseball, Fascinating Facts For Fans*, Fourth Ed. (Youngstown, OH: Balldom Company, 1927), 161; John B. Foster, ed., *The Little Red Book: Spalding's Official Base Ball Record*, (New York: American Sports Publishing, 1928), 70; Gettelson, *One for the Book* (1963); "Batting Feats: A Few of the Records Made During the 1897 Campaign," *Sporting Life*, December 25, 1897.
14. Reach, *Reach's Official Base Ball Guide for 1898*; Moreland, *Balldom*.
15. "Odds and Ends," *Sporting Life*, October 23, 1897.
16. "Comment on the League's Official Batting Averages," *Sporting Life*, October 23, 1897.
17. "Gossip of the Diamond," *Baltimore American*, October 10, 1897.
18. "Model Player: Is Keeler the League's Best Bater?" *The Sporting News*, October 30, 1897.
19. "Lost By Poor Fielding," *Washington Post*, August 10, 1887; "Baseball: National League: Detroit vs Washington," *New York Clipper*, August 20.
20. "Short Stops," *New York Clipper*, April 30, 1887.
21. With the ICI data representing the basis for the *Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia*, the incorrect Keeler home run datum was replicated there, but *Total Baseball*, for example, corrected the error. John Thorn & Pete Palmer, eds., *Total Baseball* (New York: Warner Books, 1989).
22. I use the phrase "at least" because I noted the performances as I came across them, but I wasn't specifically researching the literature for them, and as a result may have missed one or more along the way.

Origin of the Phrase “Hitting for the Cycle” and an Approach to How Cycles Occur

Michael Huber and Allison Davidson

One of the most exciting accomplishments in major league baseball is exciting because of its rarity. When a batter *hits for the cycle*, he gets a single, double, triple, and home run in the same game. From 1876 through the end of the 2017 regular season, there have been only 319 instances of a batter accomplishing this feat.¹ Given that there have been 214,651 games played, hitting for the cycle is indeed a rare event, as it has occurred in fewer than 1% of all games (0.149%, to be more precise).² To date, no game has seen more than one batter hit for the cycle.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, we will provide evidence of when the phrase *hitting for the cycle* was popularized by the media to describe the feat, and how the phrase evolved to what we use today. Throughout the paper, we will use bold font to indicate the actual cycle descriptors found in the newspapers of the day. Not until the 70th occurrence of a cycle did someone in the media try to characterize the four different hits with a common label, and more than 20 additional occurrences took place before the characterization was popularized as “hitting for the cycle” and used throughout the country. Second, we will provide descriptive statistics on the event itself and how attaining the cycle has changed over time. In recent seasons, the order in which a batter is most likely to attain a cycle has changed, especially in regards to the final hit. For example, is the last hit of a cycle most likely a triple? Has it always been that way?

THE FIRST CYCLE

Charles “Curry” Foley became the first batter to hit for the cycle on May 25, 1882, hitting a bases-loaded home run in the first inning, a triple in the second, a double in the fifth, and a single in the seventh. Foley had 10 total bases in six at-bats, and his cycle occurred in reverse natural order. A natural cycle indicates that the hits are in order of total bases with single first, then double, triple, and home run. A reverse natural cycle indicates the opposite order. Buffalo blasted the Cleveland Blues, 20–1, of which four runs were scored by Foley.³ He was clearly the hero for the Buffalo Bisons

on this day, however the daily newspapers described Foley’s accomplishment without much fanfare.

Some sources (including Retrosheet and Baseball-Reference.com) list that George Hall is actually the first person to hit for the cycle, in a game on June 14, 1876. Michael Huber, an author of this paper, discovered an entry on Baseball-Reference.com and then researched the game in several newspaper accounts. Hall, playing for the Athletic Club of Philadelphia, did get five hits in the contest against the Cincinnati Red Stockings, and all newspaper sources agree that he had a single, a home run, and at least two triples. However, the *Philadelphia Times* (the hometown paper) reported that Hall also had a double, thus meeting the definition of a cycle, while the *New York Clipper* and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* each reported three triples and no double (see Note 1). In Huber’s summary of the game, he cites SABR author Matt Albertson, who writes that John Thorn, the official Historian of Major League Baseball, does not believe that Hall hit for the cycle. Therefore, as this cycle is in dispute, we do not include it in our study. Foley’s performance is clear: four different type hits in the same game.

Since Foley’s cycle in 1882, there have been 318 additional cycles through 2017. A frequency chart, by season, of the number of times a batter has hit for the cycle is shown in Figure 1. There have been two seasons—1933 and 2009—where eight cycles occurred, each by a different batter. There have been many seasons where no batter hit for the cycle.

As another way to view the data, we will show the distribution by era. The website NetShrine.com divides professional baseball into seven eras: 19th Century Era (1876–1900), Dead Ball Era (1901–19), Lively Ball Era (1920–41), Integration Era (1942–60), Expansion Era (1961–76), Free Agency Era (1977–93), and Long Ball Era (1994–2005).⁴ We extend this last group to 2017, to include the current games. The distribution of cycles by era is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows the number of cycles increased drastically during the Lively Ball Era. In fact, every season in the Lively Ball Era produced at least one cycle.

As not every era has the same number of games played, Figure 3 displays the number of cycles per 1000 games by decade. As was seen in the increase in the number of cycles during the Lively Ball Era (1920s and 1930s), the rate of attaining a cycle drastically increased in the 1920s and 1930s as well. It is perhaps because of this explosion of cycles that writers began penning different phrases to describe the event, settling on the term *cycle* in the early 1930s, the middle portion of the Lively Ball Era.

“HITTING FOR THE CYCLE”

According to *The Dickson Baseball Dictionary*, the first printed use of hit for the cycle was in 1933.⁵ The *Washington Post* described Philadelphia’s Jimmie Foxx’s accomplishment of August 14, 1933, with, “[Jimmie Foxx] is one of only six players in all major league history to ‘hit for the cycle,’ that is, get a single, double, triple and homer in four times at bat in one game.”⁶ That article appeared on September 27, 1933. The other five players were not listed in the article.

However, the word *cycle* was actually used in context twelve years earlier! In the August 21, 1921, edition of the *Tennessean*, it was reported that George Sisler “hit the cycle” (see Figure 4).⁷

We found no mention of the word *cycle* for another ten years. Then, on May 18, 1931, Brooklyn Robins batter Babe Herman had four different hits in a home game at Ebbets Field against Cincinnati. This was Herman’s first of two cycles of the season (the other coming on July 24 against Pittsburgh at Forbes Field) and of three in his career. An Associated Press (AP) story dated May 18, 1931 (See Figure 5), printed in the *Reading Times* (Reading, PA) became just the second citation of the word *cycle* praising a batter’s collection of the four hits.⁸

Herman had indeed “found his batting eye in a big way.”⁹ The AP story did not use the entire phrase *hit for the cycle*, and the word *cycle* was only used in the headline, but this is only the second time in ten years the four different hits were labeled in what we note today as a *cycle*. The July 25 papers describing Herman’s prowess did not use the word *cycle*.

Although Herman was praised for his baseball feat, not all players with the same accomplishment received similar accolades. During the next season, on June 3, 1932, Tony Lazzeri of the New York Yankees hit a single, double, triple, and home run (as well as another single before the home run, and the homer was with the bases loaded) against the Philadelphia Athletics, in a 20–13 shoot-out New York win. Lazzeri’s rare feat had practically no mention to be found in print, as it

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of cycles, 1882–2017

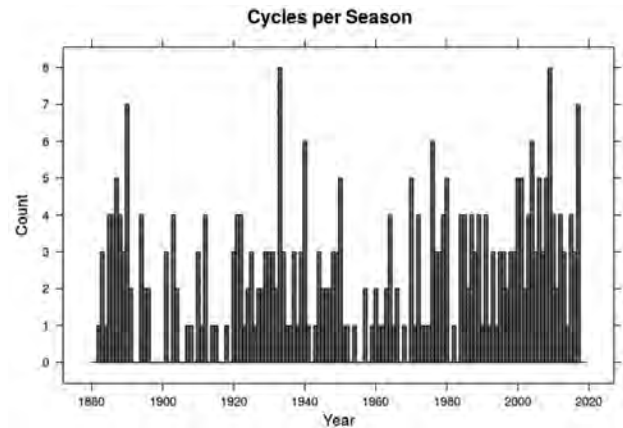


Figure 2. Frequency distribution of cycles by era

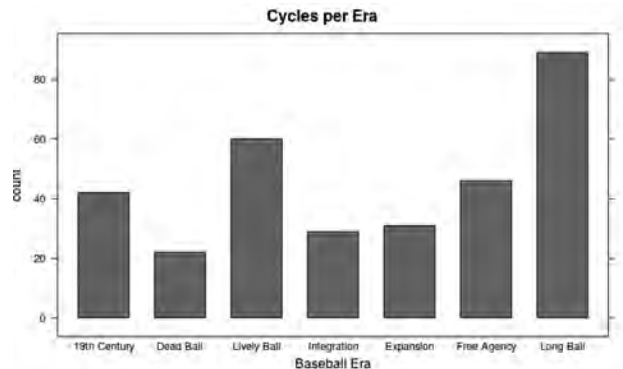


Figure 3. Rate of Cycles (per 1000 games) by Decade

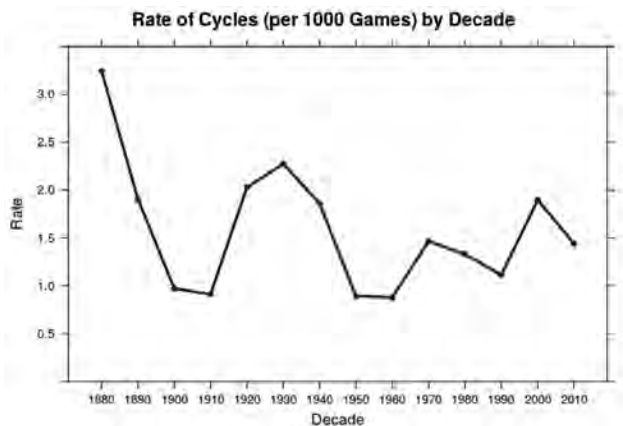


Figure 4. Mention of cycle in *Tennessean*, August 21, 1921

George Sisler on August 13 hit the cycle by getting on a single, double, triple and home run, and by getting an extra double the same game, George turned in the best total base record for one game, 12 bases, since June 28, 1916, when Rogers Hornsby got five hits for a dozen bases.

Figure 5. Headline and story in *Reading Times*, May 18, 1931

HERMAN HITS CYCLE AS ROBINS SLAM REDS, 14-4

BROOKLYN, May 18 (AP).—Brooklyn's latent batting power finally broke loose today and smothered four Cincinnati hurlers under a 14 to 4 score. The victory gave the Robins two out of three for the series.

Babe Herman found his batting eye in a big way, smashing a single, double, triple and home run in five times at bat. He drove in five runs, scored four and stole a base. His teammate, Frederick, also hit a homer.

Hollis Thurston went the route for the winners to mark up his first victory of the year.

CINCINNATI						BROOKLYN					
ab	r	h	e	s	a	ab	r	h	e	s	a
Roush cf	4	0	3	1	0	Thompson 2b	4	2	1	3	1
Crisbee cf	1	0	0	0	0	O'Doul lf	5	0	0	0	0
Wescoe lf	4	0	0	4	0	Herman rf	5	4	4	2	1
Stripp 3b	4	0	0	0	2	Bissonette 1b	4	1	2	0	0
Hendrick 1b	4	1	1	1	1	Wright ss	3	2	1	0	2
Roetiger lf	4	0	2	0	0	Slade ss	0	0	0	0	0
Cuccinello 2b	4	1	1	3	2	Frederick cf	4	2	2	2	0
Pord ss	4	0	1	2	3	Gilbert 3b	3	1	3	3	3
Sukeforth e	4	2	3	5	0	Lombardi c	5	1	1	1	0
Eckert p	0	0	0	0	0	Thurston p	3	1	2	0	1
Carroll p	2	0	1	1	2						
Wysong p	1	0	0	0	1	Totals	38	14	18	27	9
Ogden p	0	0	0	0	1						
Lucas	1	0	0	0	0						
Totals	37	4	12	24	12						

abatted for Ogden in 9th.

SCORE BY INNINGS

Cincinnati..... 0 0 1 0 0 0 1 1 1—4
 Brooklyn..... 4 0 0 1 1 4 0 x—14

Errors—Cucinello, Carroll, Bissonette.
 Runs batted in—Roush, Sukeforth, Herman, 5; Gilbert, 3; Frederick, 2; Bissonette, 2; O'Doul, Wright, Roetiger, Lucas. Two base hits—Cuccinello, Sukeforth, Thompson, Frederick, Gilbert, Herman, Roetiger. Three base hit—Herman. Home runs—Herman, Frederick. Stolen bases—Herman, Gilbert, Lombardi. Double plays—Wright, Thompson and Bissonette; Gilbert and Bissonette; Carroll and Hendrick; Cuccinello and Sukeforth. Left on bases—Cincinnati, 6; Brooklyn, 7. Base on balls—off Eckert, 1; Carroll, 2; Wysong, 3; Ogden, 1. Struck out—by Carroll, 2; Thurston, 1; Wysong, 1. Hits—off Eckert, 3 in 2-3 innings; Carroll, 8 in 3 1-3; none out in 5th; Wysong, 5 in 2 2-3; Ogden, 0 in 1 1-3. Losing pitcher—Eckert. Umpires—Phrman, Clarke and Reardon. Time—1:55.

occurred in the same game where teammate Lou Gehrig tied a record by belting four home runs. There was no mention of a cycle.¹⁰ (Curiously, Gehrig didn't earn much press either, as more than half of *The New York Times'* sport section's front page was devoted to Giants' manager John McGraw announcing his retirement.)

A month later on July 22, 1932, Mickey Cochrane of the Philadelphia Athletics collected the four necessary hits against Washington. Running an AP story of the game (Figure 6), the *Great Falls Tribune* (Great Falls, MT) used the following headline: "Mickey Cochrane Gets Four Hits of Different Lengths and Is Game's Star."¹¹

The *Tennessean* (Nashville, TN) ran the same AP story under a different headline (see Figure 7): "Cochrane Hits a 'Circle' as A's Crush Senators."

The AP story started with, "Running the base hit gamut, Mickey Cochrane led the Philadelphia Athletics

to an easy 8 to 4 victory today over Washington. The Philadelphia catcher hammered a single, double, triple and home run."¹³ Notice how the two papers used *circle* and *hits of different lengths* to link the type of hit with the number of total bases for the hit. Further, the story's use of *gamut* gave the reader the impression that Cochrane had made every kind of hit possible.

A record eight different major-league batters hit for the cycle in 1933.¹⁴ The first five (the St. Louis Cardinals' Pepper Martin on May 5 against the Philadelphia Phillies, the Phillies' Chuck Klein on May 26 against St. Louis, the Pittsburgh Pirates' Arky Vaughan on June 24 against the Brooklyn Dodgers, the Philadelphia Athletics' Mickey Cochrane on August 2 against the New York Yankees, and the Athletics' Pinky Higgins on August 6 against the Washington Nationals, colloquially known as the Senators) received praise for their many hits, but no mention of a *cycle* appeared in newspaper print. Then came Foxx and Averill.

Foxx's rare feat took place on August 14, 1933, but the citation from the *Washington Post* did not appear in print until September 27. The day after Foxx's achievement against the Cleveland Indians, the *Reading Times* revived the term and printed the following headline in their account of the A's-Indians game (see Figure 8): "Foxx Wallops Cycle to Drive In Nine Runs as A's Win 11-5."¹⁵

Figure 6. Headline in *Great Falls Tribune*, July 23, 1932

Mickey Cochrane Gets Four Hits of Different Lengths and Is Game's Star

Figure 7. Headline in *Tennessean*, July 23, 1932

COCHRANE HITS A 'CIRCLE' AS A'S CRUSH SENATORS

Mickey Gets Single, Double, Triple and Homer.

Figure 8. Headline in *Reading Times*, August 15, 1933

Foxx Wallops Cycle to Drive In Nine Runs as A's Win 11-5

Tigers Put On Batting Splurge In Seventh to Defeat Sox, 6-5; Rookie Hurler Lasts But Three Frames

CLEVELAND, Aug. 14 (P)—Slashing out a home run, triple, double, and single to drive in nine runs for a new American league record, Jimmie Foxx today led the Philadelphia Athletics to a 11 to 5 victory over the Cleveland Indians in the Mackmen's first game of their last western invasion.

Foxx opened his one-man attack in the first inning, hitting a triple with Roger Cramer and Mickey Cochrane camped on the bases, and then followed up that blast with his thirty-fifth home run of the season in the second with all of the sacks occupied.

On his third appearance at the plate in the fourth inning, the A's first baseman connected with a double, again sending Cochrane across the plate. A single in the sixth with Eric McNair and Cramer on the bases scored two more runs and gave Foxx his new record. He struck out on his last time at bat.

The old mark of eight runs batted in was set by Topsy Hartzell, of the Yankees, in 1911, and has since been equaled by Harry Heilmann, Lou Gehrig, Carl Reynolds and Earl Averill. Foxx's performance left him still three short of the major league record of 12 made by Jim Bottomley, of the Cardinals, in 1924.

The Majors

NATIONAL LEAGUE

W. L. Pct.	W. L. Pct.
New York 62 42 .594	Boston 58 52 .527
Pittsburgh 61 48 .560	Philadelphia 45 61 .425
Chicago 61 49 .555	Brooklyn 42 62 .410
St. Louis 59 52 .532	Cincinnati 44 61 .396

YESTERDAY'S RESULTS

At Philadelphia-New York, rain.
Only game scheduled.

TODAY'S GAMES

St. Louis at Philadelphia.
Chicago at Boston.

The word *cycle* again appears only in the headline and not in the story.

The use of the word *cycle* continued when two days after this headline, on August 17, 1933, Cleveland's Earl Averill also hit a single, double, triple, and home run in a game against Foxx's Athletics. On August 18, four different newspapers used *cycle* in their accounts of that game. "Earl Averill achieved a **cycle of hits** when he birched the ball for a single, double, triple and home run to top the winning forces."¹⁶ The author of this article for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, James C. Isaminger, was also the editor of the *Reach Official American League Guide*, yet his guides did not use the term *hitting for the cycle* until after the *Reach Guide* merged with the *Spalding Guide* in the mid-1930s. The *News-Journal* (Mansfield, OH) posted the headline, "Averill **Hits For Cycle**: Pounds Out Home Run, Triple, Double, and Single to Lead Indians to Win Over Athletics, 15 to 4" as part of a United Press (UP) story.¹⁷ And in the *Des Moines Register*, "Averill's stickwork **completed the cycle**, a single, a double, a triple and a home run."¹⁸ Finally, *The Sporting News* reported, "Earl Averill, Cleveland, **completes cycle** in hitting single, double, triple and home run."¹⁹

The final cycle of the 1933 season was hit by the Chicago Cubs' Babe Herman on September 30 against St. Louis. The next day, fans read (although not in the

Chicago Tribune) that "Babe Herman did a big day's work to help the Cubs in their drive down the stretch. He contributed a **cycle of safeties**, a single, double, triple and home run, and blasted four runs across the plate."²⁰ Herman became the third batter to ever hit for the cycle three times, and he is the only one of the three whose heroics were described with the word *cycle*. To date, Babe Herman is one of four players that have hit for the cycle three times in their careers. The others are John Reilly, Bob Meusel, and Adrian Beltre.

In early 1934, *The Sporting News* listed highlights of the 1933 season, stating, "The **hitting for a cycle** (single, double, triple and home run) by four American League players, Foxx, Cochrane, Averill and Higgins."²¹ There was no similar column in this issue for the National League.

Although the label was gaining recognition, it did take a few seasons until *hit for the cycle* was generally used. In 1934, Doc Cramer of the Philadelphia Athletics hit for the cycle against the New York Yankees on June 10. James C. Isaminger wrote in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "Moreover, the Jersey man made what is known in baseball as a **cycle of hits**. He hit a single, double, triple, and a home run, every one as clean as a shirt from the laundry."²² Isaminger hints that this phrase had now become somewhat commonplace. Later in the same season, Lou Gehrig (New York Yankees, June 25) and Moose Solters (Boston Red Sox, August 19) both hit for the cycle but the papers did not mention the word *cycle*.

Black's Annual Baseball Schedule and Sport Information was advertised in *The Sporting News*, on April 18, 1935, with "**Hit for a Cycle**" as part of the contents.²³ There is no mention of the cycle occurrence in Black's 1934 guide.

Various descriptions were still employed for the next few years. On June 29, 1935, Ducky Medwick of the St. Louis Cardinals hit for the cycle against the Cincinnati Reds. J. Roy Stockton of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* wrote, "Medwick gets **cycle of hits**. Joe Medwick, who has done much to keep the Cardinals as high as they are, **hit a cycle of safeties**, a single, double, triple, and home run, driving in three of the St. Louis tallies."²⁴

The next season, the sole occurrence belonged to New York Giants' Sam Leslie, who did so against the Philadelphia Phillies on May 24, 1936. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* printed the following as a description: "Leslie vied with his American League contemporaries by getting five hits out of five times at bat, including **the complete album of hits**, a homer, a triple, a double, and two singles."²⁵

It appears as if the phrase had become more widely used by 1937. When Detroit's Gee Walker cycled against the Cleveland Indians on Opening Day, April 20, 1937, W.W. Edgar of the *Detroit Free Press* penned, "Of course, [pitcher Elden Auker] got a lot of help from his supporting cast, especially 'Gee' Walker, the Reconstructed Rebel, who **hit for the cycle** with a home run, a triple, a two-base hit, and a single for a perfect day at the plate."²⁶

Yet three months later, a new phrase was introduced to describe the quartet of hits. *The Daily Journal* (Vineland, NJ) printed the headline "Yankees' Slugger In **Rare Feat**" after Yankees sensation Joe DiMaggio hit for the cycle on July 9, 1937. In the AP story, readers

found that "Joe DiMaggio **collected a 'grand slam,' or every type of base hit**, yesterday afternoon, as the New York Yankees drubbed Washington, 16-2, in the opener of a three-game series at Yankee Stadium."²⁷ This was a unique way to characterize a cycle. When DiMaggio's teammate Lou Gehrig hit for the cycle on August 1, 1937, for the second time in his career, the newspapers wrote the following:

- "Gehrig led the assault on Lou Koupal and his two successors by **hitting for the cycle**, getting a triple, double, and single, in addition to his homer, and driving in three runs."²⁸
- "The Yanks got 17 hits, Lou Gehrig **hitting for a 'cycle'**—home run, triple, double and single."²⁹
- "Gehrig Leads Assault With '**Cycle**' Hits" (headline). "Gehrig led the assault on Lou Koupal and his two successors by **hitting for the cycle**, getting a triple, double, and single, in addition to his homer, and driving in three runs."³⁰

By 1938, it seems that the phrase to describe this rare event was indeed commonplace. In *The Sporting News*, the following were mentioned from 1938 to 1941:

- "Lloyd James Waner...had distinction this season of **hitting for the cycle** against Brooklyn."³¹
- "Sam Chapman, the ex-California collegian, returned to the line-up and **hit for the cycle**, collecting a single, double, triple and home run, all blows being as clean as the Duke of Windsor's shirt front."³²
- "July 13: Johnny Mize **hits for cycle**, making twenty-second home run, in first game, as Cardinals drive in winning runs in ninth inning of each contest to sweep double-header from Giants."³³
- "The third triumph against Cleveland saw Buddy Rosar **hit for the cycle**. Only 17 times in the history of the American League had this feat been accomplished."³⁴
- "Joe [Cronin] **hit for the cycle**—a homer, triple, double and single—and inasmuch as the triple and double were hit off Buck Newsom, the day was complete for Joe."³⁵
- "Just a week after his marriage, Buddy [Rosar] hit Al Milnar of the Indians for a home run with the bases full, and the next day, also batting

Figure 9. Advertisement in *The Sporting News*, April 18, 1935

NO ONE CAN AFFORD TO BE WITHOUT ONE

Five Dollars Worth of Information for Twenty-Five Cents!

THE BASEBALL FAN'S FRIEND

Black's ANNUAL 25¢

Base-Ball Schedule & Sport Information

CONTENTS:

Outstanding Events in Sports; The "Jinx" Column; How The Teams Beat Each Other; "Babe" Ruth; Ten Leading Pitchers and Individual Batters; Ten Leading Home-Run Hitters; Pitchers Who Pitched One and Two-Hit Games; Hit for a Cycle; Three Home Runs in One Game; Home Runs As Pinch-Hitters; Happenings in Baseball and Sports; Official Schedule-Season 1935; American and National League Rosters; Pictures of Players.

The Most Complete Booklet of Its Kind Ever Published.

Subscription price, 3-years (1935-'36-'37) for \$9.00; Single copy mailed for 25c. Coin or stamps.

JOE BLACK, Publisher

241 Capitol Street.
CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

Settle your argument!

13th EDITION

against the Indians, he **hit for the cycle**—a single, a double, a triple and a homer. ‘I got an especial kick **hitting for that cycle**,’ added Buddy. ‘I am only the eighteenth American League player to accomplish the feat, and the fourth Yankee, the others being Lou Gehrig, Bob Meusel and Joe DiMaggio. It puts me in the records with some pretty good people, Sisler, Cochrane, Foxx, Averill, to say nothing of those three famous Yankees.’”³⁶

This last entry shows that even the players now knew the importance of the phrase, *hitting for the cycle*, even though Rosar’s cycle was the 121st in Major League history. From this time forward, it seems that each event of a batter getting the four hits was described as hitting for the cycle. Further, batters today who achieved the rare feat of hitting for the cycle seem to be just as excited as Rosar was.

In summary, *The Dickson Baseball Dictionary* is not inaccurate in claiming the first use of *hit for the cycle* in the *Washington Post* article. The 1921 *Tennessean* should be given credit for first use, as it reported that Sisler “hit the cycle.” However, the phrase “hitting for the cycle” became popular in the national media more than ten years later, in the early-to-mid 1930s.

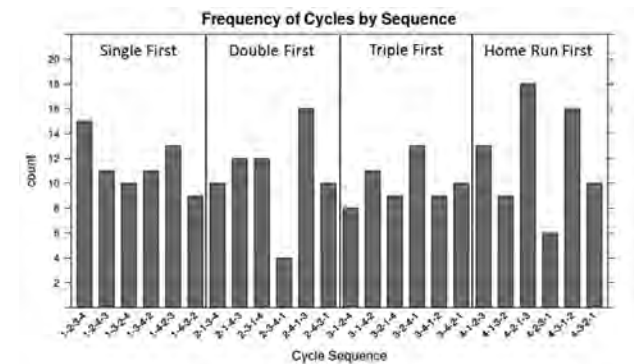
PROBABILITIES

Does the order matter? While it may not appear that the order of hits in a given cycle is important, we offer the following statistical approach simply as a matter of interest. On August 14, 2015, Matt Kemp became the first player for the San Diego Padres to hit for the cycle. Until that contest, there had been 7,444 games without a Padres batter hitting for the cycle.³⁷ After the game, Kemp told reporters, “Anytime you make history, it’s special. Not everybody does that, I’m just glad I got the opportunity to do it. I’ve come close plenty of times. I’ve just never gotten that one hit I definitely needed. That triple is the hardest one to get.”³⁸ Other ballplayers have stated this sentiment, too. Can we quantify which of the four hits is the hardest?

Of the 319 official instances of a batter hitting for the cycle, we have discovered the sequences of 265 of them by sifting through newspaper accounts and box scores. There are four factorial ($4! = 24$) ways to hit for the cycle. Of the known sequences (83.1% of the total), the most common is the HR–2B–1B–3B, with 18 occurrences. Figure 10 shows each different sequence and the total number of times it has occurred (in 265, not 319, events).

Close behind the most frequent sequence are the 2B–HR–1B–3B sequence and HR–3B–1B–2B with 16

Figure 10. Frequency of cycles by sequence (of 265 known sequences)



occurrences each, followed by the 1B–2B–3B–HR (the natural cycle) with 15 occurrences. The sequence with the fewest counts is the 2B–3B–HR–1B (just four times).

We may never know the sequence of all cycles, as newspaper accounts in the early seasons were vague and unfortunately, play-by-play data are not currently available for almost all games before the 1922 season. For example, we know that New York Giants slugger Sam Leslie hit for the cycle in a game against the Philadelphia Phillies at the Polo Grounds on May 24, 1936, but the play-by-play data are not available. The box score shows his different hits in the Giants’ victory but not the order of occurrence. We do however have every sequence for every cycle since 1937, and we are only missing two sequences since 1921.

Another way of viewing the specific sequences of cycles is to explore how often each type of hit was attained first, second, third, and last. Figure 11 lists the probabilities of each type of hit and when in the order it has occurred.

Figure 11. Probabilities of type of hit in the sequence

Order the Hit Occurred in the Cycle				
Type of Hit	First	Second	Third	Last
Single	26.04%	23.77%	30.18%	20.00%
Double	24.15%	27.17%	24.15%	24.53%
Triple	22.64%	23.77%	22.26%	31.32%
Home Run	27.17%	25.28%	23.40%	24.15%

Figure 11 shows that of the hits that occur last in the cycle, triples occur most frequently at 31.32%. Nearly as frequent is having the third hit be a single at 30.18%. The most infrequent occurrence is having the last hit of the cycle be a single with 20.00%.

Fans often ask, “Which hit is the hardest to attain?” Perhaps a similar but more quantifiable question is, “Which hit has the highest probability of being the fourth hit in the sequence?” We have seen in Figure 10

that of all known cycles, the triple occurs last most frequently, but one may wonder if this was always the case or if this is a more recent trend. The following charts depict how these probabilities have shifted over the seasons.

In Figure 12, the Dead Ball Era shows a noticeable spike in percentage of triples being the last hit, and what appears to be a dramatic decline into the Lively Ball Era. With the limited play-by-play information, there are only five known sequences in the Dead Ball Era, two of which were completed by Fred Clarke (of the Pittsburgh Pirates) and in both of his cycles, he hit the triple last.

Another noticeable trend seen in Figure 12 is a steady increase in the percentage of last hits that are triples since the Lively Ball Era; in particular, another relatively large spike in the Free Agency Era. With the Long Ball Era having the largest number of cycles and the Free Agency Era having the third largest number of cycles, all of which we have the full sequence in which the cycle occurred, there seems to be a significant trend.

We acknowledge that Figure 12 can be busy, given that the data span over 140 seasons. As the Free Agency Era begins in the late 1970s, we zoom in on the last five decades in Figure 13. We can see that in all but the 1990s, triples have been the last hit for a larger proportion of the cycles than any other hit (in the 1990s there were eight cycles where the home run was the final hit and seven with the triple as the last hit). If the last of the four hits is viewed by the batter and fans as the “hardest,” then Figure 13 seems to lend credibility that the triple might be the hardest hit to get in accomplishing a cycle.

If one were to show using probabilities that a certain type of hit (single, double, triple, or home run) is the hardest to attain, one would need to explore the frequency of all hits, and the type of hit that occurred

the least would arguably be the hardest to attain. By focusing on cycles, the probabilities we examine are conditional on the fact that we know one of each type of hit occurred. We no longer want to look for the hit that occurs infrequently, but rather explore the order in which the hits take place. It can be argued then that the hits that occur in the first at-bats are perhaps easier to attain than hits that occur last in the sequence. Therefore, if a certain type of hit occurs more often as the last hit in the sequence, it can be viewed as the hardest of the four types of hits.

Statistically speaking, the triple is the last hit significantly more frequently than any other hit in the last five decades ($p\text{-value} = 0.0002$, $\chi^2 = 19.45$, degrees of freedom = 3). In other words, if one assumes that all permutations of cycles are equally likely to occur over the last 50 years, the probability one would see the same percentage of triples being hit last as displayed in Figure 13 is 0.0002 (or 0.02%). In both the 1980s and 2010s there have been twice as many triples as the last hit than home runs, the next most frequent last hit. In the 2000s, the frequency of triples as the last hit to complete the cycle was nearly twice that of singles. For the hits to have the same level of difficulty, the trends would hover around 25% for each. We can see in Figure 13 that the percentage of triples being hit last has been far above 25% for the last several decades. There have been 40 instances of a batter hitting for the cycle in the last ten seasons (2008–17). In half of those (20 times), the batter hit the triple last.

We can conclude that, for the last close-to-50 years, triples are most likely to be the final hit which completes the cycle. Our research has studied just the four hits, not taking into account the number of at-bats (how often has it been only four at-bats?) or the number of hits (some batters have had more than four hits in accomplishing the cycle). In those instances, we do not include extra hits of the same

Figure 12. Line graph of the percentage last hit by baseball era

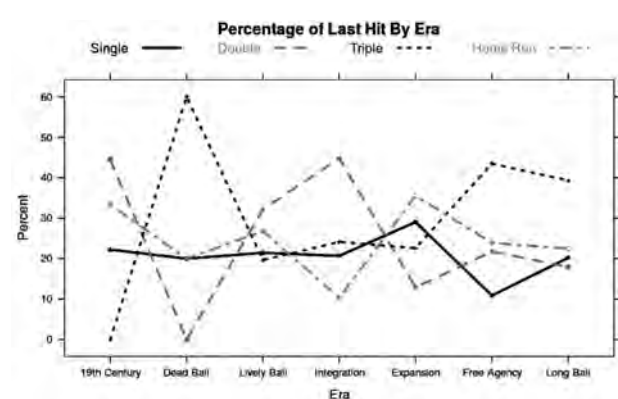
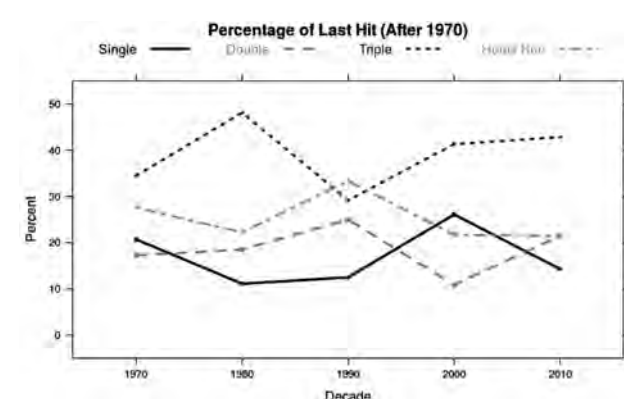


Figure 13. Line graph depicting the percentage of last hit since 1970



number of bases but only recorded which type of hit was first, second, third, or last.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the phrase “hit for the cycle” is commonplace to describe the rare feat of getting one of each type of hit in a single game, it took nearly five decades for the term to stick and become popular in the national newspapers. It has been shown that the first use of the word “cycle” occurred in 1921, penned for the accomplishment of George Sisler, the 70th cycle to have occurred in baseball history at that time, with the second occurrence of the word/phrase nearly one decade later. It wasn’t until after the explosion of cycles in the Lively Ball Era that the term found a permanent place in baseball vernacular.

Furthermore, it was shown that not all permutations of cycles are equally likely to occur. In the last five decades, when the sheer number of cycles occurring showed a dramatic increase, the triple is the last hit to attain significantly more often than any other hit.

The data listing all cycles and their known sequence of hits are provided as an appendix on SABR.org. ■

Notes

1. Retrosheet.org/cycles. There are two discrepancies with the Retrosheet list. First, Retrosheet lists Philadelphia Athletics player George Hall as having accomplished the first cycle (June 14, 1876). For a description of that game, see Mike Huber, “June 14, 1876: George Hall gets five hits, but is it a cycle?” sabr.org/gamesproj/game/june-14-1876-george-hall-gets-fivehits-it-cycle, November 2017. Different newspapers have varying accounts as to the types of hits achieved by Hall in the game. We do not include Hall’s game as an official cycle. Second, Retrosheet has not yet added a cycle hit by Chicago White Sox player Jose Abreu (September 9, 2017). Therefore, we use 319 as the official number of cycles.
2. As of the end of the 2017 regular season, according to baseball-reference.com. See baseballreference.com/leagues/index.shtml.
3. For a description of that game, see Mike Huber, “May 25, 1882: Buffalo’s Curry Foley completes first cycle in major leagues with grand slam,” posted online at sabr.org/gamesproj/game/may-25-1882-buffalos-curry-foley-completes-firstcycle-major-leagues-grand-slam, September 2015.
4. “NetShrine Baseball Timeline,” found online at netshrine.com/era.html. Accessed August 2017.
5. Paul Dickson, *The Dickson Baseball Dictionary*, Third Edition, New York: W.W. Norton & Company (2009), edited by Skip McAfee, under the heading “hit for the cycle” (page 416).
6. Cecilia Tan of the Society for American Baseball Research posted this *Washington Post* quotation on the SABR-L listserv on November 17, 2003.
7. “High Lights of Mace and Mound In Two Leagues Last Week,” *Tennessean* (Nashville, Tennessee), August 21, 1921: 12. This information was reported in Herm Krabbenhoff’s article, “Quasi-Cycles—Better Than Cycles?” *Baseball Research Journal*, Fall 2017.
8. “Herman Hits Cycle as Robins Slam Reds, 14–4,” *Reading Times* (Reading, PA), May 19, 1931: 15.
9. Ibid.
10. For a description of that game, see Mike Huber, “June 3, 1932: Lou Gehrig hits four home runs, Tony Lazzeri hits for cycle in Yankees romp,” posted online at sabr.org/gamesproj/game/june-3-1932-lou-gehrig-hits-four-home-runs-tonylazzeri-hits-cycle-yankees-romp, July 2015.
11. Headline in *Great Falls Tribune* (Great Falls, Montana), July 23, 1932: 8.
12. Headline in *Tennessean* (Nashville, Tennessee), July 23, 1932: 8.
13. Associated Press article in *Great Falls Tribune* (Great Falls, Montana), July 23, 1932: 8 and *Tennessean* (Nashville, Tennessee), July 23, 1932: 8.
14. This record was tied in 2009 when eight batters hit for the cycle. No season has had more than eight cycles.
15. *Reading Times* (Reading, PA), August 15, 1933: 10.
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18. “Indians Wallop Athletics, 15 to 4,” *Des Moines Register*, August 18, 1933: 8.
19. *The Sporting News*, January 4, 1934: 6.
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31. *The Sporting News*, September 29, 1938: 4.
32. *The Sporting News*, May 11, 1939: 3.
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37. Corey Brock, “Kemp completes first cycle in Padres history,” MLB.com, August 15, 2015. Found online at mlb.com/news/matt-kemp-hits-first-padres-cycle/c-143243112.
38. Ibid.

2018 CHADWICK AWARDS

The Henry Chadwick Award was established by SABR to honor baseball's great researchers—historians, statisticians, annalists, and archivists—for their invaluable contributions to making baseball the game that links America's present with its past.

Apart from honoring individuals for the length and breadth of their contribution to the study and enjoyment of baseball, the Chadwick Award will educate the baseball community about sometimes little known but vastly important contributions from the game's past and thus encourage the next generation of researchers.

The contributions of nominees must have had public impact. This may be demonstrated by publication of research in any of a variety of formats: books, magazine articles, websites, etc. The compilation of a significant database or archive that has facilitated the published research of others will also be considered in the realm of public impact.

JEFFERSON BURDICK

by John Thorn



Jefferson R. Burdick (1900–63) was a pioneer card collector whose invented classifications still govern the hobby; he donated his enormous collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it remains one of the most popular destinations for researchers. He created *The American Card Catalog*, the bible of the hobby, and tribute

is paid to his lifelong work whenever anyone brings up T-206 or N-162 or other codes common in card collecting. Burdick was “a collector’s collector,” said Freyda Spira, the Met’s assistant curator in the drawings and prints department. “He didn’t collect cards because of their value but because of his interest in history.” It is this approach to the visual aspect of baseball that makes him worthy of SABR’s Chadwick Award.

As Burdick wrote in 1948, he regarded his life’s work as “a national collection belonging to everybody.” His quiet joys were not in chasing value or celebrity, or in mere accumulation, but in his research and in the legacy he consciously built, despite crippling arthritis, to his dying days. Metropolitan Museum curator A. Hyatt Mayor had exhibited a career interest in printed ephemera as a window onto culture; this is what prompted him to accept Burdick’s offer of the collection in 1947.

Burdick was born in 1900 on a farm in Central Square, New York, 25 miles north of Syracuse. Like other youngsters of that era, he asked his father to purchase various brands of cigarettes so he could get different cards, according to an interview he gave to *The Syracuse Herald-American* in 1955. Though he

went on to get a two-year degree in 1922 and stopped collecting for a while, once he was diagnosed with arthritis, his decreased mobility reawakened his interest in cards. “A card collection is a magic carpet,” he wrote in 1939, “that takes you away from work-a-day cares to havens of relaxing quietude where you can relive the pleasures and adventures of a past day—brought to life in vivid picture and prose.” It was in this year that Burdick issued the first number of *The United States Card Collectors Catalog*, later retitled *The American Card Catalog*. He handed editorship of the publication to Charles R. Bray in 1949.

Burdick was a bachelor whose massive collection overwhelmed the museum’s curators. When his arthritis and heart issues forced him to retire from his job assembling electrical parts at the Crouse-Hinds plant in 1959, he relocated to an apartment at Madison Avenue and 26th Street in Manhattan. This move permitted his regular attendance at the Met to catalog and mount his collection, a particularly daunting task for a man who knew his days were numbered.

A co-worker at Crouse-Hinds and Burdick’s best friend, John DeFlores, recalled that though Burdick’s apartment was near the ballpark of the Syracuse Chiefs, he may never have seen a game. His arthritis was so severe that he could not drive a car; proudly, he insisted on walking without a cane, but his range was limited. DeFlores said that Burdick’s arthritis was so severe that he couldn’t open his mouth wide enough to insert a ball of hard candy. “All he was interested in was his cards,” his friend recalled. “That was his life’s work.”

On January 10, 1963, as Mayor would later describe it, Burdick “twisted himself into his overcoat” and said goodbye, adding, “I shan’t be back.” He admitted himself to New York’s University Hospital the very next day and died two months later. His sister had died, and he left no descendants.

As Sean Peter Kirst wrote in Burdick’s hometown paper, the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, thirty years later:

When the lifetime bachelor died in New York City in 1963, neither of the daily newspapers in Syracuse ran an obituary. For 30 years after Burdick's passing, his staggering collection of 300,000 postcards, hat cards, tobacco cards, military cards and baseball cards was kept locked away in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, available for viewing only on special request.

That is no longer the case. A splendid selection of Jefferson Burdick's cards may be viewed online: <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/drawings-and-prints/burdick-collection>. ■

BOB McCONNELL

by Peter Morris



Bob McConnell (1925–2012) was an original SABR member from 1971 and a star researcher in whatever field to which his interest turned. His expertise was on brilliant and thorough display in biographical research, nineteenth century baseball, and perhaps most notably, the minor leagues. He revamped the John Tattersall Home Run Log, purchased by SABR from the latter's estate in 1981, and kept it up to date until its publication in 1996 as *SABR Presents The Home Run Encyclopedia*, a register of every home run ever hit in major-league play. But perhaps McConnell's greatest legacy is the three-volume *Minor League Stars*, which celebrated not only the anecdotes surrounding those second-tier greats, but also documented their statistical records accurately for the first time. Along with Ray Nemec, Vern Luse, and Bob Davids, McConnell brought to life the golden age of the minor leagues, when many top-rank players preferred to stay closer to home, making salaries greater than they had made in their brief stays in the majors.

Robert C. McConnell was born on January 18, 1925, in Seattle, the son of a sea captain and a former World War I nurse. The family moved frequently while he was young, and portions of Bob's childhood were spent in Oregon, New Mexico, California, Massachusetts, and New York City before the family finally settled in Newark, New Jersey, in 1935. One of the constants in each new location was a love of baseball, which proved a good way of making new friends.

When Bob arrived in Newark, he soon became an avid fan of the local Newark Bears, one of the legendary minor league franchises.

In 1939, the ESSO Gas Company issued a fifty-page booklet to commemorate the supposed centennial of baseball and handed it out at gas stations. Among the nuggets in the booklet was a list of every major leaguer who had hit at least 100 career home runs. Fatefully, one of the youngsters who picked up a copy was 14-year-old Bob McConnell, and his new acquisition proved to be a windfall for baseball research. He was especially intrigued by the listing of batters with 100 lifetime home runs, which included only fifty-one names. He started meticulously updating it about once a week. The pages of the booklet soon became well-worn, and a lifelong passion had begun.

A world war, however, soon intervened. Bob joined the Navy for a minority hitch in 1942. (A minority hitch committed 17-year-olds to serve in the regular Navy until their twenty-first birthdays.) He spent the next three years on two ships: the *U.S.S. Whitman*, a destroyer, and the *U.S.S. Mifflin*, an attack transport.

In July 1945, Bob was selected for officer training and was sent to Vanderbilt University. He was discharged from the Navy in January 1946, but continued at Vanderbilt under the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the "G.I. Bill") after the end of the war. He graduated in 1949 with a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering. Later that year, he married Mildred "Millie" Cooper. Like Bob's mother, Millie was a native of Nova Scotia, and he met his future wife during one of his family's annual vacations there.

Bob was hired straight out of college to work as a start-up service engineer for Combustion Engineering. The job involved the construction of new power plants, so as soon as one job was done, he was on to a new location. Over the next four years, he was traveling all the time, never spending more than a few months in one spot. Millie gave birth to the couple's first son in 1952 while they were living in a house trailer.

It was time to seek a more stable lifestyle, and Bob and Millie talked over where they'd like to raise their family. Both agreed that of all the places Bob had worked, the stint they had most enjoyed was one in Wilmington, Delaware. So Bob put in an application with the Delmarva Power & Light Company in Wilmington, and was hired as a power plant engineer on April 1, 1953. It proved the perfect fit, and Bob remained in the position until his retirement in 1983 on the 30th anniversary of his hiring.

Bob and Millie completed their family with the birth of their second son, and work and parenthood

kept them busy in the years to come. But gradually they began to find time for other interests. Millie became an expert bridge player and is now a Life Master. Bob, meanwhile, began to reignite his old passion for baseball. In particular, with the minor leagues then struggling, he became fascinated with commemorating the heroics of the stars of the glory days of the minor leagues. The statistical records of many players were shockingly incomplete, and Bob began the painstaking work of filling in the gaps. He started making trips to the Library of Congress and using interlibrary loan to track down old box scores.

He got additional help from the fortuitous discovery of two articles in *The Sporting News*. One of them was a piece written by a Washington, D.C., resident named Bob Davids who displayed a similar interest in tracking home run feats. Intrigued, McConnell looked up Davids in the Washington phone book and sent him a letter. Davids responded and informed McConnell of several other kindred spirits, including Cliff Kachline and Ray Nemec. Before long, Bob McConnell had several new correspondents with similar interests.

The other article put him in touch with a researcher named John Tattersall, who was the owner of the kind of collection that every SABR member dreams of discovering. Years earlier, a Boston newspaper merger had led to the disposal of much of the morgues of one of those papers. Among its contents was an extraordinary collection of box scores and game accounts dating back to the 1876 formation of the National League. Tattersall happened to be living in Boston at the time and purchased the collection for a song. He then began meticulously going through this gold mine and using it to fill in the massive gaps that still existed in major league baseball's statistical records. Imagine Bob's excitement when he learned of the existence of this precious resource—and that its owner now lived in nearby Philadelphia.

Needless to say, the two men became close collaborators in the ensuing years. On any spare weekend McConnell could be found at the Wilmington library, poring over the goodies that had arrived as a result of his interlibrary loan requests. Once a month he would travel to Philadelphia. But box scores from Saturday games all too often remained elusive, so he made two trips a year to the Library of Congress, which had many late editions.

In the years that followed, Bob McConnell continued to slowly but surely expand his network of baseball research colleagues, including historians Ernie Lanigan and Lee Allen at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. But doing baseball research remained a

slow and tedious endeavor, especially for a man with a demanding job and a growing family. Reliable published resources were still scarce, so a voluminous correspondence was often needed just to try to fill in the many gaps in the early encyclopedias. Bob became an indefatigable letter-writer, and he had two file drawers full of baseball correspondence.

By the 1950s, he was regularly writing to ballplayers to sort out the many anomalies that were emerging. Sometimes these produced exciting discoveries, such as when Bob received a letter from George Winkelman—a player from 1886—in which Winkelman verified that he pitched with his left hand. Collaborations with fellow researchers were also generally carried on by means of the post office. That finally began to change in 1971 when Bob Davids floated the novel proposal of an organization for all of the people doing baseball research. When he got enough positive replies, he arranged for a meeting in Cooperstown on August 10, 1971.

Sixteen researchers ended up attending the meeting and forming the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR). Davids was selected as the president and McConnell became its first secretary and treasurer. Like the founders of any new organization, they had grandiose dreams of great growth. McConnell said with a chuckle, "We talked with excitement about how one day we might have as many as fifty members!" It is safe to say that SABR has exceeded their wildest dreams, as it now boasts well over 6,000 members.

Through all of SABR's growth, one constant was Bob McConnell, who attended all but one of the 41 annual conventions held during his lifetime. (Asked about the one he missed, McConnell grimaced before replying, "That was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made. I had some business come up and I don't know why but I let it get in the way.") McConnell served as a board member for an additional 11 years during SABR's formative period, and was an active participant in pretty much everything SABR undertook. The rapid expansion of the membership enabled researchers to specialize in the areas that interested them most. McConnell turned his attention to two interests that dated back to his youthful days of rooting for the great sluggers of the 1930s and for his hometown Newark Bears.

The first of these was home runs. One of John Tattersall's most ambitious projects was the creation of a log that would detail every major-league home run ever hit. McConnell was a key ally on this initiative, filling in many of the gaps in the records. When Tattersall died in 1981, SABR purchased his collection, and McConnell was put in charge of the home

run register, which was rechristened the “Tattersall-McConnell Home Run Log.” McConnell insisted that it was Tattersall who “should be credited with the bulk of the work.” The results were published by Macmillan in the 1996 book *SABR Presents The Home Run Encyclopedia*. The SABR Home Run Log, later maintained by the late David Vincent, is available for everyone to view at Baseball-Reference.com. (Go to any player’s page and click the tab that says “HR Log” to access the data.)

McConnell’s second research passion also came out of the many afternoons he spent watching the greats of the International League. Along with Ray Nemec, Vern Luse, and Bob Davids, he became one of the principals in another ambitious effort that aimed to create complete statistical records for the greatest minor league players. The project proved so successful that SABR eventually published three volumes of the *Minor League Stars* series, along the way directing new attention to “Buzz” Arlett and the other luminaries of the golden age of the minors.

Today’s researchers take for granted the completeness of the statistical record that is now available at the click of a mouse. But we need to recognize that we have that vantage point because we stand on the shoulders of giants like Bob McConnell who put in countless hours of work to make that possible.

Life has a funny way of bringing things full circle. Bob and Millie McConnell had three grandchildren and one of them worked for Exxon—that’s right, the company that released the fateful commemorative home run booklet back when it was known as ESSO. Oh, and in case you were wondering about that home run booklet, it disappeared along with his baseball cards while he was serving in the Navy. But it hasn’t been forgotten either. Some years ago, Bob purchased an original booklet from a dealer and had it bound. It occupied a prominent place in his home.

Bob McConnell died on March 18, 2012, at the age of 87. ■

Sources

Conversations and correspondence with Bob McConnell, Bill Deane, and members of SABR.

TOM SHIEBER

by Mark Armour



Tom Shieber (1964–) was still a boy in St. Louis when he embarked on his journey as a baseball researcher, creating his own (index card) database of player photo identifications from every baseball book he could find. It took a few years, and a few detours, before the rest of us began to benefit from Tom’s passion for photo identification,

among many other baseball research interests.

Tom graduated from Reed College (Portland, OR) in 1986 with a B.A. in physics, and then spent 12 years working as a telescope technician and computer programmer at Mt. Wilson Observatory, in the San Gabriel Mountains north of Pasadena, California. Although any intellectual pursuit—especially one requiring such attention to detail—is bound to ready a person for other challenges, Tom admits that there is not much direct overlap between solar physics and baseball.

Having joined SABR in 1981 while still in high school, he made his most significant contribution to the organization in 1994 when he founded the Pictorial History Committee. Tom had kept up his interest in photography and had become quite expert at it, though he envisioned his committee to also encompass drawings, illustrations, and moving pictures. Tom chaired the committee and wrote its newsletter for several years, and in 1997 he co-authored SABR’s picture-filled *Baseball for the Fun of It*.

His well-earned skepticism helped lead to the debunking of the presumed subjects or origin of many well-known photographs, including a famous daguerreotype widely assumed to be of the 1840s Knickerbocker club. For his long contribution to this field, Tom received the George Michael SABR Pictorial History Award in 2016.

Tom also developed an interest in the origins and development of the game. His article on “The Evolution of The Baseball Diamond” was the cover story for SABR’s *Baseball Research Journal* in 1994, and his presentation on the evolution of the pitcher’s mound won him the award for the best oral presentation at the 1994 SABR convention.

In 1998 Tom joined the staff of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum as their webmaster in the early days of their Internet presence, and a few years later he became the museum’s Curator of New

Media, bringing his understanding of modern technology to the museum's more traditional program. In 2006 he was named Senior Curator, and now has the responsibility for curating exhibits for both the 250,000 annual visitors to Cooperstown, and also for its exhibits that have traveled throughout the country.

He has curated numerous temporary or permanent exhibits, including "Olympic Baseball," "One for the Books: Baseball Records and the Stories Behind Them," "Babe Ruth: His Life and Legend," and many more. He helped create the Hall's first traveling exhibit, "Baseball as America," which toured 15 cities between 2002 and 2008, and was lead curator for the follow-on "We are Baseball, and Picturing America's Pastime," a traveling exhibit of photography. Under Tom's watch, the Hall also began producing interactive and on-line content, including "Dressed to the Nines: A History of the Baseball Uniform."

Tom's research ethos is best on display at his excellent personal blog (<http://baseballresearcher.blogspot.com>), which deals with whatever Tom happens to be interested in at the moment. This is usually, though not always, a deep dive into illustrations, photography, or film. Tom often points out that his research is intended as personal amusement, and writes as if he is not expecting anyone else to care, but of course we do. Whether he is peering at baseball tobacco cards lingering in the background of an obscure photograph on the Library of Congress digital archive, or considering a few baseball-related items in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, or examining the long-held story that Gary Cooper's baseball scenes in *Pride of the Yankees* were reversed to accommodate the right-handed Cooper, the reader is taken on an entertaining ride while unknowingly, step-by-step, sitting in on a master class in baseball research determination and care. His story on *Pride of the Yankees*, wryly entitled "The Pride of the Seeknay," received SABR's McFarland Research Award in 2014.

Tom makes his home in Cooperstown, with his wife Liane Hirabayashi and their daughter Natalie. His contributions to baseball research, via his employment at the Hall of Fame, his presence at SABR meetings, or the delightful wanderings of his curious and fertile mind, are very much in their prime and sure to enrich us more in the years ahead. ■

ANDREW ZIMBALIST

by Daniel R. Levitt



Andrew Zimbalist (1947–) published *Baseball and Billions* in 1992, a groundbreaking study of the economics of baseball. Since then, Zimbalist, on the faculty at Smith College since 1974, has published numerous articles and books on the business of baseball and other sports, profoundly broadening our understanding of the structure and

business of the game. Today, he is perhaps the most widely recognized authority on the economics of sport.

Zimbalist grew up in New York, moving from the Bronx to Queens, and eventually to Great Neck in Nassau County. His father was an attorney who worked in Manhattan and his mother was a nurse and later a librarian. In Great Neck Zimbalist grew into a pretty good ballplayer, where he teamed with Whitey Ford's kids on his Little League team. His love for the game continued to evolve as he played through high school. For college, Zimbalist headed off to the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where he received his BA in 1969. He then headed back east to Harvard, earning his PhD in 1974. After finishing stints as a visiting scholar at Harvard, University of Hamburg, University of Geneva, and Doshisha University, he has been at Smith College and is currently the Robert A. Woods Professor of Economics and Chairperson of the Economics Department.

It took another decade and a half, however, before Zimbalist formally combined his love of baseball and economics. In March 1990 during the spring training lockout, Zimbalist's then 11-year-old son—worried that his Little League team might not be able to play if the big leaguers weren't playing—suggested his father write a book on the economics of baseball. Zimbalist recognized the opportunity, found a publisher, and *Baseball and Billions* became a best-selling business book.

Other notable books with a baseball theme or significant baseball component include *Sports, Jobs and Taxes* (1997), *The Economics of Sport, I & II* (2001), *May the Best Team Win: Baseball Economics and Public Policy* (2003), *National Pastime: How Americans Play Baseball and the Rest of the World Plays Soccer* (with Stefan Szymanski, 2005), *In the Best Interests of Baseball? The Revolutionary Reign of Bud Selig* (2006), *The Bottom Line: Observations and Arguments on the Sports*

Business (2006), *Circling the Bases: Essays on the Challenges and Prospects of the Sports Industry* (2010), *The Sabermetric Revolution: Assessing the Growth of Analytics on Baseball* (with Ben Baumer, 2014).

National Pastime provides a fascinating compare-and-contrast of the evolution of the structure of modern sports leagues, examining the development of baseball leagues in the US and soccer in England and elsewhere. Among his non-baseball related books, *Circus Maximus: The Economic Gamble Behind Hosting the Olympics and the World Cup* (2016), offers fresh insights into the economics of these sporting mega-events.

Some notable research influences on Zimbalist include Albert Hirschman, the wide-ranging development and public policy economist; economist Sam Bowles; and Roger Noll, one of the first economists to rigorously study sports.

Over the years Zimbalist has consulted in the sports industry for players' associations, cities, companies, and leagues. Through his wide-ranging consulting assignments and research, Zimbalist has acquired a unique, nuanced sympathy for all the various actors in the business of baseball, while at the same time recognizing the various excessive positions that all sides occasionally take.

Zimbalist is married with four children. Because he has now lived in Massachusetts for most of his adult life, Zimbalist admits to being a fan of several teams, including the Yankees and Red Sox. It is not surprising that someone who can balance a rooting interest in these two hated rivals can also help us navigate the rapidly expanding and complicating business side of baseball. We can only hope that Zimbalist will continue with his original and invaluable research on sports in general and baseball in particular. ■

PHOTO OF JEFFERSON R. BURDICK, 1955, COURTESY OF THE SYRACUSE POST-STANDARD.
PHOTO OF BOB MCCONNELL COURTESY OF TOM ZOCCO.

Contributors

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ADAM BERENBAK is an archivist in the National Archives Center for Legislative Archives. He earned a Master of Library Science degree with a focus in archives from North Carolina Central University and was a 2008 Frank and Peggy Steele Intern at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum's A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center in Cooperstown, New York. He has previously published "Congressional Play-by-Play on Baseball" in *Prologue* (Summer 2011 edition), and "Henderson, Cartwright, and the 1953 US Congress" in the Fall 2014 *Baseball Research Journal*. He has written informally about baseball in Japan for the past decade here: <http://noboruota.blogspot.com>.

ALLISON DAVIDSON is an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at Muhlenberg College. Dr. Davidson's research interests include applied statistics and probability as well as statistics education. Recent applications include neurological reception in the vision of flies, what makes a popular tweet, and the impact of food waste on college campuses.

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RICHARD HERSHBERGER writes on early baseball history. He has published in various SABR publications, and in *Base Ball: A Journal of the Early Game*. He is a paralegal in Maryland.

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MICHAEL HUBER, a Professor of Mathematics at Muhlenberg College, joined SABR in 1996. Dr. Huber's research interests include studying rare events in baseball, such as hitting for the cycle and pitching a no-hitter. He frequently sponsors undergraduate research involving simulations using baseball data.

HERM KRABbenhofT, a SABR member since 1981, is a frequent contributor to the *Baseball Research Journal*. From 1986 through 1996 he published *Baseball Quarterly Reviews*, which presented his research on "Baseball's Best Run Getters," "Ty Cobb vs. Babe Ruth (Premier Hitter vs. Premier Pitcher)," "Ultimate Grand Slams," "Ultimate Winning Pitchers," "The Role of Fielding Errors in the World Series," and many more.

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DANIEL R. LEVITT is the author of several award-winning books, including *Paths to Glory: How Great Baseball Teams Got That Way* (2003, with Mark Armour); *Ed Barrow: The Bulldog Who Built the Yankees' First Dynasty* (2008); *The Battle That Forged Modern Baseball: The Federal League Challenge and Its Legacy* (2012); and *In Pursuit of Pennants: Baseball Operations from Deadball to Moneyball* (2015, with Armour). In 2015, he was selected as the recipient of the Bob Davids Award, SABR's highest honor. He served as editor of *The National Pastime* convention journal in 2012, focusing on baseball in Minnesota, and has been President and Officer of the Halsey Hall Chapter. He lives in Minneapolis with his wife and two boys.

BRIAN MARSHALL is an Electrical Engineering Technologist living in Barrie, Ontario, Canada and a long time researcher in various fields including entomology, power electronic engineering, NFL, Canadian Football and MLB. Brian has written many articles, winning awards for two of them, and has two baseball books on the way: one on the 1927 New York Yankees and the other on the 1897 Baltimore Orioles. Brian has become a frequent contributor to the *Baseball Research Journal* and is a long time member of the PFRA. Growing up, Brian played many sports including football, rugby, hockey, and baseball, along with participating in power lifting and arm wrestling events, and aspired to be a professional football player, but when that didn't materialize he focused on Rugby Union and played off and on for 17 seasons in the "front row."

JUSTIN MCKINNEY lives in Ottawa, Ontario, and writes about strange baseball history, including that time Rube Waddell got bit by a lion, at medium.com/@baseballobscure. He is an active contributor to the SABR Pictorial History Research Committee and has located images of over 80 previously missing players and counting for the Player Image Index. He is currently working on a book about the Union

Association. Growing up in Calgary, he attended numerous Calgary Cannons games and became a Baltimore Orioles fan thanks to their cool logo and Cal Ripken Jr. He still laments the loss of the Montreal Expos.

PETER MORRIS came to prominence by winning the first World Scrabble Championship in 1991, but enduring fame is likely to come from his contributions to baseball research and literature. Morris's first book, *Baseball Fever*, was a detailed look at Michigan baseball from its beginnings up to the 1870s. His second book, the two-volume *Game of Inches*, examined the origins of every aspect of baseball, from the game itself to the first use of an exploding scoreboard. *But Didn't We Have Fun?* recreated the spirit of bygone days in the words of old-time players and fans.

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PETE PALMER is the co-author with John Thorn of *The Hidden Game of Baseball* and co-editor with Gary Gillette of *The Barnes and Noble ESPN Baseball Encyclopedia* (five editions). Pete worked as a consultant to Sports Information Center, the official statisticians for the American League 1976–87. Pete introduced on-base average as an official statistic for the American League in 1979 and invented on-base plus slugging (OPS), now universally used as a good measure

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JOHN THORN is the Official Historian for Major League Baseball. He has been a SABR member since 1981.

STEW THORNLEY has been a SABR member since 1979. He is an official scorer for Major League Baseball and a member of the MLB Official Scoring Advisory Committee. He has visited the graves of nearly every member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. He once attended the funeral of a complete stranger just to get a free lunch. His interest in showdown games goes back to his experience as bat boy with the Minnesota Gophers, who beat Steve Garvey's Michigan State team in a showdown game in 1968 (details at <http://stewthornley.net/bigten.html>).

PETER UELKES has been a SABR member since 2001. He's from Germany and became an overseas member of Red Sox Nation in 1990. After receiving a PhD in physics, he worked in the finance and telco industries. Living with his wife and their two sons in Germany, Peter spends his time on topics like MLB, soccer, cryptography, astronomy, mathematics, and education.

THOMAS E. VAN HYNING was US correspondent for the Puerto Rico Professional Baseball Hall of Fame, 1991–96. He authored *Puerto Rico's Winter League* and *The Santurce Crabbers*. Tom's articles have appeared in *The National Pastime* and *Baseball Research Journal*, including pieces on Rickey Henderson, Dennis Martínez, and the Santurce Cangrejeros. He has written 10 SABR BioProject biographies, including Rubén Gómez, Joe Gibbon, Randy Ready, Pat Kelly, and Dick Hughes. A member of the Robinson-Kell SABR Chapter, Tom is Tourism Economist & Data Analyst, Mississippi Development Authority. His BBA degree is from the University of Georgia. He has two masters' degrees.



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