

Houston Baseball

Shooting Star Express

Official Newsletter of the Larry Dierker Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research



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President's Message

By Joe Thompson

The New Zealand-based band, Crowded House, released their most memorable hit “Don’t Dream It’s Over” in 1986. Depending on where you get your facts, the actual release date of the song ranges anywhere from April 1 to October 1 of that year. Quite a few places I found point to August 1 as the release date. Crowded House’s frontman Neil Finn said in an interview once that even though he could not remember the context of why he wrote the song, it “was just about on the one hand feeling kind of lost, and on the other hand sort of urging myself on.”

A lot of Astros fans, including myself, felt that way about the club’s chances to repeat when August 1 began and as the trading deadline got closer and closer. As the day went on, the hope got a little smaller and smaller. Then, in the early afternoon the day changed for Astros fans everywhere, as if something magical had just happened. Finally, the day ended for Astros fans thinking that perhaps there might just be a little magic on August 1 for Astros everywhere.

Media outlets and social media users everywhere were clear in their message to Astros GM Dana Brown as August 1 loomed. The team had to do something at the trade deadline to address the teetering pitching situation if there was any chance that the

Message continues on page 6

Astros Induct Two into Hall of Fame

By Mike Acosta

On August 12, the fourth annual Astros Hall of Fame induction ceremony took place as Bill Brown and Bill Doran were officially added to the list of Houston baseball immortals. They were presented with their orange blazers and the plaques that will be forever displayed at Minute Maid



Park. It was so very nice to see HOF’ers from previous classes such as Bob Aspromonte, Jeff Bagwell, Lance Berkman, Craig Biggio, Jose Cruz, Larry Dierker, Terry Puhl, Tal Smith, and William Wagner.

The Astros Hall of Fame was established to celebrate the legacies of those who have left a permanent impact on the Houston franchise and for the inductees to share the celebration with their families. The best part of the Hall of Fame is seeing the smiles on everyone. I was honored to have helped organize the Astros HOF and the committee that is behind the ballot and election process. It took many years to finally get it off the ground and Reid Ryan’s support was the main reason we finally got it done. Thanks to Gene Dias, Bob Dorrill, Mike

Vance, Marian Harper, Alyson Footer, Brian McTaggart, Larry Dierker, Craig Biggio, and Bill Brown who serve on the Astros HOF committee.

This group provides a fantastic amount of integrity to the process. The Astros staff also put a lot of work into creating a nice presentation once again. It was especially wonderful to

have Lisbet there as she was able to see and further understand the great game of baseball that we all love and respect. I have always maintained that the best part of baseball are the great people that are part of it. This ceremony was a reminder of that belief.

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SABR 51 in Chicago Attracts Local Members



Articles Solicitation

Want to get into the game? Tired of sitting on the bench? Play ball with us by sending in articles for future newsletters!

Give your fellow chapter members, and other SABR'ites, solid hits of wisdom, wonderment, and wit in an article of your choice that relates to baseball, especially Houston baseball.

Rookies are welcome; our cracker-jack editors will tone up your prose into major league quality. Just send your articles, from 200 to 1000 words, to umpire / editor Tony Cavender at anthony.cavender@pillsburylaw.com by October 15 for our Fall issue.

Start writing your opening pitch; join the lineup!

The editorial board would like to honor the Hall of Fame players who passed away within the past two years by having our chapter members write personal remembrances of them.

If you have unique experiences or memories with any of the recently departed players or managers, please send your stories to our umpire/editor and we will publish them in future newsletters.

For each article, please provide your photo and any artwork that goes with your story. We cannot promise that we will use all the stories, but we'll try.

Editorial Board

By Bob Dorrill

On Wednesday July 5, 2023, nine members of the Larry Dierker SABR chapter arrived in a blissfully-cool Chicago for SABR 51, leaving behind 103 degree temperatures in Houston.

Members attending were Joe Thompson, Bob Dorrill, Maxwell Kates, Herb Whalley, Scott McCay, Phyllis Mira, Gloria Rubac, Lucha Rodriguez, and Mark Wernick, plus several wives and one grandchild, for a total of 13. What a great turnout!

As many of you know, SABR conventions offer continuous baseball discussions, committee meetings, awards, posters, exhibitors, book sales, research, analysis, featured speakers, trivia, and tours running from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm Thursday through Saturday. The convention program itself is 55 pages long. SABR has grown to 7,500 members. All of the speakers presentations are available on sabr.org/convention.

Some highlights include:

Chase Carpenter, Senior Director of Chicago Cubs Strategy and Analysis.

Ozzie Guillen, former player and manager and current studio analyst of the Chicago White Sox, told many stories as only he can, using his favorite four letter word.

Mike Veeck, son of Bill Veeck took full credit for "Disco Demolation" at Comiskey Field in 1977. Mike was fired by five major league teams and owned five minor league teams. Wonderful speaker.

Dinner at Harry Carey's restaurant was set up by Maxwell Kates. Terrific food with wall-to-wall photos and memorabilia of Harry's 50 years in baseball.

A terrific session on Women in Baseball, featuring Maybelle Blair a 96 year old gal who played for the Rockford Peaches and is active in promoting all phases of women in baseball. She remembers our own Marie "Red" Mahoney.

Attending a Chicago White Sox St. Louis Cardinal game where the Sox rallied late to win after some drizzles, but no delay in the action.

Local tours: one a walking tour of downtown Chicago and another a bus tour of former major league ballpark sites.

And, as you can imagine, there were numerous presentations on Chicago baseball: the Black Sox, Wrigley Field, black baseball, former players, 1959 and 2005 World Series, Bill Veeck, and lots more.

The weather was wonderful for walking around. The Miller Bar next door to the hotel was busy and is admittedly one of Bill Veeck's favorite watering holes.



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Lifelong Fan Rates more Ballparks, Old and New

By Jimmy Scruggs

I'm very fortunate to have visited stadiums in every city where Major League Baseball is played. Here are some more stories about those parks that I hope you will find interesting.

Brewers Park, Milwaukee, Wis. (2003) – Set up similar to Minute Maid. Plenty of room to tail gate. Replica Little League Park in the parking lot. Lots of beer and sausage.

Field of Dreams, Dyersville, Iowa (2014) – Two hours from Des Moines, four hours from west side of Chicago. The day of my visit I chatted with one of the old time players who was in uniform. Had a catch with a group of new friends.



Jimmy Scruggs at Camden Yards

White Sox Park, Chicago, Ill. (2012) – They have a replica area of the picnic area Comiskey had. Great view of downtown walking up to your seats from stair well. Parking is a challenge. Overall, below average of new ballparks.

Chase Field, Phoenix, Ariz. (2007) – Don't go if the roof is open. Ha Ha. Baseball in a warehouse setting with hot tub in right center.

Progressive Field (a/k/a The Jake), Cleveland, Ohio (2000 & 2016) – With my son Jonathan, we went to a rock concert and a baseball game broke out. Loud classic rock with big speakers. Indians had all their studs of that time: Manny, Alomar, Belle, Thome (you get the picture). Best atmosphere of any regular season game I ever attended. At Progressive in 2016, I shook hands with The Chief and he let me bang the drum.

Comerica Park, Detroit, Mich. (2007) – I liked it. Some don't. Great job with Tigers history. Next

door is the iconic Hockeystown Bar. You can get a view of Ford Field. Greek town close by.

Rodgers Center, Toronto, Ont. (2006) – With the roof open, you can view the tallest building in Canada. Hotel on site is where Alomar lived.

Riverfront, Cincinnati, Ohio (1988) – Boring multi-use.

Great America Ballpark, Cincinnati, Ohio (2007) – Sorry Brownie, didn't see much great. Good job saluting Big Red Machine. Nothing around it when I visited.

Wrigley, Chicago, Ill. (First visit 1977) – Sat in centerfield bleachers. Better than Fenway.

Fenway, Boston, Mass. (2000 & 2019) – If you are going for the first or only time, pay the extra \$\$ and get Monster Seats.

PNC Park, Pittsburgh, Pa. (2007 & 2016) – In my Top 5. Walk across the Roberto Clemente bridge. Willie Stargell statue. Great view of downtown. Make sure you have a Primanti's sandwich.

Shea, Queens, N.Y. (2006) – If you're a tennis fan, Forrest Hills is

next door. Hebrew National Hot Dogs.

Citi Field, Queens, N.Y. (2016) – If you're a tennis fan, Forest Hills is next door. Hebrew National Hot Dogs.

Yankee Stadium(s), The Bronx, N.Y. I regret I didn't make it to the original. So much history other than baseball. 1958 NFL Overtime classic, epic prize fights, visits by Billy Graham and Popes. I still remember watching Mickey's moon shot into the right field upper deck to win Game 3 of 1964 WS. Remodels and new one: Even if you hate them, nothing matches Monument Park. Nathan's Hot Dogs.

Citizen's Bank, Philadelphia, Pa. (2007) – Good job with team history. Ashburn Alley. Cheesesteaks galore. The Fanatic.

RFK, Washington, D.C. (2007) – I would have rather seen the Commanders (post R—skins).

This is the second installment of Jimmy Scruggs' Ballpark Reviews. We plan to publish his final installment, including reviews of Houston's ballparks, in an upcoming issue.

Baseball



Trivia

1. Who started both the last Brooklyn Dodger and the first New York Met games?
2. Who was the only World Series MVP from the losing team and when?
3. What four pitchers struck out 20 batters in nine-inning games?
4. Who last hit four home runs in one game and when?
5. In what year did the Boston Braves move to Milwaukee?

Prepared by John Lloyd

Answers on page 6

Testing the Theory that One Big Inning can Win a Game

By Chris Chestnut

During the 2023 SEC baseball tournament, one of the announcers relayed a fact from his college coach – the winning team scores more runs in one inning than the losing team scores for the whole game.

I interpret this as a big inning by one team all but insures victory.

How true is this?

First, let's define a big inning as one where a team scores three or more runs. For this analysis, I did not consider games with final scores of 1-0, 2-0, and 2-1. These low scoring

games, while meeting the coach's definition, do not have a big inning.

Using data from Retrosheet, I analyzed the seasons 2000 to 2022. To include a bit of older historical trends, I added the even decade seasons from 1920 to 1990.

With the restrictions on low scoring games, this gives us 40,385 games to consider. In 53.9% of the games, the winning team scored more runs (at least 3) in one inning than the losing team did for the whole game. In addition, in 16.3% of the games, the winning team's largest scoring inning equaled the losing team's run total.

Therefore, the winning team's largest scoring inning equaled or exceeded the losing team's final score in 70.2% of the games.

It seems the coach was right – the big inning does propel the winning team to victory.

The chart below left shows the percentages by season. Blue represents games where the winning team scored more runs in one inning than the losing team's total score, the orange equaled the losing team, and the green where the winning team did not outscore the loser in one inning.

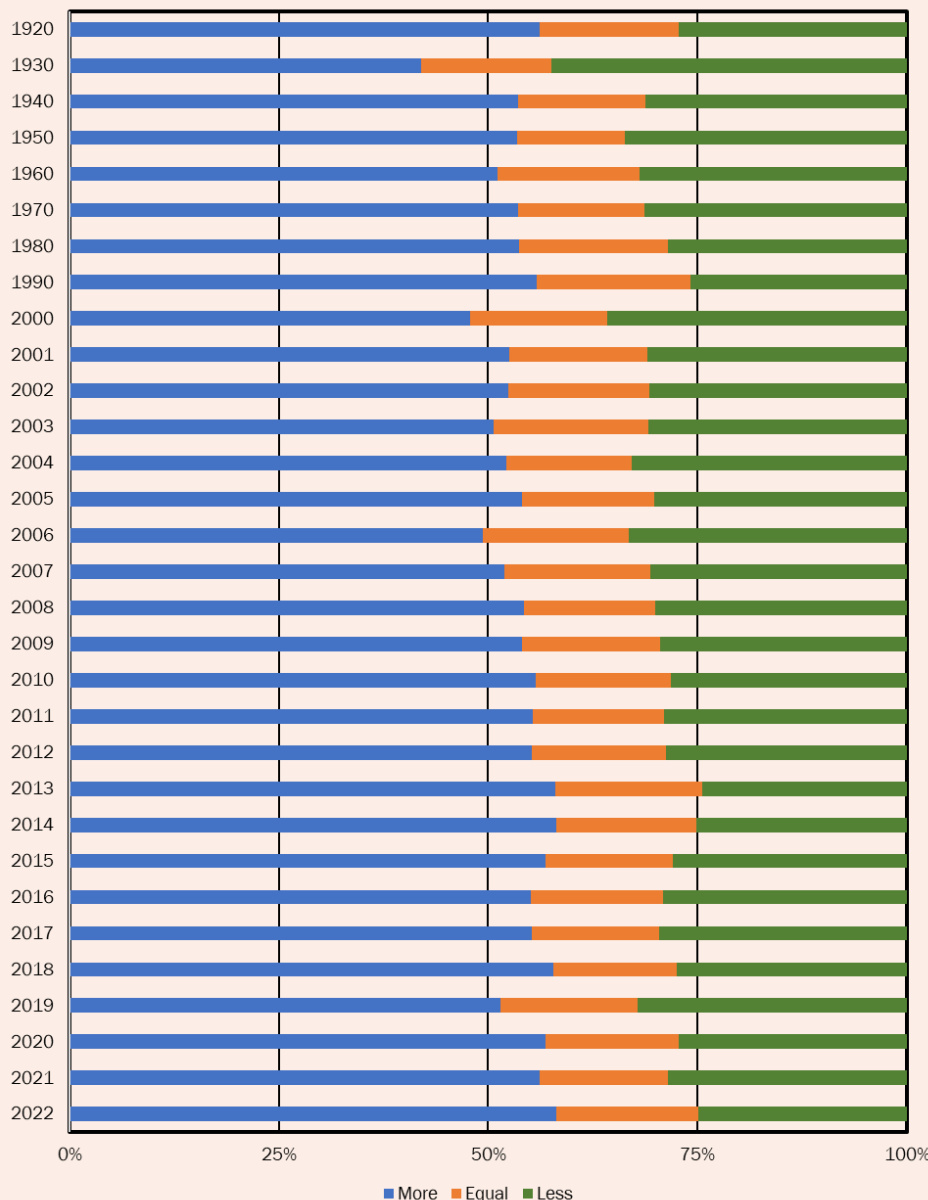
Further reviewing the data, let's look at the games where the winning team has a big inning that exceeds the total runs for the losing team. Is there a particular inning where the big inning occurs more often than expected? For this analysis, I'm ignoring the ninth and extra innings as the victorious team may win before batting enough to have a big inning.

On the surface, there is no reason for one inning to be more prevalent than another. If all innings have an equal chance of being a big inning, the average odds are 12.5%.

My expectation was that a big inning would be more likely in the middle innings when the starting pitcher tires and before the best relievers are deployed, being somewhere in the fifth or sixth inning.

But as the table below shows, this is not the case. The big innings happened more often in the first (14.36%) and the third (13.26%) innings and much less in the second inning (10.44%). Not the results I expected.

Big Innings



Inning	Games	
1	2,922	14.36%
2	2,124	10.44%
3	2,697	13.26%
4	2,588	12.72%
5	2,615	12.85%
6	2,623	12.89%
7	2,379	11.69%
8	2,395	11.77%
Totals	20,343	

HOF Snubs: Why not Carlos Delgado?

By Jimmy Scruggs

“Who Should Be In” and “Who Should Not Be In” the Baseball Hall of Fame, as voted by the Baseball Writers, can be one of the most hotly contested and debated topics. Take one of the 2023 inductees: Many disapprove of Scott Rolen’s election by the Baseball Writers. The columnist Red Smith had the best idea: “They should tear it down and start over again.”

Let’s look at the case for Carlos Delgado’s career with the Blue Jays, Marlins, and Mets. He did what only six other players ever did: He hit over 30 home runs in 10 consecutive seasons. His career total was 473. Had he not struggled with hip issues at the end of his career, he was a good bet to reach the magic number of 500.

He also had 1,512 runs batted in and a respectable .280 lifetime batting average. His postseason batting average was .351, with four home runs and 11 RBI’s. While his career was during the steroid era, he was never linked to any scandal.

His offense numbers are comparable to Jeff Bagwell, Fred McGriff, and Frank Thomas during the same era. Off the field, he was a good citizen, winning the Hank Aaron and Roberto Clemente awards. A native of Puerto Rico, he wore 21 in Roberto’s honor.

So why was his vote total 3.8% in 2015?

Perhaps, the new age of voters looked at his mediocre WAR numbers. Maybe, voters thought he’ll never make it, so why should I vote for him? Or, he’s not a Hall of Famer but a member of the “very good club.” No MVP’s. All valid reasons for the low vote total.

Welcome New Members

- Jim Fritz.....Cypress, TX
- Nic Loiacono.....Lexington, KY
- Raeanne Martinez.....Austin, TX
- Robert MatthewsMontgomery, TX
- Jarred SalinasBeaumont, TX
- Jon WalkSpring, TX
- Aidan Franklin.....Houston, TX
- David HiltonThe Woodlands, TX
- Juan PereiraKaty, TX
- David SoutherlandHouston, TX

We’ll see what if any interest he gets from Veterans Committee during that process. But think, if he had hit a “clean” 506 home runs, would he be waiting for the Veterans Committee?

P.S.: Jason Stark’s One-and-Done Team:

- P – David Cone
- C – Ted Simmons
- 1B – Carlos Delgado
- 2B – Lou Whitaker
- SS – Tony Fernandez
- 3B – Matt Williams
- LF – Brian Giles
- CF – Kenny Lofton
- RF – Moises Alou
- DH – Andres Galarraga

Lineup of Upcoming Events:

- Aug 28: Monthly Meeting: Hugo Mojica on Astros’ Community Affairs at Spaghetti Western and Zoom**
- Sept 25: Monthly Meeting: Jay Verrill on Baseball Strategy and Analytics at Spaghetti Western and Zoom**

Tal Smith Donates Collection to SABR Chapter

By Fred Soland

On Saturday, July 22, 2023, several members of the Larry Dierker chapter of SABR, led by Joe Thompson, chapter President, gathered at the home of fellow member Tal Smith to receive a very generous donation of books, manuscripts, and artwork to our chapter.

The contents of the ten moving boxes ranged from baseball novels,

biographies, and stories to annual almanacs and statistical renderings of baseball past.

As an added treat, there were several manuscripts of arbitration cases in which Tal represented the Astros. One manuscript caught the eyes of a few of us: the case of Hunter Pence. It was decided that this case would be scanned and emailed to each member of the chapter for their enjoyment of

one side’s preparation of an actual arbitration.

There were also several framed baseball prints and a few newspaper articles about Tal that had been dry-mounted and preserved, depicting actions and awards of Tal’s memorable career in baseball.

Mike McCroskey generously donated the storage space to keep the donation until the chapter catalogs the contents and decides how to best handle these pieces of baseball history.



Message continued from page 1

club would repeat as World Series champions.

Let's face it, this year has not exactly gone as we had expected, and it has been tough at times to watch the team underperform all year. The Astros have spent the entire year looking up at the Rangers and other clubs in the AL West standings. Now, the reasons for this are understandable. The team has not played at full strength all season with injuries to key players. The bullpen has also been overused and the offense has underperformed.

The team addressed its bullpen situation on July 28 by sending their top catching prospect Korey Lee to the White Sox for Kendall Graveman.

It was a reunion of sorts for the Astros and Kendall Graveman. This will be the second stint for Graveman with the Astros. The former Mariners closer was traded to the Astros along with Rafael Montero on July 27, 2021. He performed okay in a setup role, but not well enough for the Astros to sign him to a long-term deal to keep him in town after the 2021 season. Graveman left the Astros after the 2021 season to sign a three-year deal with the White Sox. When the Astros got him back on July 28, Graveman said he was happy to be back with the Astros.

The Graveman trade did not address the starting pitching situation, which seemed to be the biggest area of concern for the club. So, if you were like me on August 1, you were constantly refreshing your social media to see if the Astros had made a trade to address their starting pitching needs. The dream of repeating was diminishing by the minute as teams around the league kept making moves to improve themselves and the Astros

were not addressing arguably their biggest need. As the 6 p.m. central deadline got closer and closer, the misery online seemed to be growing and the dream of a possible repeat kept getting bleaker.

Then a few hours before the deadline, social media blew up with the news that Justin Verlander was coming back to the Astros in a trade with the Mets. The cost turned out to be high for the Astros. The Mets got the Astros' two top prospects for Verlander: Drew Gilbert and Ryan Clifford. When the financials of the

trade were released, the loss of Gilbert and Clifford seemed to sting a little less.

When the dust settled, the Mets in the end could send more than \$50 million to the Astros to help pay off Verlander's large contract.

The starting pitching had been addressed and Verlander was back. How could the day get any better?

Later that day, Framber Valdez took the mound against the Cleveland Guardians. In his previous start against the Rangers, he had allowed eight hits and six runs in 3.2 innings. Valdez had not been pitching well at all in his last few starts, however Framber seemed laser-focused from the first pitch. Ninety-two pitches after that first pitch, Framber made club history by becoming the first Astros left-hander ever to throw a no-hitter. In fact, he was only one bad pitch away from tossing a perfect game. To Astros fans everywhere, the day had indeed ended on a perfect note.

Astros fans might remember August 1 as "Yordan Alvarez Day" because that is the day when the rela-



tively unknown young 19-year-old Dodgers outfielder Yordan Alvarez was traded to the Astros for pitcher Josh Fields.

Some fans might remember August 1 for other reasons, such as August 1, 1966, when Jimmy Wynn hit a mammoth home run out of Philadelphia's Connie Mack Stadium, only to be lost for the season later in the game after suffering several fractures when he crashed into the center field iron fence while diving to catch a fly ball off the bat of Richie Allen. Or perhaps August 1, 1973, when a young J. R. Richard pitched his first-ever shutout against the Dodgers. On August 1, 2022, the Astros traded for Trey Mancini and backup catcher Christian Vazquez on their way to a World Series championship.

Some might remember those moments, but this year's August 1 might indeed top them all. The day started with Astros fans starting to lose hope of the dream of having their club repeat as champions. August 1, 2023, ended with the Astros getting Justin Verlander back and Framber Valdez pitching the first-ever franchise no-hitter by a lefty.

Astros fans should remember the message of the Crowded House song "Don't Dream It's Over." Although you might feel lost, keep urging yourself and your team on. August 1 does seem to be that day for Astros fans where they shouldn't lose hope for another magical season.



Joe Thompson with World Series Trophy

Trivia Answers

1. Roger Craig
2. Bobby Richardson in 1960
3. Roger Clemens, Max Scherzer, Randy Johnson, Kerry Wood
4. J. D. Martinez on Sept. 4, 2017
5. 1953