

## Poor luck at plate part of Tribe's uneven start

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The baseball season has almost reached the quarter pole, and the Indians have experienced plenty of ups and downs. The rotation has continued to be a strength, the bullpen has struggled to find its footing and the offense has been plagued by extreme hot and cold spells.

The result so far has been an 18-18 record, heading into Thursday's off-day. Fortunately, given the state of the American League Central, that ledger is good enough for first place. A year ago, Cleveland endured similar issues early on and had a 31-31 record in mid-June. The Indians then got on a roll, ending with 102 wins and a division crown.

The Tribe is hoping for a similar run as this summer progresses, but there are plenty of kinks to iron out in the meantime. With that in mind, what follows is a glance at the season's first six weeks for the Indians through a mix of Statcast™ data.

### The good

Francisco Lindor recently overtook Yonder Alonso for the team lead in Barrels with 16 on the season, tying the All-Star shortstop for the sixth-highest total in the Majors. Sluggers Giancarlo Stanton and Bryce Harper also had 16 on the season going into Thursday, while Alonso and Manny Machado were among those right behind with 15. Lindor also leads Cleveland batters (minimum 50 results) with a .414 expected weighted on-base average (34th in MLB).

### The bad

As a team, the Indians have feasted on fastballs (their .475 slugging percentage on all varieties of heaters ranked fifth in MLB), but they have struggled against offspeed offerings. The Tribe's .328 slugging percentage against offspeed pitches ranked 23rd in MLB entering Thursday. Cleveland's 99 strikeouts on offspeed pitches below the strike zone were the fourth-most such punchouts among big league offenses.

### The unlucky

The Indians ranked fifth in MLB as a team with a .349 expected weighted on-base average, but the club's actual wOBA (.313) was 15th, entering Thursday. Much of that can be attributed to Cleveland's rough early-April showing at the plate. The two biggest culprits in the lineup have been Jason Kipnis (.321 xwOBA vs. .235 wOBA) and Alonso (.380 xwOBA vs. .300 wOBA).

### The surprising

Given that Lindor leads the Indians in Barrels, it's not too surprising to learn that he also leads the team with 53 batted balls with an exit velocity of 95 mph or greater (10th in MLB). What is surprising is that outfielder Tyler Naquin paces Cleveland's batters in average exit velocity. Naquin's 93.3-mph average ranked 14th in the Majors among batters with a minimum of 50 results, entering Thursday.

### The fast

The Indians have two players ranked in the top 12 in the Majors in Sprint Speed. Bradley Zimmer checks in at eighth with a mark of 29.7 feet per second, and Rajai Davis is 12th at 29.5 feet per second. This is where it is worth mentioning that Davis is 37 years old. The first 11 players on that list -- including 30-year-old Dee Gordon -- have an average age of 24.8. Lindor ranks third on the Tribe (81st in MLB) with a Sprint Speed of 28.2 feet per second.

### The caught

Seeing Indians ace Corey Kluber near the top of a strikeout leaderboard is expected by now, but he's getting K's in an interesting manner so far this season. Heading into Thursday, Kluber's 23 called strikeouts ranked first among MLB pitchers (teammate Trevor Bauer was third with 18). Within that, Kluber led MLB with the most called strikeouts via a two-seamer with 17.

### The trend

Last year, the Indians' pitching staff led the Majors in the highest percentage of curveballs at 17.73 percent. Add in sliders, and Cleveland ranked seventh at 29.41 percent in '17. This season, the Tribe ranks first again in curveball use (18.58 percent) and eighth in curves/sliders (30.02 percent). Kluber's curve rate has actually dropped to 20.7 percent in '18 from 27.9 percent in '17. It's worth noting, however, that he featured 20.3 percent curves last April and May, so expect his rate, along with the team's overall percentage, to continue to tick up.

## Clevinger among unsung heroes in AL Central

By Jason Beck MLB.com @beckjason

Considering the standings, it's safe to call the American League Central an unsung division. But whether it's the title-contending Indians, the up-and-coming Twins, or the rebuilding Tigers, Royals and White Sox, every team has an unsung hero -- someone who doesn't get enough credit for the impact he makes.

These are the players who can help teams overachieve in a season, either to take an extra step forward toward contention or to keep a team in the thick of the race. The Indians certainly know that, having watched Jose Ramirez emerge from a versatile infielder coming up to an AL MVP Award candidate last year. The Royals watched Ryan Madson blossom from a comeback story to a big bullpen piece during their World Series run of 2015. The Tigers built their run of division dominance with help from super-utility player Don Kelly, who became a cult figure in Detroit with his playoff heroics and ability to play everywhere.

This season, for a contender like Cleveland, it's a swing pitcher who finds his way into the rotation and deals like an ace. For Minnesota, it's an infielder who stepped into a void and capably filled it. For Kansas City, it's a Rule 5 Draft pick who has found his place in a restructured bullpen. For Chicago, it's an infielder who doesn't rank among the top prospects in the team's rebuild, but is outperforming everyone and enlivening the clubhouse. For Detroit, it's a versatile athlete who can play everywhere, but has filled a pressing need in the outfield.

Here's a closer look at the unsung heroes of the AL Central:

Indians RHP Mike Clevinger

Why you should know about him: After fighting his way into the rotation last year, Clevinger is now a fixture. Over the 2017-18 seasons, the righty has gone 13-4 with a 2.82 ERA in 28 starts for the Tribe. Through seven starts this year, he has a 2.76 ERA with a .595 opponents' OPS.

Why you don't: Clevinger is starting to make a name for himself, but he still borders on being the "other guy" behind Cleveland's big three of Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer. The way Clevinger has been pitching, he deserves to have his name mentioned right alongside the Tribe's talented trio.

What they're saying: "Clev deserves a ton of credit. I also think guys like [Minor League pitching coordinator] Ruben Niebla, who spent a ton of time with him when he first came over here, deserve credit. I know it's early, but it's a pretty good success story. This kid's got a chance to log some innings for us. That gets exciting." -- manager Terry Francona

## **Cleveland Indians, Kansas City Royals series preview, pitching matchups**

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Here is the preview and pitching matchups for the Indians' series against the Royals.

Where: Progressive Field, Friday through Sunday.

TV/radio: SportsTime Ohio, WTAM/1100 and WMMS/FM 100.7 will carry the series.

Pitching matchups and starting times: RHP Jason Hammel (0-4, 4.78) vs. RHP Trevor Bauer (2-3, 2.53) Friday at 7:10 p.m.; RHP Jakob Junis (4-2, 3.18) vs. RHP Mike Clevinger (2-0, 2.76) Saturday at 4:10 p.m. and LHP Danny Duffy (1-4, 5.15) vs. RHP Corey Kluber (5-2, 2.62) Sunday at 1:10 p.m.

Series: The Indians lead, 2-1, this year. Overall, the Indians lead, 360-329

Friday: Bauer lost a 1-0 decision to Ian Kennedy and the Royals on April 7 at Progressive Field. He pitched eight innings and allowed a leadoff homer to Lucas Duda in the seventh.

Hammel, who pitched six scoreless innings against the Indians on April 8, has lost three straight starts. He's allowed 11 earned runs on 23 hits and six walks in 18 innings in those starts.

Saturday: Clevinger beat the Royals, 3-1, on May 8, allowing one run, while scattering 10 hits over 7 1/3 innings. Yan Gomes hit a two-run, walk-off homer in the ninth.

Junis won his last start, holding the Tigers to two runs over seven innings on Saturday. He's made two appearances against the Indians with no record. Jose Ramirez is 2-for-2 against Junis.

Sunday: Kluber, whose two losses this year have been by 2-1 and 3-2 decisions, will be facing the Royals for the first time this season. He is 9-6 with a 2.98 ERA in 20 starts against the Royals.

Duffy, who lost to the Tribe on April 6, won his first game of the year on Tuesday against Baltimore. He is 2-7 with a 4.09 ERA in 16 games, including 12 starts, against the Indians.

Team updates: The Indians, 9-11 in their last 20 games, have won eight of the last 10 games they've played against the Royals. Kansas City, headed into Thursday night's game against Baltimore, has won six of its last 10 games. Their offense is averaging just over six runs per game in May. Former Indians outfielder Abraham Almonte is hitting .207 (12-for-58) with three homers and eight RBI for the Royals.

Disabled list: Royals - RHP Jesse Hahn (right elbow), RHP Nate Karns (right elbow) and RHP Justin Grimm (back) are on the disabled list. Indians - RHP Nick Goody (right elbow), LHP Andrew Miller (left hamstring), OF Lonnie Chisenhall (right calf), LHP Ryan Merritt (left shoulder), RHP Danny Salazar (right shoulder) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list.

Next: Indians travel to Detroit for three-game series against the Tigers starting Monday night.

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## **Francisco Lindor shaves his head to pay up on bet with high school baseball team**

By Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Francisco Lindor is a man of his word. Even if that word ends up costing him his signature curly, dyed-blond locks.

Months ago the Cleveland Indians All-Star shortstop made a bet with the baseball team from his old high school in Lake County, Fla.

Lindor challenged the team from Montverde Academy to go undefeated, a perfect 25-0 season. If the Eagles could accomplish the feat, Lindor would shear off his stylish coiffure.

Last week, Montverde Academy defeated Central Christian Point (Kissimmee) to complete an undefeated season. The Eagles are currently ranked No. 2 in the MaxPreps high school national rankings. They do not compete in the Florida State Playoffs.

But on Thursday, Lindor delivered a prize beyond any that a tournament win could offer.

With the Indians on a scheduled off day following a win Wednesday in Milwaukee, Lindor jetted to his old stomping grounds where he allowed players from the Montverde Academy team to shave his head during an all-school assembly celebrating the Eagles' season.

Lindor, who was named American League Player of the Week on Monday, shared video of his very special haircut on his Instagram account Thursday night, along with a wide-eyed photo of his very aerodynamic new look.

When you loose a bet to your high school team and you gotta shave #25-0 #ShaveMyHead #EndResult

A post shared by Francisco Lindor (@lindor12bc) on May 10, 2018 at 5:10pm PDT

Lindor played for Montverde Academy before he was drafted No. 8 overall in the 2011 MLB Draft. The baseball facility at the school was named in his honor in 2013.

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### **Cleveland Indians discover that sometimes one win means more than one win**

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The Indians are used to winning.

They started this season with the best winning percentage (.562) in the American League over the last five years. In winning consecutive AL Central championships in 2016 and 2017, they won a combined 196 games.

But it doesn't take much for the element of doubt to work its way into the equation. The Indians just completed a five-game trip through New York and Milwaukee. They lost the first four games and each one was bathed in frustration. Whether it was due to a lack of defense, bad relief pitching or hitting, questions were raised.

In 2016, the Indians never lost more than three in a row during the regular season. In 2017, when they led the AL with 102 wins, their longest losing streak was four. Thirty-five games into the 2018 season, the Indians had already matched that losing streak.

The team that won 14 straight in 2016 and an AL-record 22 in a row last year, was going in the wrong direction. When they played the Brewers on Wednesday afternoon at Miller Park, they were a game below .500 at 17-18 and the Twins were a half-game behind for first place in the Central.

To add more alarm to the situation, the first three losses came against the Yankees in New York. The wild card Yankees upset the Indians in the ALDS last year, overcoming a 2-0 deficit to win the last three games. It means the Indians have lost six straight to a team that looks better than the one that took World Series champion Houston to seven games in the ALCS.

So when the Indians beat Milwaukee, 6-2, on Wednesday behind a 14-strikeout performance by Carlos Carrasco and home runs by Tyler Naquin and Francisco Lindor, there was relief in the visitor's clubhouse.

"It's an understatement to say we needed that," said manager Terry Francona.

There are no must wins in May, June or July. But a team has to win enough and has to win at the right time, to control the anxiety that is always close at hand. Wednesday's win felt like that. An ice breaker, something to keep the flow going in the long season.

"It's a nice way to end the trip, absolutely," said Naquin. "It's part of the game. You're going to run into situations where you don't have what it takes on that certain day. It just so happened to be four days in a row for us. But we're a good team, man.

"We've got good pitching and we have a steep lineup. We've got a good bench. Whoever is starting that day, we know we've got good guys on the bench as well. We've got hitters all the way around."

Exit velocity: 105.1 mph

Launch angle: 23deg

Distance: 418 ft

Translation: GONE [?] #RallyTogether pic.twitter.com/bckk0Fq1jj

-- Cleveland Indians (@Indians) May 9, 2018

Naquin was recalled from Class AAA Columbus on April 8 to replace injured Lonnie Chisenhall in the outfield. All he's done is re-establish himself as a big-league player after finishing third in the AL Rookie of the Year balloting in 2016, but appearing in only 19 games last year.

He's hitting .329 (24-for-73) with two doubles, two homers and nine RBI. On Wednesday in the fourth inning, Naquin hit a 3-2 pitch from Junior Guerra 418 feet over the right field wall for a three-run homer and a 4-0 lead.

"Naquin's homer was huge," said Francona.

Lindor, whose glove at shortstop cost the Indians in New York, singled and homered. Lindor has pushed his average to .292 (46-for-154) with 10 homers, 22 RBI and five steals in seven attempts.

Indians SS Francisco Lindor: "Both games have been lost because of me"

"Thank God we won," said Lindor, who has hit six homers over his last eight games. "It was extremely important for the team and the standings. I think we were below .500. Thank God we won."

The Indians haven't had all three elements - pitching, defense, offense - pulling on the same end of the rope for a consistent period of time. They lost to the Brewers, 3-2, on Tuesday as Corey Kluber, last year's Cy Young winner, allowed a two-run homer and a homer to the opposing pitcher.

The offense, meanwhile, was held to bases-empty homers by Lindor and Jose Ramirez. On Wednesday, Carrasco received more runs than he needed.

"That's what's crazy," said Lindor. "Carrasco had a great pitching performance today. And Kluber had a great performance on Tuesday, but we just couldn't score runs for him."

But on Wednesday, the Indians did what they were built to do. Carrasco dominated, Naquin and Lindor homered, Jose Ramirez stole two bases and Lindor and Jason Kipnis turned a couple of double plays.

"When we put it together, that's what we're capable of doing," said Lindor.

Plus one more thing, Carrasco singled home catcher Roberto Perez in the ninth inning. How's that for an unlikely accomplishment by the Tribe's battery? Perez hits just the third triple of his career and Carrasco unleashes the second hit and first RBI of his career?

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### **Willoughby woman named Indians' Honorary Bat Girl**

By Marc Bona

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Jennifer Buckland of Willoughby has been named Honorary Bat Girl for the Cleveland Indians and will throw out the ceremonial first pitch at Progressive Field on Sunday, May 13.

Each club names an honorary bat girl as part of Major League Baseball's annual "Going to Bat Against Breast Cancer" initiative. It recognizes fans who have been affected by breast cancer and who show a commitment to fighting the disease.

Buckland, a physical therapist at Cleveland Clinic Euclid Hospital, was diagnosed after receiving her first mammogram at age 40. After being diagnosed in May 2015, she underwent a mastectomy, reconstruction and 12-week chemotherapy regimen.

She also was selected for a study that provides early-stage breast-cancer patients with the chance to wear a cooling cap during chemo. The study's published results show the cap now is recognized as an FDA-approved device. (Here's more on Buckland and the cooling cap.)

The Honorary Bat Girl program, introduced in 2009, aims to raise awareness and support. This year honorees were chosen by teams; in the past, fans nominated applicants:

Past Indians Honorary Bat Girls

2017 - Julie Everett, Willoughby / Newbury

2016 - Eva Johnson, Tampa

2015 - Alecia Dennis, Columbus

2014 - Charlene Wuthrich, Sullivan Township, Ashland County

2013 - Colleen DeVito, Mayfield Village

2012 - Kelli Andres, Sylvania

2011 - Beth Ann Vanek, Munroe Falls

2010 - Tina Amstutz, New Philadelphia

2009 - Jennifer Torok, Twinsburg

Major League Baseball will donate licensed uniform royalties through Mother's Day apparel sales to Susan G. Komen and Stand Up to Cancer.

The Indians host the Kansas City Royals at 1:10 p.m. Sunday. Corey Kluber (5-2, 2.62 ERA) is expected to take the mound for the Tribe.

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### **By the numbers: High pitch counts, living (and dying) by the long ball, and Tyler Naquin's contributions**

By T.J. Zuppe May 10, 2018 2

Here are some important trends and interesting numbers to analyze as the Indians (18-18) prepare to open a three-game series against the Royals.

9 — That's how many times Tribe starters have thrown at least 110 pitches in a game this season. Carlos Carrasco eclipsed that mark for a third time, tossing a complete-game gem against the Brewers on Wednesday, striking out 14 in his second complete game of the season.

As for the entire rotation, pushing to 110 and beyond that frequently seems a little high for early May — at least if the goal is to keep their collective tanks as full as possible.

Carrasco: 3 (117, 113, 110)

Trevor Bauer: 3 (122, 116, 111)

Mike Clevinger: 2 (116, 110)

Corey Kluber: 1 (116)

Bauer leads baseball in pitches per game (108.1), which isn't surprising, given the work he puts into maintaining his arm health and strength. Clevinger (100.7) and Kluber (100.2) are also in the top 10, and a few rough outings have limited Carrasco's average (94) to 43rd.

Certainly, the bullpen's struggles since Andrew Miller landed on the disabled list have factored into the totals. And there's something to be said for all pitches not being equal (stressful pitches in tight situations, for instance, probably take a little more out of a pitcher than Carrasco's outing Wednesday, which featured a large lead and some quick innings).

However, it's fair to wonder what the long-term effects of the high totals will be if they continue to collect them. After all, one of the theories about Kluber's difficult time in the ALDS last year was that his hefty workload down the stretch might have led to some of the ineffectiveness.

It will be interesting to see whether they ease off the gas after Miller's activation or whether they continue to run up the starters' totals — and what sort of impact that will have on the group as they push into August, September and, ultimately, October.

51.2 percent — That's how many of the Indians runs have come via the home run, according to Baseball Prospectus. We referenced the team's Guillen Number a few weeks ago, and since then, their reliance on the homer has held steady. In fact, the Tribe is the most homer-reliant team in the majors this season.

Relying on homers isn't necessarily a good or bad thing. The Indians are tied with the Yankees and Angels for the most home runs in baseball (52), so it's not surprising that most of their runs would come via the long ball (the Yankees are the 10th-most reliant team, the Angels are the 15th).

What it might do, however, is help explain why their offense can so frequently live at both ends of the run spectrum. In April, when the ball wasn't traveling and typical homers are kept in the yard, the runs were scarce. When the ball began to travel in the warmer weather, their production increased.

(The three-run homer is a pretty effective weapon, after all.)

Now, perhaps that will become a problem in October, especially when temperatures dip back to frigid levels. You might not be wrong to think that. That said, when facing better pitching in the postseason, it's typically harder to string together multiple hits, which increases the value of a timely home run.

So much of the playoffs is about timing, so if the Indians continue to build their offense around the home run, they'll have to hope their ammunition of choice remains plentiful.

But then there's the flip side of the homer parade ...

54 — That's how many home runs Tribe pitching has allowed this year, second-most in the majors behind the Reds. They also own the third-highest rate of home runs per fly balls in the bigs (14.8 percent).

Last year, they finished with the ninth-lowest HR/FB rate (13 percent) and managed to accumulate the highest pitching WAR (via FanGraphs) as a staff in MLB history. This year, largely thanks to their relief issues, the Indians rank 14th in fWAR.

Josh Tomlin has yielded 13 homers by himself, which skews the number. But the second-most homers on the staff have been surrendered by Kluber (10), which has him tied for the third-highest total in baseball.

116 — That's Tyler Naquin's run-creation rate (wRC+). That metric indicates Naquin has created 16 percent more offense than the league average hitter.

His three-run homer and single Wednesday raised his season slash line to .329/.364/.438 in 77 plate appearances, essentially giving the club a similar performance (if not better) than they hoped to get from the injured Lonnie Chisenhall.

The semi-regular playing time against righties has been beneficial.

"Absolutely," Naquin recently told The Athletic. "You're seeing pitches. Maybe you have a game where you don't feel so good and you're able to bounce back the next day, making adjustments. But being in there regularly, it obviously helps."

One of the biggest differences for Naquin this year has been his success against fastballs. This season, Naquin is slugging .568 against heaters, compared with the .377 mark he posted as a rookie in 2016. And while he's still had some issues against pitches at 95 mph or faster (1 for 5), the fact he's been a bit more selective on his swings also appears to have helped.

Take a look at the pitches he's offering at this year.

Now compare with where he's typically done the most damage in his career.

Ta-da! A pretty effective plan. His team-leading 93.3 mph average exit velocity (among those with at least 50 results) and impressive hard-hit rate (50 percent) reflect that. On top of any adjustments — either planned or coincidental — what's been the biggest key in his opinion?

"I'm just healthy," said Naquin, who battled a balky back in 2017. "Bottom line. I feel good."

.322 — That was Yonder Alonso's OPS in the month of May before his two-hit day Wednesday. In addition to the single and double, he also scorched a 110 mph screamer into the waiting glove of the right fielder for a harmless lineout.

We've discussed the unfortunate luck he's battled throughout the season — he still owns the team's largest gap between his expected performance (based on quality and frequency of contact) and his actual performance — but in fairness, the contact hasn't been as terrific since May 1.

Selecting that as an arbitrary cutoff point is admittedly a little unfair, but since the start of the month, his expected weighted on-base average (.207) is significantly lower than his April mark (.426).

That said, his season xwOBA (.380) is still well above average, his barrel percentage (15.8 percent) is above last year's rate (9.9), and his exit velocity is slightly up from last season's breakout. Overall, he still looks like a wise offseason value buy, even if the numbers have yet to totally reflect it.

For more on Alonso's swing changes (and the help he received from a writer from The Athletic), check out Travis Sawchik's latest.

34 — How similar is Edwin Encarnacion's slow start to last season? Well, let's take a look through his first 34 games.

2017: .220/.367/.364, 5 homers, 42 strikeouts, 25 walks

2018: .200/.273/.423, 9 homers, 42 strikeouts, 10 walks

Encarnacion has traded some patience for power. It's not unusual for aging sluggers to begin shifting toward guess-hitters later in their careers. Their bat speed isn't what it once was or perhaps their eye isn't as sharp, which means they might have to sell out on more pitches to maintain their homer totals. (Yeah, Father Time is still undefeated.)

Is that what's happening with Encarnacion? At 35 years old, it's always a possibility. He's certainly been a bit more aggressive this year on the first pitch, and he's making less contact in the zone. On top of that, his chase rate is up over 3 percent from last year.

Season	Zone Contact %	Chase %	Chase Contact %	1st Pitch Swing %	Swing %	Whiff %
2015	82.1	23.2	63.2	25.8	43.1	23.1
2016	83.0	21.4	57.5	26.9	42.4	23.6
2017	80.5	21.2	57.7	25.5	43.0	25.4
2018	77.0	24.7	49.2	29.4	45.5	30.5

Does any of that mean he's incapable of making adjustments? Of course not. He's still on pace for just more than 40 homers. And his overall performance last year, despite the frigid start, should stop us from going too wild.

But it will be interesting to monitor how the veteran slugger's approach changes throughout the year. Will he reintroduce a little more patience? Or will he continue to transition his game into something new?

Top photo: Roberto Pérez and Carlos Carrasco (Benny Sieu/

### **Minor League Matters: 10 players who could make big-league debuts this year**

**By Emily Waldon and Melissa Lockard May 10, 2018 14**

There are few things better in sports than a major-league debut. To see the culmination of years of work in the minors come to fruition in a first at-bat or a first pitch thrown is a special sight. That moment is even more special when the player debuting carries with him expectations for greatness—it's what made Kris Bryant's first at-bat and Stephen Strasburg's first start must-see TV.

There were 262 major-league debuts in 2017, and we'll see a similar number this year. With players such as Ronald Acuña already splashing on the scene, we thought it would be a good time to see what other intriguing prospects might be on the cusp of a big league call-up. Below are breakdowns of 10 such players.

RHP Shane Bieber

Parent Club: Cleveland Indians

Current Assignment: Class AAA Columbus Clippers

Ht/Wt: 6-3/195 lbs. B/T: R/R DOB: May 31, 1995

Season Stats: 43 2/3 IP, 3-1, 1.44 ERA, 35 H, 7 ER, 3 BB, 39 K

Promoted to Class AAA earlier this month, 22-year-old Shane Bieber has relied on pinpoint precision as his mantra this year.

With 70-grade control, the right-hander started the year in Class AA Akron, where he dominated the assignment from start to finish. Bieber works four pitches, all graded average to above-average: His fastball flashes plus, but sits more comfortably between 92-94 MPH; the curveball has also made notable improvement, elevating to an above-average offering this season; his slider and changeup are both sitting as comfortably average pieces.

Since 2016, Bieber hasn't walked more than 0.83 batters per nine innings. He's had a ridiculous 1.66 FIP and he went 20 straight innings before allowing his first earned run during the five-start stint with Akron this season. That accuracy has been the secret weapon for the Indians' 2016 4th-round pick from the beginning.

Bieber's introduction to Class AAA hasn't been as flawless, but as expected, his walk rate been extremely low with just two walks allowed over his first 12 innings with Columbus. Over 43 ? innings combined this season, Bieber has walked three with a combined 1.44 ERA and 0.87 WHIP.

Profiling as a future number four starter, Bieber's pitchability and advanced feel make him a suitable fit for call up consideration, but likely not until later in the year.

## **RubberDucks have heated up in May after cold April**

If you haven't seen the 2018 RubberDucks, now might be a good time to head to Canal Park.

The Ducks opened a four-game stint with the Erie SeaWolves 20-12 Thursday 2½ games up on the Richmond Flying Squirrels in the Eastern League Western Division.

What's more, the squad has won 12 of its last 14 games and had a seven-game winning streak snapped by the Flying Squirrels on Wednesday.

"We certainly have confidence in what we have," RubberDucks manager Tony Mansolino said. "Winning seven in a row, you don't expect that and 12 out of 14. It's a heck of a run for even the most talented teams.

"We have a lot of faith in our guys in their individual performances. For the team to win that many games, you have to have a lot of things go your way. You have to have a lot of good fortune. We've had that. In that case, it's nothing expected and something we feel very fortunate to have gotten."

In April, the Ducks stayed afloat in large part because of an incredible performance by their pitching staff. The team braved frigid temperatures and posted a 13-10 mark with an outstanding 2.34 ERA.

That made up for some cold bats as the RubberDucks batted a collective .215 and logged 205 strikeouts, which comes out to just under nine per game.

To a man, batters preached on trusting in the process and staying the course.

It worked, and now the Ducks are red hot. In May, they're batting .289 and are crossing home plate in turnstile fashion. In 23 games in April, the squad scored 100 runs. In nine games in May, it has scored 64 times.

"We're just taking it day by day and sticking with the routines," RubberDucks outfielder Connor Marabell said. "I think we're having fun. We're enjoying being together and playing together.

"That's basically been the difference. We're not putting pressure on ourselves. We're just having fun out there."

It's hard not to enjoy things given the way the bats have soared. One of the biggest risers has been first baseman Bobby Bradley.

The top Indians prospect batted .114 in April with two home runs and four RBI. Toward the end of a homestand last week, there were signs he was snapping out of things and it continued on the road.

In May, Bradley is hitting .346 with three home runs, 10 RBI and has an impressive 1.221 OPS.

And he's not the only one with big numbers in the month as Andrew Calica (.375, 5 RBI), Marabell (.344, 10) and Joe Sever (.385, 6) have shown some pop.

Catcher Daniel Salters was batting .313 with seven RBI heading into Thursday, but was promoted to Columbus.

"Hitting is contagious," Marabell said. "When you see your buddies up there putting in good at-bats, it allows you to take pressure off yourself and put up good at-bats, too."

From a pitching standpoint, Shao-Ching Chang (2-0, 1.69), Sean Brady (1-0, 1.46), Cameron Mingo (0-0, 1.80) and Jake Paulson (2-0, 2.92) are scorching this month. That's made up for the loss of Shane Bieber, who was promoted to Columbus on May 3.

The staff is a collective 7-2 with a 2.48 ERA and is averaging 8.0 strikeouts per contest.

"We've played a little better defense," Mansolino said. "The pitching despite all the movement has hung in there and continued to do what it's done all year for us."

The post RubberDucks have heated up in May after cold April appeared first on Ohio.com.

## **Mud Hens 8, Clippers 4 | Big inning helps Mud Hens cap sweep**

Host Toledo scored six runs on four straight hits in the sixth inning to reverse a 3-2 deficit and defeat the Clippers 8-4 on Thursday night before 4,023 at Fifth Third Field, capping a four-game sweep.

The Mud Hens did their damage off Columbus' Jordan Milbrath (1-2). Christin Stewart and Jim Adduci opened the inning with back-to-back singles. After a groundout and an intentional walk, Jarrod Saltalamacchia and Harold Castro delivered consecutive RBI singles to put Toledo ahead 4-3.

Former Clipper Ronny Rodriguez followed with a two-run double and Jason Krizan added a two-run single. In all, Milbrath, the third Columbus pitcher, gave up six runs on six hits with one walk in 1 1/3 innings.

Columbus starter Dominic DeMasi allowed two runs (one earned) on four hits in 3 1/3 innings, with a strikeout and two walks.

Brandon Barnes led off the game with a homer for the Clippers, and Yu Chang delivered an RBI double later in the inning for a quick 2-0 lead. Richie Shaffer led off the second inning with a homer to put Columbus ahead 3-0, before the Mud Hens scored single runs in the second and fourth innings.

Yandy Diaz added a sacrifice fly in the ninth for the Clippers for the final margin.

### **Rosenthal: A radical (crazy?) proposal, from a retired pitching ace, on how to fix the game**

By Ken Rosenthal May 11, 2018 13

Many of you will shriek about what Jim Kaat is about to propose, so here's a suggestion, or perhaps I should call it a plea:

Think. Just think. Wait one minute — just one! — before composing your righteous protest and breaking your index finger as you pound “tweet.”

Kaat, 79, is not some radical who dabbles in hot takes. No, my colleague at MLB Network is one of the game's most thoughtful statesmen, a pitcher-turned-broadcaster who spent 25 seasons in the majors and rejoined the Minnesota Twins in January as a special assistant.

Yet, as much as Kaat loves baseball, he is one of many frustrated by the state of the game. His idea to revolutionize it — his bold, shocking and virtually certain-to-be-rejected idea — is best summarized by a catchphrase:

“Seven is the new nine.”

That's right, Kaat is proposing that games last seven innings instead of nine, ending a baseball tradition that has existed since, oh, only 1856. Kaat is under no illusion that baseball will adopt his plan, which would feature a Triple Crown of upheavals — historical, emotional and financial. Two recent stories by The Athletic's Jayson Stark, one on shortening the season, the other on putting more balls in play, detailed the difficulty of enacting meaningful change in baseball, a sport deeply rooted in tradition.

Well, the idea should be to make the product as appealing as possible. One early measure this season— attendance — indicates that fans are not exactly enamored with the present state of affairs. Blame the poor weather in April. Blame the number of rebuilding teams. But through Wednesday, the average attendance was 26,823, per STATS LLC. The average exceeded 30,000 every season from 2004 to '17.

Kaat, who says friends constantly tell him games are too long, dismisses baseball's new pace-of-play initiatives as “a little blip on the screen.” Through Wednesday, the average time of a nine-inning game was three hours, 43 seconds, a reduction of about 2.5 percent from the 2017 final average of 3:05:11. Forty years ago, the nine-inning average was 2:28. Twenty years ago, it was 2:52 — about 13 minutes shorter than it was last season.

Yes, reducing games to seven innings sounds crazy. Kaat, though, is serious. His plan, for better or worse, would include:

\*Restoring the importance of starting pitchers.

The average length of a start has reduced from 5.97 innings in 2014 to 5.47 through Wednesday's play. A five-inning start obviously would carry greater impact in a seven-inning game.

“Go five,” Kaat says, “and then turn it over to the setup man and closer.”

What, eliminate middle-inning relievers? That is precisely the idea, which leads to Kaat's next brainstorm . . .

\*Reducing the size of pitching staffs.

Many teams today carry 13 pitchers and 12 position players, leaving room for only four bench players in the National League and three in the American League, thanks to the DH.

Kaat would mandate a maximum of nine or 10 pitchers on each staff, enabling teams to field much larger benches and use more pinch-hitters, more pinch-runners and more defensive replacements.

“When I broke in, there were 16 teams, eight in each league,” says Kaat whose career began in 1959. “You had basically 10 pitchers on a staff, 160 in all of the major leagues. Now you have almost 400.”

Kaat contends that too many pitchers are rushed to the majors before they are ready. A number of team executives privately agree. An expansion from 30 to 32 teams, as desired by commissioner Rob Manfred, only would exacerbate the shortage of quality pitching.



Seven-inning games would alleviate the problem, in part by . . .

\*Facilitating the return of four-man rotations.

If a starting pitcher only goes five innings, Kaat asks, why can't he work every fourth day instead of every fifth?

"We went every four days back when we were pitching 300 innings," says Kaat, who exceeded 260 innings seven times and 300 twice. "These guys are bigger, better, stronger. It would just be a matter of training them."

A return to four-man rotations would enable fans to see top pitchers such as Clayton Kershaw, Max Scherzer, and Corey Kluber more often, increasing the number of quality matchups with teams no longer using fifth starters.

Of course, certain other problems would emerge, starting with a major thorn in an increasingly data-driven sport . . .

\*Altering the meaning of statistics.

Many fans would perceive any impact on statistics as a huge negative, but the stats most affected would be counting stats, not the rate stats preferred by sabermetricians and valued by team executives.

Playing two fewer innings per game, a slugger such as Giancarlo Stanton obviously would get fewer opportunities to break Barry Bonds' single-season home run mark of 73. "To me, the record book has been distorted over the years in so many ways — expansion, the DH, 13-man pitching staffs, steroids, can't brush hitters off the plate, livelier bats, hitters diving into the ball," Kaat says.

"Craig Kimbrel just got his 300th save. That's a great accomplishment. But 300 saves when Kimbrel does it is a lot different than when Bruce Sutter did it."

True enough, but any effect on statistics would pale in comparison to the idea of . . .

\*Creating a potential reduction in revenue.

For owners, this is where the discussion might begin and end. Seven-inning games would mean fewer commercial breaks on television and lower sales at concession stands. Similar issues exist with the idea of shortening the season. And good luck persuading the players to accept proportionally lower salaries under either concept.

Kaat contends the games are so long that many fans leave early anyway, leading to the vast majority of purchases occurring in the first seven innings. The revenue from the lost commercial breaks likely would be more difficult to replace, but perhaps teams could turn to creative advertising solutions.

Besides, who knows how all this would play out?

Shorter games might appeal to a larger audience, leading to increases in ticket sales and TV ratings. Players might stay healthier, enabling fans to see stars more often. And if baseball introduced accompanying measures to improve the pace of action, the product might become a whole lot more interesting. "It's become a home-run derby, with more strikeouts," Kaat says. "The fans and players deserve better."

Kaat, who believes an independent league would be the ideal testing ground for seven-inning games, concedes his idea is something of a "pipe dream" at the major-league level. Fair enough. But when a voice as respected as Kaat's calls for radical change, shouldn't the power brokers at MLB and the players' union listen? Shouldn't we all?

Don't shriek, think. Seven-inning games might not be the answer. But all Kaat wants — all anyone should want — is to make a great sport even better.

## **Salvador Perez hits a grand slam on his birthday but the Orioles clobber Ian Kennedy**

BY MARIA TORRES

BALTIMORE-For a short-lived moment Thursday night, it seemed Salvador Perez would be the Royals' hero on his 28th birthday.

With no outs and the bases loaded in the first inning, he extended his bat to Orioles starter Chris Tillman's 89 mph offering. He connected. The pitch traveled 363 feet, banged into the right-field wall and bounced back into the field at Camden Yards. As Mike Moustakas dived into third base, Perez stopped his trot just beyond first.

He didn't know what the umpire would call. From the press box, it seemed like a home run.

"As soon as I hit it, at best I thought it was a sacrifice fly," Perez said.

Seconds later, the umpire signaled a trip around the bases. Perez resumed course and was greeted at home plate with a Moustakas embrace.

The grand slam was Perez's second of his career. It gave the Royals an early lead.

Starting pitcher Ian Kennedy couldn't hold onto it as the Royals lost 11-6. He blew leads of 4-0 and 6-3, giving up three home runs as he went.

"It'd be a way better (gift)," Perez said. "A grand slam and a win? Woof. But it's part of the game. Things like that are going to happen."

The Royals lost to the Orioles 11-6 on Thursday, May 10, 2018 at Camden Yards despite jumping on an early first inning lead courtesy of Salvador Perez's grand slam. It was the second of his career. Maria Torres

The first three Orioles batters Kennedy faced recorded extra-base hits and scored. Among them was Manny Machado, who the Royals limited to only a pair of singles and a walk in the first two games of the series. He drilled a two-run homer in the first, shrinking the Royals' lead to 4-3.

Jorge Soler tried to give the Royals a cushion, dribbling a two-run single up the middle in the second inning. It wasn't enough.

Tillman departed after Soler's one-out hit, marking the second time this series a Baltimore starter did not last two innings.

Yet Baltimore's bullpen righted the course: Right-hander Miguel Castro scattered four hits and two walks in 4 2/3 innings in relief of Tillman. In all, the Orioles' bullpen surrendered six hits.

The Orioles rewarded Castro's efforts, erasing the Royals' lead in the fourth inning. Catcher Chance Sisco roped a two-run double into the gap at right-center field to give the Orioles a 7-6 lead. Then Trey Mancini muscled a 370-foot, opposite-field home run.

Kennedy left the mound after the fourth and was never handed back the ball. In a span of 78 pitches, the Orioles battered him for eight hits and nine earned runs. He'd only ever allowed a maximum of seven earned runs since signing with the Royals in 2016.

In the moments after his exit, he retreated to the visiting clubhouse. He slogged through video and noticed something foul on every pitch.

"Everything was flat," said Kennedy, who hasn't won a decision since he pitched six scoreless innings against the Indians on April 7. "The slider was flat. The curveball had a hump in it. I pulled my changeup. I wasn't on top of the ball."

The Royals, who started the three-game set by blasting the Orioles for 10 runs in the first inning of a 15-7 win on Tuesday, couldn't get any momentum going in Baltimore. They dropped to 12-25 the night before traveling to Cleveland to face the American League Central-leading Indians in a three-game series that starts Friday night.

They're 6 1/2 games outside of first place in the division. Hours before the Royals took the field Thursday, manager Ned Yost found comfort in that.

"I'm not really looking. But I'm glad we're not totally buried," Yost said. "Our guys have done a good job. Even through the roughest times, I've kept my eye on them and I've never had to (say something). ... They're not hanging their heads. They're not feeling sorry for themselves. They're just working hard and getting after it."

The Kansas City Star LOADED: 05.11.2018

### **Orioles pound Kennedy, outslug Royals**

By David Ginsburg

BALTIMORE — Adam Jones homered, scored three runs and had three RBIs, and the Baltimore Orioles outslugged the Kansas City Royals 11-6 Thursday night to emerge with their second winning streak of the season.

Manny Machado and Trey Mancini also went deep for the Orioles, who trailed 4-0 in the first inning and 6-3 in the second before rallying to beat the Royals for the second night in a row. The only other time Baltimore (10-27) won successive games this season was April 5-6 at Yankee Stadium.

The Orioles had seven extra-base hits and eclipsed their previous season high of eight runs by the fourth inning.

Miguel Castro (1-1) replaced ineffective starter Chris Tillman and blanked Kansas City over 4 2/3 innings, his longest outing of the season.

Salvador Perez hit a grand slam for the Royals, who were seeking their second series win of the year.

Staked to a 4-0 lead before taking the mound, Ian Kennedy (1-4) left with the Royals down 9-6. He went four innings and allowed eight hits, including three home runs.

"It was just a grind," Royals manager Ned Yost said. "The top of the order created a lot of problems for him."

At least he lasted longer than Tillman, who yielded six runs and got only four outs.

Tillman has given up 13 runs over 2 1/3 innings in his last two starts, raising his ERA over seven starts to an unsightly 10.46.

After starting Tuesday night's game at Camden Yards with a 10-run first inning, the Royals settled for a four-run first in the finale. A single and two walks set the table for Perez, who ripped an 0-2 pitch from Tillman over the right-field scoreboard.

Machado connected with a man on in the bottom half to make it 4-3, but Tillman gave up a two-run single by Jorge Soler in the second, prompting his early exit.

Jones hit a two-run shot in the third to get Baltimore to 6-5, and the Orioles completed the comeback in the fourth.

After Chance Sisco doubled in two runs, Mancini followed with his fourth home run.

The Capital-Journal LOADED: 05.11.2018

### **Stark: Useless Inf-O Dept, Emphasis on the 0 Edition**

By Jayson Stark 1h ago 1

No hits. No outs.

These two feats are not like the other. But they came on the very same evening this week.

James Paxton threw a no-hitter Tuesday in Toronto. I'm going to take a wild guess that you noticed that. But here's what you may not have noticed:

Dylan Bundy threw something we refer to as "a no-outer" against the Royals. Seven hitters faced. Zero hitters retired. Four hitters making home run trots. And kids, don't try that at home. Certainly not in the first game of a homestand following an 0-6 road trip!

So what happens when you get a no-hitter and a no-outer on the same day? The Useless Info Department is all over it. That's what. So fasten those seatbelts. Here we go.

#### THE NO-HITTER AND THE NO-OUTER

I was amazed by how many people that night had the same thought that I did: When was the last time we'd seen a no-hitter and a no-outer on the same day anyhow?

And of course every single one of those people had a related thought: "Well, obviously, that knucklehead Stark would know!"

OK, so I looked. I spent way too much otherwise-useful time, which I theoretically could have spent bonding with my loved ones, looking. But when you folks demand these sorts of life-altering answers, I know what I need to do. So I looked.

— Last time it happened (h/t to @mattmccall)? It was actually as recently as June 13, 2012 – Matt Cain's perfecto, paired with a P.J. Walters 4-hit, zero-out mini-start for the Twins. But wait. This gets better.

I also found two times that it happened just involving Nolan Ryan! There was Sept. 26, 1981 (11-K no-hitter for Nolan, 3-and-done start for Ed Whitson). And there was May 15, 1973 (12-whiff no-hitter for Nolan, 5-and-seeya start for Larry Christensen). See what happens when you throw seven no-hitters? You wind up in the middle of all kinds of trivia.

— So in total, amazingly, this was the sixth time both of these momentous events occurred on the same day in the division-play era. But hang on, because here comes the big note. Get ready!

— Most of those games where the starter didn't get an out didn't last as long as Dylan Bundy's seven-hitter start, you see. So what happens if we look only at starts in which the starting pitcher faced at least seven batters? Here's what:

There has been just one other day like this one in the entire live-ball era. That's what you get. That day was Sept. 1, 2007. Clay Buchholz handled the no-hit portion of the festivities. The Phillies' J.D. Durbin did the rest, with a start that went: Single, HBP, single, single, single, walk, single.

So there. I looked. You can all resume your regularly scheduled lives now. You're welcome!

#### THE NO-HITTER WATCH

Now let's keep rolling – with five fun no-hitter tidbits from a no-hit kind of week:

— First, here's to James Paxton. The 98th, and next-to-last, pitch of his spectacular, no-hit evening was clocked at 100 miles per hour. (Yeah, technically, it was 99.5, but we round those off and call them 100.) So how often do you see a guy throwing 100 frigging miles an hour in the ninth inning of a no-hitter? Here's a shocker: Almost never!

There is only one other recorded instance of anyone throwing that hard in the ninth inning of a no-hitter, in fact. According to MLB's pitch-tracking data, which goes back 11 seasons, the other guy to do it was (who else?) Justin Verlander, who launched the 105th pitch of his May 7, 2011 no-hitter at 100.4 mph to Rajai Davis. Rajai fouled it off – before striking out three pitches later.

Coincidence alert: This happened in the very same ballpark as the one Paxton was twirling in (Rogers Centre).

— Loved this list from the Yes Network's James Smyth. In honor of Josh Donaldson, who made the final out, it's all the MVPs who ever made the last out of a no-hitter:

Josh Donaldson (Tuesday vs. Paxton)

Willie McGee (1992 vs. Kevin Gross)

Hank Aaron (1969 vs. Ken Holtzman, 1967 vs. Don Wilson)

Ernie Banks (1965 vs. Jim Maloney)

Frank Robinson (1964 vs. Ken Johnson)

Ted Williams (1958 vs. Jim Bunning, 1951 vs. Allie Reynolds)

— Welcome to 2018 – the first year in baseball history with no-hitters in three different countries. There was Sean Manaea in Oakland last month, the Dodgers tag team in Mexico last weekend and Paxton's gem in Toronto – all in a span of 2 ½ weeks. We'd like to thank the Dodgers for making that possible, by throwing the first major-league no-hitter ever in a country not known as Canada or the United States.

— Shockingly, however, this is actually the fourth time there have been no-hitters in two countries in the same week. The names are fun, so here come the other three:

May 10-15, 1981 – Charlie Lea in Montreal, Len Barker in Cleveland

June 29, 1990 (same day) – Dave Stewart in Toronto, Fernando Valenzuela in L.A.

May 3-7, 2011 – Francisco Liriano in Chicago, Justin Verlander in Toronto

— Finally, check out this tremendous nugget from MLB.com's Matthew Leach. Walker Buehler started that combined no-hitter for the Dodgers. He also hit a single at the plate because... of course he did.

He's the 11th NL pitcher in a row who started a no-hitter in an NL park and also got a hit. Which makes no sense at all, naturally. You know how many 11-game hitting streaks there have been by any individual pitcher in the last 100 years? That would be exactly one – by Carlos Zambrano in 2008. Crazy!

## THE BUNDY WATCH

On the other hand, poor Dylan Bundy's night wasn't quite that upbeat. So here come five things you should know about the first single-homer-homer-homer-walk-walk-homer start in baseball history:

— The bad news is, Bundy was the first starting pitcher ever to give up four home runs and not get around to recording an out. But hey, the good news is, we found three pitchers – via baseball-reference.com's awesome Play Index – who gave up four home runs in an outing in which they faced fewer batters than he did.

Pat Mahomes – 5 batters, 4 homers on Aug. 17, 2001

Jason Grilli – 6 batters, 4 homers last June 3

And the only starter, Catfish Hunter – 6 batters, 4 homers (to Rick Burleson, Fred Lynn, Carlton Fisk and George "Boomer" Scott) on June 17, 1977

— Remember when the Royals were hitting four home runs this season over their first 422 trips to the plate? Yep. Same team. But they somehow hit four home runs in a mere seven visits to the plate against Bundy in this game. Unreal.

— Those four homers (and zero outs) aside, it's wild enough to see a box-score line that includes the tagline: "Bundy pitched to 7 batters in 1st." Did you know that only one other active starter has ever spun off one of those "Pitched to 7 in 1st" lines?

That would be Matthew Boyd, in only the second start of his career, on July 2, 2015, against the Red Sox. Here is how his night went: Single, single, single, homer, homer, single, wild pitch, walk.

— Meanwhile, no Oriole had put up a "Pitched to 7 in 1st" start in more than six decades. Last to do it: Bill Wight, against the Indians, on Aug. 31, 1955.

But here's the really crazy part of Wight's game: After he went single-single-double-walk-double-walk-single, Hal Brown came out of the Orioles' bullpen, faced 29 hitters, closed out the game and gave up no hits. Seriously.

— Lastly, as sabermetric legend Tom Tango points out, this start capped an out-of-nowhere three-start meltdown by Bundy in which he gave up nine homers (and 22 runs) in just nine innings! Just thought I'd point out that Mariano Rivera had 13 different seasons in which he didn't give up nine home runs or 22 runs all year.

## THE OHTANI WATCH

We have an unusual blockbuster Shohei Ohtani feat this week – since officially, it never actually happened. But luckily, we have witnesses!

Tuesday night, in batting practice at Coors Field, the incredible Ohtani-san hit a baseball where no one has ever hit a baseball. You can watch it here. (It's the second of two BP homers.)

It roared off into the mile-high ozone, cleared the fence in deep right-center field, soared beyond the bullpen and crashed off the fence beyond the third deck, behind Section 303. To give you an idea of how far away from home plate that is, check out this tweet from Rockies broadcaster Ryan Spilborghs.

In his quest to tell this remarkable story (and hopefully win an Emmy for outstanding achievement in hiking), Spilborghs trekked all the way outward and upward to section 303 on TV the next day. He told us he was so far from Planet Earth – I mean, home plate – up there that "I couldn't read the jersey on any player. I couldn't tell facial description. And I have good eyesight. But it was beyond my ability to tell what player was who."

At first, he said, he wasn't sure if he was even in the right place – until he looked at the railing behind the section, “and I saw the ball mark. And I was like, ‘Holy crap.’”

Error! Filename not specified.

So how could he be sure this was Ohtani's ball mark? Because Spilborghs has been watching batting practice at Coors Field for over a decade, as a player and broadcaster. And have we mentioned that this was a spot that no previous baseball had ever visited?

Spilborghs rummaged through his memory bank for us. He has seen Matt Holliday take BP. And Carlos González. And Giancarlo Stanton. And hundreds of other guys. And never, he told Useless Info, has he “seen a ball that came off the bat like that.”

He checked with Angels hitting coach Eric Hinske. Hinske told him: “I've never seen a ball hit there.” Then Spilborghs showed Nolan Arenado a photo of where the ball landed. Arenado's response: “No way he did that.”

But Ohtani did that, all right. So of course we needed to find out how mammoth a home run it actually was. And fortunately, we knew just where to turn – to Greg Rybarczyk (@hittracker), creator of the ESPN HR Tracker and currently a senior baseball research and development analyst for the Red Sox.

After perusing YouTube videos and consulting his Coors data, Rybarczyk estimated Ohtani's deepest poke of the day at an incomprehensible 517 feet. Which is just a few feet short of a tenth of a mile.

So please. Think about this. Why are we obsessed with Shohei Ohtani? Because he can throw a baseball 101 miles per hour. And he can hit a baseball 517 feet. And he's a real human being.

“This is the equivalent of Sidd Finch (the fictional Sports Illustrated cover boy once created by George Plimpton),” Spilborghs said, “but without the worker boots.”

Oh, and also without the fiction. We repeat. This is a real person doing this stuff. So Spilborghs started to ponder the possibilities of Ohtani opening the door for “other players like this” and then it hit him. There are no other players like this.

“Even if there aren't any more guys like Shohei, hitting 517-foot BP homers and throwing 101, who cares?” Spilborghs said, chuckling. “Why don't we just marvel at the one we've got?”

#### THE BARTOLO WATCH

Bartolo Colon joined yet another fun club in the last week. Let's call it the 4/44 Club. And how does a guy get admitted into this 4/44 Club, you ask? Pretty darned easily, actually. Just give up four home runs in a game – at age 44.

The club has just three members. But I knew you'd enjoy them:

BARTOLO (May 4, 2018) – long balls served to Mookie Betts, J.D. Martinez and Rafael Devers (twice).

RANDY JOHNSON (Sept. 1, 2008) – long balls served to Albert Pujols, Yadier Molina, Joe Mather and Felipe Lopez.

GAYLORD PERRY (April 10, 1983) – long balls served to Gary Gaetti, John Castino and Randy Bush (twice).

HONORABLE MENTION – Charlie Hough once gave up four in a game at age 46. And Jamie Moyer did it at age 49!

#### USELESS INFO OF THE WEEK

— Who's the greatest slayer of giants in baseball? Diamondbacks pitcher Matt Koch, obviously. He now has matched up against former MVPs two starts in a row – Clayton Kershaw on May 1, then Justin Verlander last Sunday – and his team won both of those games. According to @StatsByStats, he's the first pitcher to run into two different MVPs in back-to-back starts in more than 70 years – since Ed Lopat had to duel Hal Newhouser and Dizzy Dean on Sept. 23-28, 1947.

Addendum No. 1: I hate to break it to the descendants of Ed Lopat, but Matt Koch's feat had a way higher degree of difficulty – since there have only been two starting pitchers who won an MVP award in the last 25 years, and he faced both of them!

Addendum No. 2: At least Koch gets a break with his next start (Friday against the Nationals). He only has to face the defending Cy Young – Max Scherzer.

— Braves rookie Mike Soroka won't forget his big-league debut for all kinds of reasons. But here's one of them: He got his first career plate appearance before he threw his first career pitch. (Right you are. The Braves batted around in the top of the first.)

That's happened just two other times in the last 10 years, according to the Elias Sports Bureau – to the Reds' Luis Castillo last June 23 and to the Cardinals' Tyler Lyons on May 22, 2013.

— Gerrit Cole overmatched the Diamondbacks with a dazzling 16-strikeout complete game last week. But he sure did take a unique path to those 16 whiffs. He had no strikeouts in the first inning. And he had no strikeouts in the ninth inning. But he crammed 16 K's into the seven innings in between.

So how rare is that? Elias tells us he was the first pitcher to pile up that many strikeouts in a complete game, with none in the first or ninth, since Dwight Gooden did it on Sept. 12, 1984.

— But that's not all. Cole also had a second big-strikeout game that very same night – at the plate. In the offensive portion of his evening, he went 0 for 5, with five K's. And that's even more rare. He's the first pitcher since 1900, Elias reports, to fan five times during any kind of double-digit strikeout game, let alone a 16-strikeout game. Wow.

— Finally, this portion of Useless Information is apparently brought to you by the number five – because we're saddened to announce that for the 16th consecutive year, nobody in baseball went 5 for 5 on Cinco de Mayo. Last to do it: Omar Vizquel, on Cinco de Mayo 2002.

#### FIVE STRANGE BUT TRUE FEATS OF THE WEEK

— Josh Donaldson and Yangervis Solarte both homered in each game of the Blue Jays' doubleheader in Cleveland last week. And that, of course, has been done before. But they also homered in those two games while wearing two different numbers (thanks to a postponed celebration of Jackie Robinson Day). And I'm going to bet that no teammates had ever done that before.

— But that wasn't the only wacky thing about that doubleheader. The Indians had a seven-run inning in Game 1 and a nine-run inning in Game 2 – but didn't get a sweep out of it (thanks to a 13-11 loss in Game 1). The last team to have two innings that big in both ends of ANY doubleheader? Reginald Jackson's 1975 A's. But at least they bludgeoned the Tigers, 11-0 and 16-4, the day they did it (July 22).

— So how about this for losing the hard way? The Angels scored in the ninth, 10th and 11th innings of their game against the Mariners last Saturday – and still lost. Last team to put runs on the board in the ninth, 10th and 11th of any game that didn't end in a win, according to @StatsByStats: Eric Byrnes' 2003 Oakland A's, in an April 3 defeat to (yep) the Mariners.

— Then again, must have been one of those nights in the Pacific Time Zone. That same evening, the Orioles managed to lose in Oakland despite A) allowing a mere two hits and zero runs over the first 11 innings, B) throwing eight consecutive hitless innings in one stretch and C) putting 11 runners on base in between hits allowed.

So how did they find a way not to win a game like that? Well, their hitters also struck out 20 times, in a related development. But according to @StatsByStats, they were still the first AL team in over three decades to lose a game in which they gave up two hits or fewer over the first 11 innings. It hadn't happened since the Tigers did it – also in Oakland – on May 1, 1987.

— But nobody in the last week found a stranger but truer way to lose a baseball game than the great Corey Kluber. How did the winning run score in his 3-2 loss in Milwaukee on Tuesday? On a home run – by a relief pitcher (Brent Suter).

A sincere thanks to Fox Sports Wisconsin's Craig Coshun, for saving me the trouble of looking up all the relievers who have ever hit a home run off the incumbent Cy Young winner. According to @StatsByStats, he tweeted, that has happened just two other times.

There was a 1957 homer by Turk Farrell off Don Newcombe. And there was a 1969 bomb by Clay Carroll off Bob Gibson. I still find it incredible that Carroll hit an extra-inning game-winner off Gibson that day – and never hit another homer (or extra-base hit) in a 14-year career!