

THE SQUIBBER

July 2019

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

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TRIVIA QUESTION: Who are the only three Washington Senators pitchers to start an All-Star Game for the American League? (**See answers below**)

TALKIN' BASEBALL: Upcoming Speakers Announced, By Dave Paulson

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

- Aug. 3 -- David Bledsoe: "*Black Thursday, Blue Monday: In Search of the Curse of the Washington Nationals (A Baseball Whodunit)*."
- Sept. 7 -- Rich Donnelly: "*The Chicken Runs at Midnight*."
- Dec. 7 -- Cameron Penwell: Baseball in Japan

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

Come and bring a friend!

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CAN YOU IMAGINE? The Amazing Career of Harold Baines, By Tim Deale

Can you imagine playing Little League baseball at the age of 12 and having Bill Veeck scout your game? That did happen to Harold Baines.

Harold was born March 15, 1959, and raised in St. Michaels, Md. He continues to live there today with his wife. When Harold was a child he would travel with and watch his father, Linwood Baines Jr., play baseball in different towns. It was inevitable that Harold would grow up with a passion for baseball. He started playing in neighborhood games with the local kids and then Little League Baseball, which is when Veeck saw him playing at the age of 12.

During Harold's high school career he was so good there were scouts from different organizations watching him. In his senior year at St. Michael's High School he batted .532 and was named a high school All-American. He became the first pick in the first round of the 1977 MLB Amateur Draft by the Chicago White Sox, who had been purchased by Veeck the year before.

He was sent to Appleton, Wis. to play for the Single-A Appleton Foxes. The next year he was promoted to the AA Knoxville Sox, who won their division with Tony LaRussa as the manager. The following season he was promoted to the AAA Iowa Oaks with LaRussa again managing.

LaRussa wrote a report on Baines and sent it to Roland Hemond, the White Sox' general manager. The report stated, "Harold was one of the best 7th, 8th, and 9th inning hitters with the game on the line I've ever encountered." He was promoted to the White Sox the following season.

On Opening Day, April 10, 1980, the 6-1, 175-pound rookie made his debut as the starting right fielder for the White Sox. He faced Baltimore Orioles' pitcher Jim Palmer, a future Hall of Famer, and went 0 for 4. The following week, the Sox played the Orioles again and Palmer was pitching. With the Sox trailing by two runs, Baines hit a home run off of Palmer in the seventh inning to bring the Sox within a run. In the ninth inning he had another hit and scored the tying run.

Baines started his career doing exactly what LaRussa said he was going to do. Harold would hit in the No. 3 spot for most of his career because his managers knew they could depend on him. He consistently had timely RBIs throughout his career and developed a reputation for doing the same.

Jim Leyland, who managed for 22 years, winning three pennants and a World Series title, had this to say about Harold: "He was one of the best players of his time; he ranks very high."

Hall of Famer and former teammate Cal Ripken Jr. had this to say about Baines: "When I played against him, he was always the guy who you didn't want to have come up at a crucial part of the game. ... He almost seemed to get calmer as the enormity of the at-bats got bigger."

Baines was recently elected to the Hall of Fame. Here are a few of the highlights supporting his enshrinement.

Among Hall of Famers, he ranks 24th in RBI and 34th in home runs. His .289 career batting average ranks above many top run producers such as Harmon Killebrew, Reggie Jackson, Johnny Bench, Mike Schmidt, Carlton Fisk, Willie McCovey, Eddie Mathews, Ernie Banks, Jim Thome, Cal Ripken, Tony Perez, Ralph Kiner, Andre Dawson, Willie Stargell, Dave Winfield, Ken Griffey Jr., Carl Yastrzemski and Eddie Murray.

Harold was enjoying another All-Star season in 1986 when a career-altering play occurred. I asked Harold about that play in an interview. "It was near the end of the season and a pitcher (Neal Heaton) covering first base put his foot on the bag the same time I reached the base and I stepped on his ankle awkwardly and fell. I had eight knee surgeries during my career starting from that injury, and that is when I was switched to the designated hitter position."

Baines was an excellent defensive player before the incident, and an All-Star right fielder for the Sox. He was among the leaders in putouts, assists, double plays, fielding percentage, and range factor per game.

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HONDO'S NOBLE RUN: Recalling the Exciting 1969 Home Run Race in the A.L. -- By Andrew Sharp

Harmon Killebrew signed with Washington Senators in 1954 and appeared in his first major league game in June under the "bonus baby" rule that kept him on the Nats' roster. It took him until 1959 to win a regular job as the Senators' third baseman.

He proceeded to tie Rocky Colavito for the American League in home runs with 42. He hit 31 more for the Senators in his injury-shortened 1960 season.

Fast forward to 1969: By then, Killebrew had added four more home run titles while playing for the relocated original Senators in Minnesota. But the new Senators had a home run threat of their own -- Frank Howard, the defending A.L. home run champ whose 44 round-trippers in 1968 had broken the Washington record of 42 held jointly by Killebrew and Roy Sievers, the A.L. champ in 1957.

The previous season, Howard, the Senators' 6-foot-7, 255-pound slugger, took an early lead in the home run race that he never relinquished. During a record-breaking six-game streak from May 12-18, he blasted 10 round-trippers in 25 plate appearances.

That's a record that still stands 50 years later. It was accomplished in a year so dominated by pitchers that the rules had to be changed to help hitters. The strike zone was reduced and the mound lowered for the 1969 season.

The changes had the desired effect, especially on a trio of A. L. sluggers: Howard, Killebrew and young Reggie Jackson of the Oakland A's. With four homers in the first three games, Howard got off to a fast start. He finished April with eight homers. Jackson had six and Killebrew four.

Reggie caught up with Hondo, slugging nine homers in May. Both ended the month with 15. Killebrew had 10.

Jackson had a hot June, belting 14 homers to take the league lead with 29 over Howard (24) and Killebrew (18). Reggie belted three more homers in the A's July 2 game, and by the All-Star break, which began July 22, he was up to 37 home runs.

Howard had 34 and Killebrew had 28. Hondo also homered before his hometown fans at the All-Star game, which was played at RFK Stadium.

On July 29, Jackson hit his 40th homer as Killebrew was hitting his 30th. Two days later, Howard hit his 35th. Jackson's torrid pace slowed in August. He hit just five

homers and began September with 45. Howard hit seven August round-trippers, giving him 42 by Sept. 1. Killebrew entered September with 38.

The last two months weren't kind to Jackson. His batting average, up to .294 in early August, fell to .275 by season's end as hit .249 after Aug. 1. Worse yet, he hit just two homers in September – No. 46 came on Sept. 6, and two weeks would pass before he connected again. Killebrew meanwhile, had a strong September into October.

Howard tied Reggie for the league lead by hitting his 46th on Sept. 10. Killebrew forged a three-way tie by blasting two homers on Sept. 21. The Twins slugger took the lead for the first time when he hit his 47th the next day.

Jackson's final homer, on Sept. 23, tied him for the lead a final time. It was back to a three-way tie the next day when Howard hit No. 47.

The three sluggers failed to homer on Sept. 25, but Killebrew connected for No. 48 on Sept. 26. On Sept. 29, Howard jumped back into a tie with his 48th, the most he ever hit in a season.

But despite the exciting race, that would be it for 1969. Hondo went 0 for 5 in his final two games, although he walked three times.

Killebrew and Howard remained tied as September ended. Then, on Oct. 1, in the next-to-last game of the regular season, Killebrew matched his career high when he hit his 49th home run. That gave him his sixth and last home run title, and capped an MVP season.

Howard wasn't to be denied, however. In 1970, his 44 homers topped Killebrew's 41. Hondo also led the A.L. in RBIs for the only time.

So was 1969 the tightest race for a league home run crown? By one standard, yes. Just two homers separated the top three finishers, and the 144 homers hit by Killebrew, Howard and Jackson topped the 138 hit by Albert Pujols (47), Prince Fielder (46) and Ryan Howard (45) in 2009, the next closest another trio has come.

In 1948, 1960 and 2012, arguments could be made that the home run races in years when the leader hit at least 40 homers were just as close or closer, but for different reasons.

(The tight races when the leader had fewer than 40 quite likely were attributable to fewer homers hit overall.)

Ralph Kiner and Johnny Mize tied for the N.L. lead in 1948 with 40 each. Stan Musial hit 39, his career best and the closest he came to a homer crown. In 1960, both leagues had races as tight as 1969. In the N.L., three Hall of Famers battled for the HR title. Ernie Banks hit 41, Hank Aaron hit 40 and Eddie Mathews hit 39. Mickey Mantle topped the A.L. with 40, teammate Roger Maris hit 39 and the Senators' Jim Lemon hit 38.

The 2012 A.L. race could be called the closest ever. Miguel Cabrera's 44 led the league. Right behind were Josh Hamilton and Curtis Granderson with 43 apiece. Then came Edwin Encarnacion with 42 and Adam Dunn with 41.

But 1969 has to be the most exciting home run race for fans of the expansion Nats.

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MYTHS OF BASEBALL: True or False?, By Charles Pavitt

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

Myth #10 – It is too risky to try to tag up and score on short fly balls.

Research by Ben Baumer (2009), Pete Palmer (2016), and Russell Carleton (2017) has revealed that the proportion of runners thrown out from the outfield on tag-ups is surprisingly small.

Here is a table displaying Carleton’s findings concerning the proportion of attempts and success rate for outfield flies at various distances during 2015 and 2016:

Fly Ball Distance	Percentage of Attempts	Success Rate Percentage
225 or less	18.4	88.0
226 to 250	17.3	100.0
251 to 275	57.7	94.7
276 to 300	91.8	99.8
301 or more	99.5	99.9

Note that even the shortest fly balls are good bets to run on (although that 100% must be a small sample size fluke). Compare these to Pete Palmer’s computation that the break-even point is between 60% and 80% if the fly is the first out and 40% to 50% if the fly is the second out, depending on the number and location of other baserunners. According to Ben Baumer, the same applies for advances from second to third (2005 to 2007; attempted 23.7% of the time, successful 87.2% of the time).

Bottom Line: Third base coaches are way too conservative; although I would predict that the proportions would go down some if coaches sent the runner all the time, thus erasing the surprise element.

Myth #11 – It is too risky to try and get from second to third on a grounder to shortstop.

Pete Palmer calculated a break-even point of 19% with no outs and no other baserunners, and success rates have been very high. Russell Carleton noted an average of 42.7 relevant circumstances per team occurring in 2016, attempted advances in only 34.5 % of them, and a success rate of 96.6 %.

Bottom Line: Same as for Myth #10.

Myth #12 – The sophomore slump is a “real” result based on pitcher adjustment to hitter and hitter failure to adjust back.

It is true that outstanding rookie seasons are usually followed by poorer second ones, but the reason is likely the fact that outstanding rookie seasons are often due to players randomly hitting above their then-current ability level and then returning toward that level afterward.

This is a normal occurrence known as “regression toward the mean” (Bill James gave it the far-more-creative title Plexiglass Principle) that occurs not only for players throughout their careers but also for teams.

Taylor and Cuave (1994) put it to the test, based on an evaluation of 82 rookie hitters between 1945 and 1983 who produced at least one of the following: the number of home runs (at least 26), RBI (at least 99), or batting average (at least .298) one standard deviation better than the average rookie.

Comparing the first, second, and combined third through fifth years, their data shows no real differences across time for HR and RBI, and regression toward the mean for batting average (.300 in Year 1, .276 in Year 2, and .269 in Years 3-5). In their 1993 *Baseball Analyst* (page 28), Siwoff, Hirdt, Hirdt, and Hirdt examined the first- and second-year batting averages of hitters from 1942 through 1991. Of 228 batting .250 or above in their rookie season, 63% declined the next season, whereas the exact same 63% of 217 players hitting less than .250 as freshmen increased those averages. The implication is that rookies hitting over their head should be expected to decline and those under their heads to improve the next season.

Bottom Line: It is regression toward the mean and has little or nothing to do with pitcher adjustment.

TRIVIA ANSWER: Dutch Leonard and Walt Masterson of the original Senators started All-Star games for the A.L. in 1943 and 1948, respectively. Dave Stenhouse of the expansion Senators was tabbed to start the second of 1962's two All-Star games. The American League won all three of the All-Star games started by Washington pitchers, but here's an interesting twist: Leonard, Masterson and Stenhouse all had losing records in the years they made All-Star starts.