



# Society For American Baseball Research Baseball Records Committee

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Not everything that counts is counted; not everything that is counted is worth counting. ---Albert Einstein

## 2020's BIZARRE NEW RULE FOR EXTRA INNINGS: 2+2=5

Without a doubt, the most bizarre new gimmick for the 2020 season is that extra innings begin with a runner on second base, ostensibly designed to save time in extra-inning games, apparently under the theory that fans will gladly pay attention for 9 innings but then suddenly demand that the game be ended--by any means necessary--as soon as the 10th inning begins.

This new change will have several noticeable effects on record keeping. For example, this baserunner somehow got on base despite his team having never even batted, meaning it is now possible for a team to have more runs scored than baserunners--a logical impossibility under the rules used for the last 150-plus years of baseball.

Further, apparently the runner will be deemed to have reached via error (lest it affect the pitcher's ERA), but yet this error will not be charged to anyone on the opposing team, providing yet another example where the stats will not balance, and thus "two plus two makes five."

I also expect to see save percentages decrease for visiting pitchers: their team will often score in the top of the 10th, and the relief pitcher coming in will automatically face a save opportunity and a runner on second base, with good odds of scoring and causing a blown save more often than would otherwise occur when the visiting team is up by one run.

There are also less likely but still feasible scenarios: What if we see a repeat of **Pedro Martinez** or **Harvey Haddix**--a pitcher who carries a perfect game through 9 innings? Will the phantom baserunner in the 10th inning automatically end the perfect game? He is a baserunner, after all. And even if not, what if the runner advances to third base and then home on wild pitches or stolen bases? A pitcher could literally *lose* a perfect game!

Longtime Committee member **Tom Shieber** sent along this additional summary of the new rule:

- The batter (or a substitute for the batter) who leads off an inning shall continue to be the batter who would lead off the inning in the absence of this extra-innings rule.
- The runner placed on second base at the start of each half-inning shall be the player (or a substitute for such player) in the batting order immediately preceding that half-inning's leadoff hitter. By way of example, if the number five hitter in the batting order is due to lead off the tenth inning, the number four player in the batting order (or a pinchrunner for such player) shall

begin the inning on second base. However, if the player in the batting order immediately preceding that half-inning's leadoff hitter is the pitcher, the runner placed on second base at the start of that half-inning may be the player preceding the pitcher in the batting order. Any runner or batter removed from the game for a substitute shall be ineligible to return to the game, as is the case in all circumstances under the OBR.

- For purposes of calculating earned runs, the runner who begins an inning on second base pursuant to this rule shall be deemed to be a runner who has reached second base.

MLB apparently put quite a lot of thought into the trivial portions of this rule, even devising exceptions for when the pitcher was the last batter--which is already an extremely unlikely scenario given that both leagues will have the DH for 2020. But apparently nobody thought to step back and ask what purpose the rule serves beyond being a gimmick to end games as quickly as possible. Why not a home run derby? Or an arm-wrestling contest?

It seems the likely outcome of this rule will be either: (1) the batting team will attempt to bunt the runner to third, then hit a sacrifice fly or punch a single over the infield; or (2) the fielding team will walk the first batter to put runners on 1st and 2nd, then attempt to get a ground-into-double-play.

In other words, if the goal were to generate excitement, the rule will fail to deliver. If the goal were to end games quickly, the Commissioner might as well have said that any game that goes past 12 innings will be a tie.

And longtime member **Pete Palmer** reports that the new rule will actually not end up saving that much time anyway. In a normal inning, the odds of both teams scoring the same amount of runs (e.g., both teams scoreless, or both scoring 1 run, or both scoring 2 runs, etc.) is a little over 50%. With both teams having a runner on 2nd with 0 out (per the new rule), the odds of both scoring the same amount is about 25%.

There will be about 900 games played this year, with an estimated 150 of them going to extra innings, based on past experience. Under the old rules, about 78 of those games would make it to the 11th inning; under the new rule, about 38 will do so. Under the old rules, about 41 of the 900 games would make it to the 12th inning; under the new rule, about 9 will do so. And so on in the series with game length increasing and the expected number of such games rapidly approaching zero under either rule.

Add it all up, and the new rule will be expected to save about 110 innings over the course of the entire shortened season. By comparison to the 8100 regulation innings played (1st through 9th for 900 games), the savings in terms of time is ultimately rather negligible (1.4% of the regulation-inning total). Given that the average of all games is a little over 3 hours, this new rule will save, on average for the entire season, about 2.5 minutes per game--which is roughly equivalent to the amount of time Nomar Garciaparra would spend each game just fastening and unfastening his batting gloves while in the batters box.

## **EVEN MORE SHORTENED SEASON TRIVIA**

In honor of the proposed 60-game season that will occur this year (health permitting), I have listed several records for the best performances over any stretch of 60 games played within a single season:

### ***Highest batting average over 60 games played***

.513 by **Hugh Duffy**, Boston NL, June 15 through September 3, 1894

*The record since 1901, when the AL joined, is .486 by **Rogers Hornsby**, St. Louis NL, July 1 through August 29, 1924.*

### ***Most RBI over 60 games played***

96 by **Hack Wilson**, Chicago NL, July 26 through September 27, 1930

### ***Most home runs over 60 games played***

37 by **Barry Bonds**, San Francisco NL, April 13 through June 23, 2001

### ***Best team record***

52-8 by 1884 **St. Louis UA**, 1906 **Chicago NL**, and 1912 **New York NL** (.867 winning percentage)

### ***Worst team record***

4-56 by 1890 **Pittsburgh NL** and 1899 **Cleveland NL** (.067 winning percentage)

## **ERRATUM TO DECEMBER RECORDS LIST**

**Dr. Fred Worth** sent along one additional correction to former Chair **Lyle Spatz's** annual list of baseball records, which was presented in the Winter 2019 newsletter and spanned 17 pages. As Dr. Worth notes, **Tom Seaver** (not **Chris Sale**) owns the record for most consecutive seasons with 200+ strikeouts, with 9 in a row from 1968 through 1976.