

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

March 11, 2005

Seems like everyone is learning ten things these days. There are the **Ten Things We Learned This Week in the NBA**, the **Ten Things I Learned during the Daytona 500**, **Ten Things We Learned About Blogs**, **Ten Things We've Learned from Watching the X-Files**, and even the **Top Ten Things Learned from Watching MacGyver**. Check that last site, by the way, for ten year's worth of Top Ten Lists.

The BBC Magazine News Monitor publishes something it calls **Ten Things We Didn't Know This Time Last Week**. They even topped it off at the end of last year with **100 Things We Didn't Know This Time Last Year**. It's great stuff.

Never ones to jump off a bandwagon, we've decided to create our own **Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week** column. Or just **Ten Things**, for short. Every week, we'll let you know what came of our compulsive wanderings around the baseball virtual world, and hopefully you'll learn something too. Here's our first ten:

Jose Canseco likes steroids.

Travis Nelson, the Boy of Summer, has written a **nice review of Jose Canseco's book**. I don't understand why the Madonna relationship doesn't get more play from the press, but Travis says the Madonna chapter is boring. Oh well.

Most baseball observers have focused on Canseco's finger-pointing, using it as further testimony that steroids are terrible and something should be done about them. Well, these observers don't seem to have noticed that **Canseco advocates for more steroid use in his book — not less**. A point that **John Perricone might find to his liking**.

Long book titles have a long history.

Travis calls the title of Canseco's book, **Wild Times, Rampant 'Roids, Smash Hits and How Baseball Got Big** the longest title since **The Bingo Long Travelling All-Stars & Motor Kings**, but I would nominate **The Bad Guys Won! A Season of Brawling, Boozing, Bimbo Chasing, and Championship Baseball With Straw, Doc, Mookie, Nails, the Kid, and the Rest of the 1986 Mets, the Rowdiest Team Ever to Put On a New York Uniform, and Maybe the Best.**

That's not so bad, really. The full title of Robinson Crusoe was **Life and Most Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of AMERICA, near the Mouth of the Great River of OROONOQUE; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. WITH an Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by PYRATES.** The history of the subtitle was covered in a **recent New York Times column.**

Tigers' games won't be broadcast on local non-cable television.

Detroit's **negotiation with the Detroit UPN affiliate has died**, and Tiger fans will have to have cable to see the Tigers play on TV. I have no idea where the future of televised baseball is going, but it does appear to be moving away from good old regular television, and toward cable, premium cable and the Internet. Judging from the comments, Tiger fans are pretty unhappy with this development. But I must say that **Veronica Mars is a great show.**

Even Joe Posnanski doesn't know what to write about the Royals.

Joe Posnanski, the excellent baseball writer who covers the hapless Royals for the Kansas City Star, doesn't know what to write about in his preseason review. So he **asked the folks at Baseball Think Factory for their ideas.** There are some great suggestions in the accompanying thread, though my favorite is one of Joe's original ideas: *Andy Sisco is Very Tall.*

Sitting in a Dominican baseball game press box is like sitting in the Fenway bleachers.

I love this quote from **Susan Slusser's interview with Athletic Nation**:

“My favorite part was the press box — reporters pounding beer, rum, you name it, and cheering and taunting. It was like sitting in the bleachers at Fenway Park for a Yankees series. Now that's a fun way to cover a game. They all kept trying to get me to cheer and high five, and I was having trouble explaining the concept of no cheering in the press box when the Dominican writers were in each other's faces and shouting on every play.

I once took a date to a Red Sox/Yankee game. We sat in the bleachers. It was our last date.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

Nelson Briles was hurt by the lower mound in 1969.

There's been an interesting discussion in the SABR-L mailing list (which all SABR members should subscribe to) about how much the height of the mound matters. Nelson Briles, who passed away last month, spoke of the effect the lower mound had on him in **this interview with Bruce Markusen**, and how he adjusted by using the slider more often. I attended the World Series game that Bruce describes in this article, and it was one of the highlights of my life as a baseball fan. Rest in Peace, Nelson Briles.

There is no more artificial turf in the National League.

With the close of Olympic Stadium in Montreal, there is no more artificial turf in the National League, and there are only three such stadiums (stadia?) left in the AL. As the **New York Times notes**, this makes Cliff Floyd a happy camper. And it should make baseball fans everywhere happy. Remember when Pete Rose used to dribble the ball on the turf after fielding the final out of an inning?

A few years ago, the Mets' owners proposed a new stadium with a retractable roof to

replace Shea, and one of its features was a natural grass playing field on rollers. The plan was that when the roof was closed, the playing field would be rolled out onto the parking lot to catch enough natural sun and rain to grow. I don't know what happened to the plan, but I really wanted to see the rolling field.

David Eckstein doesn't handle flies down the third base line well, but Cristian Guzman snares line drives.

This has already been pointed out, but kudos to David Pinto for **developing his graphical fielding charts**. Most baseball sites and books are a bunch of numbers and words. Not that there's anything wrong with numbers and words.

But a picture is worth a thousand words. And baseball bloggers and commentators sometimes forget that, or don't have the skill to show it. If you haven't seen them, check out **these line graphs of baseball stats**, this **timeline of baseball history** from Parthenon Graphics, what I call the **graphical baseball encyclopedia**, or even my **historical baseball graphs**. And remember — just because you can't quote it doesn't mean you haven't learned it.

There are changes afoot in the baseball blogosphere.

Baseballing on the Internet gets more intense each year. This year, we've already seen some **excellent writers moving to new sites**, we have **well-known writers setting up their own blogs**, bloggers **getting their own newspaper gigs**, and several of us attempting to make a living from our **virtual baseball musings**. There are probably a dozen other developments I haven't mentioned or haven't even heard.

Most intriguing of all may be **Baseball Toaster**, featuring many writers from **all-baseball.com**, and brand new software from Ken Arneson (Score Bard). The neat thing about Baseball Toaster is that they've rolled their site out while it's effectively still in development, so we'll be able to watch things develop. I'm sure it will be great.

This is going to be harder than I thought.

That's only nine things and I've hit my deadline. Next week, I'll start earlier.

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Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

March 17, 2005

We introduced a new feature at The Hardball Times last week, the **Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week** column. I originally wanted to refer to it as **Ten Things That Pushed Ten Other Things Out of my Brain Last Week**, but my editor said I couldn't. That's what I get for working with an editor who's twenty-eight years younger than me. He'll understand what I mean in a couple of decades.

Anyway here are the things that qualify for whatever the title is this week:

Tall infielders catch all the pop flies.

You probably know the complaint: tall guys get all the breaks. Tall guys **make more money than short guys**. Tall guys **attract more women**. Tall guys can breathe more easily in crowded subways (personal experience).

And now we find out that tall infielders catch more infield fly balls. According to uberstatistician MGL, the height of an infielder correlates with the number of infield flies he catches. In **this thread at the Baseball Think Factory**, MGL stumbled upon the fact that tall guys just seem to take charge on infield flies, which is why David Eckstein seems to catch so few of them.

But that's okay. Being short **has its advantages too**.

Curses are ubiquitous.

The Red Sox apparently broke the best-known curse in baseball this past October, but some retrospective analysis shows just how insidious that curse was. We all know that the Curse began with the single most lopsided transaction in baseball history, right? You also may have read an article I posted a few weeks ago that also

shows that the Red Sox have **the worst trading record of the last forty years**. And **Mike Carminati took it a step further** and found that the Red Sox have traded a net total of over 1,000 Win Shares (about 335 wins) to the Yankees in mutual transactions in their history of swapping players.

Well, I've stumbled across a new facet of the Curse: the Red Sox have lost more talent in expansion drafts than any other major league team. In the very first expansion draft, the Angels selected **Jim Fregosi** from the Red Sox's minor league system, and Fregosi went onto become probably the best shortstop of the 1960's. No player drafted in the expansion draft has ever accumulated more than Fregosi's 261 career Win Shares, though **Bobby Abreu** will almost certainly catch him someday (barring injury). Overall, the Red Sox have lost over 700 Wins Shares through the expansion draft.

George Michael is some kind of Columbo.

The Sports Machine host, not the singer. The detective, not the yogurt. SABR circulated its **Baseball Research Journal** the past couple of weeks, and I had a few reactions after reading it. Bill James's essay *Underestimating the Fog* has received the most attention, but I was fascinated by George Michael's essay *Identifying Mystery Photos* in which he marks up ten photos that he has investigated.

It seems he's been collecting old photos of sliding baseball players for years (talk about specific hobbies!) and many of them aren't captioned. He's learned to pick up clues from each photograph to help him identify the players and the situation. Clues include "Dirty shoes suggest that it is not early in the game." "The runner is clearly safe on the play, so according to the scoreboard this must be the first run of the game." "A double band appeared on the sleeve of the Cubs' uniforms in 1935 and 1936." Great stuff.

Pitchers don't like to get hit by pitches.

One of the articles in the *Baseball Research Journal* dealt with the higher rate of batters hit by pitches in the American League. A question that has been studied quite a bit is whether batters are hit more often in the AL because pitchers don't have to bat and possibly face "retribution." The issue is complicated by the fact that pitchers at bat don't get hit as often by pitches anyway, and this may be the sole reason HBP rates are higher in the AL (DH's being more likely to be hit than pitchers).

Anyway, the BRJ article looks at overall HBP rates and applies a mathematical factor to normalize for pitcher at bats. And, in a beautiful example of not underestimating the fog, they conclude that you can't really say HBP rates are higher in the AL due to pitchers having no fear of retribution.

The trouble is that this subject was **well covered by JC Bradbury and Doug Drinen** last July, in a much more sophisticated analysis. Their conclusion was different — some of the difference in HBP rates does indeed appear to be because AL pitchers don't have to worry about getting hit in return. Although the BRJ article referenced several other printed studies in this area, they seem to have missed this one.

Clint Courtney was the first major league catcher to wear glasses and the first to wear an oversized mitt for catching knuckleballs.

A friend gave me a present the other day: **The Catcher** by Rob Trucks (Virgil's nephew). This is a wonderful little book that includes the history of the catching position, interviews with lots of catchers (who have great stories) and, most interesting to me, a timeline chapter that graphically highlights the major developments in catcherdom.

Really, I just picked the Clint Courtney factoid at random. I could have used a number of neat facts and stories from the book. It's a light and informative read — evidently the first of a series of position-specific books from **Emmis Books** — and I recommend it to anyone interested in the subject.

Steve Trachsel is scheduled for back surgery.

I'm no **Will Carroll**, but I do have herniated discs in my back. Three, to be exact. And I have to tell you, they are painful. Sometimes the swelling can be brought under control, but once you rupture your disc, it never heals. You have to be sure to lift with your legs for the rest of your life.

Some players **recover well from back injuries; others don't**. I don't know what will happen with Trachsel, but I hope the Mets use this to give **Matt Ginter** the opportunity he deserves.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

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Goodbye for now.

Pitchers have some control over line drives, but not a lot.

After I **wrote an article earlier this week** highlighting some of the major variances between line drives and batting average for batters and pitchers — and after I said that “we” don’t really know how much influence pitchers have over line drives hit off them — I received an email from a reader who pointed me to Ron Shandler’s most recent **Baseball Forecaster**. Evidently, there is a study in the Forecaster that found a .314 correlation between pitchers’ line drive rates in one year and the next.

For comparison, **Tom Tippett** found that strikeout rates have a .73 correlation between years (1.0 is a perfect correlation), walk rates have a .66 correlation, home runs are at .29 and BABIP is .16. There may be systematic differences between the studies, but it appears that line drive rates for pitchers may be about as predictable as home run rates.

By the way, we have an agreement with **Baseball Info Solutions** to present the same stats to you in 2005 that we presented in 2004, with an improved interface. This extra data will allow us (and you!) to perform more detailed analyses with two year’s worth of data.

The decreased foul territory at Dodger Stadium won’t have as big an impact as I had assumed.

THT’s Tom Meagher, in his **Fourth Outfielder blog**, answered a question that my brother and I have been wondering about: what will be the impact of the extra seats behind home plate in Dodger Stadium. Tom estimates that it will yield only one additional run every six games in total, or one run per team every twelve games.

In 2004, teams scored an average of 3.7 runs a game in Dodger Stadium, for a park factor of .88. One run every twelve games will raise that average to 3.8 for a park factor of .90. Slowly but surely, Dodger Stadium is becoming less and less of a pitcher’s park.

There is already a rolling grass field in Japan.

Last week, I opined that I wanted to see the rolling grass field that is supposed to be in the new Mets's stadium, if it ever gets built. Well, several readers emailed me to let me know that **such a field already exists already exists in Japan.**

Unfortunately, the grass field is for soccer; they use AstroTurf for baseball! Still, I should have known there would be something like this in Japan already. Thanks to the readers who pointed this out to me.

This is funny.

That's My Vader... Now imagine the same scenario with George Steinbrenner. And if you're actually tempted to take in the Congressional steroid hearings, you might want to read **Casey Stengel's congressional testimony** instead:

"I had many years that I was not so successful as a ballplayer, as it is a game of skill."

References & Resources

Tangotiger ponted me to **MGL's excellent article from over a year ago**, that lists rates of batted ball types, strikeout rates and other goodies.

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Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

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March 31, 2005

Well, it's been two weeks since I last listed **ten things I didn't know the previous week**, but I'll spare you a list of twenty this time. It's hard enough to come up with ten.

Andres Galarraga has retired, nearly twenty years after his major league debut.

The Big Cat was a major star in Montreal and Colorado, and his .370 BA in 1993 was one of the early warning signs that baseball would be different in Denver. But he also had a couple of fine years with Atlanta, proving that his Denver performance wasn't a complete fluke.

Galarraga will also be remembered for his grace around the bag (hence the nickname) and his courageous fight with non-Hodgkins lymphoma. He finishes his career with 399 home runs and 250 Win Shares, and the most home runs and R.B.I. (1,425) of any major leaguer from Venezuela. His presence will be missed by many, many baseball fans.

It will be the year of Nomar in Chicago

This should have occurred to me already. I attended a spring training game at HoHoKam Park in Mesa last week, and I was struck but how much attention **Nomar Garciaparra** received. Cubs' fans love their superstars — I think I first noticed this when the bleacher fans kowtowed to **Andre Dawson** every time he ran out to right field in the late 1980's. Now that **Sammy Sosa** has moved on, the obvious superstar mantle belongs to Nomar, he of the famous wife and obsessive-compulsive mannerisms.

I expect a full season's worth of adulation to be heaped upon Nomar this season, as long as he stays healthy. The adulation of Cubs fans shall not be denied!

The guys who park cars at HoHoKam are known as "Ho's."

I was talking to a local Mesa friend about parking at HoHoKam (which was actually well managed, considering how well-attended the game was) and he informed me that the guys who run HoHoKam's parking service are an independent group of community volunteers, and the parking fees are somehow reinvested in the community. I was also told that the group is known as "Ho's." From what I could tell, there are no female Ho's in Mesa.

First round goes to Lee.

I also attended a White Sox/Brewers game in Phoenix, and saw **Carlos Lee** gun down **Scott Podsednik** at the plate in a matchup of two guys traded for each other. Podsednik was on third via a triple when **Willie Harris** hit a short flyball to left. The Sox sent Pods home and Lee threw him out. First round to Lee.

Lee also hit a home run in that game and was plunked by **Damaso Marte** in the eighth (confession: I had already left by then to beat the Phoenix rush hour). According to Lee, "**they were trying to mess with me.**" Too bad the Brewers are no longer in the American League. This could have been interesting.

Jon Stewart apologized to Barry Bonds.

After **Barry Bonds** once again blamed the media for his plight (and shamelessly included his son in the limelight), Jon Stewart of the Daily Show showed true class by apologizing for leading Bonds astray. I can't find a video, but following is a transcript of some of Stewart's comments:

“ We're going to talk little bit about baseball. By way of an apology, Barry Bonds, star slugger for the San Francisco Giants, is having a bit of a rough offseason. He had surgery on his knee last week and as you know he's suspected of steroid use, which he's never actually denied, but a woman last week claiming that he was his mistress for nine years has just testified under oath that Barry said he had been taking steroids since 2000. So it's really starting to pile up on him and yesterday he held an impromptu press conference to take some accountability and put the blame for his troubles where it belonged.

[Cut to Bonds]

Bonds: You guys wanted to hurt me badly enough. You finally got there.

Reporter off camera: You say you guys. Who do you mean?

Bonds (pointing): You. You. You. You. The media. Everybody

[Cut to Stewart, with eyes downcast and looking regretful] Sorry. And I am sorry. I do take responsibility. I do remember, this was years ago, when I saw Barry Bonds for the first time and I remember saying to him, "You're skinny. And very weak. You might want to do a little (mimes sticking a needle in his arm)." So I do take responsibility for convincing him to do steroids for a long, long time. And about having a mistress, again, I should never have begged him to f*** someone outside of his marriage.

Seriously, has anyone else noticed the parallels between Bonds' media paranoia and Richard Nixon's? Consider...

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-
- Nixon mentioned **his children and their dog Checkers** in a nationally televised speech in a bid for sympathy, Bonds did the same thing with his son.
 - Nixon's VP called the media "**nattering nabobs of negativism.**" Bonds has called them something similar, though less alliterative.
 - Nixon had **Watergate**, Bonds has Steroidsgate.
 - Nixon was forced to retire early. Bonds???

There have been a lot of funky game delays in baseball history.

Last week, a spring training game was cancelled due to a horde of bees attacking a couple of players, which inspired **an article by ESPN's Jeff Merson** listing the

top ten top unique cancellations in sports history.

But the more interesting list was provided by Phil Lowry in the SABR-L nightly bulletin. Phil included a list of baseball game delays, in either the major or minor leagues, that included:

- A 35 minute delay due to bees in 1976 at Riverfront Stadium
- Two automatic sprinkler delays (not including the one in *Bull Durham*)
- One bomb scare delay (Minnesota in 1970)
- Two delays due to blinding sunlight
- A fire delay at Comiskey
- Six fog delays
- Two moon landing delays (oddly enough on the same day!)
- Five power delays
- Three snow delays
- One tarpaulin malfunction delay
- One tornado delay, and
- One wind delay

Billy Beane affirms the obvious: starting pitching is too expensive.

Athletics' Nation is just one of the best blogs around, regardless of which team you follow. Their access to some of the top front office people and writers in Oakland makes their blog incredibly informative. For instance, there were a number of gems **in this interview with Billy Beane**, including this commentary on the overvaluation of major league pitching:

“Blez: How much did the insane contracts, forgive my editorializing, for starting pitchers like Benson and Wright affect your decision to go ahead and move Hudson and Mulder? In other words, were you just taking an opportunity to move players who happened to play in a position that is suddenly overvalued?”

BB: There were a ton of things that went into the decision. As a general manager, to put it simply, I'm given a certain amount of ingredients to put together a team. In other words, I'm given, “this is what you have to spend.” My job is to manage those resources I'm given, that being in terms of dollars. To put it bluntly, we weren't going to be able to return the entire team we had in 2004 and not be far above our means. We not only aim to put a competitive team on the field, but one that will be getting progressively better, which is the trick for us. One of the things we realized about the free agent market this year, and it wasn't like it was new to us but it became even

more evident this year, is that the one thing we couldn't put ourselves in the position to do—like say with Jason Giambi or even Miguel Tejada which was even tougher—what we knew is that if these pitchers left, we had to have an answer for them. And the answer wasn't going to come via the free agent market.

Blez: Because of the cost, is what you're saying?

BB: Exactly, and not only that, but in many cases cost for mediocrity. Ordinary pitchers that we neither had the resources nor the desire to pay them that much. Once again, understand that we're operating within a budget. Myself and David (Forst), we have a certain amount to work with and we've got to work with that. One thing you can't rely on is that you're going to draft five pitchers to replace five guys. It isn't that predictable. In our market, pitching is the hardest thing to acquire and impossible for us to sign in the open market. For the health of our franchise, we had to make sure that if we traded these guys that what we got in return was at least someone that could go into our rotation for X number of years, preferably as many as possible.

Bill James affirms the obvious: major league teams carry too many pitchers on their rosters, at the expense of potentially valuable platoon and bench players.

The Sons of Sam Horn captured an **excellent interview with James**. Like the Beane interview, it contains too many pearls of wisdom for a simple column of ten. But my favorite answer concerned one of my pet peeves: why do teams insist on carrying eleven and sometimes even twelve pitchers?

“What has happened in the last fifteen years is that the expansion of the bullpens has all but eliminated platooning. Teams used to carry nine pitchers, not 15 years ago but 35 years ago. You have nine pitchers on a 25-man roster, that's leaves 16 players for eight positions, and you can platoon at three or four positions. Bobby Cox in Toronto in the early eighties was platooning at five positions. Now, teams carry 12 pitchers. You've got 13 position players for nine positions, you've got a backup catcher and a utility infielder, your options for platooning are very limited.

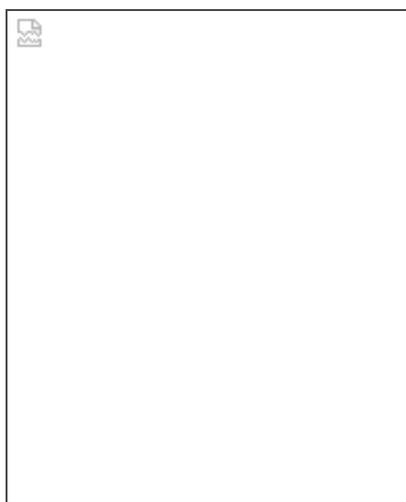
But what we're doing now doesn't make any sense, because you can gain many more runs by platooning than you can save by having an extra left-hander in the bullpen. Eventually, people will realize that what we're doing now doesn't make any sense, and then they'll start cutting back the pitching staffs and expanding the benches, and then we'll go the other way for 30 or 40 years until something else happens and history tears off on some other tangent.

If you line up all the teams in the American League in alphabetical order, all the AL Central teams are in a row.

Yes, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City and Minnesota all line up in a row, with not a New York, Boston, Oakland or Toronto to split them asunder. Now, you may think that this is not big deal, but I figured out that the odds of this happening are one in five hundred!!! Mere chance? I don't think so. I think I may have stumbled on to the biggest conspiracy in baseball since the reign of Ueberroth. Our investigative reporters are being sent to the scene as we speak...

You can make a wallet out of duct tape.

Why settle for leather when you can have the finest adhesive that also cures warts? Here are **the instructions for making a wallet out of duct tape**, which turns an ordinary roll of silver tape into a useful billfold.



It turns out that people have found all sorts of uses for duct tape, as you can see in **this page of valuable duct tape ideas and pictures**. Don't get caught without some!

References & Resources

Special thanks to the **Howard Owens site** for transcribing Jon Stewart's Barry Bonds apology. As usual during Stewart's show, I was laughing too hard to do anything as complicated as writing.

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June 23, 2005

There's always something to think about in the world of baseball. Here are 10 examples from this past week...

Derrek Lee is having one heck of a year.

I'm pretty proud of the new **batting stats format** we rolled out this week. You can now sort the stats in any order you like and learn lots of new things in the process, such as Lee's major league standing in these offensive categories:

- Runs Created: First
- Runs Created/Game: First
- GPA: First
- Batting Average: First
- Slugging Average: First
- On-Base Percentage: First
- BABIP: First
- BA with RISP: Second
- Line Drive Percent: Sixth
- HRs as % of OF Flies: Sixth

And second in All-Star voting. To top it off, Bryan Donovan (the guy who developed the tremendous stats interface) found that **Lee's BABIP is almost literally off the graph.**

Home runs come in bunches.

The Yankees hit back-to-back-to-back home runs in that historic comeback against Tampa Bay Tuesday night. In general, home runs follow other home runs more than any other event on a baseball field, a **fact uncovered by Dan Agonistes.**

This makes sense. If a pitcher allows a home run, he's not exactly on a roll. He's more likely to be a flyball pitcher in a home run park. The kind of situation that just screams home run. On the other hand, Dan found that home runs are more likely to follow a strikeout than other kinds of outs. Draw your own conclusions.

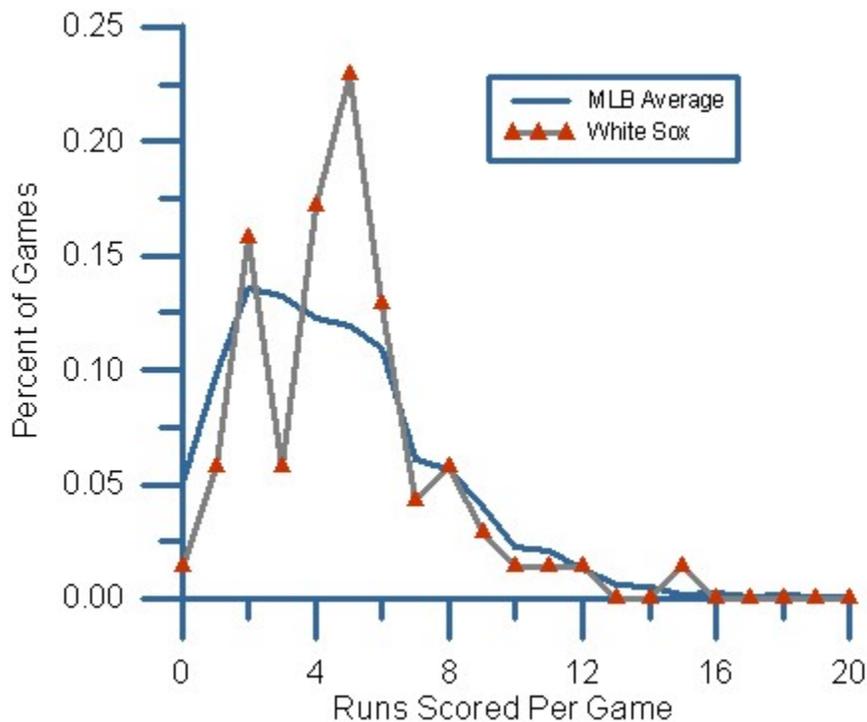
The point of small ball is to make your offense more predictable.

People keep talking about small ball in Chicago, much to the distraction of **many of us**. I really don't know what small ball (or smart ball, as Joe Morgan/Ozzie Guillen like to call it) is. But a couple of recent articles made me think of it differently.

Some writers have noted that the main benefit of playing "small ball" is that it makes the offense more consistent. Sean Ehrlich took a detailed analytic look at this supposition in a **Baseball Prospectus article (subscription required)** and concluded that it's not true. He found that teams that play small ball have about the same relative variance of runs scored per game as those that play for the long ball.

But John Dewan, in his most recent **Stat of the Week**, noted that the White Sox have scored more than 10 runs only twice this year, vs. 14 times at the same point last year, while they've been held to fewer than two runs only twice so far this year, vs. 10 times at the same point last year.

It seems to me that this is the really important point. Teams have a natural run scoring pattern, and the White Sox are not following that pattern. Here's a distribution of the number of runs per game that the average major league team has scored this year, along with the White Sox's distribution:



As you can see, the White Sox have scored two, four, five and six runs a game more often than the average team. To show you why this is important, take a look at these average winning percentages for teams that scored the following number of runs:

RS	Win %
0	0.000
1	0.078
2	0.243
3	0.322
4	0.494
5	0.606
6	0.700
7	0.858
8	0.847
9	0.880
10	0.936

Runs two through seven are a team's "sweet spot." If you had your druthers, you'd score between two and seven runs in every game. Which is just about what the White Sox have done.

In fact, if you multiply the White Sox's run distribution times the average winning percent for each number of runs scored, you'll find that the Sox have an "expected"

winning percentage of .540! Despite the fact that they are scoring nearly half a run less than average! And when you add in the fine performance of their pitching staff, you have this year's White Sox.

See, I threw in those exclamation points to make sure you didn't miss what I was trying to say. I still don't know what small ball is, but if it results in a run distribution pattern like the Sox's, then I'm all for it.

Even if you're not caught, it's still cheating.

The **Frank Robinson/Mike Scioscia brouhaha** made its way to Chicago, where the ever-quotable Ozzie basically said, "it's not cheating if you don't get caught." Now, I'm a father, and my basic point of view can be summed up **in this article**.

I've been reading *The Smartest Guys in the Room*, about the crooks who ran Enron into the ground, leading to thousands of jobs cut, billions of dollars lost and contributing to an energy crisis in California. These guys clearly believed that it's not cheating if you don't get caught. The real shame is that the people who were supposed to be watching them did a lousy job until it was too late.

So here's what I think: don't confuse baseball ethics with business ethics. Life is not a baseball field. There are umpires and rule-enforcers on a baseball field; there are very few in real life. Remember that if you're not caught cheating, it's still cheating. My kids had to sit through that lecture, so I figured you might as well too.

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by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

And while we're dishing out some bromides, try these: "Trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." "Don't settle." "Stay hungry, stay foolish." That would be **Steven Jobs talking to this year's Stanford graduates**. Unless the link is a hoax.

Major league ballplayers are fined much less than other pro athletes for their transgressions.

Even when they do cheat, major league ballplayers' wallets are relatively well protected. This ***Wall Street Journal*** article reviewed how often professional athletes have their fines reduced or—get this—refunded with interest. And I found the table at the end of the article most interesting; here's a recap:

LEAGUE	TOTAL FINES ASSESSED*
NBA	\$13,900,000
NFL	\$ 3,300,000
NASCAR	\$384,495
MLB	\$170,725

Major league ballplayers are fined MUCH less than other pro athletes. Which begs the question: do fines really matter? Skip Sauer has **some good comments about the subject**.

Pretty much exactly how much major league pitchers pitched in 1967.

We all know that starting pitchers don't pitch as much as they used to, and **Larry Dierker has outlined some very good reasons for this**. Whether or not this change has been good for baseball is one of the frequent debates at Baseball Primer.

Chris J.'s Run Support Index blog has done a wonderful job of taking Tangotiger's pitch count estimator and **applying it to previous seasons** (1967, 1969 and 1974). As an added service, Chris has categorized each pitcher's start into one of five categories, based on the **Baseball Prospectus framework**.

Here's one example. In 1967, Chris estimates there were about 280 games in which the starter pitched more than 133 pitches. In 2004, there were ten.

Along the same lines, did you know that Gary Gentry once pitched every inning of a 15-inning game for Arizona State, for a total of 208 pitches? This was three days after pitching a complete game shutout against Arizona. Imagine if a college pitcher did that today.

Or that on July 29, 1959, minor leaguer Juan Marichal lost a complete game 1-0 to Julius "Little Mudcat" Grant (the younger brother of Jim "Mudcat" Grant), who also pitched a complete game? The kicker? It was a 17-inning game.

Cap Anson once starred in a Broadway play.

Just received my copy of *The National Pastime*, SABR's annual historical magazine. I haven't had a chance to read much of it, but I did digest a great article about the time Cap Anson starred in his own play, which ran on Broadway and other theater venues in late 1895 and early 1896. Reviews were mixed, naturally, though Anson's fame seemed to carry the play for a while.

The entertainment industry has not had a lot of success turning baseball stars into actors. Babe Ruth was cast in several movies during his playing career, most notably a 1926 full-length feature called "The Babe Comes Home." Which inspired this critical appraisal from teammate Mark Koenig: "He couldn't act worth crap."

Felipe Lopez has hit the second-most outfield flies for home runs.

Did I mention that we have a **new format for our batting stats**? As another example of what you can do on that page, try sorting all major league players by HR/F, which stands for the percent of outfield flies that are hit for home runs.

Preston Wilson is first at 31%, and Reds' shortstop Felipe Lopez is second at 27%, ahead of such luminaries as Adam Dunn, Alex Rodriguez, Derrek Lee and Bobby Abreu. I'm sure the Great American Ballpark has something to do with this, but you wouldn't be wrong if you selected Felipe Lopez to your National League All-Star team.

Titanium necklaces are the new "edge."

According to *The New York Times* (registration required), those colored necklaces that a lot of baseball players wear are actually made of nylon coated in a titanium solution. Supposedly they help circulation and relieve stress.

Hey, they're better than steroids. I think.

This may be the next wave of cheating.

Speaking of steroids, everyone is wondering what the next phase of cheating with controlled substances will be. I say that opposing teams will start sending **remote-controlled headless zombie flies** to harass the pitcher on the mound.

Remember, you heard it here first.

References & Resources

My stories about pitching lots of innings came from the SABR-L mailing list. You

really **should join SABR**. And a special mention goes to Jules Tygiel for his terrific book *Past Time: Baseball as History*, which is filled with many great stories, such as Babe Ruth's acting career.

Here is an **official link to Steve Jobs' commencement speech**. Thanks to reader Jon Schwindt.

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets **@dastudes**.

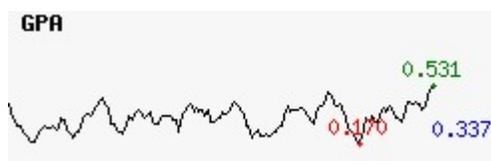
Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

September 22, 2005

David Ortiz is hot.



Perhaps the **Red Sox first baseman** is hot under the collar, since some folks think a designated hitter doesn't deserve to be called the Most Valuable Player. But he's particularly hot at

the plate, as the **Gross Production Average (GPA)** sparkline on the left shows. This is a sparkline of Ortiz's GPA throughout the season, on a 10-game rolling average. As you can see, he's turning up the heat at the end of the season when it matters most, with a GPA of .531 over the last 10 games.



What about the competition you ask? On the left you see **Alex Rodriguez's** GPA sparkline. His peak was even higher than Ortiz's, though it occurred earlier in the season. Their total GPAs

(unadjusted for ballpark) are just about even: .337 and .342. Ortiz gets points for batting well with runners in scoring position; A-Rod gets points for putting up his numbers in a pitcher's park. So who deserves the MVP? They're both great batters having great years. I guess it comes down to fielding vs. timing.

Frank Thomas has been missed.

It's nail-biting time here in Chicago. That's what happens when your team plays .500 ball while the Cleveland Indians start playing like the **1939 Yankees**, culminating in this week's terrific Chicago/Cleveland three-game series.

As I was listening to Tuesday night's game, Sox announcer **Darrin Jackson** stated that a resurgence by **Scott Podsednik** could add one to two runs a game for the White Sox. I was stunned. Apparently those Sox announcers still believe in

“Ozzieball.”



It’s true that Podsednik experienced a prolonged slump recently, as this sparkline of his OBP indicates (ignore the .000 — that’s when he was on the disabled list). And he’s clearly lost his

confidence on the basepaths. But Podsednik isn’t the guy who’s been missed the most.

One of the best-known stats of the year is Oakland’s winning percentage with and without **Bobby Crosby**. Here’s a similar stat: The White Sox have scored 5.3 runs a game when **Frank Thomas** has been on the active list, but only 4.4 a game without him.

It’s true that Thomas wasn’t **his awesome self** when he played this year. But he is still second to only Paul Konerko on the team in **Runs Created Per Game**. And, as **The Cheat has pointed out**, his presence seemed to have a positive effect on other Sox batters (most notably **Carl Everett**).

If you want to play “what if” scenarios with slumping or injured players, try thinking about the White Sox with a healthy Frank Thomas all year long.

Podsednik had 12 home runs last year. This year he has none.

Just thought I’d mention that. No player in the history of baseball, with at least 300 at-bats each season, has gone from 12 or more home runs to zero the next year. The irony is that he is now playing in US Cellular Field, one of the most extreme home run parks in the majors.

The American League’s three divisions are the closest ever.

It has been such a great year for pennant and Wild Card races that the Baseball Gods must be smiling. There are a lot of ways to evaluate how close these races have been. **Mike’s Baseball Rants took a look** recently and found that only 4.5 games separated the first-place team from the second-place team in each American League division, IN TOTAL. That is the lowest number since the three-division structure was created, though we obviously still have a few games yet to play before we can book this record.

Mike also found that the Dodgers have a chance for **the worst record ever by a**

team that began the year 12-2. I totally forgot that the Dodgers started the year 12-2.

Actually, my brother likes to call them the “Los Angeles Dodger” for those times when there’s only one starting player remaining from the beginning of the season. Here’s an excerpt from a recent e-mail he sent me:

“Yesterday, walking into Dodger Stadium, I looked up at the four huge murals over the Loge entrance, the four players pictured are:

Drew—out for the season

Izturis—out for the season

Perez—injured, possibly out for the season

Gagne—out for the season

Speaking of Baseball Gods, the Dodgers must have angered them somehow. Seems to me that the Dodgers are tied for this year’s most significant “what if” scenario, along with Barry Bonds’s knee.

What Cool Standings Are

Cool Standings is the name of **a website that updates each team’s odds of making the playoffs**. Baseball Prospectus **does this too**, but Cool Standings includes a graphical interface that is, well, cool. I particularly like the **team dashboards**.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

Thanks to **David Pinto’s Baseball Musings** for the heads up.

The record for most runs scored in a game without a multi-run inning is seven.

Sounds boring, right? Talk about esoteric... But esoterica is **exactly what this site is about**, and it makes for a great read. This past week, this blog ran a series on one-

run inning games that included cool patterns **like this one**. I'm hooked.

Stuffy McInnis was caught as a runner in six different triple plays.

That's the record. In addition, **Stuffy** (did people really call him that?) batted into two triple plays (the record is four) which means he was called out in eight different triple plays. This certainly seems to qualify him as one of the unluckiest batters/baserunners ever.

That's just one of the gems I picked up from **Baseball's Triple Plays**, a site that seemingly has everything you'd ever want to know about triple plays. Careful; this is the sort of site that can grab your attention for several hours.

Dwight Gooden threw a lot of pitches at a very young age.

At **Baseball Analysts**, Rich Lederer has been having a discussion about **Dwight Gooden's** unrealized great career. The question, **spurred by Bert Blyleven's comments about Gooden's drug use**, is whether pitching too many innings was also a factor in his decline. Even **sportswriter Bob Klapisch gave an opinion**, claiming that Gooden's decline was totally due to drug abuse.

There's no doubt that Gooden ruined his career (and, more importantly, his life) by taking drugs. But there's also very little doubt that he was overused at the tender ages of 18, 19 and 20. In that first year, 1983, he had an incredible record for Single A Lynchburg, striking out 300 and walking 112 in 191 innings. I applied **Tangotiger's pitch count estimator** to those numbers and found that Gooden threw an estimated 3,356 pitches at Lynchburg. So far this year, only **three major league pitchers have thrown more often**. As I said, he was 18 at the time.

Mets' manager **Davey Johnson** saw Gooden pitch in the minors, and he convinced General Manager Frank Cashen that Gooden was ready for the major leagues in 1984. Johnson was right, as Gooden went on to compile a 2.60 ERA with 276 strikeouts in 218 innings. He threw approximately 3,475 pitches, including 15 games in which he probably threw over 120 pitches. I estimate that he threw 142 pitches on September 1 and 140 on July 27. He was 19.

Next was 1985, the year Gooden dominated hitters as few pitchers ever have, with a 1.53 ERA and 268 strikeouts in 276 innings. That's a lot of innings; in fact, only two major league pitchers have reached that mark since (Charlie Hough and Roger Clemens in 1987). Did I mention that he was 20 years old at the time? I estimate he

threw 4,068 pitches that year, including 153 on October 2 after throwing 140 in his previous start. There were five games in which he threw at least 140 pitches.

For a bit more perspective, I applied **Baseball Prospectus's Pitcher Abuse Points (PAP)** to Gooden's pitch count. BPro's research indicates that every pitch thrown in excess of 100 pitches in a start has a wearing effect on a pitcher's arm. In fact, it is exactly research like this that has led to a new understanding of how to handle young pitchers.

According to PAP, Gooden racked up 437,598 PAP in 1984 when he was 19. This year, only **strong-armed Livan Hernandez** has surpassed that score. **Carlos Zambrano** is second at 160,000 (a total for which the Cubs' manager has been criticized by some Cubs' fans). In 1985, Gooden reached over 820,000 Pitcher Abuse Points. Baseball Prospectus doesn't have PAP stats for all years listed, but it appears as though that figure has been exceeded only once in the last 10 years, by the aforementioned Hernandez.

I glanced through Davey Johnson's great book covering the 1985 season, *Bats: The Man Behind the Miracle*, and found several references to Gooden's workload. Johnson was aware of Gooden's workload; in fact, Cashen urged him to do something about it. Johnson didn't.

“Of course, I would prefer Doc only throw 250, 260 innings. But you have to take into account that Dwight doesn't throw as many pitches in a game as most power pitchers. He's unusual. Nolan Ryan will throw 150 pitches in a ballgame. Dwight seldom gets over 140. Most of the time it'll be between 100 and 130. So the strain is less.

We certainly have a different attitude about pitch counts today, don't we? Nolan Ryan was truly unique in his ability to handle a large number of innings. But it's also worth noting that he was rested more often early in his career, and he didn't reach Gooden's level of Innings Pitched until the age of 25.

I'm not saying that drugs didn't ruin Gooden's career. Of course they did. But if we don't also remember that Gooden was tremendously overworked at a very young age, we'll have forgotten an important lesson.

Chris Young pitches the way Alfonso Soriano hits.

Take a look at the batted ball lines of **Alfonso Soriano** and **Chris Young**, both of the Texas Rangers:

Player	PA	K	BB	GB	OF	IF	LD	Oth
Soriano A.	638	18%	6%	26%	33%	3%	14%	3%
Young C.	658	20%	7%	24%	31%	4%	13%	1%

These two guys have very similar profiles. The exception is that Soriano has hit 35 home runs and is creating 5.4 runs per game, while Young has allowed only 18 home runs and is only giving up 4.5 runs a game. Which suggests an interesting study: can you compare batters and pitchers based on their batted ball lines, and use that comparison to forecast their future performances?

Sounds like an offseason project. In the meantime, I'll just say that you'll find the batted ball lines of every qualified major league hitter and pitcher in the **Hardball Times Baseball Annual 2006**. Please support the site and order your copy today.

This is why I love this game.

There were seven one-run games last Saturday, September 17, including one in which **Chacon** beat **Chacin**. In the game, the Yankees became the first team in history to play five different players with at least 300 career home runs.

Plus there was one extra-inning game, in which the Nationals' invincible **Chad Cordero** gave up a two-out ninth-inning game-tying grand slam to San Diego's **Khalil Greene**, and the Padres eventually won 8-5. A congressional investigation **was quickly conducted**.

To top it off, the Phillies scored 10 runs in the ninth inning after being shut out for the first eight to beat the Marlins 10-2.

The night before, **Manny Ramirez** was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded and the score tied in the bottom of the tenth for a "walk-off HBP" against Oakland. And last Wednesday, **Gabe Kapler** ruptured his Achilles tendon running the bases on Tony Graffinino's home run and **had to be removed for a pinch runner in the middle of the play**. For the pinch runner, **Alejandro Machado**, it was his first time on base in a major league game.

Sometimes this column just writes itself. Is there any other game that is even remotely as fascinating?

References & Resources

I've made two changes to the original article. An alert reader noticed that I had my facts wrong regarding pitchers reaching the 276 inning mark. And two others noticed that the record for batting into triple plays was wrong (I thought it was three). Thank you!

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets [@dastudes](https://twitter.com/dastudes).

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know, Um, A While Ago

by Dave Studeman

December 1, 2005

It's been a while, hasn't it? It's hard to come up with 10 new things each week during the offseason, so don't look for many more of these columns until next spring. But here are some things to mull over in the meantime...

It's the First Base Twilight Zone

Submitted for your approval. The day before Thanksgiving, two eerily similar first basemen are traded in eerily similar deals. **Carlos Delgado** is a 33-year-old left-handed first baseman who is owed \$48 million for the three years left on his contract. **Jim Thome** is a 35-year-old left-handed first baseman who is owed \$46 million for the three years left on his contract.

Delgado is sent from the Marlins to the Mets, along with some cash, for three players. Thome is traded from the Phillies to the White Sox, along with some cash, for three players. The Marlins receive a major leaguer and two minor leaguers, including the Mets' top-ranked pitching prospect. The Phillies receive a major leaguer and two minor leaguers, including the White Sox's top-ranked pitching prospect.

The deals are so similar that comparisons are inevitable. Personally, I'd rather have Delgado than Thome, because of Thome's age and injury history. But I do expect Thome's numbers to look better than Delgado's next year, simply because of the difference between Shea Stadium and the Cell. I'd also rather have **Aaron Rowand** in center field than **Mike Jacobs** at first. I don't follow the minors enough to choose between Yusmeiro Petit (whom the Marlins got from the Mets) and Gio Gonzalez (the pitching prospect sent from the Sox to the Phils). So let's call it a wash. In terms of players, I give the edge to the Mets and Phillies.

However, I'd also rather have \$22 million than \$7 million. That's the difference in cash that changed hands, with \$22 million going to the Sox and \$7 million to the Mets. Like most everything in the offseason, the difference between these two deals was in the cash flow. Does that make them relatively even? Only your accountant knows for sure.

Rowand's contract ain't bad either.

In 2004, Rowand had a stupendous year, flashing great leather in center field and creating 92 runs and 21 Win Shares in only 534 plate appearances. In retrospect, it was a spike year for the center fielder, and his 2005 performance is what the Phillies should expect. Outstanding defense, average offense.

Rowand is under contract for the next three years, which is probably a boon to the Phillies, who won't have to go through arbitration with him. Most interesting is the option for his final year of arbitration eligibility, which is \$3.25 million if the player calls it and \$5 million if the club calls it. In other words, there is a minimum/maximum of \$3.25 and \$5 million. That's what you would call budgetability, if there were such a word.

What do major league ballplayers and gasoline have in common?

Maybe you remember the waiting lines to buy gasoline in the 1970s. No? Well, then, maybe you at least remember the free agent year of 2000, in which the average free agent signed a deal worth almost \$4 million a year? Do A-Rod, Jeter, Manny, Hampton, Mussina, Dreifort and Neagle ring a bell? Every one of those guys signed a contract worth at least \$50 million in 2000. Maybe, in both cases, you thought those crazy days were over.

Well, inflation is rising, as **Yogi Berra** might say, at the gas pump and at the ballpark. Here's a table of the average salary and length of all free agent contracts signed each of the past seven years (based on my own research):

YEAR	AVG SAL/YR	AVG YRS	NO.
1998	\$2,932,213	2.12	93
1999	\$2,879,532	1.86	57
2000	\$3,992,089	2.19	77
2001	\$3,744,319	2.00	68
2002	\$2,921,583	1.49	79
2003	\$2,344,848	1.48	149

2004 \$3,223,961 1.74 152

Salaries peaked in 2000, after which major league owners managed to restrain themselves for a few years. In 2003, the strategy of flooding the market with free agents, originally expressed by Charlie Finley, seemed to particularly help keep salaries down. Last year, however, dollar and contract length inflation would not be denied. The average annual value of a contract rose \$800,000 and the average length rose a quarter of a year.

By the way, the 1970s were truly an age of hyperinflation. The general CPI rose an average 8% during those years, while baseball salaries rose an average 17%. In general, baseball salaries have risen about nine points higher than the overall inflation rate over any appreciable length of time in the past 30 years. This is why 10% is a reasonable baseball inflation target these days. Some say that rate is unsustainable. I used to say the same thing.

This year's free agent crop seems to be holding its own.

B.J. (“Don’t Call Me Robert”) Ryan just signed a five-year, \$47 million deal with the Blue Jays. Ryan will receive a \$10 million signing bonus, and his salary will run like this:

2006: \$2 million

2007: \$5 million

2008-2010: \$10 million each year

David Gassko **already covered the economics of this deal**, but when was the last time a reliever signed a five-year contract? I’m not sure, but maybe ... never?

In response, the Mets signed **Billy Wagner** to a four-year deal worth \$10.5 million a year, with an option for a fifth year at \$8 million. It will cost them \$1 million to buy out that option. The only reliever to ever receive that much money per year is **Mariano Rivera**, who earned \$10.5 million last year (and will do so again this year). The second-highest paid reliever last year was Wagner, at \$8.7 million, followed by **Eric Gagne** at \$7.7 million and **Keith Foulke** at \$7.1 million. No other reliever was paid more than \$7 million last year.

Admittedly, Ryan and Wagner are two of the best bullpen aces in baseball right now, but these are two long, expensive deals. Plus, the five-year \$60 million contract that

Paul Konerko signed yesterday is expensive compared to two years ago, when **Vladimir Guerrero** got only \$10 million more for the same number of years. It's too early to tell for sure, but inflation seems to be rising, indeed.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

There's a strategy for inflation.

Let's say you own a gasoline station, and you're watching your gas prices go up and up. Wouldn't it be nice to have a long-term contract with a supplier for a fixed price? Wouldn't that take care of all your problems?

In fact, that's the exact strategy you should follow in inflationary times. Easier said than done, particularly for gas station owners. But imagine you're a baseball owner or general manager, watching player salaries rise 10% a year. What should you do? Sign players to long-term contracts at fixed prices?

Well, yes and no. Unfortunately, baseball players break and age (stupid baseball players!), and they're not the most predictable producers in the first place. But, for the right player, it's not a bad idea.

Let's take **Rafael Furcal** as an example. Let's say you believe Furcal is worth \$10 million to you, that you sign him to a four-year deal for \$10 million a year, and that he's going to follow the normal aging curve outlined in Nate Silver's PECOTA projection from last year. Here's a table of his projected VORP (Value Over Replacement Value) and salary for four years.

	2006	2007	2008	2009
VORP	28.3	24.8	24.0	22.2
Salary (millions)	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$10.0
Discounted Salary	\$10.0	\$9.1	\$8.3	\$7.5
Disc. Sal/VORP	\$0.35	\$0.37	\$0.34	\$0.34

For the last two rows of the table, I discounted the \$10 million salary 10% a year (see

how inflation erodes the value of a dollar?) and then divided the discounted salary by each year's VORP. You can read more about VORP and PECOTA at **Baseball Prospectus**.

This is a lot of gas to make a simple point. On the last line, you can see that your team will actually pay less for Furcal (in "dollars per VORP") in his last year than his first, even though he's gone downhill and you've paid him \$10 million each year. In fact, if you paid him less in the first two years and more in the last two years (a la B.J. Ryan), the effect would be even more pronounced.

Just something to keep in mind as you contemplate those upcoming crazy contract offers. Key question: how do you think **Paul Konerko**, who will receive exactly \$12 million each of the next five years, will age during that time?

Esteban Loaiza sure has good timing.

At the end of the season, Washington starter **Esteban Loaiza** had a mutual option with the Nationals (meaning both the player and the team had to agree to call it) for \$4.5 million. The Nationals said yes, but Loaiza said no thanks, I can do better. Good move.

Loaiza just signed a \$21.4 million, three-year contract with Oakland. He'll be paid a \$3 million bonus, \$5 million in 2006, and \$6.5 million in both 2007 and 2008. My first impression, like a lot of folks, was "Huh?"

Let's review. Next year, Loaiza will be 34 years old, so this contract runs until he's 36 (plus an option year for the next year). He was 12-10 with a 3.77 ERA last year, which is pretty darn good, but he pitched at RFK, the best pitcher's park in the majors (along with PETCO in San Diego). His ERA was 2.86 at home and 4.17 on the road, which ought to be a huge flashing warning sign.

Take a closer look, however, at these home/road breakouts:

	K/IP	BB/IP	HR/IP	DER
Home	.864	.209	.082	.730
Away	.729	.299	.084	.666

I initially thought the difference between Loaiza at home and away would be in his home run rate (because of the ballpark), but he had the same rate both places. It was

actually his other key stats—strikeouts, walks and **Defense Efficiency Ratio**—that changed on the road. These sorts of stats are not generally impacted as much by a ballpark. Maybe his home/road split was more of a fluke than anything.

I'm not saying signing Loaiza to this deal was a good move. It strikes me as a big risk with an aging pitcher, despite what I said previously about long-term deals and inflation. Plus, the A's gave up their first-round draft choice to the Nationals. But, given those home/road splits and this crazy market, it's not **Eric Milton**.

Starting Pitcher Salaries

Speaking of Eric Milton, last year I posted a study **about the contracts that were being handed out to starting pitchers**, using the same free agent data I referred to above. Several people have quoted from the study, so I figured I better update it. First of all, here's a chart of the average salary paid to a free agent pitcher over the past seven years.

YEAR	AVG SAL/YR	AVG YRS	NO.
1998	\$2,809,596	1.97	33
1999	\$3,059,596	1.85	33
2000	\$3,876,645	2.32	38
2001	\$3,578,516	1.97	32
2002	\$2,817,977	1.38	42
2003	\$2,440,293	1.46	71
2004	\$3,278,344	1.66	68

You might call this chart “The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pitching Salaries.” 2000 and 2001 were awesome years to be a free agent pitcher (Chan Ho Park and Mike Hampton, come on down!) in terms of both salary and contract length. Actually, all the observations we had before apply to this table too.

Last year, I also presented a chart of all contracts worth \$3 million or more, to focus on the top pitchers. Here's the same chart, updated through last year's figures.

YEAR	AVG SAL/YR	AVG YRS	NO.
1998	\$4,438,426	2.78	18
1999	\$4,489,035	2.32	19
2000	\$5,234,375	3.00	24
2001	\$5,637,500	2.76	17
2002	\$5,088,531	1.94	17

2003	\$4,550,298	2.14	28
2004	\$5,931,746	2.43	30

As you can see, the jump in salaries was truly staggering when you focus on the top pitchers. The average top pitcher garnered almost \$6 million per year in his contract, a jump of \$1.4 million from the previous year and more than in any year of the last seven. Was the 2004 bunch a better group of pitchers than the 2003 bunch? Well, a cursory glance at their 2004 Win Shares suggests they weren't. Top pitchers who signed free agent contracts in 2003 contributed 57 Win Shares during the 2005 season. Those who signed contracts in 2004 contributed 63. In other words, the relative talent of the two pools was about the same.

There aren't many free agent starting pitchers this year. Thank goodness!

The true Series MVP was Lance Berkman.

Enough about free agents and contracts, already. Let's talk baseball! I already **posted a column about Win Probability Added for the World Series** and Aaron and I covered it in *The Hardball Times Annual*. But I should share a couple of new WPA items with you.

Jay Bennett, one of the early advocates of WPA, posted **his own World Series results using his Player Game Percentages system**. His results were very similar to ours, except for some differences between the pitching/fielding split.

Also, several people suggested I should look at "Series Probability Added" instead of Win Probability Added. Even better, one person told me how to do it. See, the idea is that some games are more important than others, as Dennis Boznango discussed in **a couple of great articles earlier this week**. For instance, in this most recent Series, the first game had a bigger impact on who eventually won than the last game, when the Series winner wasn't really in doubt.

So I applied some math to the Series WPA results and came up with a list of the leading SPA players. Here are the leaders:

Player	WPA	SPA
Berkman	0.70	0.10
Konerko	0.34	0.07
Crede	0.41	0.06

Jose Vizcaino	0.29	0.06
Blum	0.41	0.05
Dye	0.44	0.04
Podsednik	0.24	0.04
Cotts	0.27	0.04
Pettitte	0.21	0.03
Luis Vizcaino	0.21	0.03
Backe	0.36	0.02
Marte	0.18	0.02
Garcia	0.32	0.02
Widger	0.13	0.02
Politte	0.09	0.02

Lance Berkman was still the Series MVP, but several players skipped many places. For instance, Konerko came in first for the Sox, because his second-game grand slam was a huge hit in an important game.

Derek Jeter hits a lot of ground balls.

One of the things I found while putting together the stats for *The Hardball Times Annual* was that **Derek Jeter** hit a ground ball in 43% of his plate appearances last year. That's **Luis Castillo** and **Ichiro Suzuki** territory, and I didn't think Jeter was that kind of hitter.

He didn't used to be. That GB percentage is the highest of his career, and his line-drive percentage has declined from 24% to 20% to 19% in the last three years. Take a look at **his batted-ball graph** to see what I mean.

You don't have to love baseball to play it.

Here's a great story about a homeless man who found some comfort in softball. Even though he doesn't like the game.

References & Resources

One discerning reader has pointed out to me that a statement I made about the impact of long-term salary and aging isn't true. If you paid Furcal less in the early years of a contract, and more in the later years, then the cost per VORP would indeed go up, even on a discounted basis. Another one pointed out to me that I had calculated Esteban Loaiza's age incorrectly (which I've since corrected).

Thanks goodness for discerning readers!

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets [@dastudes](https://twitter.com/dastudes).

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know ...

by Dave Studeman

February 23, 2006

Spring training is in full swing, the baseball season is nigh. Time to start up the “Ten Things” column again.

Deja vu can be a welcome sensation.

I love spring training. It's the one time of year when anything is possible, when ball players say they'll have a great year and fans believe them.

For instance, Carlos Beltran **has promised he will make up for last year**. Bret Boone plans to **revive his career**. Julio Franco is **going to use his age to his advantage**. Pedro Martinez's toe **won't bother him in the long run**. And that's just one camp.

I know a lot of these comments probably make you feel like **the guy who suffered from chronic deja vu**. But don't worry, be happy. Go with the flow. It's spring training.

You should play poker with Jim Bowden.

One of the mysteries of the offseason was why Washington GM Jim Bowden wanted more flyball hitters. He traded **Brad Wilkerson** for **Alfonso Soriano**, which only really makes sense if Wilkerson is chronically injured, and then he offered half a million dollars to an over-the-hill **Sammy Sosa**. The problem is that the Nationals play in the worst flyball home park in the major leagues.

The funny part is that Sosa called Bowden's bluff, and Bowden immediately raised his offer to \$1 million, which Sosa has also reportedly turned down. I can't say I blame him; his stats will look awful at RFK. Probably not the place he wants to end his career.

Baseball book publishers think you're stupid.

There are a ton of new baseball books this spring, which is good news but makes for difficult decisions. One of the things we've talked about at The Hardball Times is how the Internet seems to have spurred an increase in book publishing, rather than undermining it.

But have you noticed how insulting and condescending baseball books have become? I was reading a book published in 2000 that started with a chapter entitled "Everything you think you know about baseball is wrong." Not your fault, the author went on to say, everyone involved in baseball is just as stupid as you. Needless to say, I didn't read much of the book. Last year, I read a book that told me I was as dumb as a Tigers fan in a bar (why a Tigers fan?), but that when I finished their book I would be as smart as a neurosurgeon. Didn't make it through that one either, and I don't feel less intelligent for it.

Dayn Perry has a fine new book out called ***Winners: How Good Baseball Teams Become Great Ones (and It's Not the Way You Think)***. Now, really, was that last bit necessary? Can you imagine the book publishers sitting around, contemplating Dayn's book (which isn't condescending at all; in fact, the final chapter is the most cogent review of how to build a winning team that I've read), looking at the title without the parentheses when it's about to go to print and suddenly saying:

Publisher 1: "Wait a second, it's not insulting enough!"

Publisher 2: "What do you mean?"

Publisher 1: "Everyone knows you've got to insult baseball fans in order to get them to buy your book!"

Publisher 2: "Ah, yes. I forgot. Too bad we didn't tell Dayn."

Publisher 1: "Well, too late for that. Let's just add something to the title. How about 'and you're ugly, too'?"

Publisher 2: "That seems a little harsh, even for baseball fans. How about 'you're so stupid, you have to read this book, if you can read at all'?"

Publisher 1: "I think you're onto something..."

And so on, until they get it right. I guess today's writers are expected to act like **Earnshaw Cook** (who took baseball managers to task back in the 1960s with detailed mathematical calculations and snarky tones) instead of **Bill James** or **John Thorn** and **Pete Palmer**, who didn't speak down to their readers in their revolutionary publications.

I started thinking, what if all the old classic baseball books were published today? What would their subtitles be? Think about it.

MacMillan's Baseball Encyclopedia: Think you know Ty Cobb's hit total? Think again!

Shoeless Joe: You mean you **don't** hear voices???

The Glory of their Times: You know nothing unless you've been told it!

Eight Men Out: You're not stupid enough to bet on baseball, are you?

Ball Four: You think baseball players are heroes? You hopeless, naive fool.

I'm not sure if this is part of some larger trend, or if baseball fans are being singled out for ridicule. But I'm not going to buy another baseball book that treats me like an idiot. If I miss out on something, too bad. At least I won't feel so aggravated.

You can measure ballparks with Google Earth.

One of the new baseball books is called **Baseball Hacks: Tips and Tools for Analyzing and Winning with Statistics** by Joseph Adler, and it's a great reference for those of you who would like to take advantage of baseball resources on the Internet. It includes chapters that tell you how to handle the Retrosheet game logs, install MySQL and do other geeky things.

One of the book's neat tips is how to use **Google Earth** to measure ballparks, or estimate how far home runs travel. If you don't have Google Earth, I highly recommend it. It's a stunning piece of software. The Balls, Sticks and Stuff guy used it to **measure the dimensions of Citizen's Bank Park**, as just one example.

More from The Hardball Times

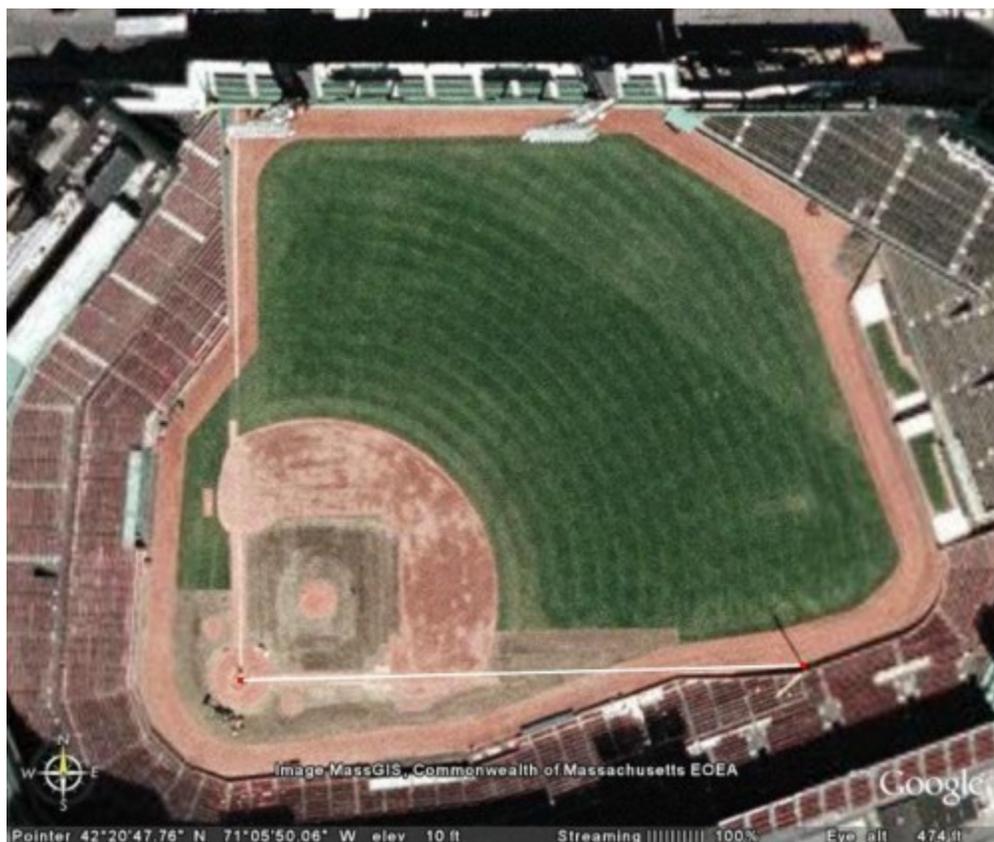


A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

Here's a Google Earth picture featuring the shortest outfield fence in the majors, Fenway Park's right field line. (See the white line? That's 302 feet long, according to Google Earth.)



Larry Bigbie doesn't hit infield flies.

I've stopped writing about **batted-ball stats** because you folks are probably sick of them. If you aren't, you'll be happy to know that I will continue to write about them at my **Baseball Graphs site**.

But I did want to mention something I uncovered while wading through the stats. Some guys just don't seem to hit infield flies. About 13% of the average batter's fly balls don't leave the infield. But, over the last four years, only 0.5% of **Larry Bigbie's** fly balls have been infield flies. He's hit only one infield fly in 1,190 plate appearances. I have no idea why or how he's done this, but it's phenomenal.

The next lowest on the list is the ageless **Julio Franco**, who has hit only three infield flies in 1,232 plate appearances, or 1.7% of all flyballs off his bat. I'm not sure what, if anything, this means. But it's wacky.

Lyle Overbay will get a bonus if he bats 645 times.

A couple of ESPN.com's top columnists, Peter Gammons and Jayson Stark, have moved to the blog format for their columns. This is a pretty interesting development, though I have a feeling it won't have much impact on their writing style or content. They're both natural bloggers (and that's a compliment!). Unfortunately, you have to

have an Insider account to read them.

Stark's first blog entry talked about some of the wacky contract incentives he's seen, such as pitchers getting bonuses if they win Silver Slugger awards. Virtually all contracts have boilerplate language about awards and bonuses, so that sort of thing isn't too surprising. I did see a couple of clauses that caught my eye, however.

Lyle Overbay, who will make \$2.5 million this year, will be paid an extra \$25,000 if he makes 645 plate appearances. That's it; no other plate appearances will trigger a bonus payment. So, Lyle, why 645?

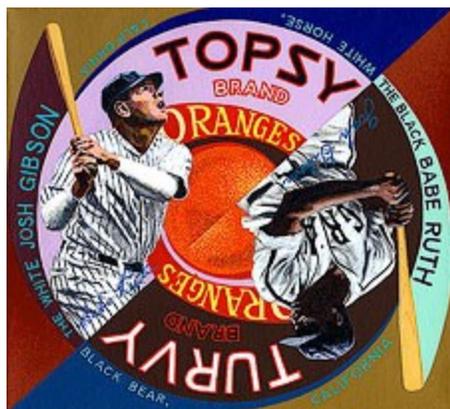
Similarly, **Dontrelle Willis**, who will be paid \$4.35 million, will make an extra \$50,000 if he starts 35 games this year. Nothing for 25 or 30 starts. Just 35. Why is that? Does his agent think that the \$50,000 will deter the Marlins from overusing him?

In contrast, **Tony Armas** will make only \$2.1 million as a base, but could make an extra \$2 million based on a scale of games started and innings pitched. Same thing with **Octavio Dotel**, based on games and games finished instead. Shoot, Dotel will make an extra \$250,000 if he's on the major league roster for just one day.

You know how Kansas City signed some lower-tier free agents to upgrade the team this offseason? For several of them, the Royals agreed to not offer arbitration when their contracts expire, in order to entice them to play in KC. By not being offered arbitration, the players will have more freedom the next time they enter the free-agent market. That's how hard it was to find players willing to play in KC.

Baseball and orange crates can inspire great artwork

Thanks to **Don Malcolm at Baseball Think Factory**, I became aware of **the artwork of Ben Sakoguchi**, which is now on display at the Los Angeles City College. After looking through the online reproductions, I settled on this as my favorite:



If you live in LA, this looks like it is definitely worth a visit.

Everyone's talking about lineups.

Cyril Morong posted an interesting analysis of the **relative importance of OBP and SLG for each position in the lineup**, and it's sparked some interest in the subject. The Scorebard used Cyril's results to **construct the ideal Oakland lineup**.

This is pretty complex stuff, and the possibility of multicollinearity throwing off the results is real, as Cyril explains. When I took my one and only statistics class, our professor would sit back in his chair when we asked him why we were getting certain results, stroke his beard, and slowly enunciate "Multicollinearity," as though he was telling us the meaning of life. We had no idea what he was talking about.

Thanks to **SG at the Replacement Level Yankees Weblog**, I became aware of a **much simpler lineup tool that you might enjoy**. That tool is based on 2005 stats, so SG created **the same tool with 2006 projections**. You can also use it to project Runs Created per game for your lineup.

You might also enjoy **this tool for creating online APBA cards**.

Big midseason trades aren't a new trend.

The other day, I was fooling around with historical Win Shares in a pivot table because, well, that's what I do. And I started looking at players who were traded in midseason despite the fact that they were producing well in that season (call it the "Carlos Beltran" trade). I expected to see trades like this increase significantly in the free-agent era, but I was wrong. Big midseason trades actually spiked in the 1950s and haven't been as high since, though the current decade is coming close.

To illustrate what I mean, here's a table of total Win Shares in each decade, the Win Shares of each player who played on more than one team in a given year (Win Shares for that year only) and the percentage of Win Shares traded during the year.

Decade	Total	Traded	Pct.
1870-1879	2,790	14	0.50%
1880-1889	25,782	265	1.03%
1890-1899	27,837	300	1.08%
1900-1909	33,408	297	0.89%
1910-1919	39,342	339	0.86%
1920-1929	36,771	216	0.59%
1930-1939	36,657	305	0.83%
1940-1949	36,831	320	0.87%
1950-1959	36,945	539	1.46%
1960-1969	47,766	559	1.17%
1970-1979	59,385	603	1.02%
1980-1989	60,945	555	0.91%
1990-1999	64,761	831	1.28%
2000-2005	43,704	616	1.41%

Baseball historians probably have a better idea than I about why this happened, but good players who switched teams in-season in the 1950s included **Red Schoendienst, Sal Maglie, Dave Philley** and **Ray Boone**. Several of these players actually played better after being traded.

It's Ozzie time.

Ozzie Guillen may well be the most dynamic and entertaining person in baseball today. A Tommy Lasorda for the 2000s, if you will. He says stupid things, but he's not afraid to say them, and he just keeps on talking anyway. He also manages to sneak in some intelligent quips while just having fun and making baseball fun.

There was a big controversy here in Chicago when he didn't attend the White House reception for the White Sox. Big deal. Then he blasted **A-Rod** for not playing with the Dominican Republic in the World Baseball Classic, and then he apologized about it. The fun never ends.

Keep at it, Ozzie. We're with you.

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets **@dastudes**.

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

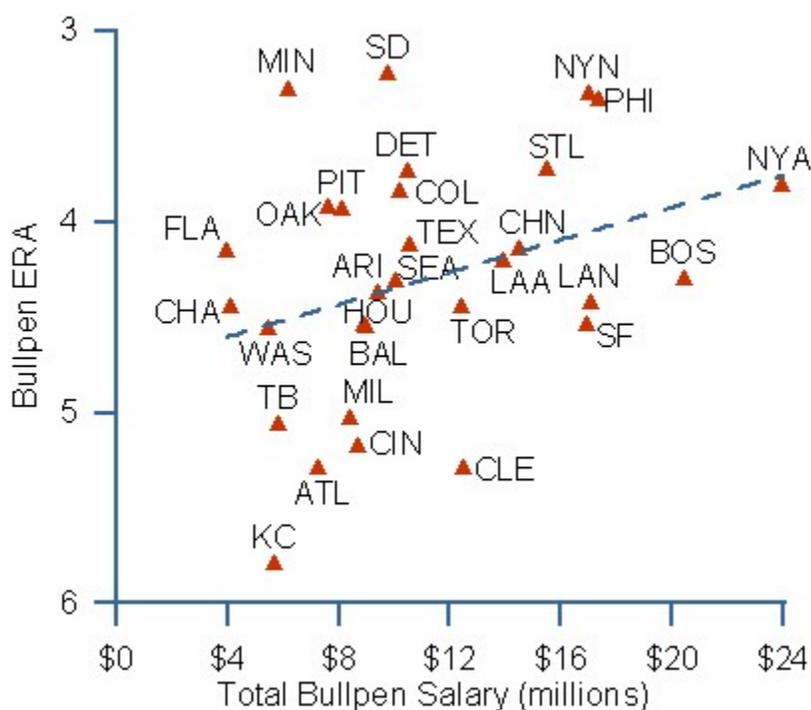
by Dave Studeman

June 22, 2006

David Riske is now the highest-paid member of the White Sox's bullpen.

When the White Sox traded **Javy Lopez** to the Red Sox for **David Riske**, the cost of Chicago's bullpen rose about 45%. Riske only makes \$1.8 million a year, but the Sox bullpen was the second-least expensive pen in the majors before the deal, with only \$4.1 million in salary scheduled for Sox relievers.

The least expensive bullpen, of course, belongs to the Florida Marlins (\$3.9M) and the most expensive, of course, is the Yankees' (\$23.9M), which got me to wondering, do teams get anything for their bullpen money? For an answer, I decided to graph some data (of course!) and came up with the following picture, which places bullpen salary against each bullpen's ERA (note that I graphed ERA in reverse order, to show a positive relationship between salary and performance).



In general, yes, teams do get more for their bullpen dollars (see the rising line?) but the data sure isn't very compelling. For you mathematical readers, the R squared is .11. My take from the graph is that spending money on your bullpen is a good way to make sure your relievers won't be terrible, but it's no guarantee that they will be great.

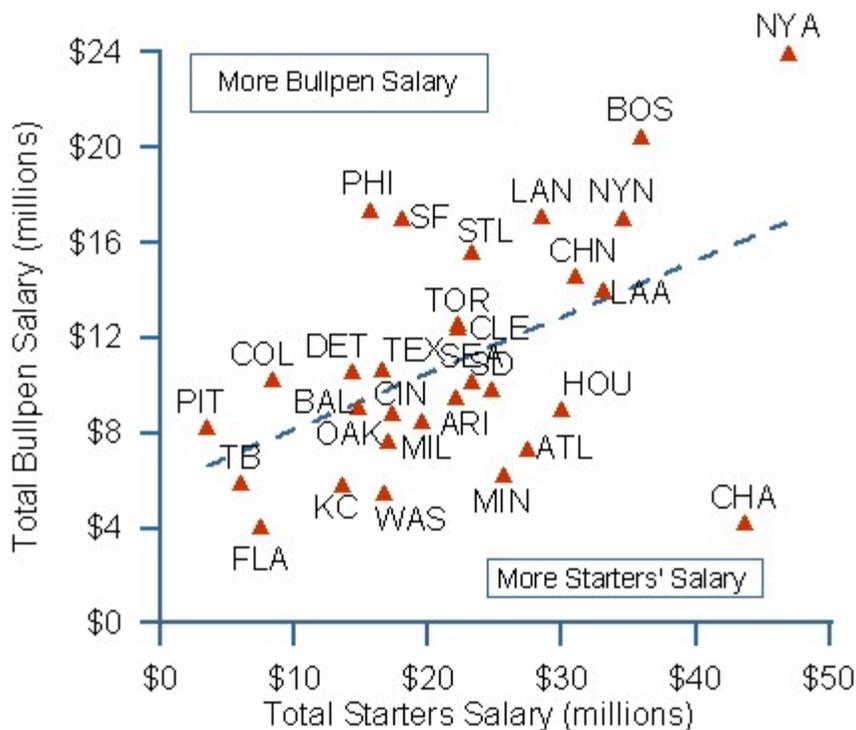
Anyway, the higher the dot is above the line, the more value each team is getting for its bullpen money, and the farther below the line, the less value it's getting. So the best bullpen values so far are in Minnesota and San Diego. The worst are in Kansas City, Cleveland Cincinnati and Atlanta. The White Sox have been only a slightly above-average value and, with the addition of Riske, they may move closer to the line the rest of this season.

By the way, teams like the Mets, Blue Jays and Cubs were criticized last year for spending too much money on their bullpens but, judging from this graph, they seem to have made decent investments so far. I know that the Blue Jays are below the value line, but if you were to adjust their ERA for the league they play in, they would be about even.

But the Sox spend a lot more on their starters.

After drawing that graph, I started to wonder which teams spend relatively more on the bullpen vs. their starters. What I found is that the average team spends almost exactly twice as much on the rotation as they do on the bullpen. As you can imagine, however, there are big differences between teams. The Pirates actually spend more money on their bullpen than their rotation, while the White Sox spend 10 times as much on their rotation as their bullpen.

Here's a graph showing the relative difference for each team:



These results are probably a reflection of both circumstance and overt strategy, though the White Sox's strategy seems crystal clear. It's the rotation, stupid!

Derek Jeter really is Mr. Clutch

The guys who wrote *The Book* (affectionately known as Tango, MGL and Dolphin) have started their own blog. They don't call it *The Blog*. In fact, they don't call it much of anything. Might I suggest *The Book Blog*?

The Book Blog will likely have more cutting-edge sabermetric research than any other free site currently running. For instance, in the latest entry, Tango has analyzed **Fangraphs' WPA stats** to determine that **Derek Jeter is having a terrific "clutch" year at bat**, even better than **David Ortiz's 2005** (keeping in mind that we're not yet at the halfway point of the season).

I'm one of those sabermetricians who feels **Jeter** is overrated by Yankee fans who consider him next to Godliness. But you have to give the guy his due; Derek Jeter is living up to his reputation this year.

By the way, **recent research has shown that smart people choke**. So here's a quick personality test: which would you rather be if you could only be one: smart or clutch?

Beltran's home/road splits

Earlier this week, I wrote a piece outlining how **Calos Beltran** has **changed his batting approach this year**. What I missed, as one commenter pointed out to me, is that Beltran is hitting much, much better on the road than at home.

At home, Beltran is batting .211/.350/.491 and on the road he's batting .358/.446/.649. That is indeed a huge difference, but take a look at some of his underlying stats:

	BB/PA	K/AB	HR/AB	BABIP
Home	0.17	0.22	0.08	.188
Away	0.14	0.23	0.09	.392

Beltran is actually walking more and striking out less often at home, and hitting home run rates at about the same pace. The difference is 200 points in Batting Average on Balls in Play. Over the rest of the year, his home BABIP will increase and his road BABIP will decline. Exactly where they come out will probably determine what his season looks like in total.

Carlos Delgado and Jose Valentin also haven't batted as well at home, **as this post highlights**.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

Odd Couples

Super poster dackle2 at the Fanhome message board did some calculations and estimated that **Ron Santo** and **Billy Williams** probably **played more games together than any other two teammates in history**. Other teammates high on the list include **George Brett/Frank White**, **Alan Trammell/Lou Whitaker**, and **Bill Mazerowski/Roberto Clemente**.

Dackle added a second post that listed **the historical pitching staffs that had the greatest future**. To determine the list, he looked at all pitching staffs and calculated how many wins each pitcher would go on to accumulate in his career.

Surprisingly, the early '90's Atlanta Braves weren't first, the 1978 Los Angeles Dodgers were. That staff included **Bob Welch** (204), **Charlie Hough** (177), **Rick Sutcliffe** (171), **Dave Stewart** (168), and **Don Sutton** (119).

Thank you, Dackle. Great stuff.

The Marlins are hot.

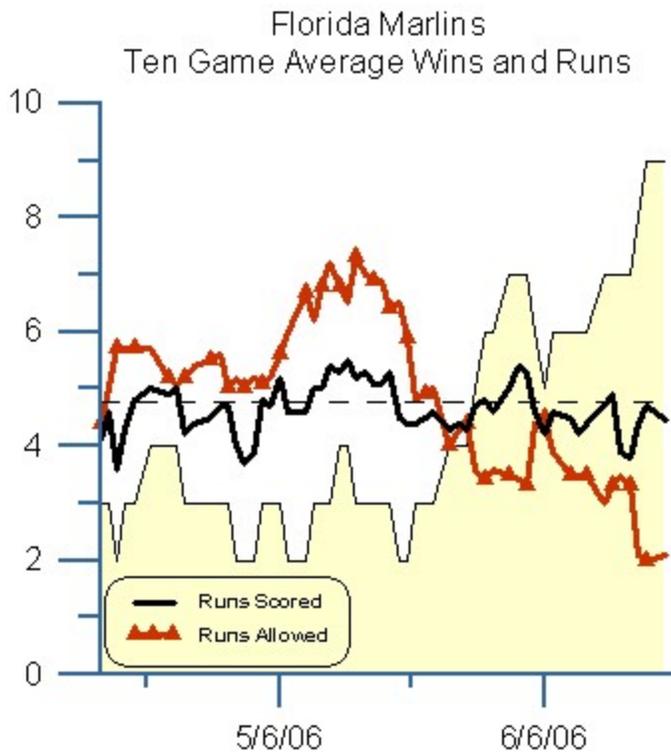
Is it just me, or have baseball teams been mighty streaky lately? In the AL Central, the Tigers, White Sox and Twins are all hot, Oakland was awesome before visiting Denver, and even the Mariners have been on a roll lately.

In the National League, most teams have been having the opposite experience, with the Diamondbacks and Braves in doldrums and several other teams close behind (Reds, Pirates, Cubs, etc.). And the Nationals continue to toy with their fans by putting together alternate hot and cold streaks.

I have a feeling that the schedule and interleague play are part of the explanation behind these hot and cold spells, but I've been particularly intrigued by the one National League team that seems to be bucking the trend, the Florida Marlins.

We all know the Marlins' story. During the offseason, they decided to trade away all their old, expensive talent in exchange for cheap, young talent. Although the Fish took some heat for these deals, many of us thought the trades weren't really all that bad, and that the Marlins would have a chance to compete again in a couple of years. We were wrong—the Marlins' turnaround started a month ago.

Here is a graph of their 10-game averages in runs scored, runs allowed and wins (the yellow area highlights the number of wins for the 10 previous games). As you can see, the Marlins' pitching has been awesome lately and their record has followed suit:



Take a look at the key stats for Marlin starters over the past 20 games (courtesy of **Doug's Stats**):

	W	L	IP	H	SO	BB	ERA
Dontrelle Willis	3	0	31.2	34	14	5	2.56
Scott Olsen	4	0	27.2	19	22	5	1.95
Josh Johnson	2	2	25.2	27	23	13	1.75
Ricky Nolasco	2	2	25.0	29	22	5	3.24
Brian Moehler	3	1	24.0	30	12	8	5.25

The Marlins' season turned around on May 22 when, after being swept by the Devil Rays, they returned home to play the hapless Cubs. On the 22nd, Nolasco beat the team that traded him, 9-1 (think the Cubs regret that deal?), and he hit a home run to boot.

Before facing the Cubbies, the Marlins were 11-31; since then, they've been 19-6.

Luck has also been a big factor. Prior to May 22, the Fish were 5-17 in close games (games decided by two runs or less) and they even **lost four in a row after leading in the ninth** (something previously accomplished by only the 2002 Devil Rays). Since then, Florida has been 8-2 in close games and the bullpen hasn't blown a save opportunity in the last 20 games.

If the Marlins finish over .500, it will be one of the best stories of the year.

The National League has better infields, the American League better flychasers.

I've mentioned our league fielding stats before, something we track on **the Hardball Times team page**. We keep track of how often each team turns each type of batted balls into outs, and what we've found is that AL teams catch outfield flies more often (26 times more than the major league average) and the NL teams gobble up more groundballs for outs (43 times more often than the major league average).

Ballparks may play a hand in these results, because the only artificial turf stadiums are in the American League and turf speeds up ground balls. Setting that aside, however, the best outfields are Atlanta's (+22) and Toronto's (+21), while the worst are Houston's (-30) and Philadelphia's (-22). Best infields are Detroit's (+52) and Houston's (+49) and the worst are Tampa Bay's (-39) and Cleveland's (-24). The Tigers' infield has been a critical ingredient to their success this year.

Who flubbed double plays most often last year.

In keeping with our fielding focus, **John Dewan's stat of the week** recently ran a list of the teams that mishandled the most (and least) double plays last year. These were outright flubs, such as dropped balls, missed pivots or bad throws; plays that clearly should have been double plays but weren't.

According to John, *With or without an error involved, in 2005 missed double plays happened about 18 times a week! It's probably not a coincidence that the World Champion White Sox were the best at avoiding this problem.* The teams that missed the least double plays last year were the White Sox (just 7), Twins (10), Giants (10) and Cubs (10). The teams that made the most DP flubs were the Mariners (23), Rangers (23), and Blue Jays (21).

Uniwatch

I've been reading a lot of the **Uniwatch blog** lately. Uniwatch is dedicated to the aesthetics of what athletes wear, and it's great fun to read. I never paid much attention to this sort of thing before, but lately I've learned...

– More and more catchers now have separate masks for home games and road games.

- A-Rod appears to be wearing vanity-branded batting gloves.
- The “high-pants look” has somehow gone from being considered old-school to being youth-associated
- The Wimbledon ballboys and ballgirls will wear blue this year instead of the traditional green (changing 30 years of tradition).

Check it out for yourself.

Humidor watch update

A few weeks ago, we noted that there **appears to be a new Coors Field in Denver**, one that pitchers actually find to their liking. Other analysts, such as **Dan Fox of Baseball Prospectus**, have observed the same trend and now, with the Rockies’ two consecutive shutouts of Oakland, everyone is noticing. One major league executive even thinks **other teams may start using humidors**.

Yes, the trend has continued, but it’s changed too. Last time we talked about this (May 11), we noted that decreased home runs were the main reason scoring appeared to be down at Coors. That profile has changed somewhat, however. Here are the relevant May stats, compared to current stats:

Park Factors	May	Now
Home Run Factor	0.85	1.04
Park-S Factor	1.07	1.00

The Park-S factor, which measures scoring on all plays except home runs, has declined to 1.00, though it’s consistently been around 1.07 the last five years. I think this is likely to be a less permanent change than the change we had seen in home run rates, and my guess is that the Coors Park Factor will increase somewhat the rest of the year as the Park-S factor increases.

On the other hand, who knows? Here’s a bit more of a breakdown: the Rockies have scored 159 runs at home, 163 on the road. They’ve hit 28 home runs at home, 40 on the road. The Rockie pitchers, meanwhile, have allowed 158 runs at home and 169 on the road and 32 home runs at home and 20 on the road. In other words, there’s a great big difference between Rockie batters and pitchers and we’re sure to see more change as the year progresses.

Jason Grimsley, you didn’t have to get caught.

Do you use HGH for that extra edge? Steroids? Other performance-enhancing drugs? Sure, you do. Well, I've got good news for you—you can now **buy naturally clean urine on the Internet!** The site even brags that the urine is pretested, safe and easy to use for any procedure. And, just in case you're concerned someone is watching, you can even buy **a kit with a fake penis** (or, as they prefer to call it, a "Whizzinator"). That's called the "Executive" version.

That's eleven things learned this week, but I wish I hadn't learned that last one. We'll throw it in for free.

References & Resources

Thanks to **Crawfish Boxes** for the "smart people choke" link.

Update: I've been told I'm about a year late on the Whizzinator. Sorry about that, but now I'm upset that I could have been cheating all this time and didn't know it!

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets @dastudes.

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

August 3, 2006

Some people need to be told that Cesar Izturis isn't really that good.

You should have read the *Chicago Tribune* the day after the Cubs dealt **Greg Maddux** to the Dodgers for shortstop **Cesar Izturis**. Phil Rogers called it a “huge steal,” a “major blow for the Cubs’ uncertain future.” Another Tribune columnist, Mike Downey, said it was “one of the Cubs’ smartest maneuvers of this century.” I couldn’t believe what I was reading.

Look, Phil and Mike, Cesar Izturis is a good-fielding shortstop, no doubt. He did have a very good year in 2004. But the first half of 2005 was a fluke. And more to the point, his batting average is empty, meaningless. He doesn’t walk and he doesn’t hit for power. Take a look at his stats the last five years:

Year	Ag	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	CS	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG
2001	21	134	19	36	6	2	2	9	8	1	2	15	.269	.279	.388
2002	22	439	43	102	24	2	1	31	7	7	14	39	.232	.253	.303
2003	23	558	47	140	21	6	1	40	10	5	25	70	.251	.282	.315
2004	24	670	90	193	32	9	4	62	25	9	43	70	.288	.330	.381
2005	25	444	48	114	19	2	2	31	8	8	25	51	.257	.302	.322

In 2004, his best season, he drew only 43 walks in 728 plate appearances and his slugging percentage was .381. This year, he is batting .252/.302/.353, which is only slightly worse than what you can expect from him in the future. You know what? The Cubs already have a similar player on their roster. His name is **Neifi Perez** and his lifetime batting line is .270/.301/.380.

What’s more, the Cubs are above average in fielding groundballs already (+15). They don’t need more slick infielders.

Here's the middle of the Cubs' infield for the rest of the year: Izturis at short, **Ronny Cedeno** (.254/.279/.338 this year) at second and Perez as backup. The two batters at the top of the Cubs' order will be **Juan Pierre** (.277/.324/.376 this year) and Izturis. That is pathetic.

The kicker is that Izturis's contract calls for him to make \$3.2 million this year and \$4.25 million next year. There's even a club option for 2008 at \$5.85 million, which the Cubs can buy out for \$300,000. Thank goodness. I really don't know what got into Rogers and Downey.

Say, doesn't the Tribune Company own the Cubs?

The Hardball Times now has its own baseball cards.

Like many of you, I collected baseball cards as a kid. So when Toronto photographer Aaron Reynolds offered to post his game photographs as baseball cards on our site, I was thrilled. I was even more thrilled when I saw Aaron's design. Take a look at the card of this guy, who's been pretty hot lately:



The Hardball Times

Justin Morneau
Minnesota Twins

Bats: L Throws: R Born: 5/15/1981

Career Win Shares to 07/24/06 : 33

Batting Stats									
Year	Tm	Lg	G	PA	AVG	HR	RBI	SB	CS
2004	MIN	AL	74	312	.271	19	58	0	0
2005	MIN	AL	141	543	.239	22	79	0	2
2006	MIN	AL	95	393	.313	27	84	1	2

Batting Stats								
Year	Tm	Lg	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G	GPA
2004	MIN	AL	.340	.536	.875	48	6.4	.283
2005	MIN	AL	.304	.437	.741	60	4.4	.247
2006	MIN	AL	.359	.597	.956	72	8.0	.308

Win Shares								
Year	Tm	Lg	Bat	Pitch	Field	WSP	WSAB	WS
2004	MIN	AL	8.7	0.0	0.9	.622	4	10
2005	MIN	AL	7.2	0.0	1.0	.279	-2	8
2006	MIN	AL	13.1	0.0	1.0	.686	7	14

www.hardballtimes.com
photographs by Aaron Reynolds

You are welcome to **download the cards** and use them on your desktop, in your blog or wherever you'd like. Right now, we have a collection of six players, but the

library will grow quickly during the year.

Excruciating Lists

Did you know that...

- The names of former majors leaguers **Bill James** and **Jim Asbell** are anagrams? **Martin Duke** and **Mike Durant**?
- **Bob Gibson** didn't have a Game Score below 25 in a single start in 1968?
- **Kevin McReynolds** has the most game-ending RBI's in Met's history (a mere eight)?
- On June 11, 2002, the starting lineups of the San Diego/Baltimore lineups had more Scrabble® points than any lineups since at least 1957? 184 points in all: (37 Vazquez, 27 Gonzalez, 25 Jimenez, 20 Pickford, 16 Lankford, 15 Cruz, 14 Klesko, 13 Kotsay, 12 Trammell, 5 Gant)

I discovered these facts and more on a wonderful new site called **Excruciating Baseball Lists**.

They guy who runs this site parsed the detailed Retrosheet game data from 1957 to 2005 and developed a bunch of wonderful trivial lists. Be sure to get lost in it. (Hat tip to the **Sports Reference Blog**)

The Mets have gotten the most out of "free talent."

One of the ways to judge the management of a major league team is to ask how well they have taken advantage of "free talent," or talent that is available to many teams at a relatively low salary. So I put together the following list of the number of **Win Shares Above Bench** that teams have gotten from free agents signed for \$3 million or less. Admittedly, the results are more about luck than anything else, but it's a revealing list:

Team	WSAB
NYN	15.3
TOR	12.8
LAN	7.1
TEX	6.1
CIN	5.7
ARI	4.7
OAK	3.9

STL	3.7
MIL	3.3
COL	3.1
CHA	2.2
SD	2.2
KC	1.9
NYA	1.2
WAS	1.0
LAA	0.8
BAL	0.8
CLE	0.4
SEA	0.3
PIT	-0.1
BOS	-0.1
HOU	-0.4
SF	-0.5
DET	-0.7
MIN	-1.7
ATL	-2.3
PHI	-2.5
CHN	-2.7
FLA	-3.6
TB	-7.2

The biggest free talent contributors for the Mets have been **Jose Valentin** and **Darren Oliver**; for the Blue Jays, **Frank Catalanotto** and **Gregg Zaun**.

\$3 million may not exactly seem like “free talent” to you, but that’s the way of player salaries these days. It’s much harder to find truly free talent than it used to be. **Ken Phelps**, where are you?

The Twins have the best young talent; the Royals have the worst.

Here’s another Win Shares Above Bench table for you. It’s the total WSAB for players with less than six years of major league service (the magic free agent hurdle), and I’ve grouped the WSAB into one-year increments of major league service time.

Team	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	TOT
MIN	13	9	18	9	1	11	61
DET	29	7	4	11	4	6	60

CIN	11	-1	5	26	7	0	48
ARI	5	3	13	12	13		46
FLA	26	-2	18			1	43
TEX	6	2	6	5	6	15	40
CHA	2	7	11	10	3	7	40
OAK	1	17	7	-1	6	9	38
LAA	12	2	4	20	1	-2	36
SD	12	5	9	-1	3	7	36
STL	8	6	0	0		22	36
WAS	5	7	1	1	-2	21	33
COL	4	14	-3	8	9	0	33
SEA	16	-4	5	3	-2	12	30
TB	-1	5	-2	15	1	9	29
TOR	2	7	8	-3	9	5	28
CLE	-1	6	3	16	0	2	26
NYN	-3	15	11	3	-2	0	25
PHI	2	4	9	2	-1	9	25
HOU	9	1	0	6	9	-1	25
MIL	6	-1	12	4	-1	4	24
BOS	13	5	0	1	3	0	22
ATL	7	3	3	3	-3		13
LAN	10	0		-1	1	1	12
SF	8	-1	-2			4	9
PIT	-1	2	12	-5	-1	1	8
BAL	5	-2	6	-2	5	-7	6
NYA	4	2	0	-2	-2	-1	1
CHN	-9	-1	-1	2	12	-2	1
KC	-6	6	1	-5	-1		-5

The Twins have the best pool of players not yet eligible for free agency, but they just barely beat the Tigers, who have the most productive rookie class. The Marlins, of course, have the second-best group of rookies. But pity the poor Royals whose young players have been collectively worse than bench players. As they used to say on TV, that's incredible.

More from The Hardball Times

A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel



Goodbye for now.

By the way, this table is also useful for gauging each team's prospects for next year. The teams that are most dependent on players about to enter free agency are Washington (**Alfonso Soriano** and **Nick Johnson**), Texas (**Vincente Padilla** and **Gary Matthews, Jr.**) and Seattle (**Ichiro** and **Gil Meche**, though Ichiro is under contract for one more year). Luckily for the Cardinals, **Albert Pujols** is signed through 2011.

Where the Twins came from.

Will Young has drawn a nice “tree diagram” of the origins of every Twin ballplayer (who each player was traded for, etc.). It's fascinating, and you can find it **on his site**. Are there organizational trees like that for other teams?

Horacio Ramirez has the highest Leverage Index of all starting pitchers.

After my **WPA articles a week ago**, one reader asked how **Jason Schmidt** could have such a high Leverage Index (1.13). I thought it was a good question, so I dug around a bit and I found that Schmidt doesn't have the highest Leverage Index among starters. Atlanta's **Horacio Ramirez** does.

Leverage Index, remember, is a measure of how “tight” a game is for each batter faced. Really good relievers are saved for “high leverage” situations and can reach an LI of 2.0, while starting pitchers tend to have a Leverage Index around average, 1.0. Ramirez's LI is 1.22. How did he achieve such a high Leverage Index? First of all, he pitched late into some close games (no surprise, given the state of Atlanta's bullpen):

- Seven innings in a 2-1 win
- Seven innings in a 2-1 loss
- Eight innings in a 5-3 win; when taken out, the Braves led 4-3
- 6.2 innings in a 3-2 loss
- Eight innings in a 5-2 win (most of the runs scored late in the game)

But there is something else. Ramirez didn't pitch very well in some games and was

taken out quickly. For instance, he pitched only 1.2 innings in the beginning of a 14-4 loss, and one inning in a 10-5 loss. So that's the key to a high starter LI: pitch late into close games because your bullpen stinks and get taken out quickly when you stink.

David Ortiz is amazingly clutch, but he's not the clutchiest.

David Ortiz simply can't stop winning ballgames. In fact, **according to this blog**, he is 8 for 9 in walk-off situations the last year and a half. When you include the 2004 postseason, his numbers are even more amazing.

“Since the end of the 2004 regular season, Ortiz has come to the plate in a walk-off situations 19 times—and reached base 16 times. He is 11-for-14 (.786), with 7 HR and 20 RBI.

It's odd, but Ortiz isn't in the top ten in **clutchiness**. His clutchiness is 1.34, pretty far behind **Albert Pujols'** 2.26 and **Geoff Jenkins'** 2.15. But remember that clutchiness is a relative stat. If a player is having a great year, like Ortiz, it will be harder for him to perform a lot better in high leverage situations.

Which makes Albert Pujols' clutchiness even more remarkable.

There is a misspelling on Bruce Sutter's Hall of Fame plaque.

The newly inducted **Bruce Sutter's** Hall of Fame plaque says that he “lead the league in saves five times.” It may not be immediately obvious to you, but “lead” is either a present tense verb, or something you don't want in your house paint. I think the Hall was going for “led.” Too bad that don't have our crack staff of THT editors in Cooperstown.

You can view all the new **Hall of Fame plaques at the MLB website**. Thanks to the posters of SABR-L for pointing out that little goof.

Tomorrow will be Britney Spears Baby Safety Night at the Newark Bears game.

Seriously, having three kids of my own, I am flabbergasted every time I see someone in a car holding a child in their lap. Use safety seats, people! (Hat tip to **Deadspin**).

Speaking of the minors, **Baseball America** has started its annual “best tools” survey. Most exciting Triple-A players? **Lastings Milledge** and **Howie Kendrick**.

References & Resources

Correction: A reader has informed me that the Nationals signed Nick Johnson to a three-year extension in March, so Soriano is the only significant National who might walk at the end of this year.

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets [@dastudes](https://twitter.com/dastudes).

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

May 3, 2007

The Brewers are awesome.

In my mind, there have been two big team stories this first month of the year: the Yankees have stunk and the Brewers have been awesome.

The Yankees story is fairly simple: all hit and no pitch. No team has scored more runs than the Yankees, and they rank fourth in the majors in runs allowed per game. Of course, injuries have decimated the Yankees staff, as has the sudden drop in **Mariano Rivera's** awesomeness. A return to health by **Chien-Ming Wang**, **Mike Mussina** and/or **Carl Pavano** will help, and so will an inevitable improvement in their record in close games. But, for now, the Yankees have stunk, and the **Phil Hughes** injury is just another karmic blow to the pinstriped universe.

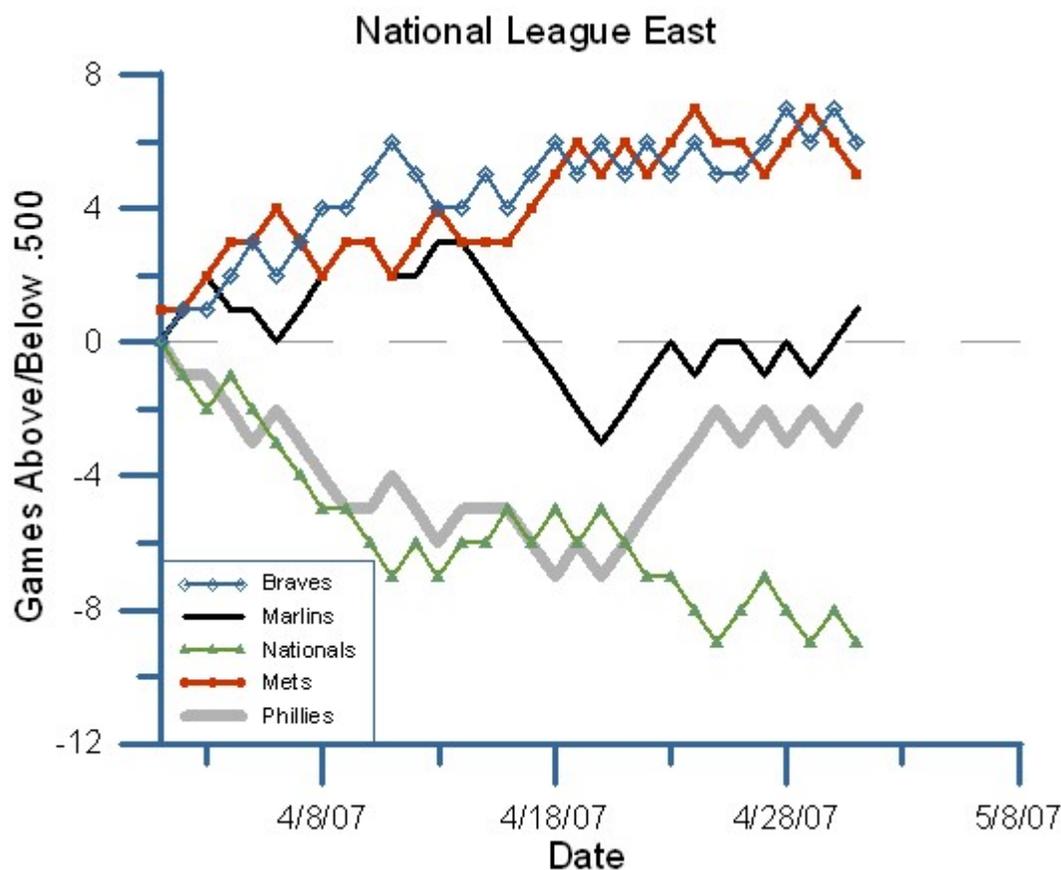
At the other end of the spectrum, the Brewers have dominated the National League Central in the first month. They're 17-9 (the best record in the majors) and four games ahead of the second place teams in the NL Central. Karma has played a role in Milwaukee, too, as the Brewers are 7-3 in close games and only outfielder **Laynce Nix** is on the disabled list. Even star pitcher **Ben Sheets'** dalliance with injury seems to have turned out well, for now.

When **J.J. Hardy** is your leading hitter (.306/.364/.556), you might expect a drop in hitting. But the Brewers' pitching is strong (**Jeff Suppan** is off to a great start) in both the rotation and the bullpen (truly, the pen has been sensational). The Brewers may not continue to run away with the division but, if Sheets and friends stay healthy, they'll be in the race until the end.

Here's a **nice review of the Brewers' fantastic first month.**

The Mets and the Braves are duking it out.

After the first month, here's my favorite division race graph:



The White Sox aren't hitting in the clutch.

If you've read this column over the past couple of years, you may know that I'm sort of obsessed with the White Sox's clutch hitting, or lack thereof.

- In 2004, the Sox's run-scoring machine was driven by their clutch hitting: .292 with runners in scoring position, second only to the Red Sox's .295.
- In 2005, when they won it all, the Pale Hose batted only .259 with RISP, the lowest figure in the league.
- Last year, when Chicago's offense came alive, they batted an astonishing .307 with RISP, first in the majors.
- This year, as the Sox offense struggles mightily, they're batting .220 with RISP, once again the lowest figure in the league.

Clutch hitting is, of course, nearly impossible to predict, but for the Sox it appears to be feast or famine. On the other hand, the Nationals are batting .176 with runners in scoring position. Ouch.

If you're a White Sox fan who ever played **The Oregon Trail**, you'll appreciate **this**

version of the AL Central Trail.

Jim Ray Hart's home/road split

While preparing my weekly *Heater* article (which dissected how much **Ron Santo**'s stats were buttressed by Wrigley Field), I came across a very unusual home/road split: **Jim Ray Hart**.

	Overall	Home	Road
PA	4,236	1,987	2,249
HR	170	72	98
BA	.278	.258	.296
OBP	.345	.329	.360
SLG	.467	.430	.500

Jim Ray Hart was the Giants' third baseman in the '60s, though he wasn't exactly **Brooks Robinson** at the hot corner and he saw a decent chunk of time in the outfield. Reportedly, he hated playing third, saying ... "It's just too damn close to the hitters."

But Hart was a masher who probably hated Candlestick Park as much as he hated playing third. Most hitters hit better at home, but Hart was a dramatic exception, with an OPS 91 points lower at home. Although a shoulder injury in 1969 put an end to his outstanding batting feats, it appears that Candlestick did its own damage. Of all the players I examined for the Santo article (maybe about 200 of the top players since 1957), no batter was hurt nearly as much by his home park as Jim Ray Hart.

Juan Pizarro's minor league year

As long as we're talking about some baseball history, I came across a partial spreadsheet of minor league seasons (thanks to the **Retrosheet** mailing list) that included most seasons of players who had reached the majors, starting sometime in the 1950s.

I thought it would be fun to investigate which pitchers had the highest strikeouts totals in the data. Take a look at this impressive list:

Name	Year	Lvl	Age	W	L	IP	ERA	SO	BB
Juan Pizarro	1956	D	19	23	6	275.1	1.77	318	149
Dwight Gooden	1983	A+	18	19	4	191.1	2.49	300	112

Ted Abernathy	1952 D	19	20	13	256.2	1.68	293	103
Nolan Ryan	1966 A	19	17	2	181.0	2.49	272	127
Bobby Bolin	1959 A-	20	20	8	226.2	2.82	271	144
Fred Norman	1963 AA	21	13	14	200.2	3.05	258	104
Pete Richert	1960 AA	20	19	9	226.2	2.74	251	115
Jim Merritt	1962 D	18	19	8	224.0	3.66	249	96
Bob Knepper	1974 A+	20	20	5	240.2	3.14	247	80
Juan Marichal	1958 A	20	21	8	246.2	1.86	246	50

There are a lot of tremendously good pitchers on this list, but I had forgotten about **Juan Pizarro**. Pizarro, like Hart, was an excellent player in the early 1960s (primarily for the White Sox, who picked him up from the Braves). He was a fireballing lefty (fastball around 95 mph) and finished in the top 10 in ERA three out of four years from 1961 to 1964. Unfortunately, he hurt his arm in 1965 and wasn't as dominant after, eventually moving to the bullpen.

When they decided to trade Pizarro, the Sox picked up **Wilbur Wood** in exchange. Nice turnaround by Chicago.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

Dwight Gooden's 1983 in Lynchburg (the same team and year in which **Lenny Dykstra** stole 100 bases) really sticks out, doesn't it? These days, you won't see a pitcher stay with one team that long, or pitch that many innings.

The number of day games has been pretty stable the past 35 years.

Remember when it seemed that all games were day games, played under the sun? Okay, I'm showing my age again, but I still remember having to skip school to watch the World Series in the 1960's. So, I wondered, when did night games really take over major league baseball?

Thanks to Retrosheet (again), we have the day/night status of all ballgames, starting

in 1960. When I looked at the files, I was surprised to find that, even in the '60s, the majority of games were played at night:

	Day	Total	Percentage
1960's	14,172	31,922	44%
1970's	13,970	39,612	35%
1980's	13,158	40,674	32%
1990's	13,733	43,188	32%
2000's	9,534	29,144	33%

Night games aren't a recent phenomenon at all. In fact, the proportion of night games hasn't changed substantially since the 1970s. Talk about playing tricks with my memory.

I decided to take a closer look at the 1960s and found that 1960 was the last year in which day games outnumbered night games.

	Day	Total	Percent
1960	1,250	2,472	51%
1961	1,396	2,860	49%
1962	1,564	3,242	48%
1963	1,496	3,238	46%
1964	1,462	3,252	45%
1965	1,410	3,246	43%
1966	1,388	3,230	43%
1967	1,354	3,240	42%
1968	1,310	3,250	40%
1969	1,542	3,892	40%

The first night game was played in 1935, in Cincinnati. Though it took a while for the rest of the major league teams to add lights and play at night, a lot of them had done so by the 1960s. Anybody have any day/night stats from the 1940s and 1950s?

Jose Lopez's Contract Clauses

Back to the present: Seattle second baseman **Jose Lopez** recently **signed a four-year contract (with a club option)**, covering his arbitration years. The most interesting thing about his contract is the physical tests requirements the Mariners managed to include. Four times a year, Lopez will be tested for four things:

- Body Fat Percentage
- 60-yard Sprint
- 20-yard Shuttle Run
- Vertical Jump

Each time he passes all four tests, he'll receive \$25,000. And if he passes all four tests all four times, he'll receive an extra \$25,000.

I've looked at a lot of contract clauses, and I'm not aware of this complicated a "stay in shape" clause for anyone else. This past offseason, the only example I can remember is **Carlos Lee's** five weigh-ins per year, but only for the years 2010-2012. Each time Lee fails a weigh-in, he'll donate \$200,000 to the Astros' charity.

By the way, I'm all for these long-term deals for arbitration-eligible players, but particularly if the club manages to get an option on one or two of the player's free agent years. There was some discussion about this in **the Bradford files**.

Jeff Francoeur may be learning to take a walk.

You don't hear much about it, but **Jeff Francoeur's** walk rate is among the early season surprises. As of Wednesday, he had walked nine times in 113 plate appearances, a shocking improvement over his 2006 performance of 23 in 686 plate appearances. Over at the Baseball Toaster, Mike Carminati found that, if Francoeur were to maintain this pace, **it would be a near-historic improvement**.

Analyzing pitcher mechanics is controversial.

Carlos Gomez has been posting a **wonderful series of articles** on The Hardball Times about pitching mechanics. I'm not someone who's ever been good at analyzing mechanics, though I still remember when a friend of my brother's told me he didn't like **Jim McAndrew's** delivery, and McAndrew broke down soon after. I remember wishing I could do that.

Still, pitching mechanics aren't an exact science—far from it. Will Carroll suffered some embarrassment a couple of years ago when he published a book highlighting **Mark Prior's** "perfect" mechanics, only to see Prior break down the next year. Mitchel Lichtman has been **venting about the subject's lack of science recently at The Book Blog**.

Jeff Sullivan, of **Lookout Landing**, shares MGL's skepticism, but he conducted

some research of his own and found **a research paper that talks about elbow and torso alignment** from the *Journal of Applied Biomechanics* (links to a PDF file). What's more, Jeff took it one step further by **applying the research to Felix Hernandez's delivery**. Jeff's analysis, and the subsequent comments, are pretty darn interesting, too.

Pitching mechanics have been discussed since the 1870s, when pitchers threw underhanded. Why, all of a sudden, are people complaining because it's not a "science"?

Players will return to form.

Barry Bonds is slugging .762. **Jeff Weaver's** Slugging Percentage Allowed is .825.

Thanks, **Chris**.

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets @dastudes.

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

July 12, 2007

The All-Star Break made people think.

It was an interesting All-Star break, wasn't it? Staging the event in San Francisco, where **Barry Bonds** is about to eclipse **Hank Aaron**'s career home run mark made for some interesting coverage. There were a lot of people taking time to pause and ask what it all means, or doesn't mean. A lot of reporters were **trying to find out what the commissioner thinks** it all means, too. Spoiler alert: he's not saying.

According to a **a New York Times/CBS poll**, 84% of fans feel that there should be an asterisk next to Bonds' record if it is definitely proven that he took steroids. I'm in that other 16%. In fact, I'm **in agreement with Mike Piazza on this issue**: Let's allow history to give us some perspective before rushing to judgment.

Not too likely, I know.

Barry Bonds needed sabermetrics, not steroids.

According to Jeff Pearlman, Bonds decided to start taking steroids after the 1998 season because he was frustrated that **Mark McGwire** and **Sammy Sosa** were getting all the media glory. In a word, he felt unappreciated.

You may remember that 1998 was the year McGwire hit 70 home runs and Sosa hit 66. Bonds hit "only" 37 homers and batted .303/.438/.609. Sosa and McGwire finished first and second in the MVP voting; Bonds finished 8th.

But while I was cruising around Jeff Sagarin's wonderful listing of **Win Probability Added** results from 1957 to 2006, I found out that Bonds added more wins (6.9 WPA) than any other batter in the majors that year other than McGwire. Bonds even led all NL players in WPA for four straight years, from 1990 through 1993. No other

player in this 50-year chronicle of WPA ever accomplished the same thing. **Mickey Mantle, Sandy Koufax** and **Frank Thomas** all led their leagues three consecutive times, but no one else ever did it four straight seasons.

So you see, if the mainstream media had just adopted sabermetric baseball stats twenty years ago, Bonds would have received lots of attention for his great years. He would have been plenty appreciated. Problem solved.

The best season of the past 50.

Admittedly, I lost a lot of free time in those WPA stats. There's enough info in there to generate a ton of "Ten Things I Didn't Know" columns. How about this one: The greatest single year of anyone other than Barry Bonds in the past 50 years was **Dwight Gooden's** 1985.

Not surprisingly, Bonds' 2001, 2002 and 2004 were the three greatest years of any player in the past 50; Gooden's was next with more than 10 WPA. If you were alive and a Mets fan in 1985 (I was both), you remember Gooden's year vividly. He was phenomenal, always a threat to strike out anyone who dared to approach the plate. Mets announcers and writers fell over themselves trying to come up with better and better superlatives for the guy. It was embarrassing.

Now, WPA isn't the best metric to judge pitchers because it doesn't include the impact of fielding. But Gooden was a strikeout pitcher who didn't rely on his fielders as much as other pitchers. He posted a 1.53 ERA in 276.1 innings and he turned it on when it counted: Batters hit only .143 with runners in scoring position against him. I don't have a hard time believing it was the greatest non-Bonds year in the past 50.

Following Gooden in great WPA years are **Willie McCovey** in 1969, McGwire in 1998, **Todd Helton** in 2000, Mantle in 1957 (an impressive ranking because they only played 154 games back then), **Albert Pujols** last year and **David Ortiz** in 2005.

The worst season of the past 50.

So guess who has posted the worst WPA season of the past fifty? None other than the infamous **Neifi Perez**, who contributed six wins less than average in 2002. As I said, WPA doesn't include the impact of fielding, so Perez's 2002 almost certainly wasn't the overall worst when you include fielding prowess.

For that honor, I would nominate **George Wright**, an outfielder for the Rangers in the early 1980s. In 1985, Wright batted .190/.241/.242 with four stolen bases in 109 games; truly pathetic figures. His batting WPA was five wins below average, the worst seasonal total of any player not named Neifi.

As I'm sure you know, Neifi Perez was **recently suspended 25 games for testing positive for stimulants** (amphetamines) for the second time. So Neifi's awful 2002 may have been chemically enhanced? Should it be asterisked?

How good was Roy Face's 18-1 season?

We baseball analysts are only now beginning to truly reap the benefits of what the great folks at Retrosheet have done. The "Retrosheet years" (1957-2006) include detailed play-by-play records of virtually every game played during those years, and it's a great deal of fun to get dirty in the details. Luckily, you don't have to be a data wizard to do so, because Sean Forman's **Baseball Reference** has done the dirty work for you. By combining Baseball Reference and Sagarin's Win Probability Added stats, you can learn a lot.

For instance, one of the most fascinating seasons for baseball historians is **Elroy Face's** 18-1 season in 1959. His won-loss percentage of .947 is the single season record, and sportswriters were so impressed that they placed Face seventh in MVP voting that year.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

But Face was a reliever and, as you probably know, wins aren't the best metric in the world for judging relievers. WPA is better and, according to Sagarin's numbers, Face had only 1.1 WPA in 1959, 51st in the league.

What happened, you ask? According to Face's splits on Baseball Reference (subscription required, I believe), opponents batted .343 against Face in the eighth inning and .248 in the ninth. Also, they batted .291 when there was a one-run

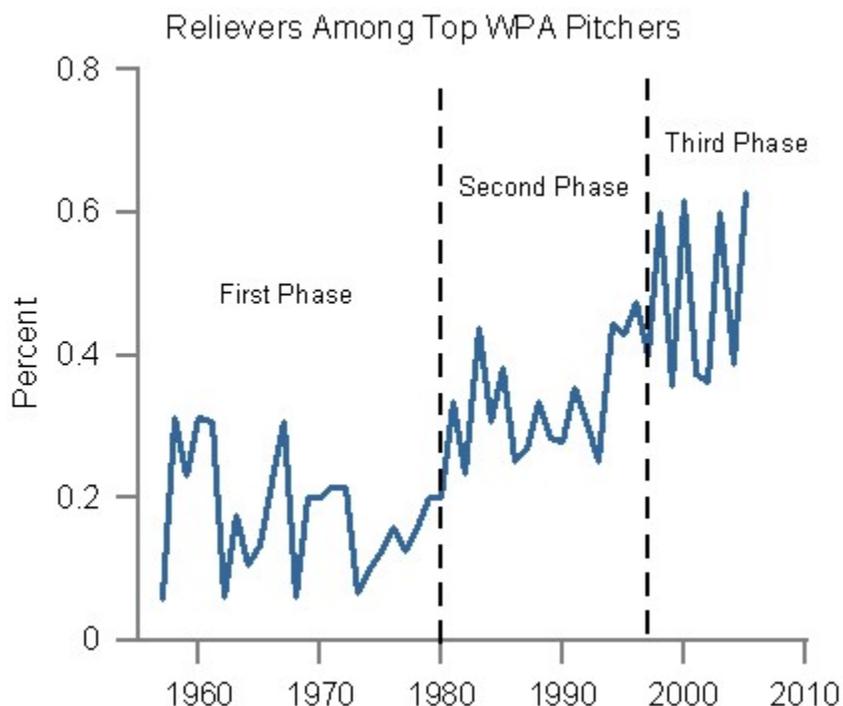
margin, but only .143 with two outs and runners in scoring position. One last fact: He allowed over half of his inherited runners to score. In sum, he had a curious habit of allowing teams back into games, but not enough so that the Pirates couldn't mount a comeback later in the game.

According to WPA, Face had better years in 1958 (1.5 WPA), 1960 (2.4) and 1962 (2.6).

How relief impact has changed.

We all know that relievers have been used more and more since the days of Face. In fact, they have dominated the WPA pitching leaderboards for the past few years, **as shown on Fangraphs**. Now that we have historic WPA data, we can ask the question: When did this happen? What has been the overall trend of relievers at the top of WPA leaderboards?

Here is a graph to answer that question. I pulled the top leaders in pitching WPA for each of the past 50 years, and estimated the percentage of them that were primarily relievers. This graph shows the percent by year, and I've added a couple of dotted lines to separate what I think have been three phases of reliever growth.



Phase one was the period of the accidental top reliever, such as **Lindy McDaniel** in 1960 and **Stu Miller** in 1965. These guys were fine relievers, but they were rarely used often enough to lead the majors in Pitching WPA. Around 1980, however,

relievers began to become more common among the WPA leaders.

Odd data point: remember **Bruce Sutter**'s phenomenal 1977, when he posted a 1.34 ERA? He finished fourth in the league in pitching WPA that year, behind **Rick Reuschel**, **Tom Seaver** and the leader in pitching WPA: **Rich Gossage** (another reliever who had a 1.62 ERA with the Pirates and pitched more innings).

Anyway, the success of Sutter and Gossage in the late 1970s evidently led managers to use relievers more often, and they placed among the WPA leaders more consistently. On average, about 30% of pitching WPA leaders were relievers during the second phase. In the late 1990s, relievers jumped ahead again, when the current trend of using relievers for just an inning in highly leveraged situations became common practice.

Will it this pattern change again in the future? You bet. How will it change? Got me.

New baseball graphs

As an occasional stock investor, I've never been sold on the value of finding stock trends by graphs. That may strike you as strange, because I'm a graphing fool, but I've usually preferred some analysis with a large dose of common sense and market knowledge. However, there's a new website that is taking an investor's approach to baseball graphs. It's called **Baseball Investor**, and it's definitely worth a look.

Ballpark progress

Are you losing sleep wondering how the new ballpark in Washington, D.C. is coming along? Worry no more, my friend, because you can now take a **daily peek at the blooming park**. This is actually fun—try going back in time a few months to see what things looked like before. **This is what it will look like** when it's finished in time for the 2008 season.

Recognition for the U.S.S. Mariner

Congratulations to our friends at **U.S.S. Mariner** for making an impact on their favorite team. Exasperated with **Felix Hernandez**'s stubborn refusal to throw anything but a fastball in the beginning of a game, they wrote an **open letter to the Mariners' pitching coach**, Rafael Chaves, pleading with him to get Felix to change his approach. Chaves actually showed the post to King Felix, who figured that if even those goofy guys thought he should change his approach, then he might as

well do it.

U.S.S. Mariner and **Lookout Landing** are two of the best team blogs anywhere. I don't know why Mariner readership is so blessed; must be something about the salmon.

Shane Victorino is crazy or fearless. You choose.

Here's the evidence.

References & Resources

The Roy Face analysis was inspired by the good folks on the SABR-L listserv.

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets @dastudes.

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

August 2, 2007

A head scratcher

Before the trading deadline came around, the Nationals signed a couple of veterans to long-term deals. **Ronnie Belliard signed a deal for two years and \$3.5 million**, and **Dmitri Young penned a two-year \$10 million deal**, with a third option year for \$6 million if he meets plate appearance targets.

When I first heard about the Belliard deal, I didn't think much about it. Under \$2 million a year seems like a pretty good price for a free agent second baseman with a decent skill set. But when I read about the Young deal, I did a double take. Yes, Young is having a very good half-season, batting .327 with a .876 OPS. But come on, people.

- He's 33 years old.
- His **batting average on balls in play** is .368, which will only go down.
- He may be the worst fielding first baseman in the league. His **Revised Zone Rating** is .634!
- You can get him out; he's batting .394 against finesse pitchers and .262 against power pitchers.
- Weird split of the day: he's batting .383 at home and .279 on the road.

(Most stats courtesy of **Baseball Reference**.) I don't know what that last split means (probably nothing), but I know what everything else means. The Nationals grossly overpaid for an (at best) average player at a position with lots of alternatives (including the Nationals' own perennially injured **Nick Johnson**). This is not a good move for a team that has to turn itself in the right long-term direction.

Joe Sheehan **expressed much the same at Baseball Prospectus**, and Dan Fox

drove home the point with **a special Dmitri Young baserunning table** (check out the article title: *The Young and the Motionless*). And speaking of trade deadlines, the Teixeira trade inspired **a great post by long-time Ranger fan Jamey Newberg**.

How much the Astros miss Adam Everett

Sean Smith recently used the latest defensive metrics, such as **MGL's UZR** and **BIS's Relative Zone Rating**, to calculate how much Adam Everett's loss has meant to the Astros. This is important, because most fans underestimate the importance of fielding, primarily because it's hard to find good fielding statistics. Luckily, the newest stats are making more in-depth analysis possible.

Sean's bottom line is that losing Everett and replacing him with **Mark Loretta** will likely result in a loss of 50 runs over a full season (or, five wins) in the field. When you give Loretta credit for his better bat, there's still a loss of 25 runs (2.5 wins) over 162 games.

In **a somewhat more sophisticated analysis**, Bagsandbidge found a smaller impact, primarily because he only counted 40 games and he also included the impact of having **Mike Lamb** play more games at third. Even so, he calculates that the difference between Everett and Loretta over a full year is about 20 runs. This is the sort of fielding analysis that should open some eyes.

Speaking of combining hitting and fielding stats, Vegas Watch recently combined WPA and UZR to determine the **American League** and **National League** MVPs of the first half of the year. In the second piece, Jacob is a bit skeptical that **Troy Tulowitzki** is really the league's MVP. It's a good point, but it's also good to remind people that Tulowitzki has had a fine year in the field, and that he's delivered some real clutch hits for the Rockies.

You can now download the Hit Tracker spreadsheet

I've gotten a big kick out of **Hit Tracker** since I first started reading it over a year ago. Hit Tracker calculates the length of every home run in the majors, using a complicated set of algorithms that only a physicist would truly understand.

The good news is that you can now **download an Excel spreadsheet that allows you to calculate the length of home runs** while you're watching a game (as long as you have a stopwatch handy). It's easy to use, and you can run the

spreadsheet for any batted ball, not just home runs.

Highly recommended as a way to waste lots of time watching your next ballgame. I'm waiting for the day STATS and BIS start to use this in their batted ball stats.

Baseball graphs

I came across **something called bivariate baseball score plots** (phew!) the other day. It's a mouthful, but there are some really neat baseball graphics included. Specifically, the site includes a plot of the number of runs scored and allowed per game for every team, each year, in major league history. There is also **a blog that talks about the plots**.

You'll find lots of interesting things on these graphs, things you might not notice when combing through the numbers. For instance, the Yankees lost nine games by a 6-5 score last year. You can also modify the graphs using a number of filters (like first half vs. second half, or starting pitcher). Using it, I found that the 1965 Dodgers were 3-1 in 1-0 games when Koufax started. And, to top it off, you can download each plot as a PDF file.

My only very minor beef is that I would have put the team on the "y-axis" instead of the "x-axis," so that wins would be on top (the more natural place for them to be). But, as I said, that's really a minor criticism. So dazzle your friends and show them the bivariate baseball score plots!

How many No. 2 hitters have been MVPs

Last week, I opined that **Nellie Fox** really did deserve the 1959 MVP award, and also wondered how many No. 2 hitters have won MVP awards. Well, thanks to super-reader Brandon Islelib, here is the complete list for the Retrosheet years (1957 to the present):

1959 – Nellie Fox

1960 – **Dick Groat**

1982 – **Robin Yount**

1984 – **Ryne Sandberg**

1985 – **Willie McGee**

1999 – **Ivan Rodriguez**

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

In other words, the answer is six. To qualify, a batter had to spend the majority of the season in the No. 2 batting position.

Bert Blyleven's neutral won/loss record

Joe Posnanski recently **gave Lee Sinins' neutral won/loss record a shout-out**, using the stat to review the careers of several players, including **Bert Blyleven** and **Jack Morris**. Neutral won/loss records basically assume that each pitcher is given an average level of run support (average for the league in that year, that is). Morris has long been identified as a pitcher who received a lot of benefit from his team's offense. Blyleven, not.

The difference can be striking. Jack Morris had a 254-186 won/loss record, primarily for some mighty Tigers teams. According to Posnanski, his neutral won/loss record is 232-208. Similarly, Blyleven's career won/loss record is 287-250, but his neutral won/loss record is 313-224. So the difference between the two rises from 33 wins to 81 when you give them equivalent run support.

Personally, I wish that everyone would just stop referring to pitcher won/loss records. Teams win games, not individuals. But I know it's a hopeless case, and many fans (as well as Hall of Fame voters) persist in believing that starting pitchers have some magical hold over whether their team wins or loses, beyond their straightforward ability to keep runs from being scored.

In particular, I've seen more than one Hall voter claim that Morris "knew how to win," and Blyleven didn't. And you know what? Maybe those writers have a point. Maybe some pitchers are indeed better at "pitching to the score" than other pitchers. What do I know?

So I went back and looked at every single play of every single game that Blyleven and Morris pitched. I calculated the impact that each play had on the team's chances of

winning, given the score at the time. If the bullpen blew a lead for a pitcher, the pitcher wasn't discredited for it. If he gave up runs in a close game, it counted against him more than runs allowed in a runaway. In other words, this analysis calculated exactly how well each pitcher "pitched to the score."

Okay, I didn't do all that myself. **Jeff Sagarin did**. As you may have guessed, the stat is **Win Probability Added**. It's not the most popular stat in the world, but it does seem extremely well suited to identify which pitchers might pitch to the score better than others.

The bottom line: Blyleven had 33 WPA in his career, and Morris had 18 WPA. Since every win is .5 WPA, that means that Blyleven's "record" would have had 66 more wins than losses and Morris' would have had 36. Applying these figures to each pitcher's won/loss record isn't exactly the most legitimate approach, but I'll do it anyway: Blyleven would be 302-236 and Morris would be 238-202.

Neutral won/loss says it, and so does WPA. Even **Rich Lederer says it**. Blyleven belongs in the Hall.

Valuable pitchers

I attended the **SABR conference last week** and learned a heck of a lot. Most of it won't make it into this column, but I was intrigued by **Mike Marshall's** talk. I remember when Marshall blew away the baseball world when he appeared in 106 games in 1974. He's been controversial ever since, taking baseball management to task for blowing out pitchers' arms unnecessarily and teaching an entirely different way to pitch.

I'm not going to get into that sort of thing here, because I know nothing about it. But I was interested in Marshall's 1974, when he won the Cy Young award and finished third in MVP voting. As you can imagine, I wondered what his Win Probability Added was. According to Jeff Sagarin, it wasn't that much. In fact, Mike Marshall had 0.3 WPA in 1974.

How can this be? The guy appears in 106 ballgames and posts a 2.42 ERA in 208 innings and has 0.3 WPA? (Imagine that: 208 innings pitched, all in relief.)

Well, I don't really know. But WPA is built on a play-by-play analysis of how much Marshall helped his team win or lose games. And here's look at the batting average

that Marshall allowed by different “game states” in 1974:

Tie game: .288

One-run game: .278

Two-run game: .260

Three-run game: .251

Four-run game: .250

Five or more: .227

For contrast, here is **Goose Gossage**'s career game state breakout:

Tie game: .211

One-run game: .222

Two-run game: .226

Three-run game: .227

Four-run game: .227

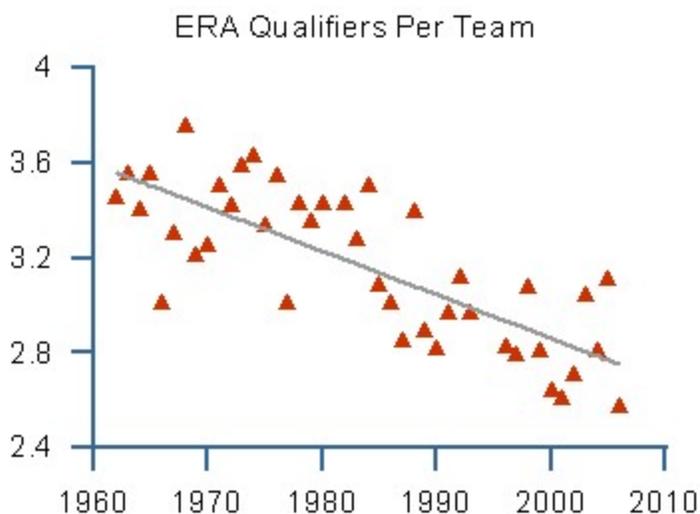
Five or more: .241

In contrast to Gossage, Marshall pitched his best when the game wasn't close, and his worst when it was. That's the kind of pitching that will lead to a low WPA. **Willie Hernandez** may have deserved his MVP in 1984, but it doesn't appear that Marshall should have even been in the running.

Maybe it's time to lower the qualifications for the ERA title

The other day, I was thinking that we haven't seen any fluky ERA leaders for a while; no **Buzz Capras** or what have you. **Scott Garrelts** was perhaps the last fluky ERA leader we've seen, 18 years ago. And he was no Buzz Capra.

I think I know why this is happening. The qualifications for ERA leaders hasn't changed in, like, forever: A pitcher must pitch at least one inning for each team game played. And though 162 innings in a season doesn't sound like a lot, there are less pitchers qualifying each year. Here is a graph of the number of qualifiers per team since 1962:



So that's why we don't see many Buzz Capra's anymore. With relief usage so prevalent, it's harder to qualify for the ERA title, which means that it's harder for outlier years to qualify. You might say that we're better for it, but you also might say we've lost something along the way.

Bill Giles got it wrong

Last week, I recounted a story from Bill Giles' recent biography, *Pouring Six Beers at a Time: And Other Stories from a Lifetime in Baseball*, in which he claimed that **Paul Richards** once proposed trading the Houston Astros' roster for the Detroit Tigers'.

The only problem with the story, according to Warren Corbett (who's writing a biography of Richards) is that it couldn't have happened.

“I'm working on a biography of Paul Richards, so accuracy compels me to point out that he was not the GM of Houston in 1967. He was in Atlanta. That's one of many flagrant errors in Giles's entertaining book. Richards did make the “I'll trade my roster for yours” offer on at least two occasions, but he would never have done so with the bounty of young talent he had in Houston.

Much of what Giles says about Richards' character is verified by other sources. However, Giles was loyal to Judge Roy Hofheinz, the Houston owner who fired Richards and engaged in a dirty slandering match over the money owed on his contract. The rumor about taking kickbacks from players is one of many that Hofheinz's men spread during that battle. I have a two-inch stack of papers from Richards' personal files relating to that. Very interesting reading.

The writer Mickey Herskowitz once said to Richards, “The judge is his own worst enemy.” Richards replied, “Not while I’m alive.”

I don't understand why publishers don't fact-check memoirs such as Giles'.

Hank Aaron's parents hugged him to protect him.

At the SABR conference, I attended David Vincent's presentation on home run records over the years. David is a noted expert on home runs, having built a database of every major league home run in history. It was a great presentation, and Vincent showed pictures of **Hank Aaron's** parents hugging him enthusiastically when he broke **Babe Ruth's** home run record. They pretty much covered him and wouldn't let go.

According to Vincent, there was more than just pure joy at play. Aaron had received so many death threats that his parents were worried that someone might try to shoot him. So they hugged to not only congratulate him, but to protect him from potential snipers.

Just in case you needed some perspective on baseball and life...

References & Resources

By the way, **Posnanski was recently interviewed by Gelf Magazine**. Good read.

If you're looking for a PC-based stopwatch to time those home runs, I personally use **Multitrack Stopwatch**.

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets @dastudes.

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week

by Dave Studeman

August 9, 2007

Barry Bonds did something noteworthy and remarkable.

Love him and/or hate him, **Barry Bonds** is the new official career home run record-holder. I'm not going to try to encapsulate the moment, because so many others have already done it well:

- Jay Jaffe **captures the feelings of a lot of fans.**
- Brian Gunn gives **the event his own perspective.**
- **Mike Downey gives Bonds his due.**
- Sally Jenkins has **a philosophical piece about PEDs in general**
- Pizza Cutter talks about **what it has meant for sabermetricians.**
- **Baseball's Steroids Era** has the big picture on who's done what, as far as we know (or guess).
- **Ten Things I Didn't Know About Barry Bonds**

Unfortunately, Bud Selig acted like a petulant child when Bonds hit his 755th homer. Standing only when prodded and refusing to clap, he reminded me of myself at, say, the age of four. Then he released this howler of a press release:

“Congratulations to Barry Bonds as he ties Major League Baseball's home run record. No matter what anybody thinks of the controversy surrounding this event, Mr. Bonds' achievement is noteworthy and remarkable.

“As I said previously, out of respect for the tradition of the game, the magnitude of the record and the fact that all citizens in this country are innocent until proven guilty, either I or a representative of my office will attend the next few games and make every attempt to observe the breaking of the all-time home run record.”

This is the guy responsible for promoting major league baseball? Methinks he needs

a new public relations department.

At least he evidently learns from his mistakes. He didn't attend the record-breaker (given the way he reacted to the 755th home run, he never should have shown up at all) and he did a better job with the subsequent press release:

“I congratulate Barry Bonds for establishing a new career home run record. Barry's achievement is noteworthy and remarkable.

“After Barry came out of the game, I congratulated him by telephone and had MLB executive vice president Jimmie Lee Solomon and Hall of Famer **Frank Robinson** — both of whom were at the game and witnessed the record-breaking home run — meet with him on my behalf. While the issues which have swirled around this record will continue to work themselves toward resolution, today is a day for congratulations on a truly remarkable achievement.”

Nicely done, Bud. There's no denying the controversy swirling around Bonds, but “work themselves toward resolution” is a much more pleasant phrase than “all citizens in this country are innocent until proven guilty,” don't you think?

The Diamondbacks are wack.

I don't like to disagree with the great David Smith of **Retrosheet**, but there was something not quite right in **this article about the Diamondbacks' record**. You see, the Diamondbacks are doing something really wacky: They have a 63-51 record, despite being outscored by their opponents by 34 runs.

I went back in history (using the Retrosheet files, of course) to see how many teams had won 12 more games than they had lost at any point during a season, despite being outscored by at least 30 runs. I found four:

- On Sept. 20, 1997, the Giants were 86-70 despite being outscored by 34 runs.
- The 1984 Mets had a long string of days with a similar record: Most notably, on Sept. 13, they were 81-66 despite being outscored by 34 runs.
- On July 28, 1978, the Orioles were 57-44 despite being outscored by 42 runs.
- The 1917 St. Louis Cardinals were 75-63 on Sept. 11 despite scoring 41 fewer runs than their opponents.

In contrast, David noted that only the 1905 Tigers had a bigger **Pythagorean variance** than the Diamondbacks' current variance, but he only looked at season-ending totals. You get a different picture when you look at the progress of records during the season, primarily because it's easier to have a bigger winning percentage variance when fewer games have been played.

But it is a kick to see how each of these teams fared at season's end:

- The 1997 Giants finished 90-72 (10 games above their Pythagorean record) despite being outscored by their opponents 793-784.
- The Mets also finished 90-72 (12 games above their Pythagorean projection) despite being outscored 676-652.
- The 1978 Orioles finished 90-71 and actually wound up outscoring their opponents 659-633 (for a seven-game Pythagorean variance).
- The Cardinals finished 82-70 in 1917 (which projects to 87 wins over a 162-game schedule) and were outscored 567-531. They beat their Pythagorean record by 10 games.

So, every single team wound up closing the run differential gap (the difference between runs scored and runs allowed) and three of the four teams won 90 games. Seems like a reasonable projection for the Diamondbacks too.

This thread at Baseball Think Factory includes some good theories as to how the Diamondbacks are doing it, but here's the thing: Two years ago, the Diamondbacks finished with the second-highest Pythagorean variance of all time (behind those 1905 Tigers). Perhaps that is just a remarkable fluke, or perhaps **Bob Melvin** is a genius. The beauty is that I have no clue which one is more likely.

Eric Byrnes is a rich(er) man.

In the meantime, the Diamondbacks signed **Eric Byrnes** to a three-year \$30 million contract this week. Byrnes is evidently a crowd favorite and is having a career year, due primarily to his .336 **batting average on balls in play** (he's not likely to sustain that for the rest of the year, let alone the next three years). In fact, thanks partly to the Diamondbacks' Pythagorean record, he's currently **leading the National League in Win Shares**.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

So the guy did a smart thing. He signed a contract at perhaps the very best time for himself. But give Arizona some credit, too. Byrnes is a good fielder, he has speed, and he's only 31. If he manages to stay healthy and create around 80 runs a year for the next three years, he'll be worth more than \$30 million (based on what free agents are being paid these days). This is not like **last week's Dmitri Young deal**.

Why Matt Morris?

This may be the real mystery transaction of the year. Why the heck did the bottom-dwelling Pirates trade for a highly paid veteran pitcher, taking on his contract for the next year (and an option year, to boot)?

On Yahoo Sports, **Steven Henson weighed in with this:**

“Verdict: The last-place Pittsburgh Pirates' acquisition of the decidedly average 33-year-old with one year and \$13.5 million left on his contract was a commentary on the sorry state of pitching everywhere and the alarming escalation of salaries.

Our David Gassko is one of the few people who actually **liked this deal for the Pirates**.

I would like to add one other perspective. According to the the previous Collective Bargaining Agreement, teams that collect money from the Revenue Sharing Plan have to put that money to work. Here's the CBA language:

“Accordingly, 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. The Commissioner shall enforce this obligation by requiring, among other things, each Payee Club, no later than April 1, to report on the performance-related uses to which it put its revenue sharing receipts in the preceding revenue sharing year.

I haven't seen the most recent CBA, but I assume that similar language is in there, too.

In other words, teams have to spend money on players (either as free agents or in development) or the Commissioner will yell at them. That may sound funny, but you better believe that the union is watching these teams closely. Seems to me that's no small reason the Royals signed **Reggie Sanders** and **Doug Mientkiewicz** two years ago. And since the Pirates have been unable to convince expensive free agents to play for them, maybe they just had to trade for one to meet their CBA obligations.

Of course there will be future 300-game winners.

I can't get over how many people are saying there may never be another 300-game winner. These people cite five-man rotations and the increasing use of the bullpen, which are good points. But there are other considerations:

- Pitchers have longer careers these days, thanks to advanced training, surgical techniques and, yes, lighter workloads.
- Money gives them incentive to keep playing.
- Free agency allows pitchers to play with winning teams each year.

I'm sure there are other considerations too, both pro and con. To me, the bottom line is that we may be facing a drought period of 300 game winners, but there will be 300 game winners in the future. We just don't know who they are yet.

Remember: **Tom Glavine** is a member of perhaps the greatest pitching "generation" in major league history. As ranked in **last year's Hardball Times Annual**, this generation includes **Roger Clemens** (ranked first all-time), **Greg Maddux** (fourth) and **Randy Johnson** (eighth). I say let's celebrate what we've been lucky enough to witness and not worry about tomorrow's leaders.

Rafael Betancourt has been Eckersleyesque.

Have you noticed what **Rafael Betancourt** is doing in Cleveland? He's pitched in 51.2 innings, but he's only walked four batters. Four. I looked into this using the **Baseball Reference Play Index** and found that only **Dennis Eckersley** has walked fewer batters in 50 or more innings.

Betancourt's walks per game (actually, 38 batters) the last four years have been 2.5, 2.4, 1.8 and 0.8. That's a nasty little trend, isn't it?

For a take on another unique player, see what **Derek Zumsteg has to say about J. D. Pruitt**.

How few players the Mariners have played.

Reader John McCann pointed out to me that, prior to bringing up **Adam Jones**, the Mariners had used only 13 position players on the roster so far this year. Of course, that number will increase when September rolls around, but my curiosity was piqued. I wondered, how does that 13 (now 14) stack up against history?

- The '62 and '63 Red Sox had only 15 non-pitchers on their roster the entire year, the lowest total in all the years since 1960. Yeah, the Sox not only have the lowest total, but they did it two years in a row, which is crazy when you think about it. Both teams won 76 games, though they were run by two different managers (**Pinky Higgins** and **Johnny Pesky**; if you want to refer to both of them, just say Pinky Pesky). That 1963 team included one September call-up, **Rico Petrocelli**, but as far as I can tell, there were no September call-ups in 1962.
- Going back in time, from 1938 through 1943, the Yankees only carried 14 men on their roster four different years. That's another remarkable record, though it doesn't include arguably the greatest team of all time, the 1939 Yankees (which carried 15 position players all year long). The Yankees won four World Series and one other league championship those six years, under manager **Joe McCarthy**. A remarkable run of excellence (and health!).
- Among all post-1900 teams the 1905 Philadelphia Athletics have the record for fewest position players on its roster, 12. **Connie Mack**'s team won the AL championship with just 12 position players and 7 pitchers. Now, **that's** managing your roster.

Maybe it does make sense to slide into first base.

Like a lot of Mets watchers, I was driven nuts by **Roberto Alomar**'s tendency to slide into first base on a close play. But according to physicist Alan Nathan, I maybe have been too hard on the guy.

“A final example: Can a batter get to first base quicker by running through the base or in a head-first slide? Most people believe the former. I believe the latter. The essential physics is that by sliding with outstretched arms, the batter reaches the bag before his center of gravity reaches it, whereas those two times more or less coincide when running through the bag.

I'm still not convinced—runners have to reach down and fall forward, which seems to slow them down—but who am I to argue with a physicist?

The quote is courtesy of **Dan Fox's interview with Dr. Nathan**. A subscription is required to read it, but there's no reason you shouldn't be a **Baseball Prospectus subscriber**.

Don Mattingly was only voted to the All-Star team once.

Hardball Times co-founder Matthew Namee sent me an e-mail this week, letting me know he had stumbled onto something.

“**Don Mattingly**, who made six All-Star games, won the fan voting at first base in only one of them, 1987. He didn't win the fan voting in his MVP season in 1985, though that was understandable—he was hitting .309 with nine homers at the break, and the winner, **Eddie Murray**, was at .296 and 15. (Incidentally, Mattingly hit .340 with 26 homers in 76 games after the break in '85.) But in 1986, Mattingly was the reigning MVP and was on track for an even better year, batting .341 with 14 homers. But who won the fan voting? Rookie **Wally Joyner**, who was hitting .313 with 20 homers at the break. Joyner went on to bat .257 with **two** home runs in the second half, while Mattingly got even better: .365 with 17 homers. So at the end of the day (well, year), Mattingly had a .352 average, 31 homers and a 161 OPS+ (and finished second in MVP voting), while Joyner finished at .290 with 22 homers and a 119 OPS+ (and an undeserved 8th place MVP finish).

Not that this is all that important ... I was just “random paging” around on Baseball Reference and thought it was odd that Mattingly started just one All-Star game. I guess the silver lining is that it was Wally Joyner's only All-Star game, and he had a nice career and deserves that little “All-Star” banner on Baseball Reference. And of course Mattingly did make the team as a backup anyway.

I'm sure that a few other players had a similar record. For instance, **Harold Baines** made six All-Star teams, but only started in one. However, I doubt that anyone else with a similar All-Star record played in New York. With all of the New York media and exposure, Mattingly should have made it more often.

Could it be that Donnie Ballgame was actually underappreciated in his own time?
Nah...

Kevin Youkilis has been taking less pitches.

Kevin Youkilis, made famous by Michael Lewis as the Greek God of Walks, is having the best year of his career: .306/.400/.478. The odd thing is that he's achieving success while seeing fewer pitches at the plate.

According to Baseball Reference, Youkilis has been seeing 4.23 pitches per plate appearance. That's still above the league high of 3.8, but less than his totals of the past three years: 4.6, 4.7 and 4.4. The reason appears to be straight-forward: when Youkilis swings, he's putting the ball in play more often.

Youkilis has swung at 37% of pitches this year, up slightly from 36% last year (the league average is 45%). But the percentage of his strikes that are foul has fallen from 26% to 23%, and the percentage of strikes that have been put in play has risen from 26% to 28%. In other words, he's hitting the ball better when he swings (less fouls), so he's seeing less pitches per plate appearance. That's just darn good hitting.

Seriously, how awesome is Baseball Reference?

Thanks for the Youkilis tip, **Jacob**.

References & Resources

Sean Lahman's database was the source of the analysis of least position players on a roster.

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets [@dastudes](#).

Comments are closed.

Ten Things I Didn't Know a while ago

by Dave Studeman

March 27, 2008

We took a little bit of a break over the winter, but THT's *Ten Things I Didn't Know Last Week* column is ready to go another season. Many thanks to the two people who encouraged me to keep going a fourth year.

Some of these items will be old news to you, but I've got to start somewhere. It was a busy offseason.

I think I know what sabermetrics is

My good buddy John Brattain wrote **a column a couple of weeks ago** taking sabermetricians to task for sometimes going too far with their findings:

“The thing is, there is a disconnect between what has been studied and what I have seen. For example, we read about the limited utility of the stolen base and its effect on run scoring. However, to take that as absolute gospel is to say in effect that Rickey Henderson and Tim Lincecum would have been superior players (or at the very least, no less valuable) had they consistently stayed on first base whenever they got on.

Now, someone rightly pointed out to John that stolen bases aren't the problem—it's the outs incurred while trying to steal bases that concern most sabermetricians.

Having said that, I've got to admit something. I'm not exactly sure what a sabermetrician is. In the 1982 *Baseball Abstract*, Bill James called sabermetrics “the mathematical and statistical analysis of baseball records.” He should know, right? After all, he coined the term. More recently, in a **Bill James Online** article, he had this to say about sabermetrics:

“First, the concept of a “traditional sabermetric model” is gibberish. Sabermetrics is not based on tradition. Sabermetrics is founded on the concept of questioning

traditional beliefs, not on a moral imperative to embrace them.

Second, the main thrust of sabermetrics has been to pursue the truth.

Even though they come from different places, I think John and Bill share some of the same concerns. It seems that some folks use “traditional” sabermetrics to make their point about stolen bases or sacrifice bunts. But there is no such thing as traditional sabermetrics. There is only the pursuit of truth.

So who are the truth-seekers out there? Well, I know **Tangotiger and MGL** are. **Greg Rybarczyk** is. Most of us at THT are—even the ones who don't dabble in math. We're mostly interested in the truth of baseball; it's what we like to write about.

The thing is, truth comes in many forms. The truth isn't always about answers, it's also about the framework, the context. For instance, I think one of the most important contexts to come out of sabermetrics is the power of the win. Most things come down to wins and losses. Even runs scored and allowed only have one purpose: to win and lose. Who should be the MVP? Whoever did the most to help his team win. Who should be in the Hall of Fame? There are a number of factors, but the most important ought to be who did the most to help his team win.

Which team was the best team in a specific year? The team that won the last game of the postseason.

This is why I'm a fan of **Win Probability Added** (Click on the link for more info about WPA). WPA directly measures how much impact each play had on an average team's chance of winning, at the time the play occurred. In other words, it measures the impact of an event in “real time.” WPA does have its flaws—most notably that “real time” thing—and it doesn't necessarily provide all the answers. But it's a fantastic framework, the first one I would cite when discussing sabermetric truths with anyone, including John Brattain.

I was going to write an entire article about sabermetrics and framework, but I decided to include my ongoing thoughts in the Ten Things column during the season. That way, you folks will have a lot of time to correct me.

When to bunt

So I was messing around with WPA and looked up something that John might

appreciate: Does it ever make sense to sacrifice bunt, according to WPA? Well, yes, one time. In the bottom of the ninth with a tied score, runner on second and no outs. Bunting him over to third increases the home team's chance of winning from 83 percent to 84 percent. In every other instance I examined, the bunt didn't increase the team's chances of winning.

This is a gross measure, however. It doesn't take into account the specific skills of the batter, or the batter on deck or the baserunner or the pitcher or the third baseman. But you can make some assumptions about those things and change the framework. In fact, this is what **MGL did in the Book**, and what James Click did at **Baseball Prospectus** a while ago.

More from The Hardball Times



A Hardball Times Update

by RJ McDaniel

Goodbye for now.

Here's one of the rules from the Book:

“Late in a close game, in a low run-scoring environment, it is correct to often sacrifice bunt with a runner on first and no outs. In an average run-scoring environment, you should sometimes sacrifice to keep the defense honest.

I think that is the best “answer” from the best of sabermetrics. The Book has a lot of other rules about sacrifices, but my point is this: they came up with the rules for bunting by using the Win Probability framework as a beginning point.

What WPA/LI is

This is very technical, but it's something I've devoted a lot of brain cells to lately. Tangotiger, one of the leading advocates of WPA, invented a statistic called Leverage Index (LI). You can **read about Leverage Index here**, but the concept is simple. LI measures the criticality of a situation. 1.0 is average. The bunt situation I just mentioned has an LI of 2.4; with the runner on third and one out (in other words, after the bunt), the LI is 4.3, which is very, very critical. You can do all sorts of fun things with LI related to game strategy.

You can also use it to modify WPA and address some of the issues people have with WPA. If you take the WPA of each play and divide it by the LI of the situation, you basically have a “normalized” WPA.

Then, if you take each player's WPA/LI and add it up for the year, you've got a WPA rating in which players are rated on an even scale. That is, they don't get extra credit for having more opportunities to impact a game. It's a lot of work, but the good news is that **Fangraphs is already doing the work for you**. Look up any player at Fangraphs and you can find his WPA/LI for each of the last six years.

So WPA/LI is a very attractive way to rate players. Still, I stumbled over the question: what is it, exactly? What does WPA/LI measure? I mean, I understand the calculation, but when a situation has a higher WPA/LI than another, what does that mean?

You know, if you make a pain of yourself and keep asking stupid questions, eventually someone will answer. That's what Tango **did for me in this thread**. The answer is that WPA/LI measures how well players performed in specific situations. Tango has started calling it “Situational Wins.”

Here's an example. Which is worth more: a home run with runners on second and third and no outs, or a home run with no one on and two outs? Tie score, first inning. Well, they're both home runs, so they're both equal from that perspective. But the first one came with two on and resulted in three runs, while the second one only yielded one run.

On the other hand, runners on second and third with no outs are pretty likely to score anyway, so a batter probably shouldn't get too much credit for batting them in. In fact, according to WPA, the first home run is worth .107 WPA and the second homer is worth just a little less at (.087 WPA).

But WPA/LI rates the bases-empty home run much more highly (.202 vs. .096). Why? Because a home run with the bases empty and two out is the best outcome, by far. A home run with runners on second and third is pretty cool too, but a single or double would have been just about as powerful. Think about it from the pitcher's point of view: he'd rather walk a guy than give up a home run with two outs and the bases empty. The home run is the last thing he would want to give up. With runners on second and third, however, he wants a strikeout and will pitch differently. He recognizes that he doesn't want a batted ball at all.

So the pitcher receives a bigger “ding” for giving up a home run with no one on and two outs, and the batter receives a bigger “ka-ching.” The context drives the value in a different way than it does in WPA.

There's more to learn about WPA/LI, and not everyone buys into it. But it's got me thinking.

Survey says: more about stats

We ran a survey this week so that you could tell us what you like and don't like about the Hardball Times. So far, over 900 people have filled it out. Thank you for your fantastic feedback; we're already working on some of your suggestions.

One of the themes that came out of the survey is that people would like to know more about our statistics. So I plan to highlight a THT statistic or two as we plug along this year. Remember that we do have **a statistics glossary** that contains definitions and links to articles with more information.

But I'd like to talk about one class of statistics that I've been thinking about lately: ERA estimators. ERA estimators have been in use for a long time now. We've got Expected ERA, component ERA, DIPS ERA, peripheral ERA, QERA and lots of other alphabet names I can't remember. David Gassko has **written about HIPS, LIPS and DIPS** and Derek Carty uses LIPS in **his fantasy work**. Lookout Landing recently **invented something called tERA**.

I guess people will never stop coming up with new ways to estimate ERA. But the first question should be: why? Why bother to estimate ERA? After all, we have actual ERA, right?

There are a few basic reasons I can think of to estimate ERA:

- To estimate a pitcher's “true talent” as a way to predict his future performance.
- To isolate the impact of the pitcher from his fielders (related to the first point).
- To pull out the impact that relievers might have had on inherited runners.
- For the heck of it.

At THT, we track two simple stats: **FIP** and **xFIP**. They both explained in our glossary, but the idea is simple. FIP (which stands for Fielding-Independent Pitching) uses strikeouts, walks and home runs to meet the first two goals listed

above, and it does pretty well. A year and a half ago, Tango tested FIP to see if it worked as well as advertised, **and it does**.

FIP totally ignores batted balls, other than home runs. We know home run rates vary from year to year, are heavily dependent on a pitcher's flyball rate, and can be affected by the ballpark. So I created something called xFIP, which takes the home run portion of FIP and adjusts it to a league-normal rate based on a pitcher's flyball rate (but calibrated to the pitcher's ballpark). In theory, xFIP should be a better indicator of future pitching performance than FIP.

There have been lots of studies about pitching estimators; allow me to add another to the mix. I pulled together 140 matched pairs of seasons for pitchers in the last four years, with both years consisting of at least 100 innings pitched and for the same team (so, no impact from changing fielders or ballparks), and no season included more than once in the sample. I found that...

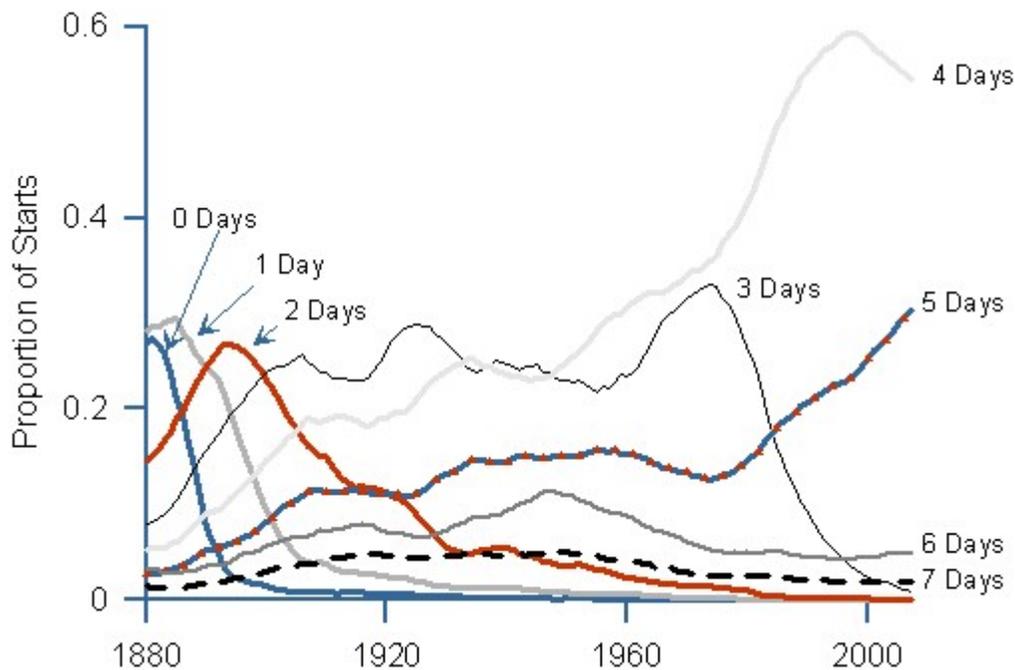
- ERA and FIP were about equal in how well they predicted the second year's ERA. ERA was actually a bit better.
- xFIP was slightly better than either one.
- If you want to include more batted ball information in FIP, remember that FIP inherently includes GB/FB ratio information, by virtue of the home run count. But you can add infield pop flies to the strikeouts and line drives to the walks to get a "batted ball" FIP (**Hat tip, Tango, natch**), and a "batted ball" xFIP was even more highly correlated with the following year's performance.
- None of these estimators was terrific at predicting the second year's ERA.

You know, a couple of stats may be better predictors than FIP, but they're much more complex. I don't generally like complex. I'm a simple guy.

But the better question to ask is how well these pitching estimators did predicting ERA for those pitchers who switched teams. Come back next week.

Days of Rest Graph

I don't know if you saw it, but this was my favorite sabermetric post of the offseason.



That's a graph of the number of calendar days a major league pitcher rested between starts, using nine-year average rates. "0 Days" means he started on consecutive days, "1 Day" means he had one day of rest between starts, etc. As a graph nut, I love this graph because it shows some very complex information in a very simple way. It's a line graph, easy to understand. It doesn't try to collate the information into averages; it lets you pick out the complexity.

And the information is complex. The guy who created the data was investigating the question of when the transition went from three days of rest to four. As Steve Treder has pointed out several times, the transition hasn't been that straightforward. Pitchers have been used in a variety of ways throughout the years. Here's a summary quote from **the original author**:

“Starting on 2 days of rest peaked in 1892 and rapidly declined when the mound moved back to 60'6", with a slight jump in 1901. Starting on 3 days of rest peaked in 1897, 1920, and had its largest peak in 1973, followed by a rapid decline. Starts on 4 days rest have risen almost steadily, peaking in 1995, and have dropped in the last decade. The frequency of starts with 5 days rest began rising rapidly in the 1970s, and jumped to a new level in 1998. Starts with 6 days rest peaked in 1942, when Ted Lyons was ending several successful years as a Sunday starter.

I think the real move toward today's "five-man rotation" began in the middle of the 1970's. From 1975 to 1976, starts with three days of rest declined from 33% to 24%, and continued to decline afterwards, while starts with four days of rest rose from 38% to 44% and really took off beginning in 1980. Starts with five days of rest made

their biggest leap from 1987 to 1988 (21% to 24%).

SABR's minor league database

Another big event of the offseason that didn't get much notice was **SABR's new minor league database**. They don't have all the data I'd like to see (For instance, **Dwight Gooden** and **Lenny Dykstra** are both listed with Lynchburg in 1983, but their 300 strikeouts and 105 stolen bases aren't. Respectively.). But it is still very neat stuff. Random example: **Tony Oliva**.

The flukiest fielding year

Hopefully, you saw Sean Smith's **Total Zone article** earlier this week. Some of the best sabermetrics these days concerns fielding; how to measure it and how to evaluate players with it.

Sean's work gives a fielding rating (runs above or below average) to just about every fielder who has played since 1956. The spreadsheet is great fun to pour over. One of the things I decided to do was see which players had the greatest fluke fielding years. To determine that, I looked at each player's performance per 100 plays at each position over his career, and then compared that to each individual year that player played that position (for a minimum of 400 chances). I only considered players whose careers are over, or close to.

The greatest fluke year I found was Kirby Puckett's rookie year, 1984. He was 4.6 runs above average when he first came up to the majors, but never came close to that level again. His second-best year was his sophomore year, 1.2 runs above average, and the stats say he was about average or slightly below most years after that.

That's certainly not the image most of us have of Kirby's fielding prowess, but it brings to mind **the work that has been done on fielding and aging**, which suggests that most players' best fielding years are in their youth.

Over the winter, Sean also did some work on **how many runs a great fielding first baseman can save a team by scooping out bad throws**, a study that **MGL was able to duplicate**.

The bottom line is that the difference between the best and worst first basemen in a given season is probably about one win, based solely on how well he fielded throws from his fellow infielders.

I also hope you caught Dan Turkenkopf's study of **how well individual catchers blocked balls the past few years**. This is another fantastic study, taking advantage of the latest Pitch f/x data and computing skills.

The bottom line: it's a good thing IRod has a great arm.

There's a job opening in Cooperstown

Dale Petroskey was **asked to step down from his post as Executive Director at the Hall of Fame**. I know nothing about this situation, but the press release says the Board felt he "failed to exercise proper fiduciary responsibility." Doesn't sound good, but we shouldn't be too surprised. Eric Enders reported about **a Petroskey incident four years ago**.

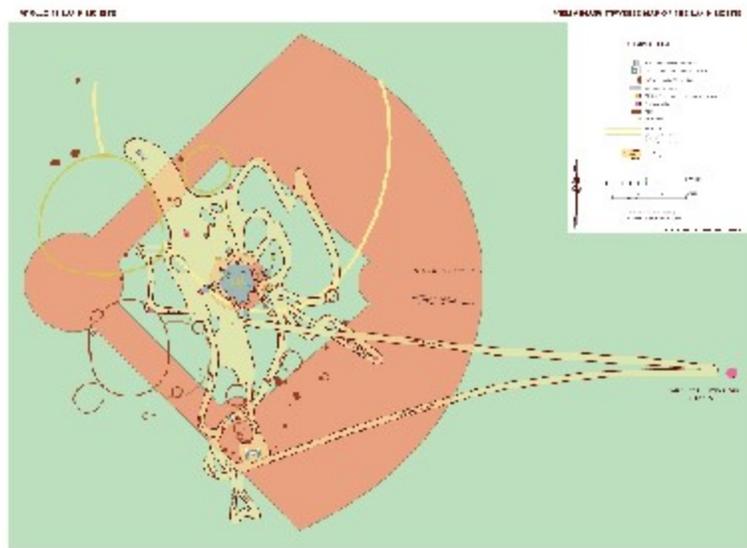
Why, yes, I am available for a job. Why, yes, I would be willing to relocate to Cooperstown.

Spring Training foresight

Are spring training stats meaningful? John Dewan thinks that there is an angle that works. He likes to look at each player's slugging percentage each spring and compare it to his career percentage. John projects that three-fourths of those who exceeded the career mark by 100 or more points are likely to improve this year. **Check out the list**.

The moon versus the diamond

You didn't ask for this, but here is a map of how far men walked on their first trip to the moon, superimposed on a baseball diamond:



Looks like a typical David Wells Spring Training workout to me. The map is **courtesy of NASA.**

Dave Studeman was called a "national treasure" by Rob Neyer. Seriously. Follow his sporadic tweets [@dastudes](#).

Comments are closed.