What's a Batted Ball Report?

By Dave Studenmund

March 23, 2009

Glad you asked. The Hardball Times has been purchasing batted ball stats from Baseball Info Solutions for several years. We know the number of times each batter hit (or each pitcher gave up) each type of batted ball, and how often he achieved a certain outcome for each type. For instance, we know how many ground balls were outs, singles, doubles, triples or fielded for an error.

We're going to update these data on a daily basis in 2009 and we're going to share the results of this cool stuff with you each week. We'll shake up the stats and look at them from all sorts of different perspectives. Maybe we'll try crossing our eyes, too. Whatever seems interesting.

Our goal is to present the batted ball data to you in a way that helps you understand the strengths and weaknesses of all batters and pitchers. We'll tear apart the trends and we'll turn them into run values, the number of runs the player added to his team for each type of batted ball.

Let me show you what I mean. Here's the batted ball profile of the new Phillies left fielder, Raul Ibanez:

Raul Ibanez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	699	16	9	42	19	39	.11	.17	71	89	.05	.07	.45	.23	1	5	8	11	25
2007	636	15	9	42	18	40	.09	.12	67	86	.05	.08	.41	.19	0	8	1	7	16
2008	707	16	9	41	19	40	.14	.11	71	83	.06	.06	.45	.20	2	4	8	6	20
MLB Totals		*17*	*9*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*84*	*.05*	*.05*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Looks good in red, doesn't he? (Icon/SMI)

Today, we're talking about Ibanez in order to introduce you to the entire concept of batted balls. Ibanez is one of the most interesting hitters in the majors because he has many consistent strengths and no outstanding weaknesses. He's so good that his bat was 20 runs better than average last year (you can find that number in the far right hand column), in line with his production the previous two years. What's more, he was above average in each of the four categories we track in our batted ball profiles. Looking at the far right-hand columns:

- NIP, or "Not in Play," which consists of strikeouts, walks and being hit by a pitch. Ibanez was two runs above average in that category, and he's usually around average;
- GB, or Ground Balls, in which Ibanez was four runs above average;
- LD, or Line Drives, in which Ibanez was eight runs above average, and;
- Fly, which includes all fly balls (infield and outfield, those in play and those hit for home runs), in which Ibanez was six runs above average.

When we talk about a player's batted ball profile, we'll often use this format

and start in the right-hand columns, which consist of the player's overall strengths and weaknesses, and then use the rest of the table to break him down further.

Anyway, you don't often see a profile like Ibanez's. Most hitters have a particular strength or two, something they particularly excel at. Ibanez does it all, and has been doing it all for quite a while. Let's pick these apart one-by-one. First up, strikeouts and walks (for reference, here's the same table again):

Raul Ibanez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	699	16	9	42	19	39	.11	.17	71	89	.05	.07	.45	.23	1	5	8	11	25
2007	636	15	9	42	18	40	.09	.12	67	86	.05	.08	.41	.19	0	8	1	7	16
2008	707	16	9	41	19	40	.14	.11	71	83	.06	.06	.45	.20	2	4	8	6	20
MLB Totals		*17*	*9*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*84*	*.05*	*.05*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

In the third and fourth columns from the left, you can see the percentage of times Ibanez struck out and walked (the walk column includes intentional walks and HBPs). He's been the very model of consistency here, striking out and walking almost exactly as often as the major league average. His slightly positive NIP scores come from the fact that he strikes out slightly less often than the major league average.

The next three columns, "% of Batted Balls," tell you how often Ibanez has hit each of the three main types of batted balls. He hits line drives at the major league rates, ground balls a little less often and fly balls a little more often. In other words, he's got a tendency to be a fly ball hitter, but not outrageously so. An example of a more extreme fly ball hitter is the guy he's replacing, Pat Burrell, who hit 45 percent fly balls. The Orioles' Kevin Millar was most extreme, at 51 percent. We'll be looking at Batted Ball Leaderboards throughout the year.

The inherent value of ground balls and, to some extent, line drives don't vary a lot, but the value of fly balls does. The next two columns take a critical look at a batter's fly balls. The first column represents the percentage of fly balls that don't leave the infield. These are important because an infield fly is an automatic out, and some batters do tend to hit infield flies more or less often than average. As you can see, Ibanez hits slightly more of them, but not significantly so.

The next column is concerned with only outfield flies. Outfield flies separate the sluggers from mere hitters, and the key metric is the percent of outfield flies that clear the wall for a home run. Ibanez hit a career peak in 2006 with 33 home runs, and 17 percent of his outfield flies were homers (six points more than the major league average). His home run production has declined since then, and he hit an average proportion of outfield fly home runs last year.

The next two columns are the percentage of each type of batted ball that was fielded for an out. We track this for two types: ground balls and outfield flies that aren't home runs. And here we see something surprising about Ibanez: He's a high-average ground ball hitter. In each of the past three years, Ibanez has had more of his ground balls scoot through the infield for hits than the average major league hitter.

For some perspective, try turning the percentage around: The average major hitter has roughly a .260 batting average on ground balls. Last year, Ibanez hit .290 on grounders, and in 2007 he hit .330. That kind of shows you how prolific Ibanez has been with his grounders. How does he do it? I have no idea, but three years of data would seem to indicate that we're not talking about a statistical fluke here. Now you know: Raul Ibanez is a ground ball hitting dude.

Personally, I find this sort of thing fascinating—the type of insight you don't expect but can get from batted ball stats. If you also find it fascinating, I guarantee that you'll enjoy the Batted Ball Reports. If you don't find it fascinating, well, I envy you your sanity.

Last year, Ibanez was about average in outfield fly outs, but that figure has declined the last two years. In 2006, 89 percent of non-homer outfield flies were outs. Not good.

The rest of the table is devoted to the run values of each batted ball type. Under "Runs per Event," we list the number of runs the batter delivered for each type of batted ball. These figures are driven by the number of outs, double plays, triple plays, singles, doubles, triples and home runs the batter hit in each category.

The table again:

Raul Ibanez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	699	16	9	42	19	39	.11	.17	71	89	.05	.07	.45	.23	1	5	8	11	25
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2008	707	16	9	41	19	40	.14	.11	71	83	.06	.06	.45	.20	2	4	8	6	20
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Ibanez has had average strikeout and walk rates, so his "NIP" run values are about average. Thanks to his low out rate on ground balls, he's above average in that category. As we said, Ibanez hits line drives at the major league average rate, but he gets more out of his line drives than the average hitter—about .06 more runs per line drive. He has also gotten more out of his outfield flies each year, even when he hasn't hit as many outfield fly home runs, but the difference hasn't been as great as it has been with his line drives.

The five final columns put it all together. You can think of them as a combination of the "frequency" columns (% of Batted Balls) and the "per value" columns (Runs per Event). Here's what we can say about Raul Ibanez's strengths as a hitter:

- He strikes out slightly less than average.
- He doesn't hit a lot of line drives, but he does get more out of them than average. Presumably, he hits them harder or "places" them on the field better.
- He hits fewer ground balls than average, but he gets more out of them than average (surprise finding!).
- He hits slightly more fly balls than average, but he's not really a particularly strong fly ball hitter because he's not a power home run hitter.

Raul Ibanez is one of the many players we'll be watching in 2009. How will his switch to the National League and Citizens Bank Park affect his batting style? Will he become more of a fly ball hitter? Will he still beat out ground balls? Keep reading THT's Batted Ball Reports and find out.

The other side of the ledger

By Dave Studenmund

April 2, 2009

While we're waiting for actual baseball games to watch (and fresh baseball stats to pick apart), let's talk about the Batted Ball Profile from the pitcher's point of view. One of the beautiful things about Batted Ball Profiles is that they follow the same format for batters and pitchers. The only difference is that low run values—especially negative ones—are best for pitchers, while big positive run values are best for batters.

Here's the Batted Ball Profile of Arizona's Dan Haren, in the same format as Raul Ibanez's from last week, but let's think about these numbers from the pitcher's perspective instead of the batter's:

Dan Haren

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	930	19	6	45	19	35	.12	.12	73	85	.00	.06	.42	.18	-14	4	2	-3	-12
2007	935	21	6	44	17	38	.11	.10	73	83	-.01	.06	.37	.19	-15	3	-11	0	-23
2008	881	23	5	44	21	34	.08	.09	74	84	-.03	.05	.38	.15	-20	0	-3	-11	-34
MLB Totals		*17*	*9*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*84*	*.05*	*.05*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Starting in the far right-hand column, we see that Haren was 34 runs below average last year (for a pitcher, we should probably say "better than average"). That's pretty darn good; it was the 11th-best figure in the majors and one run better than teammate Brandon Webb (-30). Looking at the components, Haren had two areas of strength in 2008: fly balls and NIP (or Not In Play: strikeouts, walks and hit-by-pitch).

You can find the drivers of his fly ball prowess in the columns to the left. Typically, the two drivers of run value are frequency (he allowed 34 percent flies last year, three points less than average) and runs per fly (.15 runs, .03 less than average). The runs per fly were primarily driven by Haren's home run rate (.09, two points less than—oops, better than—average). But there is another driver here that isn't as obvious.

Of the batters who faced Haren, 28 percent didn't put the ball in play last year (23 percent struck out and 5 percent walked/HBP'd). That's two points higher than the major league average (17 percent and 9 percent, or 26 percent in total). Since the average batted ball is worth about .15 runs, you save your team some runs every time you don't allow a batted ball in play (as long as your strikeout-to-walk ratio is decent; better yet if it's like Haren's). For an average pitcher, the higher the total percentage of balls NIP, the lower the total number of runs allowed on batted balls and in total.

Last year's National League Cy Young award winner presents a good example of this phenomenon. Tim Lincecum struck out or walked 39 percent of the batters he faced—only Erik Bedard in 2007 has posted a higher figure in the last three years. Take a look at the results:

Timothy Lincecum

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	618	24	11	47	15	36	.08	.09	74	83	.03	.05	.37	.17	-3	0	-13	-4	-21
2008	928	29	10	44	20	34	.08	.06	74	85	.00	.04	.40	.10	-12	-3	-7	-25	-48
MLB Totals		*17*	*9*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*84*	*.05*	*.05*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Of course, Lincecum was dominant in several areas (.10 runs per outfield fly???) but he posted negative total run values for ground balls and line drives simply because he didn't allow many batted balls in the first place.

I was talking about Dan Haren. Haren's ground balls, line drives and fly balls have all been up and down the past three years (table on the previous page); only balls NIP have been a consistent strength for him. On the left-hand side of the table ("% of Batted Balls"), you see that his distribution of ground balls, line drives and fly balls allowed have all hovered around the major league average, and his other breakouts have all tended around average, too.

This is sort of a "classic" pitcher profile. Haren is a living example of what has become known as the "DIPS pitcher," someone whose pitching strengths (or, in other cases, weaknesses) lie in what happens when the batter doesn't actually hit the ball. Once the ball is hit, each pitcher's outcomes tend to hover around average in the long term.

A three-exposure image of Haren's delivery. I'll leave the analysis to you delivery experts. (Icon/SMI)

As we walk through the season, we'll find many pitchers who seem to break the DIPS mold—some of that will be illusory, some of it real—but I doubt that Dan Haren will be one of them. For Haren, it's all about the strikeouts and walks.

Let me recap the Haren angle. Last year, he struck out 23 percent of batters, which was the 21st-best rate of the last three years (Bedard has the highest rate: 30 percent in 2007). Plus, he walked only 5 percent of batters, which was the 31st- best rate of the last three years (the best was Greg Maddux's 3 percent in 2007).

Put the two together, and Dan Haren had the best strikeout-to-walk ratio in the majors last year (including HBP in the walk total). Only three other pitchers have had better ratios in the past three seasons.

And when assigning run values to his strikeouts and walks, Haren was 20 runs better than average last year, also the best figure in the majors. Only four pitchers had better marks over the last three years. Bottom line: Dan Haren was the major league's best strikeout/walk pitcher in 2008.

The worst, by the way, was Baltimore's Daniel Cabrera.

Daniel Cabrera

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	662	24	16	41	22	36	.10	.08	72	87	.07	.05	.36	.12	11	-1	-4	-12	-5
2007	922	18	13	50	15	34	.10	.13	72	82	.08	.05	.42	.22	12	4	-7	4	12
2008	821	12	13	48	19	32	.09	.13	73	85	.13	.05	.35	.20	16	4	0	2	22
MLB Totals		*17*	*9*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*84*	*.05*	*.05*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Whenever a batter didn't put Cabrera's offerings into play, he added .13 runs to his team's total. Compared to the .15 runs an average pitcher allows per batted ball, Cabrera gave up lots of runs no matter what happened.

And now I'm going to get all dorky on you. I apologize for this, but I want to document the exact methodology behind the run values assigned to all of these batted ball events. I think I owe it to you, but I promise I'll only do it this once, unless something changes in the future.

To start, you might want to read this article by Tom Ruane of Retrosheet:

http://www.retrosheet.org/Research/RuaneT/valueadd_art.htm

Okay, that's a pretty long article; you may not want to read the entire thing. But here's the idea: At the beginning of an inning, an average team will score a certain number of runs. That's typically called "run expectancy" or some such pseudo-mathematical name. In Tom's example at the beginning of his article (the 1992 American League), the average run expectancy at the beginning of an inning was .482 runs (or 4.3 a game). With one out and still no one on base, the average was .258. So an out "contributed" a negative number of runs (.482 minus .258, or -.224 runs), on average, in that situation in that league in that year.

If you apply this run expectancy table to every play in a season and sum up the run expectancy differences from before and after the play, you can calculate the average change in run expectancy for each type of event (a strikeout, single, home run, what-have-you). That is the event's average "run value" for that season.

One of the tricky, yet useful, things about this system is that the value of each event has varied (sometimes quite a bit) from year to year. That's because there was a big difference in the value of, say, a strikeout in the NL in 1968 (-.216) when run scoring was extremely low, and the AL in 2000 (-.322) when run scoring went through the roof. Context matters in this sort of system, as it should.

Even though I've got several years of data in my batted ball database, I'm using only one set of run values for my analysis. That's not the ideal approach, but it's much easier than calculating run values for every year and it works well enough for our purposes.

The run value concept is now widely used in baseball blogs and publications, such as John Dewan's *Fielding Bible Volume II*. It's a very useful way to evaluate things like hitting, fielding and batting; just about everything baseball.

When I first wrote about this subject, in the *Hardball Times Annual 2006*, I took Ruane's run values for batting events and applied them to different types of batted balls, resulting in the following table of runs above/below average generated by each type of batted ball:

Event	Runs
Line Drive	0.356
HBP	0.342
Non-Intentional Walk	0.315
Intentional Walk	0.176
Outfield Fly	0.035
Ground ball	-0.101
Bunt	-0.103
Infield Fly	-0.243
Strikeout	-0.287

I was pretty proud of that table; I think it's one of the simplest yet most powerful baseball charts I've created. You see, for instance, that an average line drive is more than half a run better than a strikeout. However, I found a little problem. In the year after the *Annual's* publication, bloggers and other writers started misinterpreting the data. I remember one person writing that a ground ball was a "negative event."

Actually, a ground ball generates less runs than average, but it still creates runs. A theoretical team that hit all ground balls would score 1.6 runs a game. Since I don't like having my data misinterpreted, I recalculated the run values. This time, I lowered the value of an out until the total run values, over the average distribution of batted balls, equaled 4.7 runs a game (the average number of runs scored per game from 2006 through 2008). This is the process originally recommended by Pete Palmer in *The Hidden Game of Baseball*, one of the seminal sabermetric books of the 1980's.

This is the table now driving the results we're using:

Event	Runs
Line Drive	0.391
HBP	0.355
Walks	0.345
Outfield Fly	0.183
Ground ball	0.045
Bunts	0.022
Infield Fly	-0.092
Strikeouts	-0.113

I've changed some of the underlying values (notice that HBP has gone up a bit), but the biggest difference lies with the outs: strikeouts now are -0.113; infield flies (which are outs 99 percent of the time) are now -0.092. But you can now see that a ground ball is indeed a "positive event." Just not a very positive one.

This isn't ideal because, as you can see (for instance), the difference between a line drive and a strikeout is not as large as it was before. But I think this data is less open to misinterpretation, and I use them for the major league averages of "runs per event" on the Batted Ball Profile.

Still, we like to compare players to average for the last part of our table. The way I do this is kind of complicated, so let me just lay out the math for you. I'll use Dan Haren's -20 NIP runs as an example:

- First, we calculate the total runs allowed by Haren on NIP by multiplying his total strikeouts, walks and HBPs by the appropriate run value of each one from the above table. For Haren, the result is -7.3 runs.
- We then calculate an "expected" NIP figure, based on major league averages and Haren's total number of outs created during the season. In this example, the average major league pitcher gave up 0.078 NIP runs for every NIP out (just strikeouts, really). On average, NIP outs account for 26 percent of all the outs in a game, so we multiply 0.078 times .26 for an expected NIP value of .002 runs per out for **all** outs (not just NIP outs).
- Haren recorded 627 outs last year. We multiply that times .002 to get an expected number of NIP runs of 13.
- We then subtract 13 from -7.3 to get a total NIP run value of 20 runs below average (-20).

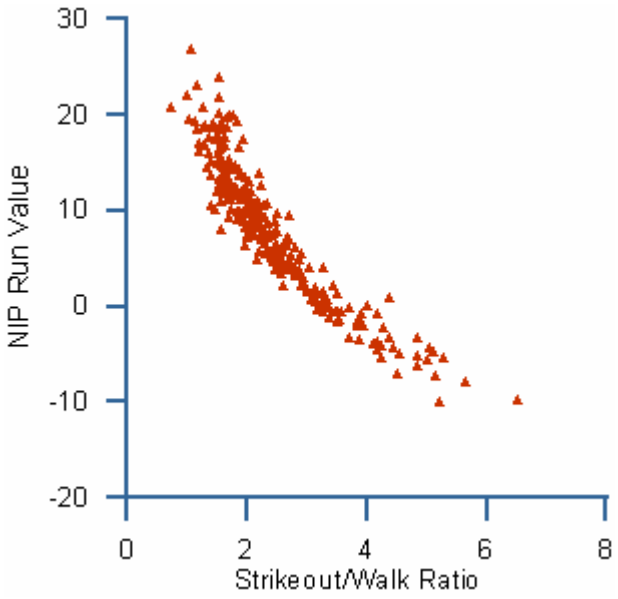
My apologies, but I wanted to go through the math one time to get it out of the way.

Moving from "relative" run values to "absolute" run values is probably kind of controversial among sabermetricians, but I've got too many spreadsheets built on this methodology to change now. I'm partly kidding; if you can see a way out of this dilemma, drop me an e-mail.

Hey, if you're still reading, I'm going to give you a bonus dork point. I mentioned strikeout-to-walk ratios before, but I generally dislike ratios. The scale is all wrong. For instance, a ratio of 1.5-to-1 is not 50 percent better than a ratio of 1-to-1. A 1-to-1 ratio equals 50 percent and a 1.5-to-1 ratio equals 60 percent (because 1.5 divided by 2.5 is 60%), so it's only 20 percent better.

Something else: A strikeout doesn't have the same value of a walk. As we saw, a strikeout equals -0.113 "absolute" runs and a walk equals 0.345 "absolute" runs. So a ratio that considers them equal is misleading, kind of like using a ratio of stolen bases to caught stealing despite that fact that a caught stealing hurts more than a stolen base helps.

Still, despite my complaints, strikeout-to-walk ratios aren't that bad a thing. Take a look at the graph on the right, which compares the K/BB ratio to the total NIP runs above/below average for all pitchers over the last three years who qualified for the ERA title:



See how the triangles are closely aligned? That means that strikeouts/walks predict NIP Run Value pretty well. But do you also see how the triangles form a curve instead of a straight line? That's because increasing ratios are typically the result of more strikeouts (Walk rates can only go down so much, but strikeout rates have lots of room to grow.) and strikeouts have less of an impact than walks. A ratio assumes a straight line. And that's another reason I don't like ratios.

Let the baseball games begin.

The Heartburn Kid

By Dave Studenmund
April 11, 2009

I was "watching" the Mets/Reds game the other night (what do you call it when you follow a game on Fangraph's WPA graph? Nerd watching?) when their new closer, Francisco Rodriguez, entered the game in the top of the ninth with a 9-7 lead. As a Mets' fan, I was anxious to see how our new closer would perform with my relief pitcher stats of choice: Win Probability Added (WPA) and Leverage Index (LI).

A quick definition for those not familiar with the concepts of WPA and LI. WPA is a simple, yet powerful, stat that calculates the "expectation" that a team will win its game, given the inning, score and base situation. It's based on the run scoring (and allowing) performance of an average team. LI calculates the importance of a situation by comparing all the possible WPA outcomes of a situation; an LI of 1.00 has an average level of importance.

As you can imagine, the late innings of a tight game have the highest LI. For instance, the Mets had a 90% expectation of winning the game I was nerd-watching, given their two-run lead in the ninth, but the LI of the situation was higher than average at 1.93.

This is what happened next:

- Brandon Phillips walked. Mets' WE decreased to 81% and the LI rose to 3.53.
- Jay Bruce popped out. WE back up to 89% and LI was 2.71.
- Carlos Delgado made an error on an Edwin Encarnacion grounder and Phillips wound up at third. WE down to 78% and LI up to 4.82.
- Ramon Hernandez walked and the bases were loaded. Yow. WE down to 66% and LI all the way up to 7.36.
- Alex Gonzalez struck out and the Mets' WE rose to 82%. Phew. But the bases were still loaded and the LI was 7.00.
- Laynce Nix flied out to center. Game over, huge sigh of relief.

And I wondered, is this how K-Rod works? Is this how it's going to be for the next three years of his contract? With an option year?

So I did a little research, with many, many thanks to Fangraphs (www.fangraphs.com) for their terrific WPA data. I wanted to know a very specific question: which "classic" closers (who typically pitch only ninth innings in save situations) give their fans the most heartburn?

I pulled all ninth-inning situations with a reliever on the mound, using two years of data (2007 and 2008). In case you're curious, there were 4,691 top of the ninths in the last two years with a reliever on the mound, with an average LI of 0.93, and there were 2,528 bottom of the ninths, with an average LI of 1.74. It makes sense that the bottom of the ninth would have a higher LI, because the home team doesn't bat if it's ahead.

Here is a little list of the average Leverage Index at the beginning each half-inning, grouped by the lead of the pitching team. I'll include just the most critical innings, those with the closest leads.

Lead	Home	Away
-1	0.70	--
0	2.36	2.29
1	2.91	3.55
2	1.57	1.95
3	0.82	1.00

No wonder he's so happy. (Icon/SMI)

Normally, I would go into a rant about how closers are misused and the save rule is dumb. Take a good look; the importance of the ninth is greater in a tie game than a game in which the team has a two-run lead. Yet you hardly ever see managers use their closers in tie games.

In fact, being one run behind is almost as important as being three runs ahead. The save rule, with equal emphasis on one, two and three-run leads (and none to tie games) has it all wrong.

I'll know which managers are sabermetrically savvy by watching how often they use their best relievers in the ninth inning of tie games instead of the ninth inning with a three-run lead. I haven't seen many.

Okay, rant over. Back to the subject at hand. Here's an easy test: let's look in our database to see how many times the Leverage Index didn't rise higher than the half-inning's initial LI. In other words, let's count the number of ninth innings in which the relief pitcher managed to keep things under control such that the criticality of the game didn't rise. I'm going to focus on ninth innings in which the game was tied or the pitching team had a lead of three or less runs.

Lead	G	No LI increase	%
0	904	339	38%
1	878	397	45%
2	799	373	47%
3	642	310	48%
Total	3223	1419	44%

Overall, relief pitchers stayed in control of the situation in 44% of these innings. And the percentage increased as the lead increased, which makes a ton of sense. It's harder to keep a game from getting more critical when it's already pretty tight.

Let me give you an example. In the top of the ninth of a game in which the home team has a three-run lead, at the very beginning of the inning, a typical Leverage Index is 0.75. If you retire the next two batters but the third one hits a double, the LI is lower: 0.44. However, if you do the same thing in a tie game, the Leverage Index begins at 2.32 and rises to 3.66. In a tie game, a runner on second with two out is more critical than having no one on with no outs.

You can play with all of these scenarios yourself at the Hardball Times' WPA Inquirer. Use this URL: http://www.hardballtimes.com/thtstats/other/wpa_inquirer.php

Now, I'm going to use this data to rank relievers. On the next page there's a list of all relievers who began at least 15 ninth innings (in 2007 and 2008) with just a one-run lead, ranked by the percent of times they kept the situation in control by not allowing the Leverage Index to increase during the inning. Remember, the overall major league average was 45%.

The hurlers at the top of this list, such as Francisco Cordero, Jonathan Papelbon and Billy Wagner, dominated their games. They typically left no doubt about the outcome. The closers who induced the most indigestion are the ones at the bottom of the list. Guess who's at the very bottom.

Reliever	G	No LI increase	%
Francisco Cordero	29	19	66%
Jonathan R Papelbon	29	18	62%
Billy Wagner	21	13	62%
Brad Lidge	28	16	57%
J.J. Putz	23	12	52%
Huston L Street	18	9	50%
Joakim A Soria	24	12	50%
Jose Valverde	32	16	50%
Mariano Rivera	24	12	50%
Trevor Hoffman	26	13	50%
Matt Capps	19	9	47%
Joe Nathan	30	14	47%
Salomon Torres	15	7	47%
Todd Jones	20	9	45%
Chad Cordero	18	8	44%
Takashi Saito	27	12	44%
Bobby Jenks	21	9	43%
Brian P Wilson	15	6	40%
Jeremy Accardo	15	6	40%
Brian Fuentes	17	6	35%
Joe Borowski	18	6	33%
Kevin Gregg	22	7	32%
Francisco Rodriguez	36	9	25%

Met fans may be in for a long summer of indigestion.

Ah, I can't stop there. It's true that one-run leads are the most stressful save situations, but they're not the only ones. So let's use a more inclusive ranking of Save Indigestion Inducement by including all ninth-inning save situations (one, two and three-run leads) and not just one-run leads.

To adjust for the fact that pitchers come into games with different leads, I compared each pitcher's performance against an expected performance, based on the lead. And instead of using the percent of times a pitcher didn't allow the Leverage Index to increase, I used the average maximum LI all pitchers reached given each type of lead.

Said differently, if a pitcher doesn't allow LI to increase during the inning, the maximum LI of that inning is the same as the beginning LI. However, we know that LI increases in these innings more than 50% of the time, so the average maximum LI will be higher than that. I'm going to compare the maximum LI reached by each pitcher to an adjusted baseline.

Here's the baseline table, which includes the LI at the beginning of each inning as well as the average maximum LI that occurred during the inning. The higher the maximum LI, the harder it was for the reliever to keep the inning in control.

Lead	G	LI on First Play	Average MaxLI
1	878	3.21	4.46
2	799	1.75	3.08
3	642	0.91	1.88

And here's the master list. It includes all ninth innings in which the pitching team had a lead of three runs or less. Plus, I included only those innings in which the reliever pitched the entire inning and the team won the game (minimum of 25 games). These are your classic "ninth-inning save" outcomes.

A positive "+/- Max LI" means that the pitcher's average maximum LI was higher than the expected baseline. And that's bad.

Reliever	G	LI on First Play	+/- Max LI
C.J. Wilson	28	2.13	0.88
David Weathers	26	2.15	0.25
Joe Borowski	41	1.97	0.21
Francisco Rodriguez	90	2.09	0.20
George F Sherrill	27	1.97	0.18
Brad Lidge	56	2.20	0.15
Brian Fuentes	45	1.99	0.10
B.J. Ryan	31	1.86	0.03
Salomon Torres	33	1.95	-0.04
Chad Cordero	36	2.01	-0.05
Kevin Gregg	50	1.96	-0.06
Mariano Rivera	56	2.16	-0.06
Kerry Wood	28	2.04	-0.07
Troy Percival	26	1.79	-0.08
Brian P Wilson	39	1.93	-0.09
Brandon Lyon	26	2.17	-0.10
Todd Jones	48	2.01	-0.13
Francisco Cordero	65	2.08	-0.14
Jeremy Accardo	33	2.06	-0.19
Matt Capps	35	2.01	-0.24
Ryan Dempster	26	1.95	-0.26
Jason Isringhausen	36	1.80	-0.30
Bobby Jenks	58	1.97	-0.32
Jose Valverde	83	1.97	-0.34
Takashi Saito	48	2.07	-0.41
Al Reyes	25	2.01	-0.42
Trevor Hoffman	59	1.89	-0.42
Joakim A Soria	53	1.94	-0.42
Huston L Street	32	1.93	-0.42
Joe Nathan	72	1.94	-0.44
Jonathan R Papelbon	63	1.94	-0.55
J.J. Putz	47	2.03	-0.61
Billy Wagner	53	1.74	-0.66

K-Rod doesn't come out well here either, but Texas' C.J. Wilson really takes the prize. His expected maximum LI was 3.27 but his actual average maximum LI was 4.15. That is much, much worse than the second-worst performer, David Weathers. Rodriguez is fourth on this list, a bit ahead of Brad Lidge. Never fear, Mets' fans. No matter how we cut the data, it's clear that K-Rod likes to make things, um, interesting.

Next week: Our first look at 2009 Batted Balls.

Big Bangs

By Dave Studenmund

April 17, 2009

And we're off. Baseball is in full swing and ain't it glorious? Finally, baseball games are counting and baseball fans are counting, too. To make things even more interesting, something is afoot. About ten games into the season (I'm writing this on Friday the 17th, so I'm looking at stats through the 16th), run scoring is up. The senior circuit is averaging 4.85 runs a game (up from 4.54 last year) and the American is also up 0.3 runs a game (to 5.08 from 4.78). Ten games is only ten games, but the consistency of the rise in offense, cutting across both leagues, is striking.

What's happening? Let's take a batted ball look:

Runs per Batted Ball

Type	Last 3 Years	2009
NIP	.05	.06
GB	.04	.04
LD	.39	.39
FB	.18	.21

Strikeout and walk rates are slightly higher this year. In the past three years, batters struck out in 17% of plate appearances and walked in 10%. So far this year, they've struck out 18% of the time and walked 11%. The net effect is a small increase in the run-scoring impact of balls not batted.

But the real difference is in the fly ball, particularly the outfield fly. Batters are hitting slightly more fly balls this year (at the expense of ground balls, not line drives) and although more of them are just infield flies (13% this year, vs. 10% the last three years), more of them are also home runs. 12% of outfield flies have been home runs this year. That rate had been slightly under 11% the past three years. Plus, the "out rate" of non-home run outfield flies is down a bit.

Carlos Pena blasts a HR against the Yankees (Icon/SMI)

The overall impact is that run scoring is up .03 runs per fly ball. Since there are typically about ten fly balls per game, there's your 0.3 runs per game difference.

Greg Rybarczyk, of Hit Tracker Online (http://www.hittrackeronline.com), believes there is a new ball in play. He recently wrote to me:

> Well, we've got 199 home runs so far in 2009, and the live ball theory gets stronger every day. The difference in standard distance (i.e. with the weather and altitude factored out) stands at 8.5 feet, meaning 2009 balls are flying 8.5 feet farther than 2008 balls on home runs. The p-value (likelihood that the observed effect is not real) is down to 0.000031, so it seems that we're looking at a real difference. I also checked the 2009 data against April-only data for 2008, 2007 and 2006, and all those comparisons support the theory that this year's ball is flying farther.

Greg's data is pretty solid. It isn't affected by ballparks, and, as he said, he adjusts for weather and altitude. I'm not as convinced as he is that we can draw strong conclusions just nine or ten games into the season, but this is something to watch. And here is a list of specific players to watch, those who have created five or more runs above average on fly balls so far.

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Longoria E	TB	23	3	27	23	50	.08	.42	100	43	-.06	-.19	.59	.78	-1	-2	2	8	7
Kinsler I	TEX	14	10	25	25	50	.00	.19	75	62	.07	.05	.60	.49	0	0	3	6	10
Swisher N	NYA	16	14	19	23	58	.07	.29	40	70	.10	.38	.30	.53	1	2	0	6	8
Pena C	TB	23	12	21	18	61	.24	.38	100	75	.04	-.14	.37	.62	0	-1	0	6	4
Snider T	TOR	22	11	35	6	59	.10	.33	83	50	.04	.00	.80	.71	0	0	0	5	4
Cruz N	TEX	20	10	32	7	61	.06	.31	78	91	.04	.03	.64	.43	0	0	-1	5	4
Ibanez R	PHI	11	6	52	14	34	.00	.30	87	57	.04	-.07	.48	.63	0	-1	0	5	3
Lind A	TOR	20	10	44	22	33	.08	.27	75	50	.04	.01	.38	.61	0	0	1	5	5
Cabrera M	DET	10	10	32	29	39	.00	.33	40	88	.12	.25	.39	.48	0	2	2	5	9
Soriano A	CHN	18	13	29	26	45	.07	.31	78	78	.08	.03	.19	.51	0	0	-1	5	4

Evan Longoria, Carlos Pena and Nelson Cruz are tied for the major league lead with five home runs and their batted ball stats are wild.

- 42% of Longoria's outfield flies have been home runs and only 43% of those that haven't cleared the wall have been caught for outs. On the other hand, 100% of his ground balls have been fielded for outs. His strikeout-to-walk ratio is 23/3.
- Carlos Pena's ground ball out rate has also been 100% and 24% of his fly balls have been infield flies. Pretty unimpressive stats. On the other hand, 38% of his outfield flies have been home runs.
- It's nice to see Nelson Cruz have a big start, after wallowing in the minors for many years. He's been another all-or-nothing fly ball hitter. 31% of his outfield flies have been home runs, but they've been outs 91% of the time when they haven't left the yard.

Among other wild and crazy stats, Nick Swisher has created .38 runs with each ground ball and Miguel Cabrera has created .25 runs per ground ball. Here's a tip: those rates won't last.

Some other players have made big impacts, too. Here's a list of other players who have created seven or more runs than average, but less than five runs on fly balls.

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Pujols A	STL	2	18	35	20	45	.06	.18	64	93	.30	.12	.50	.22	2	1	2	2	7
Duncan C	STL	19	14	46	7	46	.08	.17	38	70	.08	.28	.80	.40	1	3	0	3	7
Fukudome	CHN	10	18	44	26	30	.00	.38	75	60	.18	.03	.41	.70	1	0	1	4	7
Youkilis K	BOS	10	12	28	22	50	.13	.14	33	83	.14	.30	.53	.22	1	2	2	2	7
Dunn A	WAS	22	30	17	28	56	.10	.33	67	67	.15	.10	.31	.57	2	0	0	4	7

Check out the plate discipline of this group of hitters. King Albert has only struck out once and walked nine times (four intentional). Kosuke Fukudome has a 10/18 strikeout/walk ratio. Plus, 60% of Fukudome's outfield flies have been home runs (with no infield flies). And Chris Duncan is having another very nice year, despite hitting only 7% line drives. A 38% ground ball out rate has been a big factor in his success. Did I mention that might not last?

Okay, let's turn the tables. Here are the five pitchers who have given up the most runs on outfield flies.

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Bass B	BAL	17	7	48	16	35	.00	.45	73	50	.02	.04	.49	.86	0	0	1	8	9
Litsch J	TOR	19	5	34	16	50	.13	.29	73	70	-.02	.06	.37	.53	-1	0	0	5	4
Matsuzaka	BOS	13	16	30	22	48	.08	.25	75	56	.14	.02	.49	.55	1	0	2	5	8
Myers B	PHI	23	4	49	13	38	.13	.38	89	75	-.05	-.04	.50	.62	-2	-1	-1	5	2
Bonine E	DET	17	3	46	25	29	.00	.43	82	25	-.04	-.01	.19	.89	-1	0	0	5	4

Dice-K is off to a terrible start, lasting just 6.3 innings in two starts and posting a 12.79 ERA. There's not much to like in his pitching line or in his batted ball line. However, the other pitchers on this list have more going for them. Their batted ball lines are all around zero, or less, once you take out the fly balls.

Eddie Bonine? He's pitched just six-and-a-third innings this year, and batters are slugging .759 against him. But his other stats have been decent. I wouldn't give up on him. Jesse Litsch has a 9.00 ERA, but his other stats, including a fine strikeout-to-walk ratio, are mostly positive.

The most interesting name on this list might be Brett Myers, who has a fantastic line except for the fact that he's given up .62 runs on each fly ball. Let's compare his very short 2009 line to his career.

Brett Myers

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	833	23	8	46	18	35	.09	.14	72	86	.01	.05	.44	.21	-10	0	-1	2	-10
2007	292	28	9	46	19	34	.08	.14	75	82	.00	.04	.38	.25	-4	-1	-4	1	-8
2008	817	20	9	47	20	32	.11	.16	74	85	.03	.04	.43	.25	-5	0	5	6	6
2009	53	23	4	49	13	38	.13	.38	89	75	-.05	-.04	.50	.62	-1	-2	-1	5	2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Except for his fly ball stats, Myers has been even better than his career. He's walked very few hitters so far, and check out the 89% out rate on ground balls. In fact, Myers would already be four runs better than average if he had average fly ball stats. Don't worry, Phillie fans, that 38% home run rate won't continue.

Let's finish with a series of tables, listing the batted ball leaders in each category. I'm going to include the full batted ball profiles of these batters so you can see their entire story. For instance, did you know that top ground ball hitter Cristian Guzman hasn't taken a walk yet?

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Guzman C	WAS	18	0	63	15	22	.00	.00	29	83	-.11	.31	.56	.05	-1	5	1	-1	4
Lewis F	SF	27	22	53	26	21	.00	.00	20	75	.09	.43	.26	.13	1	4	0	-1	4
Duncan C	STL	19	14	46	7	46	.08	.17	38	70	.08	.28	.80	.40	1	3	0	3	7
Chavez E	SEA	9	7	57	17	26	.44	.20	60	75	.08	.13	.29	.32	0	3	0	0	3
Murphy D	NYN	12	7	56	12	32	.36	.14	58	100	.06	.18	.19	.12	0	3	-1	-2	0

Fred Lewis is one of the most intriguing hitters in baseball. He was a line drive/ground ball hitter last year, and he's fitting that bill again this year, with a 26% line drive rate and only a 20% out rate on ground balls.

You're probably not surprised that "Three True Outcome Dunn" is among the leaders in NIP runs.

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Ramirez M	LAN	11	30	54	15	31	.13	.00	79	86	.22	.01	.64	.03	3	0	1	-2	2
Figgins C	LAA	14	26	46	17	38	.00	.00	73	78	.18	.09	.34	.07	3	1	0	-1	2
Ethier A	LAN	13	24	39	7	54	.07	.14	73	83	.18	.02	.48	.22	3	0	-1	1	3
Dunn A	WAS	22	30	17	28	56	.10	.33	67	67	.15	.10	.31	.57	2	0	0	4	7
Bay J	BOS	13	26	29	25	46	.09	.10	86	67	.19	-.01	.60	.35	2	0	2	2	6

Where did Manny's line drive stroke go?

One of the leading line drives hitters, Victor Martinez, has generated only one run above average on fly balls despite a 25% home run rate? That's because 100% of his non-homer outfield flies have been outs.

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Rolen S	TOR	7	11	27	35	38	.07	.08	80	92	.17	.02	.47	.06	1	0	4	-1	3
Martinez V	CLE	12	14	36	28	36	.08	.25	77	100	.13	.02	.58	.28	1	0	4	1	6
Roberts B	BAL	15	12	20	33	47	.07	.00	50	77	.10	.19	.52	.11	1	1	4	0	5
Hill A	TOR	17	2	31	26	43	.11	.19	69	92	-.07	.03	.54	.24	-1	0	3	1	3
Kinsler I	TEX	14	10	25	25	50	.00	.19	75	62	.07	.05	.60	.49	0	0	3	6	10

It's probably fitting that the last batter on our last leader table is the hot-hitting Ian Kinsler. Kinsler is hitting 75% line drives or fly balls yet hasn't hit an infield fly yet. His overall hitting has made him the top line drive/fly ball hitter in the first ten games of the year. Of course, he won't maintain this pace, but many of his batted ball stats aren't really out of line with last year's. Which suggests a perfectly fine way to end this week's article:

Ian Kinsler

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	474	14	9	35	20	43	.14	.10	73	84	.07	.06	.37	.16	1	1	2	1	5
2007	566	15	13	35	19	44	.13	.12	78	89	.10	.02	.43	.16	8	-6	3	0	5
2008	583	11	9	32	23	42	.08	.09	72	80	.09	.06	.39	.18	3	0	12	9	24
2009	42	14	10	25	25	50	.00	.19	75	62	.07	.05	.60	.49	0	0	3	7	10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Everything's Topsy Turvy

By Dave Studenmund

April 23, 2009

What a topsy-turvy year so far, huh? Consider the following standings (as of Thursday morning)…

- In the AL East, last year's division winners, the Rays, are in last place, replacing the Red Sox in the basement thanks only to a recent Bostonian surge. The Blue Jays are in first.
- In the AL Central, last year's two last-place teams, the Royals and Tigers, are tied for first.
- In the AL West, the Angels and Mariners have switched places. The Mariners were the bottom of the heap (61-101) last year and are now first, while the Angels are 5-9 and in last place after wining the division handily last year.
- Things are a little less surprising in the National League, but the Marlins hold first place by a comfortable margin in the East and the Padres were just recently tied for first in the West after going 63-99 last year. The Diamondbacks are last in the West after finishing second last year.

Consider also the swings in winning percentage among some of these teams from last year to this. The five biggest gains have been…

	Last Year			This year			
Team	W	L	%	W	L	%	Diff
SEA	61	101	.377	9	6	.600	.223
FLA	84	77	.522	11	4	.733	.212
SD	63	99	.389	9	6	.600	.211
PIT	67	95	.414	9	6	.600	.186
TOR	86	76	.531	11	5	.688	.157

While the five biggest declines have been…

	Last Year			This year			
Team	W	L	%	W	L	%	Diff
LAA	100	62	.617	5	9	.357	-.260
TB	97	65	.599	6	9	.400	-.199
MIL	90	72	.556	5	9	.357	-.198
CLE	81	81	.500	5	10	.333	-.167
WAS	59	102	.366	3	11	.214	-.152

Can things get any wackier? In fact, I wondered: Is this the wackiest beginning to a season ever? Has this year seen the biggest swing in standings, 15 games into the season, compared to the previous year?

In a word, no, of course not. Not even close. Baseball's history is rich and varied. It will humble you.

There are a lot of ways to study something like this, and I chose the easy way. I calculated the winning percentage of teams as of their 15th game of the year and compared each one to its winning percentage from the entire previous year. I included all seasons since 1902 in the database, and took out the first seasons of new franchises (such as the Expos in 1969, etc.).

There is a good reason, by the way, for including only years since the turn of the 20th century. Leagues appeared and disappeared in the 1800s and players would switch from team to team at the whim of the owner (who sometimes owned more than one team). This instability makes for fascinating story-telling, and 19th century baseball is rich with characters and tall tales. But it's tough on the record-keepers.

That was a bit of a tangent, wasn't it? I've been reading *Spalding's World Tour*, by Mark Lamster, which has made me a little more aware of these issues, I guess. But mostly, I wanted an excuse to heartily recommend it. It's a great read.

Anyway, there are lots of ways to rank this sort of thing and none of them are definitive. But after trying many different approaches, I found that a few season beginnings stand out as the topsy-turviest, no matter how I cut the data.

Nineteen Twenty Five

It was early in the reign of the Yankees, when Ruth was newly mighty, the Senators had won the World Series in fabled fashion the previous year and the Tigers, featuring an outfield of Harry Heilmann, Heinie Manush and Ty Cobb, had finished third. In the National League, the Giants had a staggeringly good offense led by the likes of George Kelly, Frankie Frisch and Travis Jackson and Dazzy Vance's Dodgers had finished a close second.

That was 1924. The start of 1925 played out very differently. Babe Ruth got sick in spring training en route to the worst year of his prime and the Yankees started 4-11. The Tigers also started with a 4-11 record when their offense had trouble getting untracked. And the Indians, who had been 67-86 in 1924, were 11-4, including a 21-14 pasting of the Browns in their opener. Nevertheless, they would finish 70-84.

Lastly, the Athletics also got off to an 11-4 start (what is it about fours and elevens?). They were in the midst of a major franchise turnaround. After winning just 71 games in 1924, they would be led by youngsters Al Simmons and Jimmy Dykes and an outstanding pitching staff (including rookie Lefty Grove) to a second-place finish and 88 wins in 1925.

Think what the pundits must have been saying 15 games into the 1925 season. The Indians and A's were tied with the Senators for first in the American League, while the Yankees and Tigers were tied with the Red Sox for last (the BoSox would go on to lose 105 games). Things weren't so topsy-turvy in the National League, though the Dodgers and Pirates got off to slow starts. The Pirates would go on to win the pennant, but the Dodgers never would recover.

Nineteen Eighty One

I know you remember 1981. That was the year a whole bunch of us got excited about the longest game in professional baseball history, a 33-inning affair that included Cal Ripken Jr. and Wade Boggs and was eventually won by Pawtucket, 3-2. Yes, it was a minor league game, but the press coverage was equal to a World Series or All-Star game.

Why did it receive so much press coverage? Because there were no major league games at the time the 33-inning affair was finished (it had started in April but was called after 32 innings; the game finished in June). You might say that 1981 was the year the player-owner battle came to a head. The players went on strike for 50 days in the middle of the season, the year was broken in two and the Reds, who had the overall best record in the majors, didn't qualify for the postseason.

It's too bad the season was broken, because it started out as a very interesting year. The Athletics (now in Oakland) started the year with a 14-1 record after completing a 54-108 record just two years before. The A's pitching was phenomenal—they didn't allow more than three runs in any of their first 15 games. This was the second year that Billy Martin rode his starting rotation unmercifully; the A's rotation pitchers completed 60 of their 102 games. The careers of starters Mike Norris, Rick Langford, Matt Keogh and Steve McCatty would never be the same.

The Cardinals were also off to a hot start, 12-3, after a 74-88 record in 1980. The Cardinals actually finished with the best record in the NL East in 1981 but, like the Reds, didn't qualify for the postseason due to the split schedule. It was Whitey Herzog's second year in St. Louis; he would go on to win the World Series the next year after trading Garry Templeton for Ozzie Smith.

The split season did benefit several slow starters. The Astros, NL West champions in 1980, were last in the division with a 3-12 record after 15 games. They eventually recovered and won the second-half division title. The Royals had won 97 games in 1980, but were off to a 5-10 start. Like the Astros, they recovered and won the second-half title.

Picture it again. After 15 games, the surprising A's were riding their starting arms and leading the AL with a 14-1 record. The White Sox were second in the AL West, after going 70-90 in 1980. The Astros, NL West division winners the previous year, were last. The Cardinals, a sub-.500 team in 1980, were tied with the Expos (featuring rookie Tim Raines) for the NL East lead.

Two Thousand and One

You can make a mathematical case that it's easier to post big variances when there are fewer teams. But even if we stick with 30-team years, there are several that started more upside-down than this year. The 2001 season is a good example.

The Twins were 69-93 in Y2K, but they jumped off to a major-league best 12-3 record in 2001 and ultimately finished second in the AL Central. This was the year some of their young pitchers, like Brad Radke, Joe Mays (and, eventually, Johan Santana) stepped forward. Meanwhile, the A's (why are the A's always on this list?) dropped from a division-leading 91-70 record in 2000 to last place with a 4-11 record after 15 games. They would regain their step and finish 102-60 in the AL West, but would still finish second to the Mariners' juggernaut.

Toronto took an early lead in the AL East, tying Boston for first with an 11-4 record. The Blue Jays were barely above .500 in 2000 and would finish just below .500 in 2001.

In the National League, the Cubs jumped out to a 10-5 lead in the Central after finishing last in 2000 (65-97). The Cubbies allowed 904 runs in 2000; in 2001, they allowed only 701. Same thing was happening in the East, where the Phillies were leading the division with a 9-6 record after finishing last in 2000. They kept up the pace, finishing second to the Braves by just two games.

I'm not going to try to tell you where the start of the 2009 season lines up against these other starts, because the process isn't that precise. Suffice to say, it's way below the years I've mentioned. Probably in the top third of all seasons, but nowhere near the top.

Still, I thought you would enjoy the excuse for a little trip down memory lane.

And now we turn to our batted ball stats to take a closer look at some of this year's surprisingly fast starts. Good pitching and fielding are behind most of these quick getaways, so I'm going to post the pitching batted ball tables for several hot starters.

The Mariners have a huge lead in the AL West, and they've allowed only 3.5 runs per game. The batted ball stats show that they are 24 runs better than average, thanks primarily to their fly ball prowess:

	% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
SEA	19	10	44	18	38	.10	.03	69	89	.04	.08	.40	.03	-3	7	-3	-24	-24
MLB	*18*	*11*	*42*	*19*	*38*	*.12*	*.11*	*75*	*83*	*.06*	*.04*	*.39*	*.19*	--	--	--	--	--

Two things are happening for the Mariners. Their pitchers have allowed only three home runs per 100 outfield flies, which is the best rate in the majors. And their outfielders have been outstanding, catching 89% of non-home run outfield flies, also the best rate in the majors. That home run rate is certainly fluky, but the outfield play may be only partly fluky.

On the good news/bad news ledger, their strikeout/walk rate has been very good, but their infield defense has been the worst in the majors.

The Royals' pitching has been even better, allowing 3.4 runs per game. Their batted ball stats aren't as impressive as Seattle's, but the Royals have allowed slightly fewer runs by leaving more men on base.

	% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
KC	23	10	47	21	32	.09	.08	77	80	.02	.03	.37	.16	-5	-1	-3	-9	-18
MLB	*18*	*11*	*42*	*19*	*38*	*.12*	*.11*	*75*	*83*	*.06*	*.04*	*.39*	*.19*	--	--	--	--	--

KC has posted an outstanding strikeout/walk ratio, including the highest strikeout rate in the majors, as well as the second-best ground ball rate. Strikeouts and ground balls are an awesome combination. It bodes well for the Royals that their basic pitching line is based on such solid fundamentals.

The Pirates have been perhaps the biggest surprise of the early season. They're 9-6 and they've allowed 3.33 runs per game, the lowest figure in the majors. Yet they have posted one of the most peculiar pitching batted ball lines:

	% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
PIT	14	10	40	19	40	.17	.07	76	85	.08	.03	.32	.13	2	-1	-5	-10	-14
MLB	*18*	*11*	*42*	*19*	*38*	*.12*	*.11*	*75*	*83*	*.06*	*.04*	*.39*	*.19*	--	--	--	--	--

Pittsburgh has the second-lowest strikeout rate in the majors (not an encouraging sign), but their defense has picked them up, nabbing outs at above-average rates in both the infield and outfield. In fact, Pirate fielders have posted one of the best Revised Zone Ratings (RZR) in the majors (behind only Milwaukee and Toronto). Coupled with better-than-average infield fly and home run rates (and a high number of men left on base), the Pirate defense (that's pitching and fielding combined) has been the best so far. Unfortunately for Pirate fans, it won't last.

Finally, consider the AL East-leading Toronto Blue Jays:

	% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
TOR	21	10	45	17	38	.08	.12	82	77	.03	-.01	.38	.25	-5	-10	-9	7	-16
MLB	*18*	*11*	*42*	*19*	*38*	*.12*	*.11*	*75*	*83*	*.06*	*.04*	*.39*	*.19*	--	--	--	--	--

By combining a ground ball staff with an outstanding infield, the Blue Jays have the best ground ball run rate in the majors. That 82% out rate on ground balls is amazing; three points better than Milwaukee. Toronto's pitchers have also posted a very good strikeout rate and their line drive rate has been better than average so far.

Sure enough, Toronto's pitching and defense are real. The big question is whether their offense can continue to score runs at the best rate in the league (adjusted for ballpark).

Batted Ball Notes

By Dave Studenmund

May 1, 2009

There was a simple, yet aggravating, mistake in the data I quoted last week and made available for download. The spreadsheet cut out a few people at the end of the list—basically, anyone with a last name starting after "W"—and a couple of really good hitters didn't make it into your batted ball consciousness.

Let me try to make it up to you (and them).

Kevin Youkilis

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	680	18	15	31	24	45	.07	.07	71	80	.10	.07	.34	.15	12	0	4	2	18
2007	625	17	15	34	21	45	.03	.09	71	79	.10	.06	.37	.19	12	1	2	11	26
2008	621	17	12	34	22	44	.03	.15	71	80	.07	.06	.39	.28	6	1	6	29	42
2009	93	16	18	26	28	46	.07	.19	56	86	.13	.15	.53	.27	3	1	5	4	14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

As of Thursday, Kevin Youkilis was leading the majors in batted ball runs (14 above average). Check out some of his 2009 figures. An 18 percent walk rate, a very low ground ball rate coupled with a very low out rate on ground balls and a 28 percent line drive rate, at over half a run per line drive.

Of course, he won't keep up those rates. But isn't it time to say that Kevin Youkilis is one hellacious hitter? He tends to get overshadowed at first base by the likes of Albert Pujols (huh; as if there are other hitters "like" Pujols), and he's not a home run hitter in the mold of Ryan Howard. But he's a tremendous all-around hitter nonetheless.

So is this guy.

Chase Utley

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	739	18	10	37	19	43	.14	.15	68	81	.06	.08	.46	.26	2	6	10	19	38
2007	613	15	12	38	20	42	.06	.12	69	78	.10	.09	.44	.25	9	7	9	22	46
2008	707	15	13	33	24	42	.12	.16	75	88	.10	.04	.42	.23	11	-2	17	14	39
2009	89	12	18	44	16	40	.00	.24	70	74	.16	.07	.46	.40	3	1	1	7	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Utley's line drive rate isn't yet the same as last year's, but he's been launching fly ball home runs at a strong rate (seven home runs so far; tied for third in the league). Coupled with better plate discipline, he ranks sixth in the majors in batted ball runs.

As long as we're talking Phillies, recall our first batted ball report, in which we studied the excellence of Raul Ibanez's hitting and wondered how he would do in the National League (and in Citizens Bank Park). The early answer is, very well (and differently). Ibanez has been one of the most productive hitters in the league (already 12 runs above average) and he continues to post an excellent batting average on ground balls. His line drive rate is down, but his strikeout/walk ratio has moved in a positive direction.

Certainly, the league is still getting used to Ibanez, but he has a very fine batted ball profile so far; better, even than his previous years'.

Raul Ibanez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	699	16	9	42	19	39	.11	.17	71	89	.05	.07	.45	.23	1	5	8	11	25
2007	636	15	9	42	18	40	.09	.12	67	86	.05	.08	.41	.19	0	8	1	7	16
2008	707	16	9	41	19	40	.14	.11	71	83	.06	.06	.45	.20	1	4	8	6	20
2009	90	11	12	48	14	38	.04	.28	70	72	.13	.05	.40	.52	2	1	0	10	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

28% of his outfield flies have been home runs, and only 72% of his non-HR-outfield flies have been caught for outs. The returns are early, but Ibanez appears to have adapted to his new surroundings and leveraged his new park, too.

Speaking of fly balls, but from the pitcher's perspective, no team has given up more runs on fly balls than the Orioles. Baltimore's pitching has been terrible this year, thanks entirely to the fly balls they've allowed. In fact, they have given up 38 more runs than average on flies, a horrible figure. The second-highest team (the Phillies) has given up just 17 runs more than average.

Pitching	% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Team	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Orioles	17	9	36	19	45	.13	.16	72	78	.04	.06	.42	.30	-5	3	5	38	41

The Orioles have yielded fly balls at a 45 percent rate (highest in the majors), allowed home runs at a 16 percent pace (second to the Phillies), and only 78 percent of non-homers have been caught by the outfield (that's the second lowest figure; the Blue Jays are just a bit lower). Put all those rates together, and the Orioles' pitching has one huge, glaring weakness. By the way, they gave up only three runs more than average on fly balls all of last year.

Mark Hendrickson has been the biggest culprit. He has given up 10 runs more than average on fly balls alone, truly out of line with his past performance and three runs more than anyone else.

Mark Hendrickson

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	719	14	9	48	16	35	.14	.09	72	84	.07	.06	.41	.14	2	5	-3	-8	-4
2007	532	17	6	44	22	31	.13	.13	70	85	.00	.07	.34	.21	-7	4	2	0	-1
2008	590	14	9	44	20	34	.12	.10	69	81	.07	.08	.33	.18	1	7	-3	0	5
2009	93	15	11	36	17	46	.06	.23	72	70	.08	.06	.34	.44	1	0	0	10	11
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

How about our other preseason case study, Arizona's Dan Haren? Haren may be only 2-3, but he's been pitching exceptionally well. His ERA is 1.54, second only to Johan Santana in the National League, and he's tied for the major league lead at 14 batted ball runs less than average:

Dan Haren

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	930	19	6	45	19	35	.12	.12	73	85	.00	.06	.42	.18	-14	4	2	-3	-12
2007	935	21	6	44	17	38	.11	.10	73	83	-.01	.06	.37	.19	-15	3	-11	0	-23
2008	881	23	5	44	21	34	.08	.09	74	84	-.03	.05	.38	.15	-20	0	-3	-11	-34
2009	129	28	4	45	16	36	.03	.10	87	86	-.06	-.03	.30	.13	-4	-3	-4	-2	-14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Haren's strikeout/walk rate has been even nastier than last year's, and he has an 87 percent out rate on ground balls. That's pure serendipity. Doug Davis's ground ball out rate is 68 percent.

The week that was

Among the batters we did include in last week's report, two had a sizzling week. Both Jorge Cantu and James Loney were seven runs above the average batter this past week. Cantu already had been above average, but Loney's week pulled him from a run below average to six runs above. Their profiles are a study in contrasts:

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Player	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Cantu J	FLA	13	13	35	22	43	.13	.35	68	77	.12	.05	.44	.54	1	0	2	8	12
Loney J	LAN	4	16	43	29	29	.09	.00	79	80	.25	.01	.44	.05	4	-1	5	-3	6

Cantu has been a prototypical fly ball hitter, with a 35 percent home run rate on his outfield flies. He's also benefited from a 68 percent out rate on his ground balls. But Loney has been a line drive machine with an insane strikeout/walk ratio.

Angels in the field

Frank Francisco (0.00 ERA and six saves in six opportunities) and Rafael Soriano (0.90 ERA, two saves and three holds) have been bullpen stalwarts for Texas and Atlanta, respectively. But their defenses have helped them out, too. Francisco and Soriano are the only two pitchers with significant pitching time with 100 percent out rates on both their ground balls and outfield flies. Both have fly ball rates above 50 percent and neither has given up a home run.

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Player	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Francisco F	TEX	23	5	18	25	57	.13	.00	100	100	-.03	-.10	.36	-.10	-1	-1	0	-4	-6
Soriano R	ATL	37	16	29	18	53	.00	.00	100	100	.02	-.14	.80	-.10	0	-1	0	-3	-4

Of course, they've each pitched only 10 innings so far, so perhaps "significant" isn't quite the right word.

Zack

Zack Greinke, he of the 0.50 ERA, has been spectacular, of course. His strikeout rate has jumped to 32 percent, his ground ball out rate is 80 percent and he hasn't allowed a home run. I want to post his batted ball table for "shock and awe" purposes:

Zack Greinke

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	28	18	11	35	35	30	.17	.20	86	100	.06	-.01	.32	.21	0	0	1	0	0
2007	507	21	8	32	22	45	.09	.08	75	86	.01	.04	.44	.13	-6	-3	6	-3	-6
2008	851	22	7	43	19	38	.09	.10	73	83	.00	.05	.41	.18	-12	0	-2	-1	-14
2009	138	32	7	43	21	33	.07	.00	80	81	-.04	.00	.39	.06	-4	-2	-2	-5	-13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Wang

And while we're documenting things, let's document what's happened to Chien-Ming Wang. Wang has exploded, giving up 23 runs in just six innings. Diagnosing Wang is far beyond my ken (though I did once write an article about

him for a book that was printed in Taiwan, the only time my work has been translated that I know of), but I know horrific numbers when I see them.

Chien-Ming Wang

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	900	8	6	63	17	20	.05	.07	78	78	.08	.02	.35	.18	-2	-3	-5	-13	-23
2007	823	13	8	58	18	23	.08	.07	77	79	.07	.02	.35	.17	0	-5	-5	-13	-22
2008	402	13	9	55	22	23	.04	.06	77	89	.08	.03	.32	.07	1	-1	0	-13	-13
2009	45	4	16	29	33	36	.15	.18	60	44	.24	.13	.54	.59	2	1	5	5	13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

This table needs no commentary, except to say that Wang's 13 runs allowed over average is the highest in the majors. Quite an accomplishment for just six innings of work.

Also kind of bad

The worst batter in the majors is another former star, the Padres' Brian Giles.

Brian Giles

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	717	8	15	40	17	43	.11	.06	81	82	.18	.00	.41	.13	22	-10	3	-4	10
2007	552	11	12	40	19	40	.08	.08	77	83	.13	.03	.36	.14	9	-2	0	-1	7
2008	653	8	14	42	21	37	.10	.07	70	81	.18	.06	.34	.15	17	5	5	0	27
2009	94	13	9	55	14	31	.09	.00	88	86	.07	-.05	.28	.00	0	-4	-3	-5	-11
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Everything has gone wrong for Giles. Ks are up, walks are down, ground balls are way up, and 88 percent of those ground balls have been outs. No fly balls have cleared the fence. He's significantly below average in everything except for balls that aren't batted, his historic strength, in which he's average.

The other Zimmerman(n)

Let's end on a hopeful note, for a team that could use a lot of hope. How does Washington's new stud pitcher, Jordan Zimmermann, look after just two starts (that is, before Friday night's game, in which he gave up three home runs to the Cardinals)?

Jordan Zimmermann

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	46	17	9	42	18	35	.33	.13	62	86	.04	.18	.34	.24	0	2	0	0	1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Zimmermann has a great infield fly rate but his infielders haven't been very helpful on his ground balls. Those two factors kind of even out, and Zimmermann looks like a league-average pitcher. Not bad for a rookie.

Batted Ball Leaderboards

By Dave Studenmund

May 9, 2009

Welcome to the column that doesn't care about steroids or ticket prices or Hall of Fame qualifications or other baseball sideshows. Just the resounding report of bat on ball.

The best batted ball pitcher this past week (all stats through Thursday's games) was Jake Peavy. Peavy was eight runs better than average, two runs better than the second-best pitcher, the Angels' Jered Weaver.

Peavy had two excellent outings—against the Dodgers and Diamondbacks—but he still has only a 2-4 record with a 4.27 ERA. I can understand your disappointment, Padres fans, but cheer up. Peavy is the same pitcher he's always been, as you can see from his four-year batted ball profile:

Jacob Peavy

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	846	25	8	38	18	43	.09	.10	78	75	.00	.01	.39	.25	-13	-10	-10	15	-18
2007	898	27	8	44	17	38	.09	.06	78	84	.00	.02	.43	.10	-15	-8	-11	-22	-56
2008	709	23	9	41	21	37	.17	.11	74	85	.01	.04	.30	.16	-7	-3	-12	-10	-31
2009	189	28	9	43	17	38	.13	.13	70	89	.00	.08	.37	.17	-3	1	-4	-2	-8
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Strikeout rates, batted ball distributions, even his home run rate are all relatively in line with previous years. The difference this year is that Peavy has left only 67 percent of his baserunners on base; 33 percent have scored. The major league average is 70 percent and a pitcher as good as Peavy will typically have an LOB percentage in the mid 70s. Last year, he posted an 82 percent LOB rate. Today's fearless prediction: Peavy's ERA will improve.

The best batted ball hitter this past week was Milwaukee's Prince Fielder, seven runs better than average. Fielder has had a couple of fluky things working for him so far: his walk/HBP rate is 22 percent (his previous career high is 15 percent) and his batting average on ground balls is .350. Oh, and one other thing: he's creating .6 runs on every line drive he hits.

Prince Fielder

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	648	19	11	42	18	39	.12	.17	77	80	.05	.02	.42	.29	2	-5	0	17	13
2007	681	18	15	35	19	46	.08	.25	82	82	.10	.00	.43	.38	14	-9	4	46	55
2008	694	19	14	41	19	40	.13	.19	75	83	.08	.04	.45	.30	9	-2	3	19	30
2009	131	24	22	37	17	46	.09	.13	65	85	.11	.09	.62	.22	5	1	1	2	10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

That line drive rate is second in the major leagues among all qualified batters. The top five are:

Player	Tm	LDR
Longoria Ev	TB	.62
Fielder Pr	MIL	.62
Morales Ke	LAA	.62
Wells Ve	TOR	.60
Bay Ja	BOS	.58

Which is my sneaky way of introducing this week's theme: Batted Ball Leaderboards. You can sort and create your own Batted Ball Leaderboards from the downloadable Excel spreadsheet on the Hardball Times site, but they're also useful for highlighting some of the most interesting batters of the young season. Which makes them column fodder.

Runs per line drive are cool, but line drive rate is just as important. In fact, in the long term, it's probably a better indicator of a batter's true skill. The top five batters in line drives per batted ball this year are:

Player	Tm	LD%
Johnson Ni	WAS	34
Rolen Sc	TOR	32
Bartlett Ja	TB	30
Fukudome Ko	CHN	28
Cabrera As	CLE	28

Typically known for his glove, Jason Bartlett has been smacking line drives at a 30 percent rate, third-best in the majors. He's also smacked a few home runs (15 percent of his outfield flies have been home runs, much higher than his typical rate of 4 percent). That's why he's batting .355 with a .523 slugging average.

Look at the difference in his profile. 2009's line drive and home run rates seem to belong to another batter:

Jason Bartlett

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	372	12	9	44	22	33	.07	.02	75	75	.08	.04	.39	.11	1	0	6	-5	2
2007	570	13	10	44	20	36	.11	.04	74	84	.09	.05	.36	.09	4	1	0	-12	-6
2008	494	14	6	49	20	30	.10	.01	67	83	.03	.10	.32	.06	-4	11	-1	-15	-10
2009	111	14	6	34	30	35	.13	.15	67	78	.03	.09	.27	.27	-1	1	1	3	5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Obviously, Bartlett will cool his jets, but if he can keep up some semblance of this newfound production and maintain his outstanding glovework, he really, legitimately, could be the Rays' MVP this year. Or one of them, anyway.

The overall leaders in line drive runs vs. average are:

Player	Tm	LD
Martinez Vi	CLE	7
Hill Aa	TOR	7
Johnson Ni	WAS	6
Rolen Sc	TOR	6
Beltran Ca	NYN	6

Aaron Hill is another fancy-fielding middle infielder who maybe, just maybe, has found his swing this year. Like Bartlett, the major difference for Hill has been his line drive and home run rates.

Aaron Hill

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	606	11	8	46	19	34	.07	.04	71	81	.09	.06	.37	.10	2	5	2	-10	0
2007	657	16	6	40	21	39	.08	.08	70	85	.02	.06	.43	.14	-6	4	10	-2	5
2008	229	14	8	35	17	46	.18	.03	69	82	.06	.08	.36	.08	0	1	-2	-5	-6
2009	150	14	7	36	26	37	.05	.19	63	91	.04	.08	.44	.24	0	2	7	5	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Also like Bartlett, Hill has an outstanding glove. According to Fangraphs, Hill trails only Ian Kinsler and Chase Utley in total value (wins above replacement player) among second basemen. Heady company.

One other slick-fielding second baseman is off to an unexpectedly fast start: the Dodgers' Orlando Hudson. His start has been fueled by a more discerning batting eye and a high batting average on fly balls.

Orlando Hudson

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	650	12	10	49	18	31	.10	.10	73	79	.09	.05	.41	.20	4	3	4	2	14
2007	601	14	12	52	20	28	.02	.08	76	77	.09	.03	.38	.22	7	-3	3	2	9
2008	455	14	9	48	23	28	.06	.08	77	79	.07	.02	.44	.17	2	-3	11	-2	7
2009	139	9	13	45	23	31	.06	.10	85	68	.15	-.02	.47	.30	3	-3	5	4	9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The leaderboard in runs created per ground ball includes some interesting characters. Here are the top five (I've also listed each batter's ground ball rate (ground balls per batted ball) to give you a fuller picture.):

Player	Tm	GB%	GBR
Lewis Fr	SF	51	.24
Damon Jo	NYA	24	.20
Upton Ju	ARI	33	.17
Duncan Ch	STL	37	.16
Inge Br	DET	41	.15

Johnny Damon has posted numbers completely out of character with his career numbers. And how bizarre; the second-highest rate in runs per ground ball combined with one of the lowest rates of batting ground balls in the majors? Warrants a look at his year-by-year profile, don't you think?

Johnny Damon

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	671	13	11	41	19	39	.15	.14	75	83	.10	.05	.39	.23	6	1	2	10	19
2007	605	13	11	48	18	33	.13	.09	70	86	.10	.08	.36	.14	7	9	-2	-7	7
2008	623	13	10	44	22	34	.14	.12	69	82	.09	.08	.35	.20	5	8	5	2	21
2009	120	12	12	24	16	59	.15	.15	55	87	.12	.20	.35	.22	2	3	-1	5	9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Damon has morphed into an extreme fly ball hitter this year. His 59 percent fly ball rate puts him in the same level as some of the best-known fly ball hitters in today's game. Here is the leaderboard for fly ball percentage (fly balls as a percent of all batted balls):

Player	Tm	FB%
Pena Ca	TB	60
Damon Jo	NYA	59
Molina Be	SF	59
Ludwick Ry	STL	58
Teixeira Ma	NYA	56

Damon almost certainly will revert to form, but I wonder if his newfound fly ball proclivity is purposeful? Might he be trying to take advantage of his new home park?

And how about Brandon Inge? The Tigesr third baseman has only a 57 percent out rate on his ground balls (the fifth-lowest in the majors) and a 94 percent out rate on his non-home run outfield flies (the 11th highest). That is quite a dichotomy, but he's managed to add a 32 percent home run rate and is 10 runs above average overall.

Brandon Inge

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	601	21	8	40	14	45	.11	.15	68	84	.02	.08	.41	.25	-5	4	-9	15	4
2007	577	26	10	37	21	40	.07	.09	77	82	.02	.04	.40	.16	-5	-4	-1	-4	-13
2008	407	23	13	37	16	45	.10	.10	77	88	.05	.03	.37	.15	1	-3	-8	-3	-13
2009	108	20	17	41	15	44	.17	.32	57	94	.09	.15	.40	.41	2	3	-1	6	10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

One last note about ground ball hitters: Freddie Lewis has just a 45 percent out rate on his ground balls, the equivalent of a .550 ground ball batting average.

Three batters have yet to notch a hit on a non-homer outfield fly. Magglio Ordonez, J.J. Hardy and Jason Kendall all have 100 percent out rates on outfield flies. At least Ordonez and Hardy have hit home runs. Kendall hasn't even done that. He has nothing to show for his fly balls this year (-.10 runs per outfield fly), which is why he avoids them like the plague (27 percent fly ball rate).

These batters have created the most runs per outfield fly (the table has a few other stats for story-telling purposes):

Player	Tm	FB%	HR/OF	Out/OF	OFR
Howard Ry	PHI	34	.25	56	.55
Pena Ca	TB	60	.32	73	.54
Young Mi	TEX	27	.28	67	.53
Longoria Ev	TB	42	.29	64	.52
Gonzalez Ad	SD	39	.33	78	.52

Obviously, there are two drivers of outfield fly production: home runs and everything else. Ryan Howard is known for hitting powerhouse home runs, but this year he's also thrown in fly ball singles and doubles, even a triple. As a result, he's produced more runs per outfield fly so far than he has in any previous year.

Michael Young has been an outfield fly machine the first month of the season, which is just completely out of character. In the past three years, he was consistently five or six runs below average in fly ball hitting. This year, he's already eight runs above average.

Michael Young

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	748	13	7	48	25	27	.04	.08	70	85	.04	.07	.36	.15	-4	10	15	-5	16
2007	692	15	8	48	27	24	.02	.07	71	78	.04	.06	.34	.17	-3	6	14	-6	11
2008	708	15	8	47	23	31	.04	.07	72	84	.04	.05	.35	.14	-2	3	5	-6	-1
2009	127	17	6	51	23	27	.04	.28	71	67	.01	.07	.34	.53	-1	2	1	8	10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Of course, it isn't surprising that Young is having a good year with the bat. What's surprising is how he's done it.

By the way, the move to third base hasn't gone as well as hoped. Young has a .610 Revised Zone Rating at third; the average third baseman is at .720. The good news is that new shortstop Elvis Andrus has an .800 RZR (vs. .780 for an average shortstop).

Pitching Batted Ball Leaderboards

By Dave Studenmund

May 15, 2009

Last week, we reviewed leaderboards for our special batted ball stats, but we had time to cover only batters. Batted Ball Reports are equal opportunity lenders, so we're going to devote today's column to the most effective pitchers in the majors through Thursday's games.

I'll probably revisit the leaderboards periodically during the year, but you can create your own from the Excel spreadsheet I'm making available each week. So I won't waste too much space on this subject in the future.

Pitcher leaderboards look exactly the same as batter leaderboards, but we interpret them differently. Strikeout and walk rates are important for batters, but other categories, such as home runs per fly ball, are even more important. Not so for pitchers. In fact, sometimes all you need to know about a pitcher is his strikeout and walk rate. Everything else is usually just quirky.

Well, almost everything else. Pitchers do have significantly different groundball rates. It's good to be a groundball pitcher, because you give up fewer home runs. The leaders so far are:

Player	Tm	GB%
Lannan Jo	WAS	58
Lowe De	ATL	58
Meche Gi	KC	57
Pineiro Jo	STL	57
Halladay Ro	TOR	56

Lannan, Lowe and Halladay are perennial groundball leaders. Joel Pineiro has been a bit of a groundball pitcher in the past, but he's been even more extreme this year. But Gil Meche? When you look at his multi-year batted ball profile, you kind of want to say "Who is Gil Meche, anyway?"

Gil Meche

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	811	19	11	43	18	38	.08	.12	73	91	.06	.06	.44	.16	3	2	1	-4	3
2007	906	17	7	47	18	35	.11	.10	75	83	.02	.04	.37	.18	-8	-1	-7	-3	-19
2008	886	21	8	39	22	38	.08	.08	71	90	.02	.06	.39	.10	-8	1	3	-17	-21
2009	202	19	8	57	18	25	.05	.06	72	76	.02	.06	.40	.18	-2	2	-1	-2	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

He is a strong strikeout/walk pitcher, for sure. But he was a line drive master in 2007, a flyball master in 2008 (mostly thanks to a 90 percent out rate) and he's been a groundball master this year. You may think that Meche's +2 on groundball runs means that ground balls haven't been a strength this year, but that's not right. Many groundball pitchers have positive run figures on their ground balls—the power of a groundball pitcher reveals itself in the line drive and flyball run figures. So it is with Meche.

This year, anyway. Meche is kind of hard to pin down; he's sort of a "Haren Lite," someone who has consistently strong strikeout/walk figures and manages to pick up additional value through a rotating array of different batted ball types. The difference between Haren and Meche is that Haren's strikeout/walk stats blow your mind; Meche's simply surprise.

So here's the question: Is it merely "luck" that has made Meche a very good pitcher the last three years? If batted ball values are truly random in his case, is it just a fluke that those values have been favorable for him recently? Or does his pitching style lend itself to favorable outcomes, regardless of the batted ball type in a given year? Or has his pitching style changed over time?

Hmm.

Before your brain starts to hurt, let's move onto another leaderboard. The difference between a line drive and a fly ball (and sometimes even a ground ball) can certainly be subjective. That may be one reason why line drive rates tend to be random over time. It certainly has been for this year's leaders:

Player	Tm	LD%
Saunders Jo	LAA	11
Dempster Ry	CHN	12
Karstens Je	PIT	12
Billingsley Ch	LAN	12
Scherzer Ma	ARI	13

None of these five pitchers have shown a consistent ability to keep their line drive rates down. Shoot, Max Scherzer's line drive rate was 27 percent last year. Only one of them, the Angels' Joe Saunders, had a below-average rate last year:

Joseph Saunders

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	302	17	10	48	20	32	.03	.09	76	81	.06	.02	.40	.17	1	-2	2	-1	-1
2007	473	15	7	45	21	34	.04	.09	76	81	.04	.03	.44	.17	-2	-2	9	1	6
2008	807	13	7	47	15	37	.09	.10	75	82	.05	.03	.34	.17	-3	-4	-12	0	-18
2009	190	12	7	49	11	40	.20	.06	72	89	.07	.05	.47	.07	0	1	-3	-6	-9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Saunders is a fine pitcher with excellent control, but his 3.41 ERA last year was primarily the result of a 15 percent line drive rate. This year, his line drive rate is just 11 percent. Is this for real? Has Joe Saunders found some line drive pixie dust? Time will tell, but I wouldn't bet on it.

Infield flies may be my favorite batted ball stat, because they're just so good. Infield flies aren't subjective, because Baseball Info Solutions, our data source, defines them according to a set circumference around the baselines (instead of just basing them on whether an infielder caught the fly). And infield flies are 99 percent outs, meaning they're just about as good as a strikeout. This year's leaders include some of the best pitchers in baseball.

Player	Tm	IF/F
Santana Jo	NYN	.27
Maholm Pa	PIT	.24
Oswalt Ro	HOU	.23
Maine Jo	NYN	.23
Harden Ri	CHN	.23

As good as these pitchers have been, however, they haven't typically had above-average infield fly rates in the past. In fact, the only one of them who has shown a consistently solid infield fly rate is the one you might pick as the worst on the list: the Mets' John Maine.

John Maine

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	365	19	10	38	15	46	.14	.15	83	92	.04	.00	.45	.18	-1	-6	-4	0	-11
2007	810	22	10	37	18	43	.13	.11	76	85	.03	.05	.38	.17	-4	-3	-10	-2	-19
2008	608	20	12	41	20	38	.14	.10	68	86	.06	.09	.31	.14	2	5	-8	-8	-9
2009	175	17	15	37	18	44	.23	.07	79	89	.10	.03	.34	.08	3	-1	-3	-4	-5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Maine has struggled so far this year, but his infield fly rate has saved him. But he's put up better-than-average infield fly rates in every one of his major league seasons. Even when he posted a 6.50 ERA in 2005 with the Orioles, he had a 20 percent infield fly rate.

I'm going to call this a substantial, demonstrated asset of Maine's. He is an infield fly pitcher. Book it.

Another batted ball stat that is mostly fluky for pitchers is the home run rate. That's because we measure home runs as a percentage of outfield flies, which negates the positive impact that groundball pitchers have on home runs. Some tendencies cling over time, but they can't describe this year's leaders, three of whom have not yet given up a home run.

Player	Tm	HR/OF
Jimenez Ub	COL	.00
Greinke Za	KC	.00
Rodriguez Wa	HOU	.00
Billingsley Ch	LAN	.02
Stults Er	LAN	.02

Colorado's Ubaldo Jimenez is a true curiosity. Despite allowing no home runs, he has given up more runs per outfield fly than the average pitcher this year:

Ubaldo Jimenez

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	30	10	10	42	17	42	.10	.11	80	100	.12	.02	.19	.07	0	0	-1	-1	-2
2007	354	19	12	46	16	36	.08	.11	79	83	.06	.03	.42	.20	2	-2	-3	0	-3
2008	868	20	13	54	17	27	.08	.07	77	79	.07	.03	.40	.16	8	-3	-7	-14	-15
2009	181	19	14	48	20	30	.16	.00	70	68	.08	.07	.24	.19	2	1	-4	-2	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The problem is his 68 percent out rate on outfield flies. I assume that is mostly a fluke, with a hint of ballpark thrown in for good measure.

Here is the bad side of the home run flukes, the pitchers who have given up the most home runs per outfield fly. As you can see, there are some mighty fine hurlers on the list. All of them will improve as the season progresses.

Player	Tm	HR/OF
Johnson Ra	SF	.27
Oswalt Ro	HOU	.25
Harden Ri	CHN	.23
Hamels Co	PHI	.22
Myers Br	PHI	.22

Getting batters to hit ground balls is nice, but it's also nice if your infielders back you up. The pitchers who have the highest out rates on ground balls are:

Player	Tm	Out/GB
Feldman Sc	TEX	89
Volstad Ch	FLA	88
Burnett Al	NYA	88
Buehrle Ma	CHA	88
Tallet Br	TOR	87

It's hard to imagine that groundball out rates are a true pitching "skill," particularly since you can't easily separate it from the skill of the infielders. The two best infields this year have been Toronto's (the Jays' 82 percent out rate is the major league high) and Texas' (79 percent).

Last year, Texas had a 72 percent groundball out rate. The improvement in the Rangers' infield defense has been a big reason for their early success.

By the way, Mark Buehrle is another fascinating pitcher. He's had above-average out rates on his ground balls each of the last four years, despite having an average infield defense behind him. Could this be a hidden secret of his?

Mark Buehrle

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	876	11	6	44	18	36	.13	.14	76	80	.05	.04	.39	.24	-4	-1	4	19	17
2007	835	14	6	43	18	37	.08	.09	77	81	.03	.02	.39	.17	-7	-6	-1	1	-13
2008	918	15	6	50	19	31	.10	.11	76	80	.02	.02	.41	.21	-9	-5	5	2	-6
2009	184	16	8	41	22	36	.06	.11	88	86	.04	-.03	.31	.15	-1	-5	-1	-1	-8
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

It's hard to say, but worth watching. It's particularly hard to say whether Chris Volstad somehow yields "fieldable" ground balls—it's much too early in his career—but his record so far is pretty good.

Christopher Volstad

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	365	14	11	53	17	28	.13	.03	79	77	.09	.02	.35	.11	3	-3	-4	-9	-12
2009	173	19	10	50	18	30	.05	.17	88	83	.04	-.04	.33	.29	0	-5	-3	2	-6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

By the way, Cole Hamels and Tim Wakefield had the highest groundball out rates last year, 80 percent.

Last year, too, Johan Santana had the highest flyball out rate, 94 percent. That's over a full season, and it would place in the top five in even this short sample of a season.

Player	Tm	Out/OF
Oswalt Ro	HOU	100
Blanton Jo	PHI	97
Danks Jo	CHA	96
Young Ch	SD	94
Weaver Je	LAA	93

I have to admit something to you. I always have been fascinated by Chris Young the pitcher. Not because he's tall and went to Princeton, because he's a batted ball anomaly. He's an extreme flyball pitcher who doesn't get hurt by the fly ball. Take a look:

Christopher Young

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	735	22	10	25	18	54	.16	.12	78	90	.03	.02	.35	.16	-3	-9	-13	0	-25
2007	705	24	11	29	16	53	.13	.05	78	89	.03	.01	.44	.07	-2	-9	-10	-20	-41
2008	434	21	11	22	24	51	.19	.11	74	87	.05	.06	.30	.16	0	-3	-4	-3	-9
2009	195	17	12	32	17	48	.14	.09	64	94	.07	.12	.49	.08	1	2	1	-4	0
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

See those infield fly rates? Always above the league average. How about the out rates on outfield flies? Same thing. The guy usually gives up his fair share of home runs but still gives up fewer runs per fly ball overall.

PETCO has to be a factor—outfield flies are caught more often in PETCO than in your average park—and his out rate per outfield fly was about average in Texas. So maybe we're just talking about park impact here (this year, for example, his home ERA is 2.37 and his away ERA is 8.03). If so, we may be talking about one of the best fits between player and ballpark in the majors.

Let's finish with our "true leaders" leaderboard, otherwise know as the Haren List; pitchers who have given up the fewest runs per ball **not** put in play:

Player	Tm	NIPR
Slowey Ke	MIN	-.05
Greinke Za	KC	-.05
Haren Da	ARI	-.04
Halladay Ro	TOR	-.04
Vazquez Ja	ATL	-.04

Some of the best pitchers in the league are on this list, including Mr. Haren himself, but the list leader was a surprise to me. Kevin Slowey has had impeccable control this year:

Kevin Slowey

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	297	16	4	29	21	50	.13	.15	78	78	-.03	.03	.37	.28	-6	-3	2	15	9
2008	653	19	4	36	19	44	.10	.11	76	85	-.03	.04	.40	.17	-14	-3	-1	4	-13
2009	176	15	2	31	24	45	.14	.13	67	84	-.05	.10	.42	.21	-4	2	5	4	7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

He's been hurt by line drives and a few other batted ball quirks—too bad he's not a groundball pitcher—but it certainly appears that Kevin Slowey is ace material. That may become apparent only when his other batted ball stats line up with Gil Meche's.

Batted Ball Park Factors

By Dave Studenmund

May 24, 2009

One of the most-coveted free agents of the offseason stepped to the fore this past week. Mark Teixeira found his switch-hitting stroke and created ten runs above average since our last report (stats through this past Friday's games, the first of the interleague interregnum). Teixeira has been an extreme fly ball hitter this year:

Mark Teixeira

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	727	18	13	39	20	41	.12	.16	75	84	.08	.03	.46	.25	8	-3	9	16	30
2007	575	19	14	39	20	41	.09	.20	74	77	.08	.04	.42	.36	8	-1	4	29	40
2008	685	14	15	43	21	36	.08	.17	69	85	.13	.08	.43	.25	17	8	10	15	50
2009	179	18	16	34	13	53	.11	.22	83	84	.10	-.01	.47	.34	4	-3	-2	11	10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Last week, Teixeira had generated .21 runs per outfield fly; it's now up to .34 runs. That is the definition of a hot week. What's up with his 53% fly ball rate? Is he purposely trying to put more loft on the ball? Or is it just one of those things?

A couple of weeks ago, we noted that Johnny Damon had a 59% fly ball rate, way out of whack with his previous trends. Since then, his fly ball rate has dropped to 50%. I guess it was just one of those things.

Overall, the Yankees have a 39% fly ball rate, which is only slightly higher than the major league average, but they are generating .28 runs per outfield fly, the highest rate in the majors.

Is the new Yankee Stadium helping? Yes. So far, teams have batted home runs on 19% of outfield flies in the Bronx, but only 12% elsewhere (same teams, different stadia). They have generated .30 runs per outfield fly at Yankee Stadium; .23 runs per outfield fly elsewhere.

I'll have more to say about park factors in a minute, but I first want to finish the discussion of the biggest run producers of the past week. Here are the top ten:

Teixeira Ma	NYA	10
Ibanez Ra	PHI	9
Morneau Ju	MIN	9
Branyan Ru	SEA	8
Wright Da	NYN	8
Cuddyer Mi	MIN	7
Ross Co	FLA	7
Reynolds Ma	ARI	7
Bartlett Ja	TB	6
Rodriguez Al	NYA	6

Juan ("Super Manny Sub") Pierre just misses this list, at six runs above average.

On the pitching ledger, Adam Wainwright had two excellent outings in the past week, going eight innings or more against the Brewers and Cubs and allowing just one run in each start. Before the week, Wainwright was two runs worse than average, but he's now six runs better.

Adam Wainwright

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	309	23	8	48	17	35	.15	.10	78	85	.01	.03	.46	.15	-4	-2	-2	-6	-13
2007	882	15	9	48	18	34	.12	.07	71	80	.06	.06	.38	.15	0	7	-5	-8	-6
2008	544	17	7	46	19	35	.17	.10	77	90	.02	.04	.41	.13	-5	-1	0	-10	-16
2009	244	19	10	46	15	39	.08	.10	76	73	.04	.03	.29	.22	0	-1	-6	3	-6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Wainwright had his ground ball chops working against Milwaukee and Chicago (his ground ball rate rose from 41% to 46%) and he only allowed six line drives. Most importantly, he's allowed only .29 runs per line drive this year.

The ten best pitchers of the past week:

Wainwright Ad	STL	-8
Peavy Ja	SD	-6
Pineiro Jo	STL	-5
Kawakami Ke	ATL	-5
Lowe De	ATL	-5
Cook Aa	COL	-4
Davies Ky	KC	-4
Shields Ja	TB	-4
Howell Ja	TB	-4
Willis Do	DET	-4

Hey, a Dontrelle Willis sighting! Willis found his rhythm at least briefly against the Rangers on Tuesday, giving up just one hit and no runs in 6.1 innings, striking out five, walking none and allowing only four fly balls.

Here is a picture of Willis' last four years:

Dontrelle Willis

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	975	16	10	47	19	33	.10	.10	75	78	.07	.03	.36	.20	4	-4	-3	0	-3
2007	942	15	11	46	21	32	.07	.12	72	81	.07	.07	.40	.22	6	8	10	6	30
2008	122	15	30	43	12	46	.03	.13	83	85	.19	-.03	.38	.23	9	-2	-3	3	7
2009	44	11	9	44	24	32	.09	.10	80	78	.09	.00	.16	.20	0	-1	-1	0	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Obviously, 2008 was the year of pitching dangerously, but his 2007 was only somewhat less hair-raising. He was worse than average on every type of batted ball. So far this year, his line drive rate is 24%, but the drives haven't hurt as much as in previous years; only .16 runs per line drive. Of course, Willis has only faced 44 batters, so this is all just a conversation piece right now. But every hardcore baseball fan should have more than a passing interest in Dontrelle Willis' progress.

Someone else was in the news this week. Jake Peavy was theoretically traded from the Padres to the White Sox, but reality crashed the party when Peavy just said no. There was a lot of interesting talk about Peavy and the impact the American League, leaving PETCO and moving to Comiskey would have on the hurler.

I was kind of surprised to see Peavy categorized as a "flyball pitcher." I presented his four-year stats last week, but look at them again. Does this look like a flyball pitcher to you?

Jacob Peavy

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	846	25	8	38	18	44	.09	.10	78	75	.00	.01	.39	.25	-13	-10	-10	15	-17
2007	898	27	8	44	17	39	.09	.06	78	84	.00	.02	.43	.10	-15	-8	-11	-22	-56
2008	709	23	9	41	21	38	.17	.11	74	85	.01	.04	.30	.16	-7	-3	-12	-10	-31
2009	271	29	9	41	19	41	.11	.12	74	88	-.01	.06	.38	.16	-5	-1	-5	-3	-13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Well, okay, a slight fly ball pitcher. But remember that Peavy strikes out and walks more than his share of batters—38% vs. 27% for all major leaguers—so he actually allows less fly balls per batter faced than average (25% vs. 27%).

Still, the point is well taken. Moving to the American League would have added about half a run to Peavy's ERA in general—the AL is just the better league right now, and there's that darn DH—and switching parks would definitely impact his stats.

A few years ago, I wrote a detailed article for the *Hardball Times Annual* called "Batted Ball Park Factors." It broke down the way each ballpark impacts how balls are batted and I found some pretty interesting things in the data. David Gassko updated the information after the 2007 season (it's here: http://www.hardballtimes.com/main/article/batted-balls-and-park-effects/) and found that many of the same trends still held.

I've been playing with batted ball park effects again this year, and I'm going to refer to some of this year's stats, as well as the results from David's study.

Here's a relevant bit: An outfield fly is 26% more likely than average to be a home in Comiskey (or whatever you want to call the Sox's stadium) and 14% less likely than average to be a home run in PETCO. That's a huge swing. In fact, Comiskey and PETCO are the two most extreme home run parks in the majors (at least, they were until this year; the jury is still out on the new Yankee Stadium), but at opposite ends of the spectrum.

So if Peavy's most likely outcome is, say, 10% home runs on his outfield flies (I'm eyeballing his chart) while pitching half his games in San Diego, that rate would increase to 12% if he were pitching on the South Side of Chicago. The net result would be about a quarter of a run more per game.

And that's just the impact of outfield flies. Here's a table of the number of runs per game scored in these two ballparks last year, compared to how those teams and their opponents did on the road, and broken into our four main batted ball types:

Team	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Total
CHA	0.04	-0.04	-0.13	0.31	0.17
SD	-0.02	-0.09	-0.27	-0.69	-1.07

These aren't park factors. They are based on only games in 2008, and they're not "broken in half" to reflect the fact that teams play only half their games at home. This is just a simple outcomes table, but I like the format so I'm going to share it with you. And, as you can see, there were 1.24 more runs per game scored at Comiskey than at PETCO last year. The primary impact was due to fly balls, but PETCO repressed scoring in every category to some degree, even on balls not in play.

The bottom line is that moving to the White Sox and Comiskey would probably have added as much as a full run to Jake Peavy's ERA. I don't know if that was a consideration in his decision to stay in San Diego, but I'll bet a lot of fantasy owners took note.

Enough Peavy—let's talk new ballparks.

I've pulled together all the batted ball data this year, and compared how teams have batted and pitched in each home park vs. how they've performed on the road (including both the home team and the road team). It's far too early to say anything meaningful about park factors for Yankee Stadium and Citi Field, but that hasn't stopped a bunch of people from opining. So I thought I'd chime in.

Here are the runs-per-game park impacts of our two new New York ballparks:

Team	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Total
Yankees	0.31	-0.02	0.33	0.64	1.26
Mets	-0.22	-0.58	0.03	0.34	-0.44

There are some crazy numbers in them thar tables. Let's talk about Yankee Stadium first:

- At home, the Yankees and their opponents have struck out in 17% of plate appearances vs. 18% on the road. At the same time, they've walked 12% of the time vs. 11% on the road. Put the two together and you have the second-largest positive "NIP" park differential in the majors this year. The Diamondbacks are first at .34 runs per game.
- The same group of players have hit line drives more often at Yankee Stadium than elsewhere, and they've also generated more runs per line drive at home.
- We've already discussed the fly ball impact, but I will say that several other ballparks have had a bigger impact on fly balls than Yankee Stadium. In fact, the Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati has added more than a full run per game on outfield flies.

So Yankee Stadium fly balls have generated a lot of discussion this year, but you can see that a lot of other factors have combined to make it the second-best hitter's park this year, behind only Chase Field in Phoenix.

About the Mets' new park:

- The strikeout and walk patterns are almost exactly the same as those in Yankee Stadium, but in reverse. The Mets and their opponents have struck out more often and walked less often in Citi Field than in other ballparks.
- Ground balls have been fielded for outs in Citi Field 76% of the time; 70% elsewhere. Only Oakland's Coliseum has provided a more beneficent ground ball setting.
- Contrary to my initial expectations, Citi has been a decent park for outfield flies (.34 runs above average per game). Home runs have been hit there more often than elsewhere and they've also been caught for outs less often.

Both of these mini-profiles are surprises to me. They don't fit the pattern of what we've heard and expected, but keep in mind that they're about as meaningful as Johnny Damon's 59% fly ball rate. We'll need time to find the true patterns of New York's parks.

Scoring Runs

By Dave Studenmund

May 24, 2009

It's been six days since we last compiled our batted ball stats (through Thursday's games) and the hottest hitter in that time has been Arizona's young wonder, Justin Upton.

Justin Upton

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	152	24	8	36	16	48	.17	.05	78	84	.00	.02	.51	.11	-2	-2	-1	-3	-8
2008	417	29	14	37	21	42	.10	.17	66	81	.04	.11	.37	.29	1	3	-4	8	8
2009	183	24	11	38	23	39	.13	.21	52	77	.03	.20	.52	.38	0	6	5	8	19
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Upton was stone cold in the beginning of the year, and he actually sat out a few games, but he's now batting .346/.415/.636 with nine home runs and he's sixth in the majors at 19 batted ball runs above average. Upton has put up a dynamite package of groundball hitting (only a 52 percent out rate) and power (.52 runs per line drive and .38 runs per outfield fly). He's obviously hot right now, but his underlying profile shows that he will continue to be an interesting hitter to watch.

Upton led the majors with seven runs above average in the past six days and Gary Sheffield was second with six runs above average. What a contrast: the young toolsy player and the old guy who used to have all the tools (and still has an extremely quick bat).

Gary Sheffield

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	166	10	8	49	15	37	.12	.11	65	87	.10	.09	.42	.16	1	4	0	0	4
2007	593	12	16	41	17	42	.15	.14	71	91	.15	.06	.42	.17	17	3	0	0	20
2008	482	17	13	43	14	43	.17	.13	73	91	.08	.04	.43	.15	6	-1	-6	-5	-7
2009	111	14	21	51	15	34	.12	.23	62	88	.16	.12	.28	.34	5	3	-2	3	10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Sheffield is getting a lot of respect from National League pitchers; he's sporting a 21 percent walk rate and combining it with a 14 percent strikeout rate for a nice "not in play" total. His groundball out rate is just 62 percent and he's got a 23 percent home run rate. I'll be surprised if Sheffield maintains this pace, primarily because that groundball out rate is pretty clearly a fluke and NL pitchers may wise up sooner or later, particularly if the Mets don't obtain any protection for him.

I'm truly fascinated by theses profiles, which is why you've been subjected to them so often this season. I want to try a few things here, just for fun and our mutual education.

Here's something to chew on. It's the standard deviation in batted ball runs across all major league teams, broken out by type:

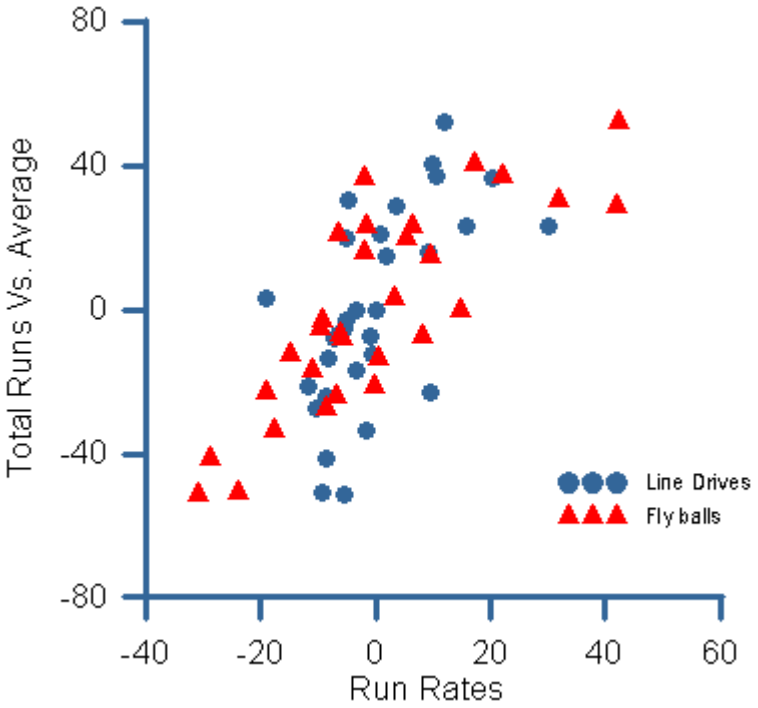
- Not in play: Nine runs
- Ground balls: Nine runs

- Line drives: 11 runs
- Fly balls: 18 runs

I won't get into the technical definition of standard deviation, but it's a way of measuring the spread of talent in each category. This is important because you've got the most leverage among values with a lot of spread between teams and players. If all teams or players had the same groundball value, or roughly the same, then there would be no particular competitive advantage in focusing on it.

So, by this measure, fly balls are twice as important as NIP and ground balls, which are slightly less important than line drives.

Perhaps you're someone like me, who likes to see this sort of thing on a graph to get the "picture." Perhaps not, but see if this helps. It's a graph of the number of runs teams have scored on fly balls (red triangles) and line drives (blue circles)



Do you see how the red triangles are wider than the blue circles? And can you see that the red triangles are much more closely aligned with the total runs above average? There is more of a slope in the red triangles than the blue ones.

This isn't really new or surprising. I mean, we know that home runs are important in terms of both impact and rarity. That's why the '90s happened. But now you have graphical proof.

By the way, I drew the graph with NIP and ground ball for the blue circles and it looks the same, only more so.

So let's give a shout out to the flyball hitters in the majors by listing the top 10 flyball hitters so far this year, along with their pertinent flyball stats. I love that the flyball leader is the guy we picked on for our preseason "curious case" to follow:

Player	Tm	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	Out/OF	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Ibanez Ra	PHI	42	.03	.28	80	.46	1	1	-1	21	22
Gonzalez Ad	SD	40	.11	.38	83	.57	2	-2	-2	18	16
Pena Ca	TB	59	.11	.25	77	.43	3	-3	-3	16	13
Longoria Ev	TB	44	.03	.20	69	.39	0	-3	6	15	17
Howard Ry	PHI	39	.02	.25	69	.47	-2	-2	-4	14	6
Teixeira Ma	NYA	50	.10	.24	85	.37	4	-3	0	14	14
Dunn Ad	WAS	50	.08	.30	89	.41	5	-2	1	14	18
Bay Ja	BOS	50	.10	.23	80	.38	5	1	-2	14	18
Reynolds Ma	ARI	43	.04	.30	77	.50	-2	0	-3	13	8
Morneau Ju	MIN	46	.17	.20	75	.37	4	4	2	13	23

Most of these guys are "pure" flyball hitters, but there are exceptions. Longoria has been hitting line drives this year, and Morneau actually has a fine all-around line with positive figures in every category. His teammate, Joe Mauer, just missed making this list.

Mauer deserves a closer look, doesn't he?

Joe Mauer

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	608	9	13	49	25	26	.02	.10	73	80	.16	.04	.40	.22	14	1	18	4	38
2007	472	11	13	55	18	28	.01	.07	73	82	.13	.05	.40	.16	9	3	1	-3	10
2008	633	8	13	49	23	28	.04	.05	74	81	.18	.03	.40	.13	16	0	14	-4	26
2009	113	12	17	45	18	38	.00	.37	67	84	.15	.09	.40	.54	4	2	1	13	19
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Wow. Look at the difference in Mauer's flyball rate this year, as well as his home run rate. And he hasn't hit an infield fly yet. The guy is creating a half run every time he hits a fly ball. You or I would be crazy to even suggest that any player would post such a radical difference in his profile, even in 113 plate appearances. But maybe Mauer studied our batted ball figures in the offseason and decided to make himself even more valuable to the Twinkies by concentrating on fly ball hitting. Can't argue with the results.

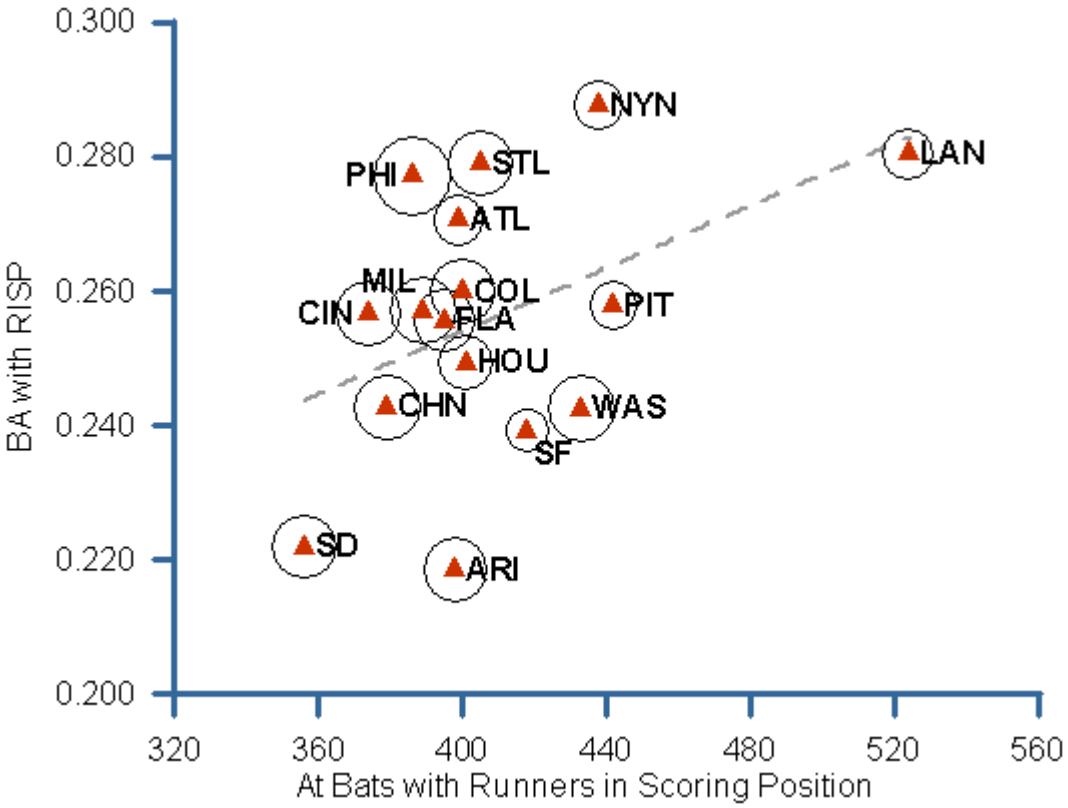
Several teams are doing pretty well without the flyball emphasis. These three teams are all at least 20 runs above average in total, but they have posted negative flyball totals:

Team	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	Out/GB	Out/OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
LAN	17	12	44	22	34	.09	.08	74	77	.08	.05	.39	.19	15	3	20	-2	37
NYN	15	12	46	20	34	.11	.08	73	78	.09	.05	.35	.19	17	10	1	-6	21
TOR	14	10	40	20	40	.11	.09	76	83	.07	.03	.43	.16	4	-9	30	-2	23

The Dodgers and Blue Jays are making it on line drive hitting while the Mets are doing it with plate discipline and groundball hitting. We've already seen that Citi Field has been a groundball hitting park so far this year, but I wouldn't expect that to continue and I wouldn't expect the Mets' offense to continue producing without more fly balls or, at least, line drives.

By the way, the best batted-ball offense has been the Yankees (52 runs above average) even though the Dodgers lead the majors in runs scored. I'm going to move away from batted ball stats to answer your question: how are the Dodgers doing it?

Behold, a terribly messy graph of NL teams:



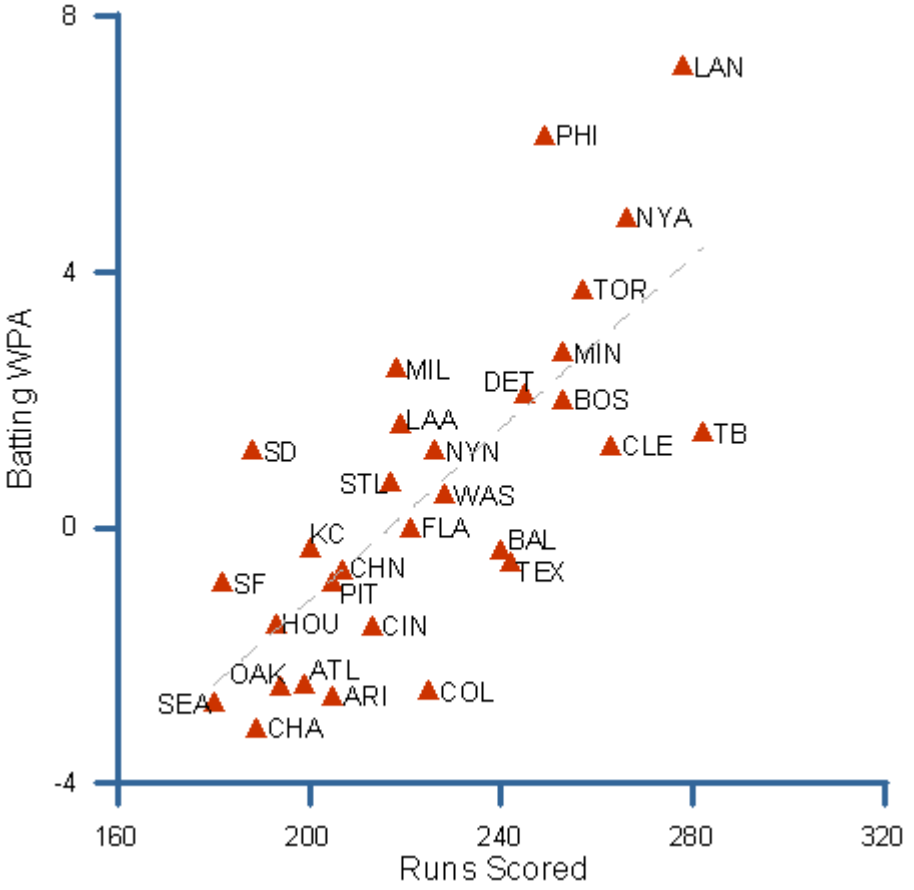
At the bottom of the graph, we have the number of at-bats for each team with runners in scoring position, where the Dodgers blow away the competition. Although they haven't hit for home runs (which is represented by the size of the circle), they have managed to get runners into scoring position over 100 times more than the next-best NL team.

Plus, they are one of the best hitting teams with runners in scoring position, where their .281 batting average has been bested only by the Mets' .288. This sort of information isn't captured by our batted ball stats, but it's vitally important to a team's success.

By the way, is it a complete coincidence that the two best batting teams with runners in scoring position are also the only two National League teams we listed on the previous page? (Total batted ball runs at least 20 runs above average, but fly ball runs below average). Absolutely not. Teams that are getting line drive hits (like the Dodgers) or groundball hits (like the Mets) are more likely to have solid batting averages in general—and also to have more runners in scoring position.

I know I've strayed from my batted ball subject, but I thought that Dodgers figure was pretty interesting. And, as long as we're way off subject and into our graphs, I've got one more question for you: Which team has truly contributed the most offense to its team's wins? I didn't ask which team has scored the most runs, but which offense has contributed the most. There is a difference.

I'm talking, of course, about Batting Win Probability Added.



On the bottom axis, we've got the total number of runs scored (I actually didn't know that the Rays had scored the most runs in the majors as of Friday) and on the left axis we've got the Win Probability Added of each offense.

There can be a substantial difference between the two—just look at the six-game difference between the Dodgers and Tampa Bay. If a team scores a lot of runs in a 15-3 blowout, most of those runs don't add very much to the team's victory total. But if it spreads those 15 runs over three close ballgames, it adds a lot.

The difference may be technical, but it isn't trivial. In fact, you could argue that batting WPA is what it's all about, that we're better off referring to a team's batting WPA than its runs scored if we really want to understand why it's been successful.

On the graph, teams above the line have contributed more wins than their runs scored total would suggest; teams below haven't. The Dodgers, Phillies, Padres, Brewers and Giants are among the teams that have leveraged their offense the most. The Rays, Indians, Rangers, Orioles and Rockies aren't.

Yes, there is a relationship between high-offense settings (the American League, Coors Field) and run-scoring effectiveness. You're more likely to see that 15-3 blowout in the AL than the NL, in Coors instead of PETCO. In that way, WPA is kind of naturally park-adjusted.

Well, I've strayed too far afield and I can't get back. See you next week.

Easy fly outs and preventing runs

By Dave Studenmund

June 5, 2009

The Best Hitter Alive was tired of being kept out of these pages, so he upped his performance last week and led all major league hitters with nine batted ball runs above average. We can't avoid him anymore. Feast your eyes on this batted ball profile:

Albert Pujols

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	634	8	15	37	18	45	.16	.24	71	88	.19	.05	.46	.35	20	2	11	38	71
2007	679	9	16	42	19	39	.07	.17	72	86	.18	.05	.45	.25	22	2	11	21	57
2008	641	8	17	40	22	37	.12	.20	68	88	.19	.09	.45	.29	24	9	20	22	75
2009	232	8	20	38	18	45	.08	.22	63	89	.22	.10	.44	.30	11	4	3	12	30
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Albert Pujols has a strikeout-to-walk ratio that is just plain silly. Only Chase Utley has gotten on base via a walk or HBP at a more frequent rate than Pujols, and that's only because Utley is the 2009 version of Craig Biggio, having been hit by a pitch 11 times already.

Most batters with high NIP figures make it by walking a ton regardless of their strikeout rate, but not the Best Hitter Alive. His 8 percent strikeout rate is phenomenally low for a power hitter. In fact, no batter with at least five flyball runs above average has a strikeout rate under 10 percent. Pujols' numbers are 12 runs above average and 8 percent.

Pujols obviously isn't a groundball hitter, though this year he has only a 63 percent out rate on grounders (essentially a .370 batting average on ground balls). But the most interesting thing about Pujols is his flyball out rate—it's always been above the league average. He's a home run hitter, but when his outfield flies stay in the park, they're caught for outs more often than average.

Over the last four years (2006 through 2009, minimum of 1,000 plate appearances), Pujols has had the 13th-highest out rate on his outfield flies. The top outfield out producers have been:

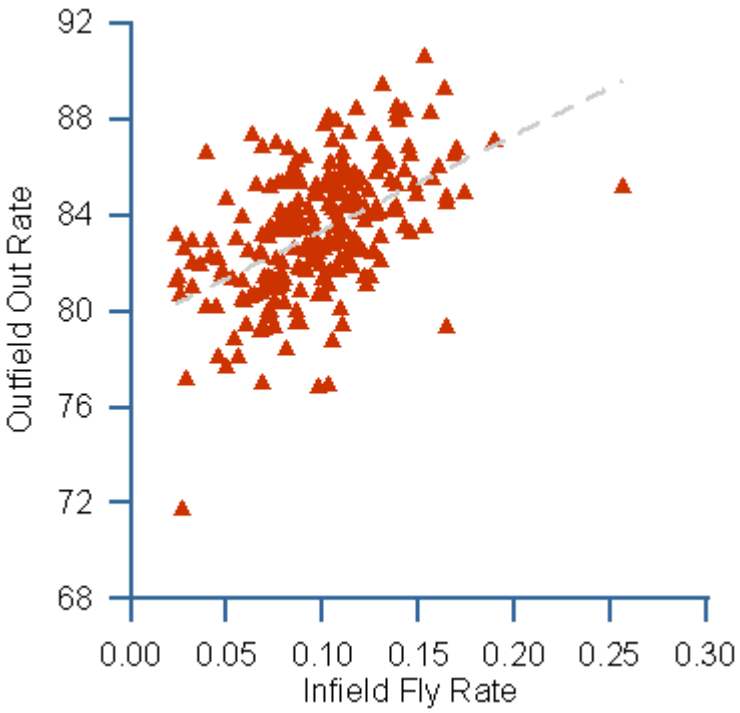
Batter	OF Out Rate
Gary Sheffield	91
James Hardy	89
Shane Victorino	89
Joe Crede	88
Frank Thomas	88
David Eckstein	88
Rickie Weeks	88
Craig Biggio	88
Troy Glaus	88
Marcos Scutaro	88

What a bizarre list, a mix of mashers and speedsters. I have no idea what, exactly, drives a hitter's likely "outfield out rate," but I'm going to propose a theory. I propose that these batters tend to put more loft on their outfield flies than the average batter, giving fielders time to camp under them.

Sometimes you can confirm the veracity of a theory by finding consistencies with other related stats, so let's compare outfield out rates to other batted ball stats. For instance, you'd think that hitters who put more loft on their outfield flies might be home run hitters but, as you can see from the above list, the relationship between home run hitting and fly ball outing is virtually random.

Well, then you might expect batters who avoid lofting fly balls to be line drive hitters. Unfortunately, looking at the 230 batters with at least 1,000 plate appearances the last three years, the relationship between line drive hitting and fly ball outing is also random

How about the relationship between infield fly rate and outfield fly out rate? If these batters do tend to put more loft on the ball, they might be expected to hit more infield flies, which are all loft and no distance. Turns out there is a consistency between the two. Let's graph it.



This is cool. The higher the infield fly rate, the higher the out rate on outfield flies tends to be (an R squared of .25, for the geeks among you). It seems as though we can say something about a batter if he has a high infield fly rate (above the major league average of 10 percent) AND a high outfield fly out rate (above the MLB average of 83 percent). Let's see…

- Sheffield: 15 percent and 91 percent. Yup. Lofty flies.
- Hardy: 13 percent and 89 percent. Yup.
- Victorino: 16 percent and 89 percent. Yah.
- Crede: 14 percent and 88 percent. Uh huh.

And so on.

As for the Best Hitter Alive, Pujols' lifetime infield fly rate is 11 percent, only marginally higher than the major league average. So he doesn't completely fit this new profile we've uncovered, the Easy Fly Out. But he's on the edge.

By the way, that batter far off to the right of our chart, with an infield fly rate of 26 percent, is the Infield Fly King, Eric Byrnes. Byrnes has had an insanely high infield fly rate his entire career:

Eric Byrnes

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	606	15	6	38	18	44	.26	.15	68	86	.03	.09	.40	.22	-5	8	0	3	6
2007	699	14	10	35	19	46	.27	.11	65	83	.07	.10	.41	.19	3	9	5	-1	15
2008	224	16	8	39	19	42	.24	.09	83	86	.04	-.01	.42	.14	-1	-4	0	-4	-9
2009	159	11	6	38	16	46	.22	.09	73	91	.06	.06	.34	.10	-1	0	-2	-4	-7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

To make it worse, Byrnes has consistently had an above-average flyball rate too, ranging from 42 percent to 46 percent. He'd do better by hitting grounders all the time and avoiding fly balls.

The player in the lower left-hand part of our graph, with the very low infield fly and outfield out rates, is the remarkable Joe Mauer. What else is there to say?

Among the brethren of the mound, the best pitcher of the past week was Tampa Bay's Jeff Niemann. Niemann pitched twice and was six batting runs better than average. He had a particularly good game against the Royals on Wednesday, pitching a complete game shutout and giving up only three line drives. His profile is about average so far, with a below-average record on NIP and good results from avoiding line drives.

Jeffrey Niemann

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	76	18	12	43	14	43	.05	.15	67	94	.07	.12	.62	.16	1	1	0	0	3
2009	257	15	11	39	16	45	.14	.11	72	89	.08	.05	.39	.15	2	0	-2	-1	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Niemann has seemingly been a top Rays prospect forever. Last week's results were good, but his batted ball profile, particularly that NIP rate, doesn't yield a lot of hope yet.

On the other hand, Rich Hill's profile might give Orioles fans something to look forward to:

Richard Hill

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	417	22	10	30	18	52	.13	.12	74	90	.03	.05	.41	.16	-2	-2	-3	0	-7
2007	812	23	9	36	21	43	.12	.13	78	86	.02	.03	.35	.19	-6	-7	-7	0	-20
2008	89	17	21	33	17	50	.19	.09	83	95	.14	.00	.39	.08	4	-1	-1	-2	-1
2009	90	24	13	37	17	46	.24	.05	75	78	.05	.00	.55	.14	0	-1	0	-2	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Hill pitched a very fine game Monday against the Mariners, giving up no runs in seven innings and allowing just two line drives. It's far too early to get excited about the big lefty, but he's always had a devastating curveball. If he can harness his control and resemble the fine young pitcher of his Chicago days, the Orioles may have something.

Speaking of comebacks…

Chris Carpenter

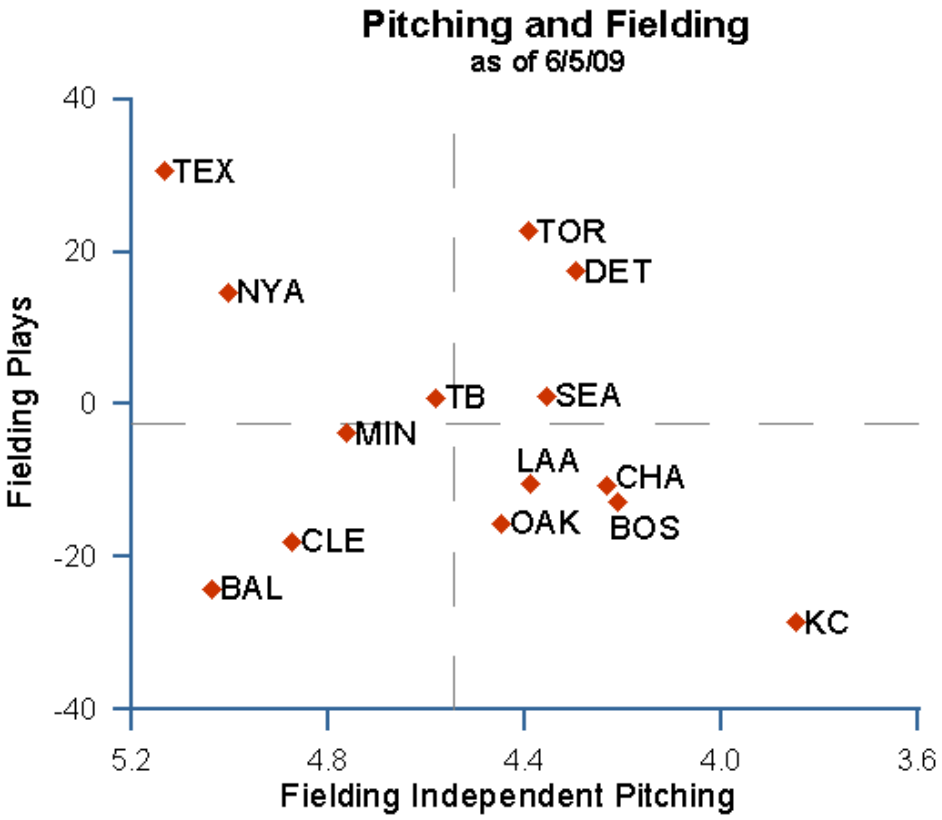
		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	896	21	6	53	18	28	.07	.12	79	83	-.01	.02	.35	.21	-16	-7	-12	-6	-41
2007	29	10	7	65	26	9	.00	.00	67	50	.07	.10	.29	.35	0	1	0	0	1
2008	63	11	6	51	24	24	.08	.00	84	91	.05	-.02	.44	-.05	0	-1	2	-3	-3
2009	136	23	4	57	16	27	.15	.05	89	90	-.04	-.05	.35	.07	-4	-5	-4	-6	-18
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

…Chris Carpenter is apparently healthy and definitely on form. When he's on, Carpenter combines a fantastic strikeout-to-walk ratio with ground balls, the ultimate recipe for major league success. Even though he hasn't pitched enough innings to qualify for the ERA title, he's fifth in the majors in batted ball runs vs. average.

When you combine Carpenter's ground ball prowess with Joel Pineiro's newfound love of the grounder (mentioned in a previous report), you get a staff that's leading the major leagues in ground ball creation. Of the batted balls allowed

by the St. Louis staff, 48 percent have been grounders, a key ingredient to their pitching success this year. Only the Dodgers have allowed fewer runs per game in the National League.

In general, there's not usually a lot you can say about team batted ball lines. The results just aren't interesting because there isn't nearly as much difference between teams as there is between players. But the American League is an exception this year, where two different kinds of extreme pitching and fielding teams make for some interesting reading.



To illustrate one of these exceptions, here is today's version of a graph I update once a week on the Hardball Times site, the one that separates the impact of pitching and fielding. On the left, the American League.

Teams at the top of the graph are good fielding teams; teams on the right are good pitching teams. Teams in the upper right are good fielding/pitching teams and teams in the lower left are bad at both. Teams in the other two quadrants? They're interesting.

The Rangers have been winning this year despite having arguably the worst pitching in the league (as measured by strikeouts, walks and home runs allowed). But their fielders, particularly their keystone combination of Elvis Andrus and Ian Kinsler, have been more than 30 plays better than average.

On the other hand, the Royals have had the best pitching and the worst fielding in the league. Their FIP (an ERA-like measure that includes only the impact of strikeouts, walks and home runs) is the lowest in the league thanks to the likes of Zack Greinke and Gil Meche. But their fielding has been atrocious, the worst in the majors according to our batted ball stats. Only Washington has a worse Revised Zone Rating.

Here's another interesting case: The Seattle Mariners and Toronto Blue Jays are in many ways mirror images of each other. Let me show you what I mean:

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Team	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
TOR	1436	18	9	45	20	35	.08	.13	80	80	.04	.01	.40	.23	-13	-22	9	18	-8
SEA	1392	17	10	43	19	38	.11	.10	70	87	.05	.07	.36	.14	-1	16	-9	-22	-17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

First of all, the Blue Jays are a better walk-and-strikeout staff. But when the ball is put into play, these two teams are polar opposites. The Blue Jays are a ground ball team (-22 runs) and the Mariners are a fly ball team (also -22 runs).

And their "not-so-good other" major type of batted ball—the Blue Jays' flies and the Mariners' grounders—are also ranked just about evenly (+18 for the Jays and +16 for the Mariners).

Part of the difference is due to pitching tendencies. The Blue Jays give up a few more ground balls and the Mariners give up a few more flies. But the real difference is in the fielding.

The Jays' infielders have been excellent once again this year (their 80 percent groundball out rate leads the majors), but not so much in the outfield (only the Braves have a worse outfield fly out rate). On the other hand, the Mariners have the best outfield fly out rate and the worst groundball out rate in the majors. Yes, their fielders occupy two extremes, even more than the Blue Jays.

As I said, the good news is that these teams are built to their strengths. The Jays induce more ground balls than average and their infielders are top notch. The same is true for the Mariners, fly balls and outfielders.

Do opposites attract? I'm not sure about that. But fielding and pitching go together like a horse and carriage, and that's why we capture the impact of both of them in our batted ball stats.

And Win Shares too

By Dave Studenmund

June 13, 2009

David Wright was the majors' hottest Batted Ball batter this past week (Thursday to Thursday), garnering nine runs more than average. Wright has had an interesting career progression:

David Wright

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	661	17	11	36	19	44	.10	.13	74	77	.06	.05	.44	.27	3	-1	7	23	33
2007	711	16	14	39	23	38	.04	.16	71	78	.10	.06	.41	.28	13	2	13	24	53
2008	736	16	13	36	26	38	.08	.14	71	85	.09	.06	.44	.21	11	3	23	9	46
2009	253	22	15	35	26	39	.05	.07	54	69	.08	.17	.40	.25	4	6	5	6	22
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Three years ago, Wright was a flyball hitter, but his line drive production increased the next couple of years so that, by 2008, he was more of a line drive hitter than a flyball one. He's maintaining his line drive rate this year, but his home run power has declined. The good news is that his out percentages, for both outfield flies and ground balls, are way below the major league average. Which is why he's batting .364.

Did you know Wright already has 17 stolen bases, too? Not bad for the one-third point of the year. He's halfway to his major league best of 34.

The key number everyone in New York is talking about is four, the surprisingly low number of home runs Wright has hit. You can see (in the above table) that his home run/outfield fly percentage is half of last year's, but that doesn't tell the entire story.

As Wright grew into more of a line drive hitter, he became a powerful line drive hitter. Unfortunately, some of that power has apparently deserted him this year. The number of line drive home runs he has hit over the last four years is 1, 2, 7, and 0. Admittedly, the difference between line drives and fly balls is a subjective one, particularly for just seven hits. I guess the bigger point is that Wright has been a less powerful hitter this year on both line drives and fly balls.

The Mets, in general, are a different type of batting club this year, and the difference is a tad disturbing for Mets fans:

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	4173	16	10	46	23	31	.11	.11	76	85	.07	.04	.38	.17	27	-9	52	-38	32
2009	1460	14	11	46	21	33	.11	.08	75	79	.10	.04	.35	.17	22	3	6	-12	19

The Mets' power is down and they're hitting fewer line drives than last year's team did. The good news is that their strikeouts are also down and their walks are up. Their plate discipline has improved, but other hitting essentials have gotten worse. Of course, injuries to Delgado, Reyes, Church and others have had a lot to do with this.

One other key facet to Wright's batting game, by the way, has been his home/road split. He's batting .312 at home, .417 on the road. He's hit three of his four home runs, and all three of his triples, at home. He's hit 14 of his 18 doubles on the road. His strikeout/walk ratio is 36/13 at home and 22/26 on the road. These are odd splits in many contradictory ways, but they're really nothing more than a curiosity.

Pablo Sandoval was also one of the week's hot hitters. Sandoval isn't quite a rookie anymore, but there's still not much major league history to judge him by. So I pulled together the batted ball stats from his last two partial years and added a "Total" row before the major league averages below:

Pablo Sandoval

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	154	9	3	45	26	29	.13	.06	59	88	.01	.14	.36	.07	-2	6	5	-4	5
2009	217	14	6	50	17	33	.11	.10	67	78	.03	.09	.51	.22	-1	5	4	2	10
TOT	371	12	5	48	21	31	.12	.08	64	82	.03	.11	.43	.16	-3	11	9	-2	15
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

This is a surprise. In his short career, Sandoval has been a groundball, line drive hitter. A ground ball hitter? Have you seen the guy? In case you haven't, here are the listed weights of the top ten groundball hitters this year:

Player	Tm	GB	Weight
Suzuki Ic	SEA	13	172
Crawford Ca	TB	8	215
Ellsbury Ja	BOS	8	185
Pence Hu	HOU	7	210
Bourn Mi	HOU	7	180
Guzman Cr	WAS	7	213
Wright Da	NYN	7	217
Upton Ju	ARI	7	205
Sandoval Pa	SF	6	246
Tejada Mi	HOU	6	213

The second-heaviest batter on the list, Wright, is 30 pounds lighter than Sandoval.

The top pitchers last week were Carlos Zambrano, Javier Vazquez and Jose Contreras, believe it or not. The fourth-best was young Florida southpaw Sean West. In four starts, West has a 2.22 ERA. He's not a batted ball sensation—it's just that he's managed to keep his runs per line drive and outfield fly low (.15 and .05 runs, respectively). But he does have a live arm and he'll be fun to watch.

Zambrano is getting it done a little differently this year. I used to think of him as a strikeout/ground ball guy. Yes, his K rate is even higher this year, but his groundball rate is down, below the major league average.

Carlos Zambrano

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	917	23	14	47	17	36	.12	.11	76	85	.06	.03	.36	.18	6	-5	-16	-10	-25
2007	925	19	12	47	17	37	.13	.12	79	84	.07	.01	.42	.18	7	-9	-7	-6	-15
2008	796	16	10	47	18	35	.12	.10	77	80	.06	.02	.35	.19	1	-5	-8	-2	-15
2009	267	21	11	41	20	39	.19	.07	82	81	.04	.00	.40	.14	0	-4	-1	-4	-9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Zambrano is also one of those guys who apparently induces more infield flies than most. His 19% infield fly rate this year is particularly strong, the third-best in the majors among qualified pitchers.

But I don't want to write about batted balls anymore. Let's talk about Win Shares.

I'm going to spare you the full-blown Win Shares introduction. If you don't know what they are, I suggest you read this article I wrote some five years ago:

http://www.hardballtimes.com/main/article/2004-win-shares-have-arrived/

I can't believe how long I've had this gig.

This year, I decided to forego the regular publication of Win Shares on the THT site, for a few reasons. One is that I'm just tired of spending several hours every weekend on the task. Like I said, I can't believe how long I've had this gig.

Secondly, there are some very good win stats (WPA and WAR) available at Fangraphs and you can make a good argument that they are both better than Win Shares. Essentially, Win Shares is a bit of a compromise between these two systems.

Finally, Win Shares are available on the Bill James Online site and, after all, Bill did invent the thing. He has also changed the method to incorporate both Win and Loss Shares (though those aren't available on his site yet), which is an important step forward for the system.

Still, I decided to run my Win Shares file a few times during the year, just for the heck of it, and to share the results with you subscribers. I'll also share a downloadable spreadsheet of the Win Shares stats each time I update the stats.

Our key measure is Win Shares Above Bench, which accomplishes the critical task of adjusting Win Shares for playing time. The 2009 WSAB leaders through Thursday's games were:

Player	Team	POS	BatWS	PitchWS	FieldWS	TotalWS	WSAB
Z Greinke	KC	SP	0.0	13.5	0.0	13	11
J Mauer	MIN	C	11.2	0.0	2.2	13	11
R Braun	MIL	OF	13.8	0.0	1.5	15	10
P Fielder	MIL	1B	15.0	0.0	0.4	15	10
J Bay	BOS	OF	12.5	0.0	2.1	14	10
A Pujols	STL	1B	14.4	0.0	0.6	15	10
A Gonzalez	SD	1B	13.8	0.0	1.0	15	10
C Utley	PHI	2B	12.8	0.0	1.7	14	10
J Weaver	LAA	SP	-0.1	11.3	0.0	11	9
R Halladay	TOR	SP	-0.1	11.8	0.0	12	9

I'm guessing that you're not surprised by any of the names on this list, except perhaps Jered Weaver of the Angels. Weaver has been the Angels' MVP, though he's also been helped tremendously by his defense:

Jered Weaver

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	490	21	7	30	18	52	.14	.10	73	88	.00	.06	.30	.13	-7	-2	-11	-4	-24
2007	695	17	7	36	17	47	.11	.07	71	84	.02	.06	.45	.14	-6	1	2	-2	-5
2008	745	20	8	33	22	46	.14	.09	77	82	.02	.03	.40	.17	-7	-5	4	0	-8
2009	325	21	8	33	18	49	.16	.08	82	91	.01	.00	.45	.08	-4	-5	-1	-9	-20
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Both his ground ball and outfield fly out rates have been better than average and the Defense Efficiency Record behind him has been .759. Win Shares are supposed to adjust for the impact of fielding, but they don't do it as well as they should on the individual pitcher level.

I like win stats because they're a lot of fun to play with. You can investigate all sorts of neat things with Win Shares. For instance, what's the difference between this year's Cincinnati Reds (31-29) and last year's (74-88)? Well, we can get into that by comparing the Win Shares Percentage (essentially, the winning percentage) of each position on the team. Like this:

POS	2008	2009	Diff
C	.440	.644	.205
1B	.521	1.098	.577
2B	.513	.644	.131
3B	.367	.138	-.229
SS	.474	.238	-.236
OF	.435	.409	-.026
SP	.398	.643	.245
RP	.603	.735	.132

Pitching has been key to the Reds' success, particularly the increased strength of their starting pitching. Johnny Cueto is off to a tremendous start (seven WSAB) and Aaron Harang has four WSAB. In the bullpen, Nick Masset (four WSAB) has been a revelation, at least in the short term. Of course, first baseman Joey Votto's year (.357 with 8 home runs) has been outstanding, and second baseman Brandon Phillips has upped his game.

But I didn't know that the Reds' catching platoon of Ramon Hernandez and Ryan Hanigan was doing so well. Hanigan is batting .310 and Hernandez is batting .300 with runners in scoring position. Plus, they've caught 43% of attempted base stealers, second to only Yadier Molina in St. Louis. So give a bit of credit to the backstops, too.

Let's try one other. Sticking with the National League Central, what's wrong with the Cubs this year?

POS	2008	2009	Diff
C	0.660	0.296	-.364
1B	0.461	0.399	-.062
2B	0.638	0.167	-.472
3B	0.681	0.491	-.189
SS	0.417	0.519	.102
OF	0.565	0.530	-.035
SP	0.785	0.793	.008
RP	0.516	0.490	-.026

Cubs' fans are disappointed in the start of their heroes, and they have two people to blame: catcher Geovany Soto and Jim Hendry (for trading second baseman Mark DeRosa). Soto simply hasn't found that 2008 stroke this year and Mark DeRosa is having a pretty good year … in Cleveland. Aaron Miles and friends just haven't been up to the challenge. Also, Aramis Ramirez's injury hasn't helped.

And that's a cut of Win Shares. If there are other teams you'd like me to examine in this way, drop me a line. In fact, let me know if you have any feedback for the Batted Ball Reports—you can use the feedback form on the downloads page.

Till next week…

"Historical" context

By Dave Studenmund

June 19, 2009

Welcome back to the Land of Batted Balls, where real stories lurk and truth is uncovered. Milwaukee's Corey Hart is our batted ball hitter of the week, popping from four runs below average last Friday to three runs above. He made good contact this past week, hit three flyball home runs and threw in a few line drives for that little something extra.

A couple of years ago, Hart looked like a high average hitter with power, reaching a .295 average with 24 home runs in 2007. That batting average was a bit of an illusion, however, propped up by a low 63 percent out rate on ground balls (remember, that's the equivalent of a .370 batting average). He does appear to be a good ground ball hitter, just not that good. Here is his four-year profile:

Corey Hart

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	256	23	7	42	17	41	.09	.13	67	91	-.01	.10	.56	.16	-4	4	3	0	2
2007	566	17	9	37	17	46	.07	.14	63	89	.04	.13	.50	.19	-2	12	5	9	25
2008	657	17	5	40	19	40	.05	.09	74	84	-.01	.05	.44	.16	-10	0	6	2	-3
2009	266	22	9	38	19	43	.09	.13	67	84	.02	.09	.38	.22	-2	3	-2	4	2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

This is what you can expect from Corey Hart: below-average plate discipline but good ground ball hitting with flyball power. There are worse things.

I'm going to try to add some more context to these batted ball musings, and here's one: How uncommon a hitter is Corey Hart? To answer the muse, I looked up the 2006-2009 career totals for major league hitters with…

- a minimum of 1,000 plate appearances,
- a higher-than-average strikeout rate,
- lower-than-average walk rate,
- lower-than-average outs per ground ball and
- positive fly ball runs in total.

There have been six batters who match the Hart Profile in this way. They are listed below, with their total runs above/below average during the three-plus years in question:

Hunter Pence	47
Matthew Kemp	34
Corey Hart	26
Ty Wigginton	25
Jose Guillen	0
Jorge Cantu	-1

These are the "Coreys," although there is no Haim or Feldman on the list. Hunter Pence is the best Corey of all, but he may not qualify for this list much longer. He's batting .321 this year with a .399 OBP and ten home runs. Most importantly, his plate discipline has improved mightily, as his profile shows:

Hunter Pence

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	484	20	6	49	19	32	.10	.17	66	77	-.01	.10	.43	.34	-8	11	5	14	23
2008	642	19	7	52	14	34	.13	.17	67	85	.01	.09	.43	.27	-8	12	-7	9	6
2009	269	14	12	51	15	34	.12	.17	63	79	.10	.10	.41	.32	4	7	-1	8	18
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Pence has always been a top prospect and fine-looking young player. If he continues to post this level of plate discipline, ground ball hitting and flyball power, he'll be a star.

Anyway, it was a good week for lackluster hitters. After Hart, the next three best totals were posted by Gabe Kapler, Robinson Cano and Arizona's Chris Young. Young was the fourth-worst batter in the majors a week ago, at 15 runs below average, but he's now "only" nine runs below average. The guy is a case study in something:

Christopher Young

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	78	15	9	42	20	37	.14	.11	80	94	.06	.02	.42	.11	0	-1	1	-2	-2
2007	624	23	8	37	15	48	.13	.17	73	85	.01	.06	.39	.26	-8	0	-11	17	-2
2008	699	24	9	38	19	43	.17	.13	74	80	.01	.05	.42	.24	-7	-2	-3	7	-5
2009	245	24	9	27	19	54	.26	.09	74	86	.01	.05	.41	.16	-3	-2	-2	-3	-10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

He's renowned for his lack of plate discipline, but the other disturbing trend is that his fly ball rate has trended up but, this year at least, he doesn't have a lot to show for it. His infield fly rate has shot up to 26 percent, his outfield fly out rate is 86 percent and his home run rate is a bit down. You get the sense that flyball production is the only thing that can save Young's career, and it's not working for him. In fact, Young looks like one of those "flyball out" guys we discovered last week, with high career figures in both infield fly and outfield out rates.

Quick comment about the values in these tables. The four-year profiles differ somewhat from the 2009 figures, because the distribution of outs has been slightly different this year. The 2009 figures I quote, such as Young's nine runs below average, are based on the 2009 distribution of outs. The figures in the four-year profiles (10 below average for Young in 2009) are based on the four-year distribution of outs.

And what of Robinson Cano? The guy who panicked the entire Bronx last year with his .271 batting average and .305 OBP? And batted just .246 and .285 in the first half? What's his batted ball profile look like?

Robinson Cano

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	508	11	4	52	20	28	.13	.14	69	78	.01	.07	.43	.26	-6	9	10	6	20
2007	669	13	7	52	17	31	.05	.11	72	81	.05	.06	.45	.22	-2	6	5	7	17
2008	634	10	5	47	19	33	.08	.08	74	85	.04	.04	.34	.13	-6	2	-1	-7	-12
2009	285	7	5	48	21	31	.10	.15	73	87	.07	.05	.39	.23	-2	2	5	4	9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

So far, Cano has really cut down on his strikeouts, upped his line drive rate and smacked home runs at a very good rate. And this isn't a Yankee Stadium illusion. He's batting .304 at home and .318 on the road, with six home runs in both venues. I don't know if he can keep up this pace, but his numbers aren't wildly out of line with his past performance. Cano is most definitely back from that first-half slump of 2008.

On the other hand, it's hard to know exactly what type of hitter Cano is. Obviously, he puts the ball in play and he hits more than a fair share of ground balls. His outfield fly power and his line drive prowess are a bit better than average.

So I tried to find batters similar to Cano, using the same approach I used when I uncovered the Coreys. Specifically, I looked for hitters who put the ball in play—strikeout rates equal to 14 percent or lower and walk rates equal to seven percent or lower. This is a list that Cano, at 11 percent and 6 percent, easily qualifies for.

There were only 11 batters on the list, and none of them are really like Cano. There are…

- Line drive hitters, like Mark Grudzielanek and Freddy Sanchez and, to some extent, A.J. Pierzynski and Kenji Johjima.
- Ground ball/line drive hitters with no fly ball power, such as Juan Pierre, Placido Polanco, Ichiro and Jose Lopez, sort of.
- A fly ball hitter who can't run (Bengie Molina)

But when Cano is hitting well, he's hitting ground balls, line drives and fly balls for power. He's more rounded than any of the other players on the list.

Looking at it another way, I found 45 players who were average or above in ground balls, line drives and fly balls. None of them put the ball in play more often than Robinson Cano's 83 percent rate. The next highest rate was 80 percent (Jimmy Rollins and Carlos Lee, who are very different types of hitters).

So here's how I'd describe Cano: He puts the ball in play more often than most players and, when he does, he's a well-rounded hitter with groundball tendencies.

Among pitchers, Postseason Poster Boy Dan Haren had the best week, with two excellent starts against Houston and Kansas City. We've discussed Haren enough here, so I'm not going to delve any deeper into his profile, except to point out again that, unlike previous years, Haren is getting a big boost from his defense. His outfield fly out rate is 89 percent and his ground ball out rate is a whopping 84 percent. These are both amazing figures that almost certainly won't last. For perspective…

- The highest ground ball out rate among qualified pitchers the last three years was Brian Bannister's 82 percent in 2007.
- There have been only seven pitcher seasons in which a qualified pitcher had an outfield out rate over 89 percent, led by Johan Santana's amazing 94 percent last year. The next highest figure in that time was Gil Meche's 91 percent in 2006.

Bannister was also one of the best pitchers of the week, and his profile is worth a look:

Brian Bannister

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	171	11	14	40	15	45	.18	.09	68	95	.14	.10	.38	.08	4	2	-2	-4	0
2007	683	11	7	41	19	40	.13	.08	82	85	.07	.00	.42	.14	-1	-10	6	-6	-11
2008	811	14	8	37	22	41	.11	.13	76	81	.05	.03	.37	.23	-1	-3	7	17	20
2009	279	14	9	49	18	33	.10	.06	72	83	.07	.06	.33	.12	1	2	-3	-4	-5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

If something looks different in Bannister's profile this year, it's his groundball rate, which has increased to 49 percent. I don't know if this is a fluke or a fundamental change in his pitching approach, but it sure is helping. Combined with a low home run rate of 6 percent, it's making Bannister an effective pitcher this year.

Let's finish this week's report with someone who is quietly have a sensational year in Atlanta:

Javier Vazquez

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	872	21	8	40	20	41	.13	.11	72	82	.02	.05	.40	.19	-8	0	0	2	-6
2007	882	24	6	40	17	43	.09	.12	74	82	-.02	.05	.37	.21	-17	-2	-13	8	-24
2008	890	22	8	38	20	42	.13	.10	76	83	.00	.04	.48	.18	-12	-4	9	0	-7
2009	367	31	5	43	23	34	.10	.14	80	82	-.05	.01	.37	.24	-12	-5	-3	0	-20
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Javier Vazquez has been an excellent, yet somehow frustrating pitcher to watch. His ERA and won-loss records have never matched the promise of his stuff or his batted ball stats. But he's stepped it up in 2009, raising his strikeout rate to 31 percent and lowering his walk rate to 5 percent. His -12 NIP is in the same league with major league leaders Haren, Greinke and Halladay.

And yet…

Greinke's ERA is 1.96. Haren's is 2.23. Halladay's is 2.53. And Vazquez's is 3.41.

What gives? Let's compare them:

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Player	Tm	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Haren Da	ARI	25	4	42	20	38	.07	.12	84	89	-.05	-.02	.33	.15	-13	-7	-6	-5	-31
Greinke Za	KC	27	5	42	18	40	.10	.03	74	77	-.04	.04	.39	.13	-12	-2	-4	-7	-25
Halladay Ro	TOR	22	3	56	20	24	.11	.10	80	74	-.05	.00	.38	.23	-12	-5	0	-5	-22
Vazquez Ja	ATL	31	5	43	23	34	.10	.14	80	82	-.05	.01	.37	.24	-12	-5	-2	-1	-20

You can see part of the problem here. Vazquez isn't a groundball pitcher like Halladay, and his flyball home run rate hurts him. Also, his line drive rate is higher than the others—he has typically had a line drive rate on the high side.

But to really understand what's up with Vazquez, check out his batting average allowed with no one on base compared to having runners on:

	No one On	Men On	Diff
Greinke	.267	.173	-.094
Haren	.201	.175	-.026
Halladay	.241	.255	.014
Vazquez	.197	.263	.066

Maybe you see the issue. Vazquez' overall performance is undermined by the fact that hitters have hit him for a much higher average with runners on base. This has been a chronic problem for Vazquez. In his career, his batting average allowed has been 32 points higher with men on base than with no one on. I wouldn't expect it to change anytime soon.

I hate to admit it, but sometimes you've got to look beyond the batted balls.

Pitching, batting and drama

By Dave Studenmund

June 27, 2009

We're going to get dramatic in this report, but let's first make our usual awards to the top hitters and pitchers of the week. On the pitching front, a couple of Cardinals head the list, two pitchers we've discussed before. Chris Carpenter and Joel Pineiro were both six runs better than average this past week. We've talked about both of these gents before, so I'm not going to say anything more other than to point to Craig Brown's nice piece on Pineiro's Tuesday night gem against the Mets. You can find it at http://www.hardballtimes.com/main/article/joel-pineiros-scorched-earth-policy/.

The next-best pitcher in the majors last week, five runs better than average, was former Astros pitcher and newfound Mets ace Fernando Nieve. Nieve hasn't actually pitched a lot for the Mets, but he's been a lifesaver for their decimated rotation in the few games he has pitched.

Fernando Nieve

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	411	17	10	41	15	44	.13	.16	82	87	.06	-.01	.44	.24	1	-7	-4	8	-2
2008	49	24	4	31	31	37	.15	.09	45	90	-.05	.23	.49	.12	-1	2	3	-1	3
2009	82	16	12	39	14	47	.07	.04	78	100	.09	.02	.27	-.04	1	-1	-3	-5	-8
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

You probably noticed that there are no 2007 data in the table; Nieve was busy with Tommy John surgery at the time. His arm apparently has recovered and he's now averaging more than 92 miles an hour on his fastball. He's also ditched a slider and is using his change-up more often and to good effect.

But the bottom line is that his strikeout/walk ratio hasn't been extraordinary—it's pretty much in line with his 2006 season. He's been getting the job done by holding line drives down and keeping outfield flies in the park and in the gloves of his fielders. In fact, 100 percent of his non-homer flies have been caught for outs.

Nieve hopes he's back in the majors to stay, but he won't continue to display this kind of magic.

Another pitcher who was five runs better than average last week was Hiroki Kuroda, who has returned to the Dodgers rotation with a vengeance.

Hiroki Kuroda

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	776	15	6	51	20	29	.08	.08	79	84	.02	.02	.36	.14	-7	-5	-1	-13	-26
2009	142	21	5	53	14	33	.12	.14	81	84	-.03	.00	.41	.23	-3	-2	-3	0	-9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Kuroda has pitched only six games—five since returning from injury—but he's been a force. Terrific strikeout/walk rate, high GB rate and low LD rate, pretty much everything you would look for in a pitcher. Just like last year, he's average or better in all four batted ball categories.

The best batter of the week was the Marlins' Hanley Ramirez. Have we talked about Ramirez yet? I'm starting to lose track. If we haven't, let's make up for it now: Hanley Ramirez is one of the best all-around hitters in the game today.

Hanley Ramirez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	700	18	9	44	21	35	.13	.10	67	86	.03	.11	.47	.16	-3	14	12	-5	19
2007	706	13	8	40	18	42	.11	.13	67	76	.06	.09	.46	.26	1	10	10	24	45
2008	693	18	14	46	17	37	.10	.19	68	85	.09	.09	.52	.28	12	10	9	17	49
2009	303	15	11	38	22	41	.07	.12	63	80	.08	.12	.44	.22	3	6	7	7	23
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

A few things stand out in Ramirez's profile. For one thing, his runs per line drive have been consistently above the league average. In fact, Ramirez has been the second-most productive line drive hitter in the majors. The most productive line drive hitters of the past four years (minimum of 1,000 plate appearances) in terms of runs per line drive have been:

Luke Scott	.51
Hanley Ramirez	.48
Ryan Braun	.47
Corey Hart	.46
Matthew Holliday	.46
Eric Hinske	.46
Albert Pujols	.45
Ryan Church	.45
Miguel Cabrera	.45
Carlos Delgado	.45

It hardly ever gets noticed, but look also at Ramirez' groundball out rates. They've been at least six points below the major league average every year, and he's at 63 percent this year (the equivalent of a .370 batting average). Let's contrast that with the 10 best batting averages on ground balls over the last four years (minimum of 1,000 plate appearances):

Rickie Weeks	63.5%
Matthew Kemp	63.8%
Ryan Braun	65.2%
Ichiro Suzuki	65.5%
Akinori Iwamura	66.2%
Hunter Pence	66.3%
Cristian Guzman	66.4%
Mark Reynolds	67.0%
Hanley Ramirez	67.1%
Matthew Holliday	67.8%

You can see that Ramirez, Holliday and Braun are three terrific, well-rounded batters. But, wait a second. Mark Reynolds is a groundball hitter? Really? **The** Mark Reynolds? Mr. Strikeout Guy?

Yes, indeed. Mark Reynolds has been a high-average groundball hitter in each of his major league seasons.

Mark Reynolds

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	414	31	10	36	20	44	.14	.18	67	72	.00	.09	.40	.38	-6	2	-3	16	10
2008	613	33	11	36	19	45	.11	.20	68	85	.00	.07	.49	.29	-8	0	-2	13	2
2009	303	33	12	43	14	43	.06	.31	66	77	.01	.09	.41	.51	-3	2	-6	22	15
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

I looked up the most prodigious whiffers of the past four years and found a lot of flyball hitters, but few groundball hitters on a par with Reynolds.

- Jack Cust has struck out 31 percent of the time but his groundball out rate has been 83 percent.
- Ryan Howard, 28 percent and 78 percent.
- Jonny Gomes, 28 percent and 74 percent (more about him in a second)
- Brad Wilkerson, 27 percent and 76 percent
- Adam Dunn, 26 percent and 80 percent

You get the picture. On the other hand, Reynolds is just a variation of the Corey Hart "type" we drew last week. The only difference between Hart and Reynolds is that Reynolds actually walks a little bit. Oh, and Reynolds also strikes out a ton.

Coming back to our top hitters of the week, Gomes was just a run behind Hanley Ramirez, as were Ichiro, Miguel Cabrera and Troy Tulowitzki. Gomes hasn't played much for the Reds (61 plate appearances) but he managed to turn in some designated hitter duty during the interleague period and hit he did. His average is now up to .351 and his batted ball profile shows why.

Jonny Gomes

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	461	25	15	29	17	54	.11	.13	77	84	.05	.03	.43	.20	4	-5	-5	6	0
2007	394	32	11	26	21	53	.09	.16	71	84	.00	.08	.43	.26	-5	-1	-1	10	3
2008	177	26	12	34	10	56	.13	.15	81	87	.04	.01	.44	.23	0	-2	-6	3	-5
2009	69	22	16	37	21	42	.17	.13	50	77	.08	.22	.59	.26	1	3	2	1	8
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Gomes has been Reynolds Extreme this year, posting a 50 percent groundball out rate! Given their poor-hitting outfield, the Reds may give him more playing time, but they should expect a return to his old flyball ways, not this sudden imitation of Ichiro.

One of the better stories of the past month has been Tulowitzki's return to hitting mastery.

Troy Tulowitzki

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	108	23	10	49	21	30	.10	.05	69	89	.03	.08	.39	.06	0	1	0	-3	-3
2007	682	19	10	42	20	38	.12	.14	72	80	.04	.05	.43	.26	-1	0	5	13	18
2008	421	13	10	42	20	37	.13	.08	79	79	.08	.00	.38	.16	2	-6	2	-2	-4
2009	264	19	14	39	16	46	.13	.17	75	88	.08	.02	.48	.24	3	-2	0	6	7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

So far this year, Tulo is exhibiting a couple of new batted ball strengths. He's walking more often, which would indicate more selectivity at the plate (or, more pitchers respecting him). According to Fangraphs, he's swinging at 22 percent of pitches outside the strike zone, compared to a career average of 24 percent.

And Tulo has become a more-pronounced flyball hitter this year. Of his batted balls, 46 percent have been flies, vs. 37 percent and 38 percent the last two years. If this is a permanent thing, it definitely indicates a different approach by Tulo at the plate, putting more loft on the ball. Let's see if it sticks.

And now for something completely unrelated. At the end of last year, I created a measure called the Drama Index (you can read about it here: http://www.hardballtimes.com/main/article/the-drama-index/). The Drama Index was created to measure the importance of a game to a team's season, in the same way that Leverage Index measures the criticality of a plate appearance to a game's outcome.

As a season progresses, games naturally become more critical—we don't expect to find many critical games early in the season. Yet some teams already have played their most critical games. The Nationals' most critical game was May 15 against the Phillies. They were 11-21 and there was an outside chance that they might be able to scratch back into contention. They lost to the Phils, however, and lost the following six games too. The Nats now have virtually no chance to make the postseason and they will not play a critical game the rest of the year.

The Nats' Drama Index on May 15 was 0.89, by the way. A Drama Index of 1.00 is what an average .500 team might expect during the season. In other words, we're not talking about a real cliffhanger here.

The Dodgers, on the other hand, haven't played a critical game all year. Their most critical game came on April 12, when they were 3-3 and one game behind the Padres. They beat the Diamondbacks 3-1, won the next six games, took over first place and never looked back.

The Drama Index of that game was 0.45. Overall, the Dodgers have had the least dramatic season of any team in the majors (an average Drama Index of 0.13), because they are so far ahead in the NL West. Obviously, fans are a lot more interested in their teams' won-lost record than their Drama Index. A lack of drama can be a good thing.

At the end of a season, the highest Drama Indices will go to the teams that competed in the tightest pennant races. At this stage of the season, however, the highest indices go to the teams that are "contending to contend," if you know what I mean.

So let's review the average Drama Index of each major league team as a way of ascertaining how each team's season is unfolding. (By the way, in this article I kind of use the terms "drama" and "criticality" interchangeably, even though I know there's a difference.)

Team	Total	Comments
HOU	0.791	The Astros are in the midst of some very critical games right now. They're six games back in the competitive NL Central and in danger of falling out of the race.
CLE	0.789	A little over a week ago, the Indians were in the same place as the Astros. Unfortunately, they lost eight of nine and their Index has plunged from 1.04 on June 18 to 0.6 on Thursday.
TB	0.781	The Rays have been playing consistently dramatic games, between 0.8 and 1.0, nearly the entire season. That probably won't stop anytime soon.
ARI	0.772	On June 19, their Drama Index was 0.9, but they've since lost six of seven. There's not much drama left in the Diamondbacks' season.
OAK	0.760	Things have been critical for a while for the A's. Two of their last three games have had an index over 1.0. The next couple of weeks may be most critical.
BAL	0.740	The Orioles are in the same place as the A's, playing very critical games right now. Of course, their outlook isn't as hopeful because the AL East is so extremely competitive.
PIT	0.734	The NL Central is a jumble, which makes games most critical for those teams trying to hang in there. That describes the Pirates exactly. Their index has been over 0.9 the entire month.
COL	0.714	The Rockies dramatically fired Clint Hurdle when their Drama Index was over 0.9. Their run under Jim Tracy has relieved the criticality of their games somewhat.
SD	0.710	The Padres are on a critical run right now; they've already had six games with an Index over 1.0.
CHA	0.695	The Sox have had eight games over 1.0 and are in the midst of an even more intensely critical period right now.
MIN	0.682	Ditto the Twins. Their game last Thursday against the Brewers had the highest index of any game in the majors, 1.05.
ATL	0.669	The Braves are back in contention in the NL East and seven of their last eight games have had an index over 1.0.
LAA	0.659	The Angels' index was highest (0.95) on June 12, when they began the seven-game winning streak that essentially put them in a tie for first. Right now, their games are a little less crucial.
SEA	0.633	Like the Pirates, the Mariners' index has been over 0.9 every game in June. A week ago, they had a stretch of eight straight over 1.0. Their overall index is lower because they had a nice run in first place earlier in the year. Now, they're just trying to stay in contention.
SF	0.625	Why is the Giants' index lower than the Padres, Rockies or Diamondbacks? Because they have been the wild card leader, or close to it, for most of June.
FLA	0.617	The Marlins have followed a pattern similar to the Mariners. Not as much drama when they had the division lead early, lots of drama now. Their situation is not as desperate as the Mariners', so there is a little less criticality right now.
KC	0.613	Things are pretty critical for the Royals right now—they recently had five games over 1.0.
CHN	0.584	Most of the teams on the bottom of this list are still in contention for the postseason. Their drama will come later in the season.
CIN	0.582	The Reds are just now entering an extremely critical phase. Their drama index zoomed over the last five games, and was 1.05 Thursday.
WAS	0.535	Oof.
NYN	0.535	Lots of drama to their season, but they've remained in contention.
NYA	0.479	Same here.
MIL	0.425	Yada Yada.

Team	Total	Comments
TOR	0.412	Toronto's games became somewhat critical on June 14, 15 and 16, when they were in danger of really falling behind. However, they're hanging in there. Big-time drama on its way.
PHI	0.393	No critical games yet.
TEX	0.354	When they had a solid lead in the AL West, the Rangers' index was typically around 0.2. Now that the Angels have caught them, they're around 0.6. Will get higher still.
STL	0.354	No critical games yet.
DET	0.326	And..
BOS	0.303	that's..
LAN	0.130	all.

I won't have a Report on the July 4 weekend, but I will post a spreadsheet. Talk to you in two weeks.

Francoeur and Church and everything else

By Dave Studenmund

July 11, 2009

It's not often we get a chance to assess a competitive challenge trade, but the Mets and Braves have handed us one such opportunity on a golden platter. In case you missed the online outrage from Mets fans, they just traded Ryan Church to Atlanta for Jeff Francoeur.

Ryan Church is a 30-year-old left-handed hitting outfielder. He has a severe platoon differential, which means he really should only play against righties. He's an average fielder, perhaps a bit above average, with a solid right field arm. He's arbitration-eligible and won't be a free agent until 2012. Here's his batted ball profile.

Ryan Church

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	230	26	13	39	18	43	.07	.16	77	76	.04	.02	.56	.32	0	-2	2	8	8
2007	530	20	11	43	22	35	.09	.12	79	77	.05	.01	.47	.24	1	-6	11	6	11
2008	359	23	10	45	24	31	.11	.18	79	81	.03	.02	.40	.29	-2	-3	3	3	2
2009	255	14	7	48	22	31	.00	.03	82	76	.05	-.01	.40	.14	-1	-4	3	-2	-5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--
TOT	1374	21	10	44	22	34	.07	.12	79	78	.04	.01	.45	.25	-2	-15	19	15	17

Church has been afflicted by the same drop in power that virtually all Mets hitters have experienced (his runs per outfield fly are half of last year's). At the same time, his contact rate has gone up tremendously and his strikeouts and walks are way down from past years. I wonder if he's been swinging for contact this year and giving up some power. One other note: He's a bad groundball hitter, with a 79 percent out rate. Unless he regains some flyball power, he'll only be as good as his line drive rate.

Jeff Francoeur, on the other hand, is a 25-year-old right-handed hitting outfielder whose platoon differential is about normal. In the outfield, his range is below average but he has a plus arm, which makes him average overall. He's on the same arbitration/free agency schedule as Church. The last two years, he's been a terrible hitter.

Jeff Francoeur

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	686	19	5	45	18	37	.21	.17	73	83	-.02	.05	.39	.27	-14	2	-2	8	-6
2007	696	19	7	43	19	37	.15	.11	69	85	.01	.07	.46	.17	-8	6	9	-3	4
2008	653	17	8	45	21	34	.12	.07	78	86	.03	.02	.40	.09	-5	-6	4	-17	-24
2009	324	14	5	41	18	41	.08	.04	75	87	.00	.03	.37	.06	-5	-2	-1	-9	-17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--
TOT	2359	18	6	44	19	37	.15	.10	74	85	.00	.04	.41	.16	-31	1	9	-21	-42

Francoeur is known for his awful plate discipline, but the thing that jumps out at me is his woeful outfield fly production. He's generated less than one-tenth of a run per outfield fly the last two years. His home run rate has been low and his out rate has been high. In fact, these kinds of data make me wonder if he has some sort of physical impairment.

This really was a fascinating trade. Two teams in the same division traded right fielders in similar contract/free agent situations. The Mets got the worse player, but they gave up only a good role player in return. This move smacks of

desperation—I don't know of any reason to believe Francoeur can get better, except that perhaps he just can't get worse—but I guess I can't blame Omar Minaya too much for that. The Mets are in a desperate situation.

Also, the Mariners traded shortstop Yuniesky Betancourt to the Royals for a couple of pitching prospects. Betancourt used to have one useful batting trait: He was a productive groundball hitter. No more.

Yuniesky Betancourt

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	584	9	3	46	18	36	.17	.05	68	88	.00	.09	.42	.06	-8	13	5	-19	-9
2007	559	9	3	43	19	38	.17	.06	69	83	.00	.08	.36	.11	-8	9	3	-10	-6
2008	590	7	3	40	20	40	.12	.04	72	84	.03	.04	.33	.09	-7	0	1	-13	-18
2009	245	7	4	41	18	41	.21	.03	77	83	.05	.01	.33	.08	-2	-3	-2	-7	-14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--
TOT	1978	8	3	43	19	38	.16	.05	70	85	.02	.07	.36	.08	-25	20	6	-49	-48

That's all I have to say about Yuniesky.

It's been two weeks since I last covered the weekly leaders, so I'm going to review this week's two-week leaders instead (also because I evidently made some mistakes in last week's spreadsheet. That's what I get for doing things in a hurry. If you downloaded it, please ignore it.). In case you have a smidgen of a doubt, Albert Pujols is the major league batted ball leader by a wide margin, 49 runs above average. Prince Fielder is a distant second at 37 runs above average.

Pujols tied for the major league lead with 11 runs above average the past two weeks, along with Philadelphia's Jayson Werth, who is also one heck of a good hitter.

Jayson Werth

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	304	24	15	40	27	33	.10	.15	66	78	.06	.11	.39	.26	4	4	5	3	16
2008	482	25	13	39	23	38	.10	.21	73	81	.04	.06	.39	.35	1	1	2	16	20
2009	357	21	15	38	17	44	.09	.22	70	82	.08	.06	.34	.33	5	1	-5	16	18
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--
TOT	1143	23	14	39	22	39	.09	.20	70	81	.06	.07	.38	.32	11	6	3	34	53

Werth went on a flyball rampage in late June and early July, popping seven home runs and a .947 slugging percentage. The interesting thing about Werth is that his line drive rate has plummeted the last three years but he's become a better hitter by adding more flyball emphasis and power. Plus, he's a better-than-average groundball hitter and he has good plate discipline. Add in better-than-average range in right, and you've got the player the Braves and Mets wish they could have traded for.

Put away the concern that Werth is a product of his environment. This year, he's batting .235 at home and .302 on the road.

One other batter worth noting had a strong couple of weeks, posting nine runs above average. He's worth noting because a pattern may be emerging. I'm talking about the Mariners' Franklin Gutierrez, who is showing signs of fulfilling the Corey Hart profile: below-average plate discipline, high-average groundball hitter with outfield power.

Franklin Gutierrez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	141	20	2	43	23	34	.17	.03	67	79	-.07	.09	.29	.11	-4	2	-1	-3	-7
2007	301	26	7	43	15	42	.07	.17	70	79	-.01	.07	.43	.30	-5	2	-4	9	1
2008	440	20	8	42	17	41	.12	.07	67	84	.02	.09	.38	.14	-4	5	-5	-5	-9
2009	305	20	9	45	21	34	.10	.16	71	78	.03	.06	.39	.28	-1	1	1	5	6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--
TOT	1187	21	7	43	18	39	.11	.11	69	81	.00	.08	.37	.21	-15	10	-10	5	-9

Gutierrez is also a superb right fielder and/or center fielder. If his recent power surge is indicative of what he can produce consistently, he'll be a heck of a good player for the Mariners.

The best pitcher of the past two weeks has been Tim Lincecum. I can't believe I haven't talked about Lincecum yet, but I just went through my notes and it's true. Please allow me to make it up to you.

Timothy Lincecum

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	618	24	11	47	15	38	.08	.09	74	83	.03	.05	.37	.17	-3	0	-13	-4	-20
2008	928	29	10	44	21	35	.08	.06	74	85	.00	.04	.40	.10	-12	-3	-7	-25	-47
2009	513	29	7	47	21	33	.08	.04	73	83	-.02	.06	.33	.09	-12	1	-9	-16	-36
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Stare at this one for a while. These are amazingly consistent numbers. Lincecum has a strikeout-to-walk ratio that would make Dan Haren proud. In fact, it's gotten better each of his three years. His infield fly rate has been 8 percent and his home run rate has been below average each year; this year it's far below average. His out rates are normal.

This is what Super Pitcher looks like.

Second to Lincecum in batted ball runs below average was one of the surprises of the year, the Rockies' Jason Marquis. Marquis has posted an ERA of 3.61 despite never being below 4.00 before in his career. If you glance at his profile, you can see what's going on:

Jason Marquis

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	870	11	10	43	17	40	.09	.14	74	84	.11	.05	.43	.22	9	2	4	18	32
2007	846	13	11	50	17	33	.08	.10	77	84	.09	.03	.43	.18	7	-4	2	-1	4
2008	738	12	11	48	20	33	.09	.09	74	89	.10	.04	.38	.13	7	0	2	-11	-2
2009	494	11	8	58	16	26	.05	.09	81	86	.08	.00	.46	.14	0	-8	1	-8	-15
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Marquis' groundball rate has jumped up to 58 percent and his groundball out rate has jumped to 81 percent. He's given up only 26 percent fly balls, which is the fifth-lowest figure in the majors. Like you, I don't expect these figures to continue.

On another note, I got to thinking about team-level batted ball stats and, in particular, what they can tell us about some of the differences we've seen in teams this year. So I took all of last year's run scored and run allowed rates and compared them to this year's (in other words, number of runs scored and allowed per game). The biggest difference

this year has been in Texas, where the Rangers have allowed only 4.6 runs a game after allowing 6.0 runs a game last year. That's 1.4 runs a game, or roughly 230 over a full season. That's a lot of runs.

How have they done it? Well, let's first consider the number of men left on base. Last year, the Rangers stranded 66 percent of the men who reached base against them, which was the lowest rate in the majors. This year, they've stranded 74 percent on base, an above-average rate. Huge impact.

The rest of the improvement can be found in their batted ball profile:

Texas		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Outs	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	4101	15	11	43	21	36	.09	.11	72	83	.08	.06	.39	.19	49	31	36	46	162
2009	2128	15	10	43	19	38	.10	.12	77	86	.07	.02	.38	.18	12	-12	14	1	16

We're a little past the midway point of the year, so the Rangers are on track to give up about 130 fewer runs per game from a batted ball perspective. The Rangers pitching staff has walked a few less batters this year and given up fewer line drives. Off the top of my head, that looks like a difference of about 35 runs prorated over the full season.

However, the infield fly and home run rates are about the same (in fact, their home run rate has gone up a bit). I think we can safely say that the other difference lies in their out rates, which have gone up five points on ground balls and three points on outfield flies. In other words, their fielding has contributed close to 100 prorated runs more than last year's fielders did.

This fits well with other data points. According to *Bill James Online*, the Rangers were 27 runs below average all of last year. In the first half of this year, they've been 38 runs above average. Double that and add 27. A hundred runs.

So we've identified three big factors behind the Rangers' improved defense:

- Situational pitching and fielding (partly thanks to a rejuvenated bullpen): About 100 runs prorated over the year.
- Better pitching: 35 runs prorated over the year
- Better fielding: 95 to 100 runs prorated over the year.

That is indeed a team effort.

Another team has also shown a vast improvement in run prevention capabilities. The Pittsburgh Pirates have allowed only 4.3 runs a game this year after allowing 5.5 last year. Prorated over a year, that's 190 runs. Let's run through the same exercise.

- Last year, the Buccos left 70 percent of men on base; this year they've left 72 percent on. Not as dramatic as the Rangers' improvement, but not bad. Let's give it about 40 runs.
- Going directly to John Dewan's fielding stats, they are 20 runs above average this year, the best figure in the National League. Last year, they were nine runs below average. Prorate it out and you've got something close to 50 runs.
- Then there's the team batted ball profile:

Pirates		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	Outs	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	4125	15	11	44	21	35	.08	.11	75	83	.08	.04	.40	.19	52	0	60	41	153
2009	2093	14	10	44	19	37	.09	.09	75	84	.08	.04	.38	.16	18	1	5	-15	9

The Pirates are actually striking out fewer batters, but they're also walking fewer. There's a prorated net impact in their favor of 15 to 20 runs. More importantly, they've allowed fewer line drives and allowed more fly balls and, even more importantly than that, they've managed their outfield flies well. More infield flies, fewer home runs, more in-play outfield flies caught has led to a lot fewer line drive runs **and** fly ball runs.

Some of the credit goes to the fielders, of course. But fielders have little to do with giving up home runs or infield flies. We were left with 100 runs of credit after considering situational and fielding stats. I don't think we can give all of that credit to the pitchers, but we can give most of it to them.

By the way, Jack Wilson is having a superb year at short for the Pirates. He's second in the majors with 15 runs saved so far.

Till next week…

Win Shares at the break

By Dave Studenmund

July 17, 2009

We've just gotten past the All-Star break, that time of the season when we don't get to watch our favorite teams play and we don't get to collect more baseball stats. The most boring time of the summer. So we're going to put aside (most of) the batted ball stats this week and concentrate, instead, on Win Shares.

For the uninitiated among you, Win Shares were developed by Bill James several years ago as a way of allocating each team's wins to specific players, based on their statistical contributions to the team. In Bill's system, a lot of thought was put into understanding how specific stats lead to wins (the relative worth of a single vs. a double, for instance, or fielding vs. pitching). It's a very useful system, though it isn't perfect.

Guess who's been missing way too often? Answer below. (Icon/SMI)

The biggest imperfection of Win Shares is this: no Loss Shares. Why? Think of it this way: Let's say a player has ten Win Shares. It's like saying that a team has 64 wins. Is that good or bad? It's impossible to say unless you know how many games the team has played (or how many losses it has). Same thing with players.

James admitted this was an issue when he first rolled out the system, and he's been slowly rolling out a new version of Win Shares at *Bill James Online* that includes Loss Shares. In the meantime, the Hardball Times has addressed the issue by using each player's playing time (plate appearances, innings in the field and innings pitched) to calculate the number of "games" he has played, in Win Shares terms. We then compare each player's performance to the level of a bench, or replacement, player. We call it Win Shares Above Bench (or WSAB).

You can't get 2009 WSAB stats anywhere but here in THT's Batted Ball Report. So I'm going to list all the leaders in WSAB as of the All-Star break in today's report and I'll also make a spreadsheet of everyone's WSAB available on the site. The top ten overall leaders in WSAB are:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Pujols	STL	1B	19
Ramirez	FLA	SS	16
Fielder	MIL	1B	15
Mauer	MIN	C	13
Haren	ARI	SP	13
Utley	PHI	2B	13
Greinke	KC	SP	12
Sandoval	SF	3B	12
Braun	MIL	OF	12
Lincecum	SF	SP	12

I plan to concentrate on position players in today's report. I'll tackle pitchers next time, along with more batted ball stats.

It's no surprise that Albert Pujols heads our list. The major news outlets have lately made minor sport of annualizing King Albert's totals. He has 26 Win Shares at the All-Star break, which would give him nearly 50 on an annualized basis. 50 is a historic benchmark, reached only ten times since 1900. I don't expect Pujols to create 50 Win Shares this season, but that gives you an idea of how good his first half was.

Everyone else is at least three WSAB behind Pujols, with Hanley Ramirez in second place. Ramirez has the third-most Runs Created in the majors (helped by his .450 batting average with runners in scoring position), and he's been an average-fielding shortstop this year. Average fielding shortstops who can hit like Ramirez are very valuable players.

Let's get into some detail for each position. Catchers first.

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Mauer	MIN	C	13
Suzuki	OAK	C	6
McCann	ATL	C	5
Posada	NYA	C	5
Hanigan	CIN	C	5

Of course, Mauer's figure is remarkable considering he missed the first month of the season. There is no other catcher having a fantastic year, though many of them are having good ones. Oakland's Kurt Suzuki has had a line drive stroke this year (23%; it was 19% last year) and although he's thrown out only 19% of baserunners, he's made just one error.

And holy moley Ryan Hanigan. The Reds' half-a-platoon catcher has thrown out 40% of potential basestealers and is batting a singles-heavy .338 with a 24/13 walk/strikeout ratio. His batted ball profile kind of reminds me of Jason Kendall in his prime: good eye, line drive contact hitting, no power or fly ball hitting.

Ryan Hanigan

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	11	18	9	38	38	25	.50	.00	67	100	.04	.20	.29	-.10	0	0	0	-1	0
2008	98	9	13	51	21	28	.19	.12	71	87	.16	.06	.25	.17	2	1	-1	-1	1
2009	163	7	13	46	26	28	.06	.03	72	88	.18	.06	.38	.03	4	2	5	-5	6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

So, no, Hanigan is not the guy swinging and missing in the photo at the beginning of today's Report, but our captioned swinger is a catcher. Onto first basemen:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Pujols	STL	1B	19
Fielder	MIL	1B	15
Youkilis	BOS	1B	10
Morneau	MIN	1B	10
Gonzalez	SD	1B	9

I'm going to guess that you're familiar with these guys and move right onto second basemen.

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Utley	PHI	2B	13
Kinsler	TEX	2B	10
Zobrist	TB	2B	9
Pedroia	BOS	2B	7
Eckstein	SD	2B	6

We've discussed Utley and Kinsler before, I think, but how about Ben Zobrist? The nomadic Ray has played all over the field this year, though he's put in the most time at second. According to John Dewan's plus/minus fielding stats, he's already eight defensive runs above average at second (third most in the majors), although Win Shares gives him a relatively low rating in the field. As a result, his standing among second basemen suffers more than it probably should. As a batter, well…

Benjamin Zobrist

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	198	13	5	47	22	30	.15	.05	80	84	.01	.02	.27	.08	-2	-1	-2	-6	-12
2007	105	20	4	43	20	37	.11	.04	78	88	-.04	.02	.18	.03	-3	-1	-4	-5	-13
2008	227	16	12	44	13	42	.07	.16	76	85	.08	.04	.51	.25	2	-1	-1	6	7
2009	285	18	17	42	18	40	.01	.23	71	79	.11	.06	.37	.39	7	1	-1	18	26
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

…Zobrist's home run ratio has climbed the past two years and his infield fly rate has decreased each of the last four years to nearly **zero** this year. Also this year, his out rates on both ground balls and outfield flies are down and he's generating a tremendous .39 runs per outfield fly.

David Eckstein squeaks onto the second base list primarily due to the negative impact Petco Park has on a batter's stats. When you adjust Eckstein's batting line for the park he plays in, he's not terrible. Still, being ranked the fifth-most productive second baseman of the half-season is mostly a fluke.

Among third basemen, a Giant rookie stands tall.

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Sandoval	SF	3B	12
Wright	NYN	3B	8
Inge	DET	3B	8
Figgins	LAA	3B	8
Blake	LAN	3B	7

Pablo Sandoval is an undeniably fine hitter, but his fielding stats are all over the place. Win Shares rates him above average, Ultimate Zone Rating rates him average, and John Dewan's plus/minus system rates him below average. One thing to note, however, is that Sandoval ranks highly in handling bunts.

All systems are in agreement, however, that David Wright's fielding has really gone downhill. Last year, he got an A+ in handling bunts (according to the plus/minus system). This year, he has a C-minus. And his range has really declined too. While they're talking about Wright's power outage in New York, they ought to also be discussing his fielding slump.

When the Win Shares system was first introduced, it represented a real step forward in evaluating defense, particularly for players who played in the last century, when detailed fielding stats weren't available. However, Ultimate Zone Rating and the Plus/Minus system are both superior to Win Shares for modern players. The discrepancy between systems is particularly apparent at shortstop this year.

Pittsburgh's Jack Wilson, for instance, has been this year's best fielding shortstop according to both advanced systems, but Win Shares only rates him about average. Even so, his bat is so weak that he wouldn't rank among the top five shortstops even if Win Shares ranked him as highly as the other systems in the field.

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Ramirez	FLA	SS	16
Bartlett	TB	SS	8
Escobar	ATL	SS	7
Jeter	NYA	SS	7
Tejada	HOU	SS	6

There's some mild disagreement between systems about Jason Bartlett's glove, but there is no doubt that his bat has made him the second-best shortstop in the majors this year. If he had enough plate appearances to qualify, he'd be leading the majors in line drive hitting.

Jason Bartlett

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	372	12	9	44	22	34	.07	.02	75	75	.08	.04	.39	.11	2	0	6	-5	2
2007	570	13	10	44	20	36	.11	.04	74	84	.09	.05	.36	.09	4	1	1	-12	-6
2008	494	14	6	49	21	30	.10	.01	67	83	.03	.10	.32	.06	-4	11	-1	-16	-9
2009	261	15	8	32	28	40	.09	.11	65	77	.04	.11	.37	.23	-1	4	8	6	17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

He has also had a terrific jump in his home run rate, though that has cooled down lately.

By the way, do you know who's right behind Bartlett in line drive hitting (but also doesn't quite have enough plate appearances to qualify?). Texas' Jarrod Saltalamacchia. The issue is that he hasn't put the ball in play enough for those line drives to really make a difference.

Jarrod Saltalamacchia

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	329	23	6	44	17	39	.05	.13	77	78	-.02	.02	.38	.25	-6	-2	-4	7	-5
2008	229	32	14	31	27	42	.10	.06	72	80	.02	.07	.43	.16	-1	0	3	-2	0
2009	246	35	7	34	27	39	.07	.12	65	89	-.03	.11	.38	.14	-7	2	0	-4	-9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

You don't often see a 27% line drive rate accompanies by 0 (zero!) line drive runs above average. When Salty actually hits the ball, he's pretty good. He just doesn't hit the ball enough. And that's why he made a special photographic appearance at the beginning of this Report.

Win Shares doesn't distinguish between left fielders, center fielders and right fielders; it lumps them altogether because specific outfield position info isn't available for all of major league history. Here are the top 15 outfielders of the half-year, all bunched together:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Braun	MIL	OF	12
Bay	BOS	OF	12
Kemp	LAN	OF	10
Abreu	LAA	OF	10
Suzuki	SEA	OF	10
Hunter	LAA	OF	10
Werth	PHI	OF	9
Bourn	HOU	OF	9
Beltran	NYN	OF	9
Hawpe	COL	OF	8
Ludwick	STL	OF	8
Damon	NYA	OF	8
Dye	CHA	OF	7
Victorino	PHI	OF	7
Choo	CLE	OF	7

This is one curious list. I'm skipping past the All Stars, such as Braun, Bay, Kemp, etc. to point out a few things that intriguted me…

- Batted Ball Poster Boy Raul Ibanez didn't make it into the top 15 (he's 18th). The Wins Above Replacement (WAR) stats at Fangraphs lists him first among all left fielders, even ahead of Ryan Braun (the top WSAB outfielder). Playing time is clearly a factor—Braun has nearly 100 more plate appearances than the injured Ibanez—but I don't know why that would affect their relative standings so much.
- How did Michael Bourn make the top 15? Well, he's actually having a pretty good year, with a .357 OBP, stealing 33 bases and batting .394 with batters in scoring position. He's also played a solid center field. Win Shares may overrate him a bit, but he's having about as good a season as Shane Victorino.
- How about fielding? According to UZR at Fangraphs, Nyjer Morgan is 14 runs above average in left field and Matt Holliday is two runs above average. Over at John Dewan's plus/minus gang, Holliday is 23 runs above average and Morgan is six above average. Interestingly, Morgan is the best-fielding left fielder in the Win Shares system and Holliday is pretty far down the list.

There are a couple of related Batted Ball Profiles I'd like to show you. One is Torii Hunter's:

Torii Hunter

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	611	18	8	45	18	37	.16	.21	73	87	.03	.04	.41	.30	-3	-1	0	15	12
2007	650	16	7	49	14	37	.09	.15	74	83	.03	.04	.50	.26	-5	1	-1	15	11
2008	608	18	9	46	19	35	.10	.15	68	89	.04	.08	.39	.22	-1	9	0	5	13
2009	324	16	11	46	17	37	.10	.22	74	79	.08	.05	.36	.38	3	1	-2	16	18
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Hunter's outfield fly out rate dropped nearly ten points in the first half of this year and he's managed to draw a few more walks. That, plus the extra home run power, led to a very good first half. In the outfield, both systems have him about average.

And I want to point out one thing about Brad Hawpe's Profile…

Bradley Hawpe

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	575	21	13	42	22	36	.07	.17	78	79	.06	.03	.48	.31	4	-3	10	16	28
2007	606	23	14	36	21	43	.07	.19	75	77	.06	.03	.41	.34	6	-3	3	28	33
2008	569	24	14	38	23	39	.03	.18	73	80	.06	.05	.42	.29	5	-1	5	18	27
2009	313	19	12	40	20	39	.00	.15	72	69	.06	.05	.39	.36	2	0	2	19	23
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

…No infield flies so far this year.

Finally, the top designated hitters in the American League:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB
Scott	BAL	DH	7
Lind	TOR	DH	6
Thome	CHA	DH	6
Matsui	NYA	DH	5
Kubel	MIN	DH	5

Here's the Batted Ball Profile of the old man in the group.

Jim Thome

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	610	24	19	37	20	43	.08	.29	73	85	.09	.06	.41	.44	15	0	0	37	52
2007	536	25	19	43	18	39	.05	.29	78	81	.08	.02	.49	.43	13	-4	1	28	38
2008	602	24	16	40	18	42	.08	.24	85	84	.07	-.04	.44	.36	8	-13	-2	25	18
2009	263	26	20	45	22	33	.11	.31	80	86	.09	.00	.40	.46	7	-4	0	9	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Thome's ground ball out rate has improved this year, though he still runs like molasses. The troubling trend, however, is his fly ball rate, which has dropped to 33% this year. Hopefully it will pick up in the second half.

Predicted Win Shares

By Dave Studenmund

July 24, 2009

Having just watched Mark Buehrle pitch a perfect game (well, I watched the end of it, anyway), it seems appropriate to kick off with a Buehrle Batted Ball Profile:

Mark Buehrle

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	876	11	6	44	19	37	.13	.14	76	80	.05	.04	.39	.24	-4	-1	4	19	18
2007	835	14	6	43	18	39	.08	.09	77	81	.03	.02	.39	.17	-7	-6	-1	1	-12
2008	918	15	6	50	19	31	.10	.11	76	80	.02	.02	.41	.21	-9	-5	6	2	-6
2009	534	14	5	44	18	37	.06	.12	79	84	.01	.03	.29	.19	-6	-3	-9	3	-16
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Makes it look easy, doesn't he? (Icon/SMI)

Mark Buehrle is one of those few pitchers whose ERA has always eclipsed his "FIP." (FIP stands for Fielding-Independent Pitching and is based only on those things a pitcher has full responsibility for: strikeouts, walks and home runs.) And you can see a secret to his success in the Profile. For whatever reason, he has a high out rate on ground balls. His four-year out rate is 77 percent, three points higher than the major league average.

He's also extremely consistent. On only two instances in the past four years have his rates gotten out of line: his home run rate in 2006 and his ground ball rate in 2008.

Still Buehrle isn't someone I would have picked to throw a no-hitter, let alone two of them. He doesn't miss enough bats, the way Nolan Ryan or Sandy Koufax—the epitome of no-hit pitchers—did. I mean, if the guy is going to throw a no-hitter, then I can see the perfect game. His control is that good. But a no-hitter? Amazing. For what it's worth, he gave up 11 ground balls, eight fly balls and only two line drives yesterday.

This was the second no-hitter in the past couple of weeks. The Giants' Jonathan Sanchez pitched a no-no on July 10. In fact, he was just one error away from a perfect game himself. Sanchez is definitely not someone you would peg to pitch a no-hitter, as you can see from his Batted Ball Profile:

Jonathan Sanchez

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	185	18	15	36	20	45	.11	.02	70	83	.09	.09	.44	.06	3	2	1	-5	1
2007	238	26	14	39	22	39	.13	.15	61	88	.05	.11	.45	.21	1	3	1	0	6
2008	695	23	12	41	21	37	.10	.09	73	79	.04	.05	.37	.19	1	0	-2	-1	-2
2009	380	23	13	38	15	46	.07	.08	74	79	.06	.06	.45	.18	3	0	-4	2	1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Sanchez is a strikeout/flyball pitcher who has been stingy with line drives this year. In fact, he allowed only one line drive in his no-hitter (along with 10 fly balls and five grounders). If he can keep his line drive and home run rates in line with major league averages, he'll be a pretty good major league pitcher.

There has been one batting performance of note since the All-Star break. The Pirates' Garrett Jones has batted .338/.397/.831 with **nine** home runs in 78 plate appearances. Of his outfield flies, 35 percent have been home runs, and he leads the majors in batted ball runs above average since the All-Star break. This is his second major league cup of coffee.

Garrett Jones

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	84	24	7	34	17	48	.18	.09	70	86	-.01	.05	.28	.15	-1	0	-2	-1	-5
2009	78	15	9	46	10	44	.00	.35	81	65	.06	.00	.34	.65	0	-1	-2	14	11
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The 28-year-old Jones batted around the Atlanta and Minnesota minor league organizations (seeing time with the Twinkies in 2007) before signing with the Pirates as a minor league free agent this past December. He's always had power—he hit 31 home runs between two minor league teams in 2004—but not quite enough all-around game to stick in the majors. This season in Indianapolis, he was batting .307 and the Pirates had a need for a left fielder after trading Nyjer Morgan to the Nationals. It is great to see him take advantage of this opportunity.

That's the batted ball news of the week. If you don't mind, I'd now like to turn to some research I've been working on. I call it…

Predicting Win Shares

In 2004, Tom Hanrahan wrote an essay for SABR's *Baseball Research Journal* in which he created a Win Shares "Established Value" metric for every player in every year. He did it by averaging Win Shares from the player's four previous seasons (40 percent emphasis on the previous year, 30 percent on the year before that, 20 percent then 10 percent). It was an interesting article, but of course it had a number of holes such as not giving players with fewer than four years' experience much credit.

Bill James was intrigued by Hanrahan's approach and wrote about it on his website (the article is called *Hanrahan's List* for those of you who subscribe to BJOL). He created his own Established Value using three different averaging methods and picking the highest one, and then he established trade value by multiplying the Established Value by (41-Age)/2. When using the formula, younger players naturally have more trade value than older ones.

All well and good. In fact, all very interesting. But, as usual when I read these sorts of things, I got to wondering, Why? Why use certain ratios of the previous years? Why is the age formula based on 41 and divided by two? I like to

have some statistical certitude behind my methods (which is another way of saying that I don't trust my gut). So I decided to take my own shot at predicting Win Shares.

First of all, I pulled all everyday players in the Win Shares database (all players after the year 1900). I looked only at years in which the player had a substantial amount of playing time (eight Expected Win Shares or more, which is about 300 plate appearances). I included only years between 1910 (because I wanted to make sure that the "first year" in the data base truly was the player's first full year. Nap Lajoie played four years before 1900, for instance.) and 1990 (to make sure I compared each year to a player's entire career Win Shares total, which was calculated through 2008.).

And then I calculated the relationship between a player's age and performance in his first year against the number of Win Shares he accrued in his career. There is a formula that successfully "predicts" nearly 40 percent of a player's future performance, using just the first year's Win Shares data. I'm rounding here, but it's…

356 plus seven times Win Shares in first year minus 14 times age

So, if a player is 24 in his first full major league season and accrues 15 Win Shares, we predict that he will have a 125-Win Share career. If he is 21, we'll predict 167 career Win Shares. If he racks up 20 Win Shares at age 20, we'll predict 216 career Win Shares.

Those numbers may seem low to you. After all, we know that **Babe Ruth** had 756 career Win Shares; Ted Williams had 555. In fact, **Ted Williams** had one of the greatest first years ever, when he batted .327/.436/.609 as a 20-year-old rookie. Our formula predicts a career total of 303 Win Shares for the Splendid Splinter, 252 short of his actual total.

The issue is that Ruth and Williams went on to have great major league careers after great first seasons. Many players with great rookie seasons don't. Take the tragic case of **Charlie Hollocher**, a Cubs shortstop who broke into the majors in 1918. As a 22-year-old rookie, Hollocher batted .316/.379/.397 with an OPS+ of 134 and a solid glove—28 Win Shares, in fact. Hollocher was a great talent with a fine future. Using our formula, he had the 19th-best "predicted future" of any major league first-year player in our database.

Unfortunately, he also suffered from depression, something that wasn't properly treated or even discussed back in 1920. He quit the game before turning 30 and killed himself in 1940. There are many sad stories in the history of baseball—Pete Reiser, J.R. Richard, Ray Chapman—but I hadn't heard of Hollocher until researching this article. He should be remembered as another major leaguer who didn't fulfill his great potential due to circumstances beyond his control.

The player who fell most short of his first-year projection was the 1970 Dodgers rookie phenom, **Billy Grabarkewitz**. Grabarkewitz batted .289/.399/.454 with 29 Win Shares at the age of 24. He managed only 14 Win Shares the rest of his career and fell well short of his predicted total of 228.

The two greatest first full years of all time—I should say, the two first full years that most augured big league greatness—belong to **Shoeless Joe Jackson** and **Dick Allen** (in a virtual tie). Jackson had a phenomenal 39 Win Shares at the age of 21 and Allen had 41 Win Shares at the age of 22. Our formula predicted about 350 Win Shares for each of them. In fact, Allen finished with 342; Jackson had 294 when he was suspended from baseball for life.

But why stop there? I did the same thing for the first nine full years of every player in the database. I created formulas for each year based on three factors: the player's age, his cumulative career Win Shares up to (and including) that year and his Win Shares in that particular year. In every case, all three factors were significant and predictive.

In fact, the predictability of the formulas increased each year, from 38 percent the first year to 50 percent the second year on up to 81 percent the ninth year. (For the statistically minded among you, I'm quoting R squared.). Of course, the predictability of the formulas should increase; you have more data with each passing year.

Here are the specific components of the formula for each year:

Year	Constant	Age	WS	CumWS
One	356	-14.0	5.3	1.8
Two	319	-12.7	4.7	2.0
Three	307	-12.6	3.3	2.4
Four	288	-11.8	2.8	2.1
Five	227	-9.6	2.7	1.9
Six	210	-8.8	3.5	1.6
Seven	190	-8.1	3.3	1.5
Eight	192	-8.1	2.0	1.6
Nine	180	-7.4	2.9	1.4

(CumWS stands for Cumulative Win Shares)

Remember, I'm including only years with at least eight expected Win Shares, not every major league year. There are some dips up and down in specific factors, but the overall trends make sense to me. For instance, in the first few years the factor for cumulative Win Shares rises while the factor for that year's Win Shares decreases (cumulative Win Shares become more important to the model). It makes sense that the career number takes on more importance as the player's career progresses.

By the way, my age factor doesn't appear to be very different from (41-Age)/2. Go figure.

I had a lot of fun looking at the progression of some specific careers. For instance, here are the first nine full years of Ted Williams' career (note the skip in age when he served in the military).

Ted Williams

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1939	20	32	32	303
1940	21	30	62	317
1941	22	42	104	418
1942	23	46	150	469
1946	27	49	199	488
1947	28	44	243	505
1948	29	39	282	513
1949	30	40	322	541
1950	31	19	341	473
			Career:	**555**

Williams was fantastic each and every year of his major league career—just think what he would have done had it not been for the two wars he fought in. The fact that he missed some years in his prime probably messes up our model. It it manages to catch up to him by his eighth year (541 predicted career Win Shares) but falls off in 1950, when Williams fractured his elbow and missed half the year.

Speaking of the impact of war years, Hank Greenberg missed four years to World War II, and our model indicates that he was shortchanged by about 100 Win Shares by the war and his dramatic decline after being sloughed off to Pittsburgh. He played only 10 full seasons in the majors.

Hank Greenberg

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1933	22	14	14	148
1934	23	31	45	262
1935	24	34	79	306
1937	26	33	115	322
1938	27	34	149	350
1939	28	24	173	323
1940	29	31	204	368
1945	34	16	222	301
1946	35	31	253	356
			Career:	**267**

During his year in Pittsburgh, Greenberg was a mentor to young Ralph Kiner. After many successful years as a Pirate, Kiner was traded to Chicago, where his career drooped and he never reached the 357 Win Shares once predicted for him. It's interesting that both Kiner and Greenberg had problems with club management, were traded and lost their mojo to a similar degree.

Ralph Kiner

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1946	23	15	15	142
1947	24	30	45	245
1948	25	30	75	271
1949	26	37	112	326
1950	27	23	135	293
1951	28	35	170	357
1952	29	19	189	306
1953	30	23	212	332
1954	31	19	231	321
			Career:	**242**

I searched the data for a consistent projection and found one in another Pirate, Richie Hebner, who had a very fine first full year with 20 Win Shares at the age of 21. He never really did much better than that, and his year-to-year predictions were relatively steady as a result.

Richie Hebner

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1969	21	20	20	205
1970	22	16	36	187
1971	23	16	52	195
1972	24	22	74	226
1973	25	21	95	229
1974	26	22	117	244
1975	27	12	129	208
1976	28	12	141	213
1977	29	16	157	226
			Career:	**219**

The arc of Dick Allen's career resulted in very consistent predictions until he had that fantastic year in 1972 with the White Sox. The model predicted great things still to come, but Allen's career was pretty much over within the next couple of years.

Dick Allen

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1964	22	41	41	349
1965	23	33	74	329
1966	24	35	109	382
1967	25	29	138	372
1968	26	32	170	395
1969	27	22	192	355
1970	28	19	211	348
1971	29	29	240	397
1972	30	40	280	457
			Career:	**342**

At the other extreme, I don't think anyone really knows what happened to Zoilo Versalles after his MVP season with the Twins. Our model predicted a very good career for the shortstop, but he seemed to lose his game after '65.

Zoilo Versalles

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1961	21	13	15	159
1962	22	16	31	177
1963	23	19	50	200
1964	24	18	68	202
1965	25	32	100	269
1966	26	12	112	202
1967	27	9	121	186
1968	28	5	126	175
1969	29	6	132	163
			Career:	**134**

How about some of the all-time greats? Harmon Killebrew got off to a decent career start, but our prediction tool didn't really catch up to his eventual greatness until he upped his game in the mid-'60s:

Harmon Killebrew

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1959	23	23	28	207
1960	24	20	48	204
1961	25	27	75	261
1962	26	24	99	262
1963	27	23	122	268
1964	28	24	146	280
1965	29	22	168	284
1966	30	33	201	335

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1967	31	38	239	387
			Career:	**371**

Ted Williams' contemporary, Stan Musial, was also a fantastic player and someone our model never catches up to.

Stan Musial

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1942	21	28	31	267
1943	22	39	70	362
1944	23	38	108	402
1946	25	44	152	444
1947	26	25	177	390
1948	27	46	223	488
1949	28	40	263	496
1950	29	32	295	490
1951	30	39	334	528
			Career:	**604**

And here's an example of someone who just outlasted our model by a wide margin. Al Kaline never played a game in the minors and had a lousy rookie year in Detroit when he broke in. His second season was terrific, but you can see that his predicted Win Shares never varied much after that second year. He just kept going and going…

Al Kaline

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1954	19	7	8	142
1955	20	31	39	289
1956	21	26	65	284
1957	22	20	85	268
1958	23	23	108	279
1959	24	27	135	308
1960	25	17	152	275
1961	26	29	181	328
1962	27	19	200	309
			Career:	**443**

Contrast Kaline with third baseman Eddie Mathews. Mathews had a long, excellent career, but it somehow never seemed quite as good as the promise of his first three or four years. Our model belies that notion, and indicates that Mathews actually performed better than any of his early predictions. His second-year prediction is the sixth-highest in our database.

Eddie Mathews

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1952	20	19	19	212
1953	21	39	58	351
1954	22	33	91	357
1955	23	34	125	381
1956	24	29	154	375
1957	25	33	187	403
1958	26	24	211	380
1959	27	37	248	442
1960	28	38	286	474
			Career:	**450**

On the other hand, a beaning cut Ducky Medwick's career short before it could reach its ultimate promise, particularly the promise predicted by his Triple Crown year of 1937. According to one source, by the way, Medwick hated the nickname "Ducky." I did not know that.

Joe Medwick

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
1933	21	24	28	240
1934	22	24	52	256
1935	23	33	85	330
1936	24	36	121	366
1937	25	40	161	409
1938	26	22	183	350
1939	27	24	207	366
1940	28	19	226	363
1941	29	24	250	377
			Career:	**312**

I'm leading up to something here. In the present day, Albert Pujols is having another great year. He may finish with more than 40 Win Shares (he projects to 42 right now) for the second time in this, his ninth year in the majors. Given that projection, what does our model say about Albert's eventual place in the baseball stratosphere?

Albert Pujols

Year	Age	WS	Cumulative	Predicted
2001	21	29	29	268
2002	22	32	61	312
2003	23	41	102	397
2004	24	40	142	415
2005	25	38	180	432
2006	26	39	219	468
2007	27	32	251	453
2008	28	35	286	493
2009	29	42	328	**546**

Those 546 Win Shares would be the 16th-highest career total among all post-1900 everyday players, just behind Pete Rose. As we've seen, Pujols could eclipse that prediction, or he could suddenly lose it to injury, a falling-out with management, or a general degradation of skills. But his performance over the past two years has added nearly 100 Win Shares to his prediction. Will his future come in as predicted, or look more like fellow Cardinals Joe Medwick's or Stan Musial's? It will be fun to find out.

The midseason madcap follies

By Dave Studenmund

August 8, 2009

I just got back from vacation. Did I miss anything? Yes, it turns out that I missed a few transactions. In fact, I missed a whole lot of midseason transactions. I don't know if this was the busiest midseason period ever, but it felt like it. Here's a batted ball take on all the deals. I'm not going to try to "grade" each deal, but I will make some comments along the way. The batted ball stats are as of the end of last month (i.e., before most of these deals went down) and my comments on the prospects and minor leaguers are from *Baseball America*.

The Brewers obtained Felipe Lopez from the Diamondbacks for a couple of prospects.

Felipe Lopez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	714	18	12	50	19	30	.04	.08	73	86	.07	.05	.42	.12	5	4	2	-13	-2
2007	671	16	8	50	20	30	.03	.06	78	84	.04	.03	.38	.11	-2	-3	0	-13	-18
2008	532	15	9	50	19	31	.06	.05	72	77	.05	.06	.33	.15	-1	4	-4	-5	-5
2009	393	15	9	52	23	25	.04	.08	70	78	.06	.07	.35	.19	1	6	4	-2	9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Lopez was a below-average fielding shortstop, but appears to be an adequate fielder at second. He's best known for his bat, although that reputation took a hit (literally) when he batted .245 in 2007 and .234 in 100 games for the Nationals last year. He's batting .303 this year, thanks to an elevated line drive rate and depressed out rates on fly balls and grounders. It doesn't seem likely that he'll keep up those paces, so the Diamondbacks might have sold high here.

However, *Baseball America* labels both prospects in this deal as probably "role players" in the majors, so it's tough to see much of a winner or loser here.

The Rockies sent a pitching prospect to the Indians for Rafael Betancourt.

Rafael Betancourt

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	231	21	5	23	25	51	.12	.09	64	90	-.03	.10	.30	.12	-5	0	-1	-2	-8
2007	289	28	3	27	20	54	.20	.04	74	91	-.07	.04	.39	.03	-11	-3	-3	-14	-31
2008	309	21	8	29	21	50	.12	.12	66	87	.02	.09	.39	.17	-3	1	1	2	1
2009	129	25	12	31	12	57	.04	.07	68	83	.03	.06	.40	.14	0	0	-3	0	-3
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Betancourt had a year to remember in 2007, when the Indians almost made it to the World Series. Betancourt was always a flyball pitcher, but he'll never replicate the low walk rate (and flyball out rate). His success this year (3.52 ERA) has been primarily the result of a low line drive rate. The Rockies picked up the 34-year-old as protection in Manny Corpas' absence.

The prospect, Connor Graham, is reportedly a hard thrower with control problems. High risk kind of guy, but this seems like a good return for the Indians.

Matt Holliday was traded from the A's to the Cardinals for three prospects.

Matthew Holliday

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	667	16	9	45	21	34	.06	.19	70	82	.05	.07	.47	.31	1	6	16	24	46
2007	713	18	10	44	20	36	.04	.19	67	78	.06	.08	.48	.34	2	8	14	33	59
2008	623	17	13	46	22	33	.09	.16	65	83	.09	.11	.44	.26	9	14	12	9	45
2009	400	15	13	45	16	39	.13	.11	70	83	.10	.07	.43	.20	6	4	-1	2	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

What's been wrong with Holliday? (These stats are reflective of Holliday's time with the A's before joining the Cardinals.) A missing line drive stroke plus a lower batting average on ground balls—the two features that made Holliday special—as well as a lower home run rate. I guess that's a lot, isn't it?

Holliday has been on fire since arriving in St. Louis. Among other things, check out his home runs rate and his out rates on both ground balls and fly balls.

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Team	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
Oakland	400	15	13	45	16	39	.13	.11	70	83	.10	.07	.43	.20	6	5	0	2	13
St. Louis	59	17	14	39	27	34	.07	.31	50	56	.09	.19	.44	.60	1	3	3	6	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The prospects Oakland received in return for Holliday, including third/first baseman Brett Wallace (a potential star) and pitcher Clayton Mortenson (the sixth-best prospect in the Cardinals' system, according to *Baseball America*) seem much better than the package they sent to the Rockies to obtain Holliday during the offseason. It was an interesting couple of deals for the A's, and they managed to turn them to their advantage.

The Giants obtained first baseman Ryan Garko from the Indians for a pitching prospect.

Ryan Garko

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	209	18	10	42	17	41	.08	.12	70	82	.05	.08	.38	.21	0	2	-1	3	4
2007	541	17	10	38	19	44	.08	.13	76	75	.06	.03	.39	.27	1	-4	1	20	18
2008	563	15	11	39	20	41	.13	.09	75	81	.08	.04	.35	.17	4	-2	0	1	2
2009	258	15	11	45	16	39	.11	.14	74	82	.08	.04	.40	.22	2	0	-2	3	4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Compare Garko to the current Giants first baseman…

Travis Ishikawa

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	104	26	9	56	18	26	.11	.19	66	92	.00	.11	.51	.24	-1	3	1	0	2
2009	229	25	7	42	19	39	.07	.13	70	84	-.01	.06	.32	.22	-4	0	-3	3	-4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Garko was batting .285/.362/.464 for the Indians, which sounds good but really isn't. He's pretty much an average major league hitter all around. That would be a good thing if he were a shortstop, but he's a first sacker. He is an upgrade over Ishikawa primarily because of his superior bat control. The two could be an effective platoon (Garko is a righty batter and Ishikawa bats from the left side).

The prospect sent to the Indians, Single-A lefty Scott Barnes, projects as a midrotation starter if things fall into place for him.

The Pirates sent pitcher Ian Snell and shortstop Jack Wilson to the Mariners for four prospects and shortstop Ronny Cedeno.

Ian Snell

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	813	21	9	43	21	36	.08	.16	70	80	.03	.07	.35	.27	-4	5	-4	13	10
2007	882	20	9	46	17	37	.06	.10	71	83	.02	.07	.39	.18	-6	6	-9	0	-8
2008	766	18	12	38	25	37	.08	.09	73	84	.07	.05	.45	.17	6	0	19	-1	25
2009	360	14	13	40	22	38	.06	.08	76	84	.10	.05	.46	.15	5	0	7	-1	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

What's happened to Ian Snell? Not yet 30, his strikeout rate has dropped quite a bit the last two years and his control has worsened. Plus, balls that used to be grounders are now line drives. His slider isn't what it used to be and he's emphasized the curve ball more often this year, but he became *persona non grata* in the Steel City. He may have found himself during his minor league stint and the Mariners obviously are hoping he has.

Jack Wilson

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	594	11	6	47	23	30	.15	.06	77	92	.05	.03	.39	.06	-3	-3	9	-21	-18
2007	535	9	8	39	19	42	.11	.07	69	83	.11	.08	.34	.12	3	6	-1	-4	4
2008	330	8	5	41	22	37	.14	.01	73	89	.07	.05	.36	.01	-1	1	3	-15	-12
2009	276	11	5	40	16	43	.24	.05	74	81	.02	.06	.44	.12	-3	1	0	-6	-7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Jack Wilson is a heck of a good fielder, but not much of a batter.

Ronny Cedeno

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	572	19	3	47	16	37	.11	.04	69	85	-.04	.08	.32	.07	-14	7	-12	-18	-36
2007	80	23	4	33	23	44	.08	.17	79	100	-.05	.04	.28	.17	-2	-1	-1	0	-4
2008	236	17	8	52	18	30	.12	.04	70	72	.03	.08	.37	.15	-1	4	-1	-4	-3
2009	187	24	6	50	8	43	.14	.12	81	86	-.02	-.01	.33	.20	-4	-3	-9	-1	-18
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

At bat, Ronny Cedeno is no Jack Wilson.

The Pirates picked up catcher/first baseman Jeff Clement and three decent young pitchers. Clement has considerable power potential, but his little time in the majors has been unimpressive and the Mariners apparently gave up on him as a catcher this year.

Jeffrey B Clement

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	19	16	16	31	8	62	.00	.25	75	67	.12	.05	.48	.47	0	0	0	3	3
2008	224	28	9	41	18	40	.16	.10	74	84	.00	.04	.40	.18	-3	-1	-3	-2	-9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

This appears to be one of those classic trades involving players the other organization has given up on.

The Phillies got pitcher Cliff Lee and outfielder Ben Francisco for four minor league prospects.

Cliff Lee

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	882	15	7	33	19	48	.14	.10	64	85	.04	.11	.31	.16	-4	13	-8	5	7
2007	443	15	10	35	15	50	.09	.12	70	83	.07	.07	.48	.19	2	2	0	9	13
2008	891	19	4	46	19	35	.11	.05	73	84	-.03	.05	.36	.09	-19	1	-6	-22	-45
2009	614	17	6	44	21	35	.11	.07	72	86	.01	.05	.39	.11	-8	2	4	-12	-13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Cliff Lee got off to a rough start this year, but he's proved that 2008 was no fluke. Mike Fast had a detailed explanation for Lee's breakout year in the 2009 THT Annual, but he's experienced only minimal degradation of his 2008 batted ball stats.

Ben Francisco is an average major league hitter and can play all three outfield positions. Fourth outfielder.

Ben Francisco

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	66	29	5	47	19	35	.13	.23	75	70	-.05	.03	.53	.44	-2	0	1	3	1
2008	499	17	9	34	18	48	.15	.10	67	85	.05	.08	.37	.17	-1	3	-3	2	2
2009	332	17	11	41	17	43	.13	.08	76	81	.07	.03	.37	.18	2	-2	-4	0	-4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The Phillies didn't give up any of their tippy-top prospects to land Lee, but they did give up some very good arms in Jason Knapp and Carlos Carrasco. Both probably rank among the top 50 pitching prospects in the minors. The other two prospects, catcher Lou Marson and shortstop/second baseman Jason Donald, could be major league regulars at premium positions. The controversial Carrasco probably will be the key to the long-term take on this deal.

The Giants obtained second baseman Freddy Sanchez from the Pirates for a pitching prospect.

Freddy Sanchez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	632	8	6	37	28	36	.10	.03	74	80	.08	.05	.41	.10	-1	2	28	-8	22
2007	653	12	6	39	22	38	.06	.06	73	81	.05	.05	.38	.13	-3	2	11	-2	8
2008	608	10	4	45	24	30	.07	.06	74	87	.02	.04	.33	.08	-7	1	7	-15	-15
2009	374	14	6	44	22	34	.04	.06	71	83	.02	.07	.45	.12	-3	3	10	-4	6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Freddy Sanchez is a very good line drive hitter with a decent glove at second. The pitching prospect picked up by Pittsburgh (remember those old Federal Express commercials?) projects to be a midrotation starter, according to *Baseball America*.

The Mariners traded outfielder Wladimir Balentien to the Reds for a minor league pitcher.

Wladimir Balentien

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	260	30	6	47	14	39	.13	.13	73	82	-.04	.04	.36	.21	-7	-1	-7	-1	-16
2009	170	25	8	43	13	44	.12	.09	78	83	-.01	.04	.45	.16	-3	-1	-3	-1	-8
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Balentien, whose bat hadn't been any more effective than Jeff Clement's, was out of options and the Mariners had soured on him too. Robert Manuel, the pitcher obtained by the Mariners, could be an effective righty out of the pen.

The Dodgers picked up lefty reliever George Sherrill from the Orioles for a couple of prospects.

George Sherrill

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	174	24	16	30	19	51	.10	.00	77	82	.07	.03	.49	.02	2	-2	0	-7	-6
2007	182	31	10	25	21	55	.20	.09	80	85	.00	.02	.31	.13	-3	-2	-5	-4	-14
2008	239	24	14	34	13	53	.10	.09	60	84	.06	.12	.38	.14	2	3	-6	-1	-2
2009	164	23	9	33	16	50	.16	.06	78	84	.02	.02	.45	.13	-1	-2	-1	-2	-7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

After being relegated to LOOGY status early in his career, George Sherrill has proven he can also retire right-handed batters and the Dodgers seem to run through relievers like I run through a bowl of Ben and Jerry's. Sherrill is a flyball pitcher, but he keeps the ball in the park (check out those run rates on outfield flies) and has been consistently excellent. If he returns to the LOOGY role, he'll be outstanding.

The Dodgers gave up a couple of good prospects to get Sherrill, particularly third baseman Josh Bell. I'm no minor league expert, and I like Sherrill a lot, but I wonder if the Dodgers overpaid.

The Pirates traded pitchers John Grabow and Tom Gorzelanny to the Cubs for pitcher Kevin Hart and a couple of prospects.

John Grabow

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	303	22	11	49	18	34	.12	.09	71	81	.04	.07	.49	.18	0	2	0	-2	0
2007	228	18	9	50	17	33	.12	.13	71	88	.03	.06	.37	.18	-1	2	-2	-2	-3
2008	322	19	12	40	20	41	.12	.11	82	87	.06	-.01	.41	.15	2	-6	-1	-3	-9
2009	197	20	14	42	17	42	.06	.08	66	83	.07	.09	.29	.14	2	2	-4	-1	-1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Grabow is an effective lefty reliever who will be a free agent after the season. A couple of years ago, he appeared to be more of a groundball pitcher, but he's given up more fly balls the past two years. That may be a good thing, 'cause he's been hurt this year by a very low groundball out rate.

Thomas Gorzelanny

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	267	15	13	49	18	33	.17	.06	79	83	.10	.01	.37	.13	4	-2	-3	-6	-7
2007	874	15	9	42	18	40	.10	.07	70	85	.06	.07	.39	.13	0	7	-1	-9	-2
2008	490	14	14	40	16	44	.05	.13	68	83	.12	.07	.43	.22	11	3	-1	12	26
2009	36	19	11	46	21	33	.00	.00	91	88	.05	-.05	.37	.01	0	-1	0	-2	-3
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Lefty Gorzelanny had a fine rookie year in 2007, but his control deserted him and he started giving up more home runs so he's spent most of this year in Triple-A. He still has pretty good stuff and pitched well in the minors, so the Cubs have him in their rotation for now.

Kevin Hart

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	42	31	10	38	21	42	.00	.00	89	80	-.01	-.06	.55	.05	-1	-1	0	-1	-3
2008	142	16	15	57	20	23	.05	.10	69	63	.11	.10	.33	.36	3	4	0	2	9
2009	70	7	21	45	14	41	.10	.06	82	94	.23	-.02	.32	.02	4	-1	-1	-3	-1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Hart throws hard but he's really struggled with his control this year. He'll probably be a power righty out of the pen, assuming he finds the strike zone. The Pirates also got Jose Ascanio from the Cubs. *Baseball America* says that Ascanio has an "electric" arm with a fastball that can hit 95 miles per hours. Both Hart and Ascanio figure to fill out Pittsburgh's bullpen over the coming years.

The Tigers picked up Jarrod Washburn from the Mariners in exchange for a couple of pitching prospects.

Jarrod Washburn

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	809	13	8	40	18	42	.13	.10	74	86	.06	.06	.40	.15	-1	3	1	-2	1
2007	839	14	9	37	18	45	.15	.09	74	81	.07	.04	.35	.18	2	-2	-5	6	1
2008	675	13	8	36	23	41	.13	.10	72	86	.07	.06	.39	.15	1	2	10	-2	11
2009	504	15	7	37	21	42	.09	.07	78	92	.02	.02	.34	.07	-5	-6	-2	-13	-26
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

So check out Washburn's out rates on both ground balls and fly balls this year. His NIP rates have also improved this year, and the combination probably raised Washburn's value to the highest place it's been in a while. The two left-handed pitchers sent to the Mariners have some potential, but are hardly A-list guys.

Washburn will be a free agent at the end of the season.

The Twins obtained veteran shortstop Orlando Cabrera from the Athletics for a shortstop prospect.

Orlando Cabrera

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	675	9	8	39	17	44	.14	.04	70	85	.11	.08	.40	.07	3	8	2	-15	-2
2007	701	9	7	43	18	39	.14	.03	67	82	.09	.09	.38	.08	0	13	3	-16	0
2008	730	10	8	46	21	33	.14	.05	74	84	.09	.05	.34	.09	2	3	3	-18	-11
2009	415	8	6	46	19	34	.12	.04	75	83	.07	.04	.32	.08	-2	0	-2	-11	-14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Well, Cabrera is a better hitter than Ronny Cedeno. The A's received minor league shortstop Tyler Ladendorf for the veteran Cabrera. Ladendorf was a second-round pick a couple of years ago, but he's yet to realize his potential in his professional stint.

The Yankees picked up Jerry Hairston Jr. from the Reds for a minor league catching prospect.

Jerry Hairston

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	192	18	8	42	17	41	.17	.00	73	84	.03	.04	.30	.01	-1	0	-4	-9	-15
2007	184	13	8	35	14	52	.22	.06	76	92	.06	.02	.28	.05	-1	-2	-6	-8	-16
2008	297	12	9	32	27	41	.18	.08	67	93	.08	.12	.42	.07	1	4	10	-8	8
2009	325	14	7	33	25	42	.13	.07	75	87	.05	.05	.33	.09	-1	0	2	-7	-7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Hairston has been a line drive hitter the past two years, but he doesn't have any power and I don't know if he will keep hitting liners. He hits fly balls more than usual, but too many are infield flies, not enough are flyball homers and his out rate on outfield flies is too high.

The prospect, catcher Chase Weems (great name) has some potential to be a regular major leaguer but is a long way away.

The Red Sox and Braves swapped first basemen, Adam LaRoche for Casey Kotchman.

Adam LaRoche

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	557	23	10	38	21	41	.04	.22	81	78	.03	.00	.41	.39	-2	-8	3	33	26
2007	632	21	10	36	20	44	.06	.12	79	83	.04	.00	.46	.20	-1	-8	7	8	6
2008	554	22	10	37	20	43	.06	.16	78	82	.03	.02	.44	.27	-2	-5	4	17	14
2009	368	22	11	38	20	41	.09	.13	86	80	.04	-.04	.46	.24	0	-9	3	6	0
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The Red Sox had obtained LaRoche from the busy Pirates a week earlier. After getting Victor Martinez from the Indians (see below), LaRoche became expendable because he'll be a free agent at the end of the season. He's a very different hitter from Kotchman. LaRoche is a flyball hitter with some power; Kotchman is an extreme groundball

hitter but doesn't have a good batting average on ground balls. Kotchman likes to put the ball in play (low strikeout rate) and hits infield flies more often.

Casey Kotchman

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	88	15	8	67	11	23	.13	.08	82	100	.05	.00	.36	.02	0	-1	-3	-4	-9
2007	508	8	11	51	16	33	.11	.09	79	75	.15	.01	.46	.22	8	-4	4	6	14
2008	573	7	8	53	18	30	.13	.11	78	86	.13	.02	.36	.16	3	-2	0	-5	-4
2009	310	9	10	51	20	29	.12	.06	77	80	.13	.03	.38	.14	3	0	2	-4	2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

This sure seems like a winner for Atlanta, helping the Braves compete this year, though their first baseman of the future, Freddy Freeman, is probably another year away.

The Reds and Jays exchanged third basemen Edwin Encarnacion and Scott Rolen and the Reds picked up two young pitchers, too.

Scott Rolen

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	594	12	11	33	20	48	.12	.11	70	82	.11	.07	.40	.19	7	3	6	11	27
2007	441	13	10	38	20	43	.14	.06	73	86	.08	.05	.38	.09	2	0	1	-9	-6
2008	467	15	12	36	21	44	.13	.08	72	85	.09	.05	.40	.14	5	-1	3	-2	6
2009	346	10	9	33	25	42	.04	.05	66	89	.10	.10	.42	.07	2	5	12	-6	13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Edwin Encarnacion

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	467	17	12	41	21	37	.14	.13	73	82	.08	.06	.40	.22	4	2	4	4	13
2007	560	15	9	38	19	43	.15	.10	68	86	.06	.09	.47	.14	1	7	8	-3	12
2008	582	18	12	34	16	50	.22	.16	71	84	.08	.06	.42	.23	5	1	-4	9	12
2009	138	24	17	40	16	44	.11	.13	85	79	.08	-.02	.37	.24	2	-3	-3	2	-1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Up to this point, it had been a busy offseason, but this is when things got ridiculous. Rolen was having a big year, due primarily to three batted ball factors: fewer strikeouts, more line drives and higher batting average on ground balls. Plus, he's a terrific fielder.

Encarnacion's strikeout rate has risen during this injury-filled year, but so has his walk rate. He's been really hurt by an 85 percent out rate on ground balls, but he's mostly the same hitter he always was. Plus, he's a lousy fielder.

The Jays picked up Zach Stewart, a very good pitching prospect who has come into his own this year, as well as Josh Roenicke, who has a power arm but not so much control.

Like a lot of people, I'm scratching my head over this one. The Reds aren't going to compete this year and giving up a couple of very good young arms for an expensive (albeit very good) third baseman seems like the wrong strategy for the situation.

The White Sox finally got Jake Peavy in exchange for four young pitchers.

Jacob Peavy

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	846	25	8	38	18	44	.09	.10	78	75	.00	.01	.39	.25	-13	-9	-9	15	-17
2007	898	27	8	44	17	39	.09	.06	78	84	.00	.02	.43	.10	-15	-8	-10	-22	-56
2008	709	23	9	41	21	38	.17	.11	74	85	.01	.04	.30	.16	-7	-2	-11	-10	-31
2009	335	27	9	41	19	40	.11	.10	71	86	.00	.07	.41	.15	-5	1	-4	-5	-13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

We've discussed Peavy before; he's the same as he ever was. He's expensive and injured, but he's still one of the best in the game. It will be interesting to see how the American League and the Cell treat him.

The pitchers picked up by the Padres (Pittsburgh's perfect, Pete) are good 'uns. Three power arms among the four, and three are knocking on the major league door, but you wouldn't call any of them an "A" prospect.

Still, this feels like a risky deal for the Sox, not so much because one or two of those prospects may turn out to be stars, but because Peavy's contract will suck up a lot of money the next three years.

The Red Sox picked up Victor Martinez from the Indians for three young players, including pitcher Justin Masterson.

Victor Martinez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	652	12	11	44	22	34	.06	.10	77	73	.11	.01	.37	.24	9	-6	7	13	23
2007	645	12	11	42	20	38	.06	.14	79	83	.11	.01	.44	.22	8	-7	11	13	25
2008	294	11	9	45	22	33	.13	.03	76	87	.09	.02	.40	.05	1	-2	5	-9	-5
2009	411	12	12	46	20	34	.08	.14	77	87	.12	.03	.37	.21	6	-1	3	4	11
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Victor Martinez is a fine major league hitter, despite his off year in 2008. He tends to be an out maker on grounders but he makes good contact and hits line drives and home runs. Plus, he can catch and switch-hit.

Justin Masterson

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	365	19	13	54	18	27	.01	.15	85	82	.08	-.04	.32	.25	4	-10	-6	1	-11
2009	296	21	10	51	18	31	.03	.12	72	79	.03	.05	.40	.23	-1	1	-2	1	0
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The Indians got three very good young pitchers in return. Masterson is a ground ball pitcher, though he's less effective against lefty batters. The other two pitchers are still in A ball. By giving up Lee and Martinez (and Betancourt and Garko), the Indians picked up a boatload of good young arms.

The Nationals sent lefty reliever Joe Beimel to the Rockies for a couple of pitching prospects.

Joe Beimel

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	295	10	7	57	11	32	.09	.09	74	71	.08	.04	.37	.25	0	2	-6	4	0
2007	281	14	9	48	18	35	.10	.02	74	75	.07	.03	.36	.12	0	-1	-2	-5	-7
2008	214	15	11	47	19	34	.00	.00	69	89	.08	.08	.41	-.02	2	3	0	-10	-5
2009	163	14	10	38	16	46	.07	.06	65	85	.08	.12	.27	.11	1	3	-4	-1	-1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

And the Nationals jumped into the fray, too. Joe Beimel tends to be used as a LOOGY, but I'm not sure why. His lefty/righty splits aren't that strong. Normally a groundball pitcher, he suddenly lost that edge this year. For some reason, he has thrown his sinking fastball much less often this year and turned to the curve and change instead.

The two youngsters obtained by the Nationals have good arms but are several years away from the majors.

The Nationals sent first baseman Nick Johnson to the Marlins for pitching prospect Aaron Thompson.

Nick Johnson

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	628	16	20	42	22	36	.09	.17	78	76	.14	.02	.42	.32	24	-5	9	19	47
2008	147	17	25	38	24	39	.15	.18	78	83	.16	.02	.30	.29	8	-1	-1	2	9
2009	396	14	16	43	23	34	.09	.06	72	85	.13	.05	.41	.12	11	0	8	-5	14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--
TOT	1171	15	19	42	23	35	.10	.13	76	80	.14	.03	.40	.25	43	-6	16	16	69

Talk about improbable. The Marlins picked up am oft-injured first baseman who has been the subject of rumor trades for years. Johnson has been a somewhat different hitter this year. His phenomenal walk rate is closer to normal and he's stopped hitting home runs. However, he's maintained his line drive stroke and his plate discipline is still outstanding.

The prospect obtained by the Nationals, southpaw Aaron Thompson, is a former second-round pick with a good change-up who projects to be an end-of-rotation starter.

More trades, updates and Helton

By Dave Studenmund

August 15, 2009

A couple of trades were made since our last column. The White Sox picked up Alexis Rios on waivers from the Blue Jays. In general, this has gotten a "good for both sides and Rios' contract isn't that bad" vibe from the sabermetric Internet community. I don't disagree with that, but our Batted Ball Profile does raise some issues.

Alexis Rios

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	498	18	8	37	22	42	.05	.12	74	79	.02	.04	.42	.23	-3	-1	7	13	16
2007	711	14	9	36	20	44	.07	.11	70	84	.06	.08	.39	.19	0	6	5	13	23
2008	687	16	7	41	21	38	.08	.08	76	74	.02	.03	.41	.22	-6	-4	8	12	11
2009	485	16	8	41	18	40	.12	.11	73	86	.03	.04	.40	.17	-3	0	0	-1	-4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Rios seems to be off this year. His line drive rate is down and his infield fly rate is up—both indications that he may be a bit off the ball. Plus, his out rate on outfield flies (a strength of his last year) is up. Of course, this could all be random noise piling up in this one particular season. Or it may be a sign that Rios' skills are legitimately slipping, at least a bit. Time will tell. Or, as some of my sabermetric friends might say, time will tell within a certain level of confidence.

To boost their bullpen, the Brewers picked up David Weathers from the Reds. I've actually always liked Weathers, but he's not the groundball pitcher he used to be. He's been successful this year because he's kept his line drives down, but that's obviously a fluke. Given his NIP totals, he's probably a somewhat below-average pitcher at this stage.

David Weathers

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	314	16	11	45	17	38	.10	.16	72	94	.08	.05	.31	.18	2	1	-6	0	-3
2007	328	15	10	36	21	43	.11	.04	79	83	.07	.01	.37	.10	1	-4	0	-6	-8
2008	311	15	11	44	24	32	.10	.09	72	90	.08	.04	.43	.12	2	0	8	-5	5
2009	171	16	11	42	15	43	.12	.16	78	86	.07	.02	.35	.24	1	-1	-4	2	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Meanwhile, teams are starting to see some early returns from their deadline deals. Matt Holliday is the biggest standout, as discussed last week. He now has more batted balls above average for St. Louis, in 38 outs, than he had for Oakland in 247 outs. Check it out…

Holliday Matt

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Team	Outs	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
OAK	247	15	13	45	16	39	.13	.11	70	83	.10	.07	.43	.20	6	5	0	2	13
STL	38	17	10	44	19	37	.09	.20	42	50	.05	.24	.44	.53	0	5	2	8	16

For the Cardinals, Holliday is batting .580 on ground balls (a 42 percent out rate) and .500 on non-home run outfield flies (50 percent out rate). What a nice way to say hello.

Among other big-name trades, Cliff Lee has been outstanding for the Phillies.

Lee Cliff

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Team	Outs	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
CLE	437	17	6	43	21	36	.10	.06	73	86	.00	.05	.38	.11	-9	4	5	-14	-14
PHI	69	25	7	39	15	46	.15	.00	74	91	-.02	.02	.46	-.03	-2	0	-1	-6	-9

His strikeout rate has jumped up to 25 percent and his line drive rate has plummeted to 15 percent. Plus, no home runs allowed.

I believe that only one player has played for three teams so far this season. His most recent team, the Braves, must be happy with what they've gotten from Adam LaRoche so far.

LaRoche Adam

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Team	Outs	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
PIT	246	22	11	38	21	41	.10	.13	87	80	.04	-.04	.46	.24	0	-8	4	5	1
BOS	14	11	0	41	12	47	.13	.14	86	83	-.11	-.05	.64	.25	-1	-1	0	1	0
ATL	23	23	16	23	19	58	.07	.21	67	73	.08	.06	.55	.35	1	0	1	3	5

In his brief Atlanta tenure, LaRoche has been hitting lots of fly balls, hitting them for home runs.

The one big negative return on a trade has been in Detroit, where Jarrod Washburn hasn't been the same since leaving Seattle.

Washburn Ja

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Team	Outs	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
SEA	380	15	7	36	21	43	.08	.07	78	92	.03	.01	.33	.06	-4	-4	-1	-16	-26
DET	31	10	8	50	5	45	.11	.25	60	75	.09	.14	.19	.43	0	2	-2	5	5

Washburn's strikeout rate has dropped, he's allowing too many home runs and his fielders aren't getting to his ground balls or fly balls. Oy.

But hey, it's early and I'm cherrypicking. We should give all these players some time to do their thing.

By the way, all of these tables include games through Thursday, Aug. 13. It's been a couple of weeks since I last looked at the hottest players, so I'm going to highlight some of the hottest batters and pitchers since then. In those two weeks, a certain Rangers rookie has been the hottest hurler:

Derek Holland

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	394	19	8	45	18	37	.07	.14	71	84	.02	.05	.37	.24	-3	1	-2	7	3
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Overall, Derek Holland has been about average in virtually every batted ball metric, though he's showing some strikeout pop and control. But two weeks ago, he was near the bottom of our rankings, 16 runs below average. He's

been a different pitcher since then, striking out more batters, allowing fewer line drives and home runs, and getting his defense to handle more batted balls for outs. Very wise of the youngster.

You might have noticed last week that Tim Lincecum has overtaken Batted Ball Report Poster Boy Dan Haren for the top spot in our pitcher rankings. Over the past two weeks, he's been the second-hottest pitcher on the planet, trailing only Holland.

The hottest hitter over the past two weeks, with 12 runs above average, has been the Nationals' uninjured Zimmerman.

Ryan Zimmerman

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	682	18	9	42	22	36	.13	.11	74	85	.04	.05	.46	.18	-1	0	13	-3	9
2007	722	17	9	44	17	40	.12	.12	71	86	.04	.05	.46	.19	-2	1	2	3	5
2008	466	15	7	46	20	34	.07	.12	68	90	.04	.08	.36	.16	-3	6	0	-2	2
2009	501	17	10	40	20	40	.11	.18	69	86	.06	.05	.41	.27	2	1	4	14	21
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

It's nice to see Ryan Zimmerman batting up to much of the hype he's received the last few years in Washington. Although he's struggled a lot, he's always "looked" like a ballplayer. Looking at his Profile, he also looks like one of those "fly ball out" guys we talked about before: high percentage of infield flies and a high percentage of outfield flies caught for outs. If he can't break that pattern, his redemption will have to come from his home run bat. This year, it is.

Second on our two-week leader list (11 runs above average) is a guy who's been hot before, Joe Mauer. Although we've looked at his profile in the past, let's do it again. It's just so cool.

Joe Mauer

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	608	9	13	49	25	26	.02	.10	73	80	.16	.04	.40	.22	15	1	18	4	38
2007	472	11	13	55	18	28	.01	.07	73	82	.13	.05	.40	.16	9	3	1	-3	11
2008	633	8	13	49	23	28	.04	.05	74	81	.18	.03	.40	.13	16	0	14	-4	26
2009	391	12	12	50	20	30	.01	.24	69	84	.11	.08	.43	.37	6	7	8	19	39
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

There simply aren't many hitters like Joe Mauer in the world. Seriously, a **one percent** infield fly rate? This year he's had a high average on ground balls and, most importantly, he's been socking the ball for home run power.

Before the season began, I would have said that the best all-around hitters in baseball—guys who scored relatively well in all four of our categories—were…

- Albert Pujols
- Matt Holliday
- Chipper Jones
- Chase Utley
- Miguel Cabrera
- David Wright
- Carlos Beltran

- Kevin Youkilis
- Hanley Ramirez

…and maybe a few other batters I'm not remembering (the beginning of the season was so long ago!). I wouldn't have put Mauer on the list because of his lack of fly ball hitting. He's on the list now, near the top.

Speaking of fly balls, the third hottest hitter of the past two weeks has been a guy with some real pop, but who is also the antithesis of Mauer's bat control, Mark Reynolds.

Mark Reynolds

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	414	31	10	36	20	44	.14	.18	67	72	.00	.09	.40	.38	-6	2	-3	16	10
2008	613	33	11	36	19	45	.11	.20	68	85	.00	.07	.49	.29	-8	0	-2	12	2
2009	484	32	13	37	18	46	.08	.32	65	76	.02	.09	.39	.52	-3	3	-6	39	32
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Yeah, Mark Reynolds strikes out a lot; always has, always will. But that's okay if he keeps hitting **32 percent** of his outfield flies over the wall. And, as we've mentioned before, Reynolds is, for some reason, a dang good ground ball hitter.

He didn't make the tippy top of our list for best hitters of the last two weeks, but Todd Helton has had a bit of a resurgence, batting .435 the past seven days. The guy is so good that we should stop and appreciate his Batted Ball Profile:

Todd Helton

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	649	10	15	35	24	41	.08	.08	79	84	.16	.02	.46	.13	18	-5	21	-1	34
2007	682	11	17	40	24	36	.06	.10	73	81	.17	.05	.38	.19	25	1	14	8	47
2008	361	14	17	38	23	38	.07	.08	82	86	.14	-.01	.40	.12	11	-5	5	-4	7
2009	460	12	12	39	25	36	.06	.09	74	80	.12	.05	.39	.20	7	1	12	6	26
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Todd Helton is the third-best line drive hitter of the past four years. Only Freddy Sanchez and David Wright have created more line drive runs above average than Helton's 52. The thing that makes Helton stick out is that he isn't a flyball hitter yet he does control the plate and is walked a lot. There really is no one else with that profile. Most top hitters with his plate discipline are power, fly ball types.

Bobby Abreu kind of fits the profile, but he's not in the same league as Helton as a line drive hitter (being only 28 runs above average). Victor Martinez also kind of fits the profile but again, not nearly to the extent Helton does.

I often try to find "types" among our batted ball friends. Sometimes I do, but sometimes I just find singular cases, like Mr. Helton. That's what makes baseball great. Well, one of the things.

Batted Balls and Pythagoras

By Dave Studenmund

August 21, 2009

Once again Joe Mauer was our hottest hitter of the week, eight runs above average. But I'm tired of talking about Joe. Let's skip his profile. Three guys tied for second place, and we've talked about two of them before, too: Adam LaRoche and Jayson Werth. But the third one is a pretty interesting case study who has escaped our batted ball microscope to date, Big Papi of Boston.

David Ortiz

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	686	17	18	36	17	47	.08	.27	79	88	.12	.01	.46	.39	21	-7	2	47	63
2007	667	15	17	38	17	45	.05	.18	71	72	.13	.06	.39	.36	21	2	0	46	68
2008	491	15	14	37	19	45	.09	.16	78	87	.11	.01	.41	.24	10	-5	1	13	19
2009	471	21	13	31	18	51	.11	.13	86	79	.06	-.03	.33	.24	3	-10	-8	13	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Despite his fine week (seven runs above average), you can see that Ortiz is off his swing this year. His home run rate was already trending down and his strikeout rate has jumped. Interestingly, he's hitting even more fly balls this year; his 51 percent rate is ninth-highest among all qualified batters this year. To top it off, he's been killed on ground balls, batting just .140 (86 percent out rate) on them.

Speaking of upping the fly ball attack, the Cubs' Derrek Lee has had a resurgence after batting .189 in April. He's now batting .294 with 24 home runs and he tied for the third-most batting runs last week (batting .500 in the process). His Profile shows that he's been a different kind of hitter this year:

Derrek Lee

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	204	20	12	41	20	38	.04	.16	70	84	.06	.04	.32	.25	1	0	-2	5	4
2007	650	18	12	41	21	38	.06	.13	69	80	.08	.07	.47	.24	7	5	12	15	39
2008	698	17	10	45	21	34	.03	.11	75	84	.06	.03	.43	.19	2	-3	11	3	13
2009	462	19	12	34	19	47	.06	.17	64	81	.07	.11	.37	.29	4	6	-1	22	31
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

That 47 percent fly ball rate is about ten points higher than the last three years. At the end of April, he was hitting 55 percent fly balls—8 percent for home runs—and just 8 percent line drives. So he has driven up his line drive output and hit more outfield flies for home runs since then. To top it off, his 64 percent groundball out rate is only slightly higher than Ichiro's (62 percent). Think about it. His swing is on and his grounders are finding holes. What more could you ask?

Speaking of Ichiro (steam of consciousness, anyone?), there's a new kid in Arlington, a nice-looking player by the name of Julio Borbon. This is how you make an impression when you're called up to the bigs:

Julio Borbon

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	38	24	8	52	24	24	.20	.25	36	67	.00	.33	.37	.43	0	3	0	0	4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The kid has struck out a lot, but he's also posted a 24 percent line drive rate and hit 24 percent of his outfield flies for home runs. He's a ground ball hitter—52 percent ground balls and grounding out on only 36 percent of them. It's added up to a .485 batting average and he's impressed in left field, too. Do I need to say he won't keep it up?

The hottest pitcher last week was the Phillies' Cliff Lee. Yawn. But right behind him were a couple of good young pitchers we haven't profiled yet. They represent two extremes in a critical, non-batted-ball way. One of them has been one of the best pitchers in the National League, a legitimate Cy Young candidate if not for his teammate.

Matt Cain

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	818	22	11	36	16	48	.16	.09	75	85	.04	.05	.40	.15	0	-3	-12	-7	-21
2007	832	20	10	39	16	45	.11	.06	76	84	.04	.03	.42	.12	-1	-4	-9	-11	-25
2008	933	20	11	33	23	44	.10	.07	74	84	.05	.05	.38	.14	0	-2	3	-8	-7
2009	685	19	9	37	19	43	.11	.09	82	85	.03	-.01	.36	.14	-4	-11	-6	-7	-29
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Matt Cain's ERA has improved from 3.76 last year to 2.43 this year and he's been one of the key reasons for the Giants' success. The biggest differences between this year's Cain and last year's? First, his groundball defenders. Yes, his walk rate has improved and he's allowed fewer line drives, but the biggest batted-ball difference between this year and last is the nine fewer runs he's allowed on ground balls—even though he's given up more of them (37 percent ground balls this year, vs. 33 percent last year). His fielders have converted 82 percent of them for outs.

This doesn't have much, if anything, to do with the Giants' team defense, by the way. Their performance this year has been about the same as last year's. It's just one of those things, and Cain is likely to have more average results next year.

There's also a non-batted-ball trend at play. Cain's percentage of runners left on base (we call it LOB percentage) has been the best in the majors this year. He's left 86 percent of the baserunners he's allowed on base; last year, he left 75 percent.

The other young pitcher, Florida's Ricky Nolasco has posted a 5.22 ERA this year, so you might be surprised to discover that his batted ball profile looks pretty good.

Ricky Nolasco

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	613	16	8	39	21	40	.08	.10	74	86	.04	.04	.46	.16	-2	-1	10	-1	7
2007	99	11	10	37	19	44	.06	.10	61	93	.11	.13	.40	.11	1	2	1	-1	3
2008	868	21	6	39	19	42	.12	.11	71	88	-.02	.07	.39	.16	-17	3	-5	-5	-24
2009	578	24	6	40	21	39	.07	.12	74	77	-.02	.05	.36	.26	-12	-1	-3	11	-5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Last year, Nolasco had a 3.52 ERA and was 24 runs better than average. He got off to a very rocky start this year, posting a 9.07 ERA in the first two months. After a brief visit to the minors, he's gotten his ERA down to 5.22. Overall, his batted ball stats are pretty good. In fact, he's improved his strikeout-to-walk ratio quite a bit since last year and has given up the expected number of home runs.

Two things account for his relatively high ERA this year; you might say that he's Matt Cain's unlucky opposite cousin. The one you can see here is the out rate on his outfield flies, which has dropped 11 points from last year's 88

percentage (it was even lower in the first two months—71 percent. His line drive rate was also 26% during that time.). We should have expected a decline, but that's a doozy.

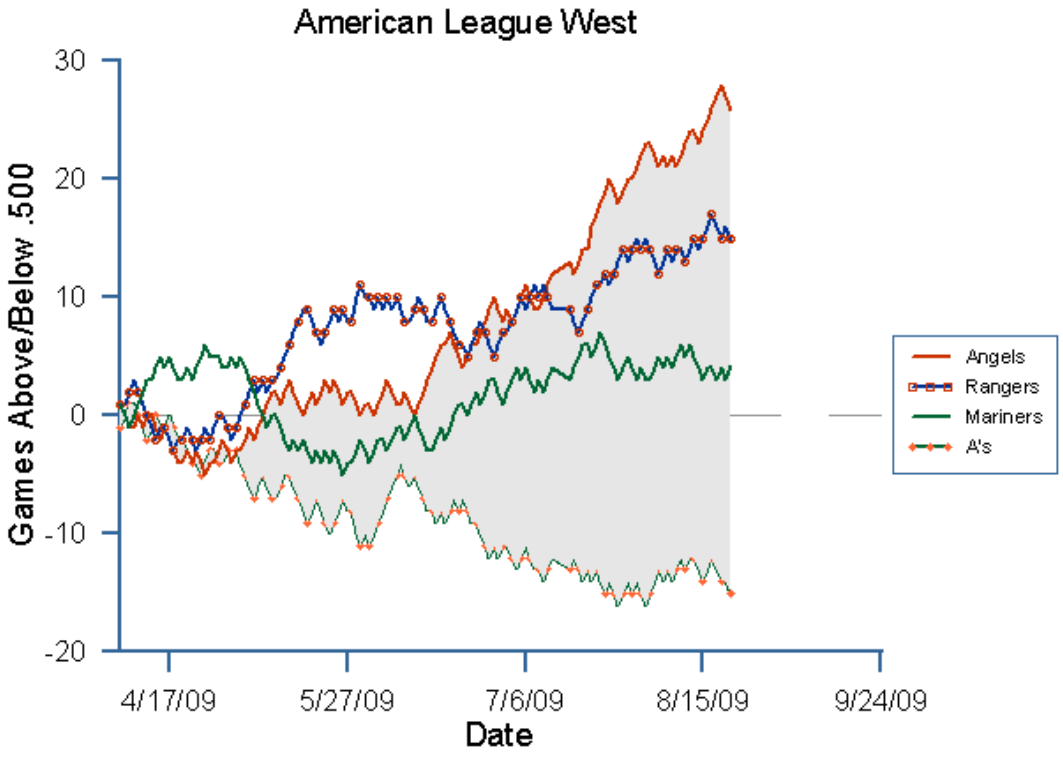
The other reason is that his LOB rate this year is 60 percent, the lowest rate in the majors by far. Last year, it was 76 percent—about the same as Cain's. Nolasco is going to be much better next year.

On a completely unrelated note, I was disappointed to learn the other day that most classical scholars evidently don't believe that Pythagoras actually existed. This is the guy who invented the musical scale and found the heavenly ratios, actually had a theorem named after him. And he didn't exist? Next they'll tell me there is no Betty Crocker, which will completely ruin my enjoyment of all baked goods.

You're probably familiar with the theorem that was named after him. The Ancient Greeks found that the ratio of a team's runs to runs scored and allowed, raised to a mystical exponent, is a good predictor of its actual won/loss record. When Bill James uncovered Phythagoras' theorem in one of his archaeological digs, it served as a reminder that the game of baseball comes down to runs…runs are the statistical link between individual performance and team wins.

The Ancient Greeks, as discovered by James, used two as their exponent, but recent serious scholars of the game have discovered that the exponent changes as the "run environment" of each team changes. I won't get into the details. You can find them at THT's statistical glossary.

Pythagoras has been in the baseball news lately because the Angels are making a nice Pythagorean run after almost setting a record for Pythagorean prowess last year. Let's start by taking a graphical look at the Angels' season thus far:



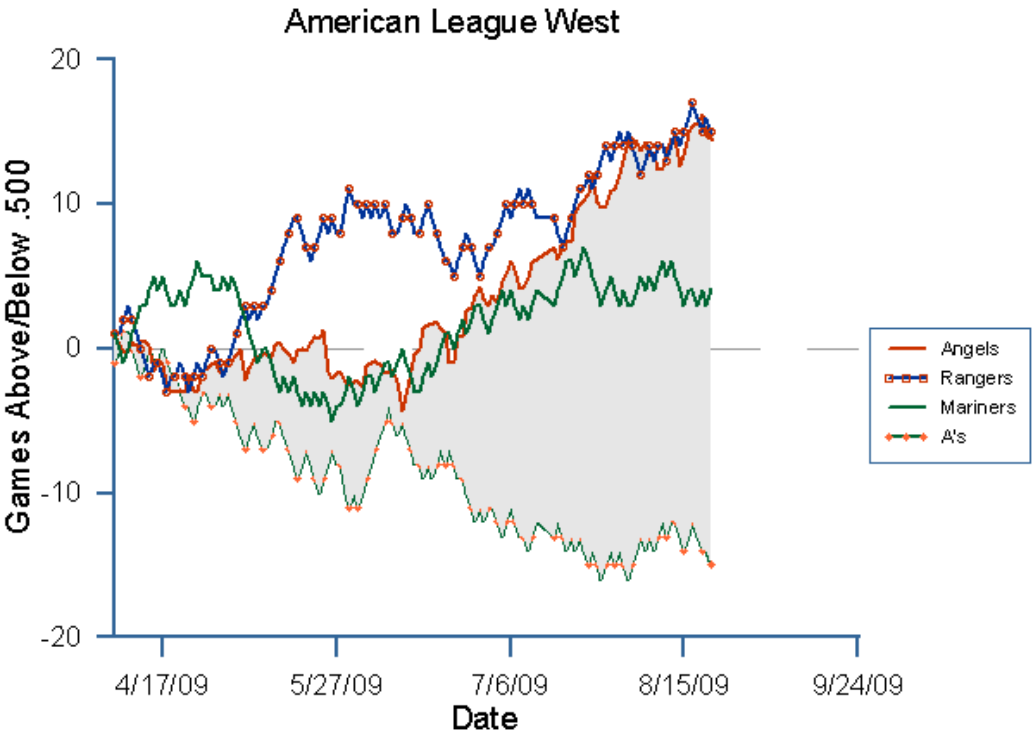
The American League West has provided a bit of fun in 2009. The A's, expected to compete, haven't been a factor at all, while the three other teams have spent some time in the driver's seat. The Mariners held an early lead, the Rangers took over in May and June, and the Angels have made the division theirs since mid-July. At this point, the division appears to be theirs for good.

On the left is a graphical look at the Angels' Pythagorean variance (the difference between their actual wins and projected wins) during this same time.

In early May, the Angels were actually playing worse than their Pythagorean record, but things started to turn around and they've been on a Pythagorean roll ever since, though they don't have much chance of matching their record from last year of 12 wins above projection.

Putting the two together, the second graph is what the AL West race would look like if the Angels were following their Pythagorean record. The Angels would be tied with the Rangers. He may not exist, but Pythagoras has certainly played a hand in the American League West.

How have the Angels done it? Let's look at a few facts:



- Their variance was hovering around one until May 25, when they lost a 17-3 game to the White Sox and it shot up to two. Giving up lots of runs in one game is a sneaky way to outperform your Pythagorean record. In fact, the Angels have played five games that have been decided by 10 or more runs and they've lost all of them.
- From July 4 to July 28 they were 16-5, two wins better than their Pythagorean

projection of 14-7. That 14-7 isn't too shabby, either, but the Angels got a boost by winning all four games won by one run.

- From my review of the data, I think the Angels' offense can take a lot of the credit for their performance. LAofA has the best offense in the majors (689 runs scored) but has been particularly adept in high-leverage situations. The Angels' batting average by criticality is:
    - High Leverage situations: .329
    - Medium Leverage situations: .299
    - Low Leverage situations: .266

This is a pretty extraordinary record. I don't have time to parse all of Baseball Reference, but I did find that the Angels' clutch hitting this year has been even better than Boston's in 2005 (a notable clutch hitting team, thanks to Big Papi and friends). Remember that WPA is a very good way of linking the difference between run scoring (and allowing) and actual wins and losses.

Bullpens tend to get a lot of credit for Pythagorean successes, but I don't think that's what happening with the Angels this year. Their bullpen has a WPA of just 1.98, which is about average. Their team offensive WPA is 14.01; the Yankees' offensive WPA (the two teams have scored just about the same number of runs) is 11.77. Since one WPA equals two wins, that's a four-win difference, two-thirds of their total Pythagorean variance.

A team's variance from its Pythagorean record is notably tough to predict. Looking back throughout baseball history, you can't use a team's previous Pythagorean variance to predict its future variance. The correlation between the two is zero, doesn't exist. It appears to be a totally random phenomenon and the Angels' success this year, and last, probably doesn't mean much.

But I believe something is going on in Pythgoras' universe. Three of the sixth-highest Pythagorean variances in "modern" baseball history (after 1900) have occurred in this decade. Here's a list, sorted by the difference in winning percentage (necessary, because teams used to play less than 162 games):

Year	Team	W	L	Win%	R	RA	PWins	Plosses	Pyth%	Diff	Diff%
1905	DET	79	74	.516	512	602	66	87	.429	13	.087
1955	KC1	63	91	.409	638	911	51	103	.334	12	.075
2008	LAA	100	62	.617	765	697	88	74	.544	12	.074
1954	BRO	92	62	.597	778	740	81	73	.524	11	.073
2005	ARI	77	85	.475	696	856	65	97	.402	12	.073
2004	NYA	101	61	.623	897	808	89	73	.551	12	.072

If they maintain their current pace, the Angels will have posted the best five-year run in Pythagorean variance ever. The current best five-year record belongs to the Yankees, from earlier this decade. Could be random, or there could be something a bit different about modern baseball, something that makes the game a little more difficult to predict. And isn't that the fun part?

I'm not sure what's going to happen to next week's Report—I've got some traveling to do. But I'll publish something sometime. Promise.

Waiver Deals

By Dave Studenmund

August 31, 2009

I'm a little late and a little short this week. Among other things, I spent some time in the Baseball Hall of Fame last week, and I haven't had time to put together a proper Report. Still, something is better than nothing, right? I'll have a more robust Report later this week.

The Hall looks great, by the way. They've added two new exhibits since I was last there, one for Hank Aaron and another commemorating international baseball. Both were well due and well done. If you haven't been to Cooperstown, I heartily recommend it.

While I was gallivanting around upstate New York, Atlanta's Matt Diaz was having a pretty good week. Last year, Diaz was off due to a knee injury, batting .244 after two .300-plus seasons, and many of us wondered how he would fare this year. He batted .216 in April, but he's been sensational in August, batting .402. He created more Batted Ball Runs than anyone in the ten days since I last compiled the stats.

Here's his Batted Ball Profile:

Matt Diaz

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	323	15	6	50	24	27	.06	.10	69	75	.02	.08	.37	.24	-3	5	5	2	10
2007	384	16	5	46	21	34	.03	.11	63	86	.00	.11	.44	.17	-5	9	8	1	13
2008	140	23	3	52	25	24	.04	.09	72	95	-.06	.06	.31	.06	-4	1	-1	-5	-9
2009	318	19	9	46	24	29	.03	.16	69	71	.04	.07	.36	.35	0	3	3	9	15
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Diaz is a kooky batter. Not so hot in the plate discipline department, he nails the ball as evidenced by his high line drive rate and low rate of infield flies. He's also a productive groundball hitter, with out rates that are consistently below the major league average. As for his poor 2008, check out that outfield fly out rate.

There's been another hot batter in the National League East—the Phillies' Chase Utley was just behind Diaz in Batted Ball Runs. There were questions about Utley in the beginning of the year, too, such as whether he would he play at all following offseason hip surgery. You may recall that we covered his hot start in early May and his Batted Ball Profile hasn't changed much at all:

Chase Utley

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	739	18	10	37	20	43	.14	.15	68	81	.06	.08	.46	.26	3	7	11	18	38
2007	613	15	12	38	20	42	.06	.12	69	78	.10	.09	.44	.25	9	7	9	21	47
2008	707	15	13	33	24	42	.12	.16	75	88	.10	.04	.42	.23	11	-2	17	13	40
2009	556	16	17	33	19	48	.07	.16	69	83	.13	.09	.42	.26	17	4	4	21	46
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Utley's line drive rate has increased from the 16% he posted in May and he's still hitting fly balls for power albeit not as extremely as he was early in the year. Utley is another good groundball hitter and his 18 HBP's have helped him post the third-highest NIP Runs in the majors (behind Pujols and Adrian Gonzalez). If not for Pujols, you might hear his name mentioned more often as an MVP candidate.

Not far behind Diaz and Utley, Andrew McCutchen had a strong week as he seems to be growing into his major league status. He swatted seven home runs in August, bringing his previously low home run rate up to major league standards. But his consistent strength has been his speed on ground balls, where he's posted the fourth-lowest out rate among qualified major league batters (the guys ahead of him are Hanley Ramirez, Fred Lewis and Ichiro).

Andrew McCutchen

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	341	16	10	42	18	39	.06	.11	64	88	.06	.12	.43	.17	1	8	2	2	14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

One last young outfielder to touch on: Felix Pie has had a fine August in Baltimore, making their stable of good young outfielders a bit more crowded. Pie has batted .333 in August with a .651 slugging percentage. Pie has hit four flyball home runs since our last Report and Hit Tracker reports that they haven't been chip shots. As you can see, his home run rate has been his one above-average talent.

Felix Pie

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	194	22	7	48	20	32	.12	.05	84	80	.00	.00	.39	.15	-3	-3	-2	-4	-11
2008	93	31	10	49	17	34	.22	.07	69	85	.00	.06	.52	.12	-1	0	-1	-3	-5
2009	205	21	9	40	22	38	.15	.16	76	82	.02	.03	.42	.27	-1	-1	1	3	1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Okay, so he's only been average overall, but if he can keep his bat in the range of average (and it appears that power is his key), his glove makes him an above-average contributor in the outfield.

Before getting to the pitchers, I want to acknowledge a few waiver deals that just came over the "wire." White Sox slugger Jim Thome was dealt to the Dodgers for a minor league infielder. Thome has always been a "three true outcomes" type of hitter, though he was more rounded than that in his prime. Still, he ranks 12th in all-time home runs, second in all-time strikeouts and tenth in all-time walks.

Jim Thome

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	610	24	19	37	20	43	.08	.29	73	85	.09	.06	.41	.44	15	0	0	37	52
2007	536	25	19	43	18	39	.05	.29	78	81	.08	.02	.49	.43	13	-4	1	28	38
2008	602	24	16	40	18	42	.08	.24	85	84	.07	-.04	.44	.36	8	-13	-2	25	18
2009	413	27	17	44	20	36	.11	.30	77	81	.06	.02	.39	.47	6	-4	-3	18	17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

At this stage of his career, he's striking out more and walking less—plus, he hasn't hit quite as many fly balls this year. With his speed, or lack thereof, ground balls aren't a good thing. I don't know what the Dodgers plan to do with him, but it sure looks like Kenny Williams has hoisted the white flag in Chicago.

The Dodgers also picked up a former White Sox hurler, Arizona's Jon Garland.

Jon Garland

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	900	12	5	42	20	38	.09	.09	72	84	.02	.06	.39	.16	-9	4	9	0	4
2007	883	11	7	39	23	38	.12	.08	80	81	.06	.01	.34	.16	-2	-10	5	-3	-9
2008	864	10	8	50	22	28	.08	.12	76	80	.08	.03	.39	.21	2	-2	16	2	18
2009	728	11	8	46	19	35	.07	.10	74	83	.08	.04	.38	.18	1	0	2	1	5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Garland has always been a curiosity; there is nothing special about the guy. In fact, his low strikeout rate would seem to disqualify him for a major league job at all. His one good year of the past four was driven by a high ground ball out rate. The best thing that's been said about the guy is that he stays healthy, which isn't a bad thing. In fact, I wish I could say that about myself.

The Sox dealt another member of their 2005 World Champ rotation when they sent Jose Contreras to the Rockies. Contreras was actually the "poster boy" of the 2008 Hardball Times Annual Stats section, due to an abnormally low out rate on his grounders in 2007. We predicted that he'd improve in 2008 and he did (though that wasn't much of a prediction—he really couldn't have done much worse than his 5.57 ERA).

Jose Contreras

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	833	16	8	45	16	39	.12	.09	77	81	.04	.04	.37	.18	-4	-2	-9	0	-16
2007	858	13	9	45	19	36	.11	.10	68	82	.07	.08	.35	.18	3	12	-1	1	16
2008	522	13	7	51	19	30	.11	.10	75	86	.05	.05	.38	.16	-2	2	1	-7	-6
2009	513	17	10	48	15	37	.07	.09	71	83	.05	.07	.51	.16	1	6	1	-2	4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

He's been as bad this year as he was in 2007 (with a 5.42 ERA) and one of the culprits is once again a low out rate on ground balls. However, the real culprit this year has been his terrible rate of men left on base. His 57% LOB% would be the lowest in the majors if he had enough innings to qualify.

Contreras has had a relatively low LOB% in five of the past six years, mostly because when he's bad, he's really bad and when he's good, he's really good. Or you could just say that he's "not clutch." Batters have hit .247 against Contreras with no one on base, but .271 with runners in scoring position.

Anyway, the hottest pitcher in the past ten days was Zack Greinke of Kansas City. We talked a lot about Greinke early in the year, when he had a 32% strikeout rate and no home runs allowed. Let's see how his season line stacks up now.

Zack Greinke

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	28	18	11	35	35	30	.17	.20	86	100	.06	-.01	.32	.21	0	0	1	0	0
2007	507	21	8	32	22	46	.09	.08	75	86	.01	.04	.44	.13	-6	-3	7	-3	-5
2008	851	22	7	43	19	38	.09	.10	73	83	.00	.05	.41	.18	-12	1	-1	-1	-14
2009	761	27	6	41	19	40	.11	.06	71	81	-.03	.06	.39	.14	-19	1	-9	-11	-38
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Greinke was 13 runs better than average at the end of May and he's added 25 more runs to his bottom line. His NIP stats are still tremendous and his home run rate is still low. On the other hand, he's been hurt by somewhat low out rates on both his ground balls and outfield flies.

Think of that. Zack Greinke would be even better if he had more fielding support.

Adam Wainwright also had another good week. Like Greinke, we looked at Wainwright's Profile in late May and it's probably a good time to take another look.

Adam Wainwright

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	309	23	8	48	17	35	.15	.10	78	85	.01	.03	.46	.15	-4	-2	-2	-6	-13
2007	882	15	9	48	18	34	.12	.07	71	80	.06	.06	.38	.15	0	8	-5	-9	-5
2008	544	17	7	46	19	35	.17	.10	77	90	.02	.04	.41	.13	-5	-1	1	-10	-16
2009	800	21	8	52	18	30	.09	.10	74	82	.01	.04	.33	.18	-9	1	-12	-10	-30
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Wainwright's strikeout rate has gotten even better (19 percent in late May) and his groundball rate has really zoomed from the 46 percent we saw before.

We haven't talked about David Price before.

David Price

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	57	21	9	50	13	38	.07	.07	70	100	.02	.07	.31	.01	0	0	-2	-2	-4
2009	407	19	11	40	22	38	.11	.14	81	80	.05	.01	.34	.26	1	-4	-1	6	1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The young Ray had a fine week, six runs better than average, thanks in particular to a strong outing against the Tigers. He had thirteen ground balls in that Tiger game, and it appears that Price's success may be tied to his ground ball tendencies. Of course, having an infield convert 81% of your ground balls into outs doesn't hurt, either.

That's all for today's Report. I'll be back with some more in-depth musings later this week.

Everyone else

By Dave Studenmund

September 5, 2009

Warning: This is a long article with a lot of tables. During the season, I used hot streaks to trigger Batted Ball Profiles 'cause I figured that was a unique way to capture the more interesting case studies in the majors. Not a bad idea, but I recently realized that I've missed a whole gaggle of interesting hitters. I want to make it up to you today.

What follows is a bunch of batters I should have mentioned during the year but didn't. Your eyes may glaze over a bit, but you also may find something of interest about your favorite batters, favorite teams or favorite numbers. I can tell you that I found the exercise fascinating. Let's dig in.

We've already talked about Albert Pujols, Chase Utley and Hanley Ramirez as MVP candidates. There are a few other players who merit MVP consideration. The Dodgers' Matt Kemp, for instance:

Matthew Kemp

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	166	32	5	40	24	36	.08	.18	80	75	-.05	.02	.42	.32	-5	-1	1	4	-2
2007	311	21	5	45	17	37	.05	.12	53	87	-.02	.17	.52	.18	-6	13	5	2	15
2008	657	23	7	45	23	32	.01	.13	65	84	-.01	.10	.38	.21	-10	12	5	4	11
2009	555	21	9	40	22	39	.05	.16	68	80	.02	.08	.40	.28	-4	5	5	18	24
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Kemp is another line drive/ground ball hitter (he batted over .400 on ground balls in 2007) who added more flyball power this year. What's more, his walk rate has improved steadily the past four years. He's really become the complete package as a hitter.

In Philadelphia, Ryan Howard has been blasting home runs at a slightly reduced rate, though he's still fourth-best in the majors. Check out his consistently impressive infield fly rates, as well as his out rates:

Ryan Howard

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	704	26	17	42	22	36	.03	.39	72	83	.07	.06	.43	.58	12	1	6	57	76
2007	648	31	17	31	24	44	.03	.30	81	81	.05	-.01	.42	.47	8	-10	2	42	43
2008	700	28	12	41	22	36	.02	.32	82	84	.02	-.01	.35	.48	-3	-11	-5	42	22
2009	573	28	11	35	23	42	.01	.25	79	75	.02	.01	.33	.44	-4	-6	-4	41	27
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Howard is a consistently lousy groundball hitter, but he's had a very good year with his outfield flies. That 75 percent out rate on outfield flies is one of the 20 best rates in the majors.

Regarding American League MVPs, we've covered Mark Teixeira and Joe Mauer. But you haven't heard much about this guy…

Miguel Cabrera

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	676	16	14	40	24	35	.07	.16	69	84	.10	.07	.49	.26	13	5	24	16	59
2007	680	19	12	40	21	39	.10	.19	71	83	.07	.06	.48	.30	6	2	13	22	44
2008	684	18	9	41	20	39	.11	.19	71	84	.03	.06	.40	.30	-3	3	3	23	26
2009	550	16	10	43	22	35	.06	.19	69	79	.06	.07	.43	.33	3	5	12	23	43
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Except for the first half of 2008, Miguel Cabrera has been a consistently spectacular hitter with above-average line drive and home run rates and below-average out rates on ground balls. In other words, he's a line drive hitter, he's a power flyball hitter, he's a groundball hitter. Only caveat I see is that his walk rate is just average. Oh well.

The "other" Yankee MVP candidate, Derek Jeter, has had a resurgence this year. Jeter has always been one of the best groundball hitters in the majors, and last year I wondered if that was his only remaining strength. He really changed his profile this year:

Derek Jeter

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	715	14	11	59	22	18	.02	.15	71	73	.09	.07	.43	.32	8	12	16	4	40
2007	714	14	10	56	20	24	.04	.10	67	79	.08	.08	.41	.22	4	16	10	1	31
2008	668	13	9	58	18	24	.03	.08	68	81	.08	.07	.34	.18	3	12	-3	-6	7
2009	604	12	10	55	20	25	.01	.15	78	73	.10	.02	.43	.30	5	-2	11	11	26
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Jeter upped his line drive and home run rates to previous standards but, curiously, his groundball hitting took a plunge. Go figure.

It took Kendry Morales eight tries to get off the island of Cuba, and it's taken him a little while to find his major league stroke. The Angels are happy he's such a persistent fellow.

Kendry Morales

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	215	13	8	52	15	34	.12	.10	78	91	.06	.02	.38	.11	0	-2	-3	-5	-10
2007	126	17	6	47	11	42	.10	.11	67	76	.00	.07	.38	.25	-2	2	-3	4	1
2008	66	11	8	41	15	44	.13	.14	82	83	.08	-.02	.31	.22	0	-1	-1	1	-1
2009	510	17	7	40	18	42	.06	.19	74	81	.02	.04	.43	.33	-4	0	3	29	27
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Morales' home run rate is his primary calling card, but also note his increasing line drive and decreasing infield fly rates, which seem to indicate that he's been "on" the ball this year—particularly in the second half of the season.

Meanwhile, you might be wondering what happened to last year's American League MVP:

Dustin Pedroia

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	98	7	8	48	23	30	.13	.10	84	95	.13	.00	.23	.09	1	-2	-2	-3	-6
2007	581	7	9	43	18	38	.13	.05	69	81	.15	.08	.41	.12	7	9	7	-6	17
2008	726	7	8	43	21	36	.10	.09	70	83	.13	.07	.41	.16	5	9	16	1	31
2009	591	7	11	38	20	41	.11	.06	72	85	.17	.05	.40	.10	10	2	9	-6	15
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Pedroia hasn't changed his game drastically. The big news is that his home run rate declined, which was expected. His line drive rate also declined a bit and his out rates increased. It looks as though he might have gotten a bit flyball happy. On the plus side, his walk rate is up.

While we're in Boston, let's take a look at the guy who has manned the team's storied left field position:

Jason Bay

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	689	23	16	41	15	44	.04	.19	72	80	.08	.05	.46	.32	12	0	-4	31	39
2007	614	23	11	38	17	45	.10	.13	74	84	.04	.05	.44	.20	-1	-1	-4	6	1
2008	670	20	13	38	17	46	.08	.15	65	79	.06	.10	.43	.28	6	9	-1	26	39
2009	538	24	17	35	17	48	.10	.21	76	75	.08	.03	.41	.38	11	-3	-5	31	33
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Bay is certainly one of the top 20 batters in baseball this year. In fact, he's been consistently excellent in three of the last four years. As you can see, Bay is a flyball hitter—his groundball and line drive rates both suffer for the fly. This year, he's upped his walk rate and home run rates and his out rate on outfield flies has been a bonus.

Continuing our team-by-team review… I'm going to go in alphabetical order, highlighting some interesting cases along the way. There's a good young cadre of outfielders in Baltimore—we profiled the fourth guy, Felix Pie, last week. Let's profile the rest of the class.

Nicholas Markakis

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	542	13	8	51	20	29	.08	.13	72	87	.07	.05	.37	.20	1	4	1	-1	5
2007	710	16	9	45	18	37	.07	.12	73	79	.06	.04	.43	.24	1	1	3	15	21
2008	697	16	14	46	21	33	.06	.12	71	81	.10	.07	.46	.22	14	7	13	6	40
2009	598	14	8	42	17	40	.07	.09	68	85	.05	.09	.46	.16	-1	10	7	2	17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Nick Markakis was spectacular this year. This year he's been merely good. His walk rate has plummeted—perhaps 2008 was just a fluke?—and his line drive and home run rates have fallen too. His flyball rate was above average this year, when it's typically been average or lower in the past. That also seems like trouble to me. Markakis hasn't been a flyball hitter in the past; seems like he's off his game.

Markakis' one saving grace has been his groundball out rate—six points below average. Thanks to that, his batting average is about the same as last year's. But don't be fooled. He hasn't been the same hitter.

This guy is seriously not a flyball hitter…

Adam Jones

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	76	29	3	44	27	29	.13	.08	78	83	-.07	.01	.32	.13	-3	-1	0	-2	-6
2007	71	30	7	34	27	39	.18	.14	73	83	-.02	.06	.44	.25	-2	0	1	0	0
2008	514	21	6	47	18	35	.15	.07	66	83	-.01	.09	.43	.14	-9	8	0	-8	-9
2009	519	18	8	55	17	28	.06	.19	76	78	.03	.04	.35	.33	-3	0	-6	12	4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Jones has hit 19 home runs this year. According to Hit Tracker, most of them have been power shots and not dingers, which gives Oriolse fans some hope. But Jones is going to have to find some way to loft the ball more often.

Nolan Reimold

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	369	19	13	50	14	36	.18	.16	70	76	.07	.07	.45	.31	4	4	-2	7	13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Nolan Reimold has had a very low line drive rate and high infield fly rate. He hasn't been "on" the ball this year. He's also been helped by some positive out rates. And Hit Tracker categorizes about half his home runs as "just enough" power to clear the fence. In other words, he's had a good first year on the surface, but warning signs lurk.

He doesn't play the outfield, but Matt Wieters was the most ballyhooed of prospects early this year. It's hard to say much about him, other than he has to get some plate discipline from somewhere. Once he does, the rest of his profile will take better shape.

Matthew Wieters

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	269	23	6	39	18	43	.10	.07	73	79	-.01	.04	.40	.14	-5	-1	-1	-1	-9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

There's a good young player on the South Side of Chicago.

Gordon Beckham

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	337	15	11	40	17	43	.11	.10	75	80	.08	.03	.48	.20	3	-2	2	4	7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Gordon Beckham has a good eye and shows a penchant for the fly ball. On all other counts, he's had roughly an average year, which is not at all shabby for a rookie. The kid has a bright future.

Anthony Pierzynski

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	543	13	6	44	23	33	.14	.13	73	85	.02	.05	.34	.20	-5	2	5	0	2
2007	509	13	6	43	18	39	.13	.10	83	79	.04	-.02	.40	.19	-3	-11	0	2	-11
2008	570	12	5	44	18	38	.11	.08	75	83	.01	.03	.40	.15	-7	-2	1	-4	-11
2009	445	9	4	47	20	33	.08	.11	74	81	.04	.04	.36	.20	-4	1	4	4	5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

A.J. the Aggravator is batting a career-high .317. He's hasn't been particularly lucky with his out rates, he's just hit the ball more often. His strikeout and walk rates are both extremely low. In fact, A.J. has put the ball in play in 87 percent of his plate appearances, one of the best rates in the majors—only Placido Polanco and Miguel Tejada have put the ball in play at a higher rate.

On the North Side of Chicago, there is only bitterness and sorrow.

Alfonso Soriano

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	728	22	10	29	20	51	.08	.19	72	84	.03	.08	.39	.29	-1	1	-1	37	36
2007	617	21	6	34	20	46	.05	.17	70	87	-.02	.08	.48	.25	-11	3	10	22	25
2008	503	20	9	29	23	48	.05	.16	81	84	.03	.00	.45	.24	-2	-7	10	17	17
2009	522	23	8	33	19	48	.09	.12	78	82	.01	.04	.40	.19	-6	-3	-2	5	-6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

In the first two years of his Profile, Soriano was a groundball and line drive hitter with power, in the category of Miguel Cabrera. The groundball average departed last year and the home run and line drive rates left the station this year.

Geovany Soto

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	26	19	4	60	5	35	.14	.00	75	83	-.04	.05	.48	.05	-1	0	-1	-1	-3
2007	60	23	8	41	22	37	.00	.20	41	58	.01	.27	.23	.48	-1	4	-1	5	8
2008	563	21	11	38	21	41	.06	.16	74	83	.05	.05	.44	.26	1	0	6	15	21
2009	311	20	14	38	20	43	.05	.10	82	84	.07	-.04	.31	.17	3	-7	-5	1	-8
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

After a terrific freshman year, catcher Soto has been a big disappointment this year. However, one of the reasons for his dive has been his groundball out rate—a high 82 percent. And on the positive side, his walk rate is up. The guy was injured and had bad luck. I know it's hard to be optimistic about someone batting .213, but his only direction is up.

Aramis Ramirez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	660	10	9	35	18	47	.12	.17	71	86	.11	.06	.37	.25	5	2	1	25	33
2007	558	12	8	39	18	44	.08	.14	70	80	.08	.06	.44	.25	2	4	6	23	35
2008	645	15	13	31	20	48	.10	.12	72	88	.11	.06	.45	.17	11	1	10	8	30
2009	249	12	9	34	23	44	.12	.15	71	83	.08	.05	.40	.24	1	0	5	7	14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

I was actually a little worried about Aramis Ramirez at this point last year. In particular, I was concerned that his increased walk rate might be a harbinger of someone who was becoming a bit passive. No need to worry. He's been injured, but when he's played Ramirez has been back on his game.

Moving onto Cincinnati and one of the finest young hitters in the game…

Joey Votto

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	89	17	6	28	26	46	.06	.13	68	85	.00	.10	.41	.21	-1	1	3	3	5
2008	589	17	10	44	25	31	.04	.18	74	81	.06	.05	.35	.30	2	1	7	14	25
2009	422	20	13	39	22	38	.02	.19	77	72	.06	.03	.37	.36	4	-2	3	22	27
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Votto is not just a home run hitter. Look at those line drive and infield fly rates. He gets his bat on the ball, and with power. This year, he's been helped a lot by a 72 percent out rate on his outfield flies, and that likely won't continue into next year. It's fun to speculate about Votto's future. Will he continue to be a line drive hitter with power? Or will he emphasize his power as he matures, hitting fly balls more often and maintain his power rates?

Here's a scenario: His line drive rate doesn't improve and his outfield fly out rate rebounds to average. He's now a .280 hitter with power, but not a great hitter anymore. Fans and the media recoil. Votto wonders what to do, things are terrible. So he starts to put more loft on the ball, trying for more power. He's unsuccessful at first, but eventually gets the hang of the power game and does morph into a classic flyball power hitter who draws lots of walks.

Could happen.

Brandon Phillips

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	587	15	7	46	19	35	.06	.12	76	80	.03	.03	.32	.21	-4	-3	-5	5	-7
2007	702	16	6	47	18	35	.10	.16	68	88	.02	.07	.37	.23	-6	9	0	9	11
2008	609	15	7	50	16	34	.09	.14	73	84	.03	.05	.37	.22	-4	4	-5	5	0
2009	520	11	8	50	16	35	.08	.14	75	83	.08	.04	.33	.24	1	1	-7	8	4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The story for Brandon Phillips is pretty consistent. He's an average major league hitter. Puts the ball in play. Doesn't hit as many line drives as the average major leaguer but has more home run power. Not a bad profile at all for a fine fielding second baseman.

In Cleveland, the midges come out at night.

Shin-Soo Choo

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	179	28	11	56	24	20	.00	.14	68	67	.02	.10	.35	.37	-1	4	0	1	3
2007	20	25	10	38	38	23	.00	.00	40	100	.02	.25	.25	-.10	0	1	0	-1	0
2008	370	21	13	41	23	36	.09	.16	68	79	.06	.09	.43	.31	4	4	5	10	24
2009	576	22	14	44	22	34	.06	.12	75	75	.07	.04	.44	.28	6	-2	7	11	23
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

You may not hear much about Choo, but you should. As a hitter, he's proven his worth for the second straight year, on a par with Carlos Pena or Andre Ethier. He's a line drive hitter with plate discipline and some power. However, I have a feeling the bubble will burst next year. His batting average was bolstered by a low out rate on grounders last year and outfield flies this year. Someday, the devil must have his due.

Grady Sizemore

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	751	20	12	33	20	47	.06	.12	74	77	.06	.06	.49	.25	5	0	11	25	41
2007	748	21	16	33	21	47	.05	.12	73	85	.09	.06	.42	.20	14	0	4	11	29
2008	745	17	15	35	19	46	.11	.16	77	81	.10	.04	.34	.28	14	-4	-5	26	30
2009	503	18	13	36	17	48	.09	.12	79	82	.08	.02	.48	.20	5	-5	0	7	7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Grady Sizemore batted .290 in 2006—he's batting .248 so far this year. We can spot the trends: fewer line drives, more infield flies, more outs on grounders. Fewer walks this year, too. Sizemore is a flyball hitter. To bounce back, he's got to get more than .20 runs out of each outfield fly.

Asdrubal Cabrera

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	186	16	10	44	20	36	.06	.04	74	81	.07	.03	.40	.14	1	-1	0	-2	-2
2008	418	18	12	46	21	34	.12	.06	73	92	.07	.05	.46	.06	3	1	4	-13	-6
2009	487	16	7	47	22	31	.03	.05	70	77	.03	.06	.44	.16	-2	4	10	-2	9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Asdrubal Cabrera is a line drive hitter, which is good. Otherwise, it's all about the out rates.

It seems like Detroit's secret to success is that the Tigers haven't had a team slump. Every other AL Central team has.

Curtis Granderson

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	679	26	10	39	22	39	.06	.12	70	80	.02	.09	.34	.25	-5	5	-5	9	3
2007	676	21	8	34	21	45	.07	.11	72	75	.02	.08	.48	.27	-5	4	12	24	35
2008	629	18	12	40	19	41	.06	.11	68	84	.07	.09	.41	.20	5	8	2	8	23
2009	580	20	11	29	22	49	.13	.15	82	87	.05	.01	.39	.23	1	-7	2	12	8
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Granderson kind of stopped hitting ground balls this year, which is a good thing, 'cause he stopped getting hits with them too. That's been the only significant difference between 2009 Curtis and previous Curtis. Don't worry about the guy.

Brandon Inge

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	601	21	8	40	14	46	.11	.15	68	84	.02	.08	.41	.25	-5	4	-9	14	4
2007	577	26	10	37	22	41	.07	.09	77	82	.02	.04	.40	.16	-5	-3	-1	-4	-13
2008	407	23	13	37	16	46	.10	.10	77	88	.05	.03	.37	.15	1	-3	-8	-3	-12
2009	514	27	11	41	14	45	.10	.20	63	92	.02	.10	.35	.25	-2	6	-13	10	1
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Brandon Inge has one of the craziest out splits in the majors. His 63 percent groundball out rate is one of the lowest; his 92 percent outfield fly out rate is one of the highest. And those are important, because he hasn't hit many line drives. He has displayed impressive power this year.

How ironic is it that two of the youngest teams in the majors play in Florida?

Christopher Coghlan

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	432	16	11	49	22	29	.09	.11	72	78	.07	.07	.38	.23	3	4	4	1	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The Marlins called up Coghlan after a month and moved him from second base to left field, where he's batted .306. He's been helped by his out rates, but he's a line drive/groundball hitter who still manages to power the ball. A real hitter. It's too bad he was moved from second, where his bat would be a huge plus.

Daniel Uggla

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	683	18	8	41	17	42	.07	.14	67	88	.03	.09	.40	.20	-3	9	-4	9	11
2007	728	23	11	34	16	51	.10	.14	73	84	.04	.06	.42	.23	-1	-1	-8	18	8
2008	619	28	14	36	16	48	.08	.20	64	82	.04	.11	.43	.32	2	6	-8	26	26
2009	550	21	15	36	17	47	.10	.17	77	85	.08	.03	.34	.26	9	-4	-9	14	10
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Uggla is the Marlin at second. He's a power flyball hitter who walks but doesn't hit line drives. He was helped by his groundball out rate last year, but not this year. His line drives have also lost some oomph and his doubles total has fallen from 49 two years ago to 21 so far this year.

Houston has surprised this year, and perhaps no one has surprised more than Michael Bourn.

Michael Bourn

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	11	27	9	50	25	25	.00	.00	100	100	.00	-.10	-.10	-.10	0	0	-1	-1	-2
2007	133	16	10	58	18	24	.05	.05	71	80	.06	.07	.36	.17	0	2	-1	-2	-1
2008	514	22	8	54	17	29	.08	.04	71	91	.01	.07	.34	.05	-6	5	-11	-20	-32
2009	557	19	10	57	21	23	.01	.04	69	81	.05	.09	.46	.13	1	11	6	-11	6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Bourn was just unlucky in the outfield fly department last year and his out rate was closer to average this year. On the other hand, ground balls are his game. His bat was on the ball this year, as evidenced by his line drive and infield fly rates. According to Bill James Online, he's been the best baserunner in the majors this season.

Kazuo Matsui

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	265	17	6	48	20	31	.08	.05	71	81	.01	.07	.39	.12	-3	3	0	-5	-5
2007	453	15	8	45	21	34	.08	.03	68	83	.04	.09	.44	.08	-2	7	6	-11	0
2008	422	13	9	46	21	34	.15	.07	76	82	.08	.04	.47	.14	1	0	8	-6	3
2009	423	17	7	48	20	32	.14	.05	73	85	.02	.06	.30	.09	-4	2	-7	-13	-21
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Matsui and Bourn switched places between last year and this one. Matsui just didn't seem to get any zip on the ball and his line drive and outfield fly run values took a dive.

Kendry Morales may lead the Angels in home runs and RBIs, but he doesn't lead in Runs Created. This guy does:

Chone Figgins

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	683	15	10	44	21	36	.07	.06	72	83	.07	.07	.31	.11	3	6	-5	-11	-8
2007	503	16	10	47	26	26	.03	.03	74	80	.06	.04	.46	.11	2	1	19	-9	13
2008	520	15	13	46	24	30	.07	.01	74	83	.09	.04	.34	.03	7	0	2	-18	-8
2009	604	15	14	41	24	35	.08	.02	70	81	.11	.07	.44	.08	11	5	14	-13	17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Chone "Call Me Sean" Figgins is a fine line drive hitter with no power to speak of. The difference between last year and this year isn't that he hit more line drives, but he got more out of them. Figgins has also been perhaps the best clutch hitter in the majors in 2009. He's hit .424 in high-leverage situations and .265 in low-leverage situations. With runners in scoring position, he's batted .366; with runners in scoring position and two outs, .345.

Bobby Abreu

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	686	20	19	45	26	29	.01	.12	72	77	.11	.05	.38	.25	20	1	10	5	37
2007	699	16	12	45	20	34	.02	.09	76	82	.09	.03	.42	.18	8	-2	6	2	15
2008	684	16	11	48	23	30	.03	.14	76	84	.07	.03	.43	.22	5	-2	13	5	21
2009	551	16	14	50	19	31	.03	.10	68	82	.10	.08	.32	.20	10	8	-3	2	17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Bobby Abreu may be having a good year, but his fundamental line drive hitting is down. His season has been saved by a .320 average on ground balls. He still doesn't hit infield flies, so his line drive rate may rebound next year.

Things have been snappy on the other side of the town, too.

Andre Ethier

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	441	17	9	41	22	37	.03	.09	71	82	.04	.06	.45	.16	-1	2	10	2	13
2007	507	13	10	46	18	36	.03	.10	72	82	.08	.06	.36	.18	3	4	-2	4	9
2008	596	15	11	41	27	32	.04	.15	74	86	.08	.06	.35	.22	4	3	11	7	26
2009	577	17	12	38	20	42	.05	.16	79	76	.08	.00	.35	.31	6	-8	0	26	25
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Has Andre Ethier changed his approach? Last year, he had a phenomenally high line drive rate. This year, he's been more of a fly ball hitter. This could be entirely the result of some sort of scorekeeping bias—one indication, for instance, is that his outfield out rate is down 10 points—but the overall production of his "air balls" does appear to be up.

Manny Ramirez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	558	18	18	36	22	42	.05	.25	74	81	.11	.04	.42	.38	17	-2	8	33	57
2007	569	16	14	38	22	41	.05	.12	79	81	.10	.00	.44	.22	10	-8	9	12	23
2008	654	19	15	38	23	39	.11	.23	66	81	.09	.08	.44	.36	12	6	14	30	62
2009	344	18	17	32	25	43	.10	.17	73	90	.11	.06	.49	.23	9	0	12	6	27
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Manny has been hurt this year by a high out rate on his outfield flies, and his groundball out rate climbed back to average, which you knew would happen. Fundamentally, he's hasn't been that different from last year's model.

Onto Milwaukee, another disappointing team on a Great Lake. We reviewed Prince Fielder early in the year, but I wanted to revisit his profile.

Prince Fielder

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	648	19	11	42	18	39	.12	.17	77	80	.05	.02	.42	.29	2	-5	0	16	14
2007	681	18	15	35	19	46	.08	.25	82	82	.10	.00	.43	.38	14	-9	4	46	55
2008	694	19	14	41	19	40	.13	.19	75	83	.08	.04	.45	.30	9	-2	4	19	30
2009	588	19	16	41	16	44	.05	.21	73	81	.10	.04	.51	.34	14	-1	3	32	48
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Fielder is, of course, a dead flyball power hitter. It may be that a 20 percent home run rate is his more natural level than the 25 percent he displayed in 2007, but we'll take it. He was helped this year by a relatively strong groundball batting average.

We also talked about Ryan Braun's fantastic groundball hitting early in the year, but didn't look at his entire Profile. Here it is—the improving walk rate is encouraging for Brewers fans.

Ryan Braun

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	492	23	7	39	16	45	.08	.23	64	80	.00	.09	.55	.37	-6	6	6	32	38
2008	663	19	7	39	17	44	.13	.19	67	86	.01	.09	.46	.28	-7	8	3	22	26
2009	578	17	10	45	20	35	.17	.22	67	81	.06	.09	.41	.37	2	10	6	20	38
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Joe Mauer, blah, blah, blah. Let's check out a couple of other Twinkies.

Justin Morneau

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	661	14	9	36	24	41	.09	.15	70	86	.06	.08	.42	.22	1	5	17	14	37
2007	668	14	10	45	16	39	.11	.17	78	82	.08	.02	.38	.28	5	-4	-5	20	16
2008	712	12	11	43	19	38	.09	.12	76	77	.11	.03	.41	.24	9	-3	7	16	29
2009	553	14	13	41	16	43	.12	.18	74	83	.10	.04	.42	.29	9	0	0	19	28
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Another good year for Justin Morneau, though he hasn't hit with men on the way he did last year. That 24 percent line drive rate in 2006 was a mirage; he hasn't come close to it before or since. He's a good hitter, but not a great one. His strengths are his plate discipline and good home run power.

Denard Span

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2008	411	15	13	54	26	20	.04	.11	73	78	.10	.07	.32	.22	7	6	3	-4	11
2009	545	13	12	55	18	27	.06	.06	68	78	.11	.09	.37	.16	8	11	-1	-6	13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

You have to like Denard Span. Excellent plate discipline and a groundball hitter who hits them often and well. Shows occasional power, as the scouts say. He's also a very good corner outfielder and a plus baserunner.

It's been a big year for the bats in Yankee Stadium.

Johnny Damon

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	671	13	11	41	19	40	.15	.14	75	83	.10	.05	.39	.23	6	1	2	9	19
2007	605	13	11	48	18	33	.13	.09	70	86	.10	.08	.36	.14	7	9	-1	-7	7
2008	623	13	10	44	22	34	.14	.12	69	82	.09	.08	.35	.20	5	9	5	2	21
2009	539	15	12	40	17	43	.14	.17	67	82	.08	.10	.37	.27	6	9	-3	16	27
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

I've got to admit that I've overlooked Johnny Damon amid the New York onslaught, but he's had a really fine year. The key has been his home run rate, which has been helped quite a bit by the new stadium (17 home runs at home; seven on the road). Notice that he's been an effective groundball hitter the last three years? I wonder what's up with that?

We looked at the impact of Yankee Stadium earlier in the year. A data update reveals that it still has been the best home run park in the majors, though non-HR outfield flies were caught for outs more often—relatively—than in any other major league park. So, overall, the effects cancelled out a bit and Yankee Stadium has been only a slight hitter's park overall.

Nicholas Swisher

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	672	23	16	33	19	48	.12	.19	76	86	.08	.03	.45	.27	12	-5	2	17	26
2007	659	20	17	37	18	46	.09	.13	78	81	.10	.02	.45	.22	15	-6	0	10	19
2008	588	23	15	35	21	45	.11	.16	82	90	.07	-.01	.37	.21	6	-10	-4	4	-3
2009	509	22	17	39	17	45	.11	.18	79	83	.09	.01	.42	.29	10	-5	-5	15	15
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

For the opposing point of view: Nick Swisher has batted .200 at home and .282 on the road. His mild rebound from 2008 had more to do with his out rates than anything else. He was still the same batter overall.

On the Letterman show last night: "No. 1 Sign You Wasted Your Summer: You Played for the Mets."

Luis Castillo

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	652	9	9	61	18	21	.14	.03	70	87	.11	.07	.37	.06	5	15	0	-22	-3
2007	615	7	9	67	15	18	.07	.00	72	81	.13	.06	.42	.05	5	13	-1	-21	-4
2008	359	10	14	66	16	18	.13	.05	77	79	.16	.02	.32	.10	9	-1	-6	-11	-9
2009	466	9	13	61	21	18	.03	.02	73	77	.15	.05	.30	.11	10	4	-2	-12	0
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

After suffering through a poor 2008, Luis Castillo was one of the few Mets to stay healthy and kind of productive during the year. His ground balls were a bit more productive this year (and boy, did he hit a lot of ground balls) and his line drive rate was up. His flyball rate was the second-lowest in the majors. There's something to be said for sticking to your strengths.

I don't know that Oakland fans were any more disappointed than Mets fans.

Jack Cust

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	507	32	21	42	23	35	.04	.33	86	74	.07	-.02	.45	.54	12	-9	0	24	27
2008	598	33	19	41	21	39	.05	.31	79	85	.05	.02	.40	.45	9	-6	-6	24	21
2009	525	29	16	37	21	43	.02	.17	79	82	.05	.01	.36	.27	5	-6	-6	11	3
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Simply put, Jack Cust just didn't hit home runs like he used to. He's never going to be a productive ground ball hitter.

Adam Kennedy

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	503	14	9	41	27	33	.04	.03	83	82	.06	-.02	.37	.09	0	-10	11	-10	-9
2007	306	11	8	43	17	40	.04	.03	76	86	.08	.02	.26	.06	1	-2	-7	-9	-17
2008	365	12	6	43	25	32	.05	.02	77	82	.04	.02	.34	.07	-2	-3	5	-9	-9
2009	480	14	8	41	24	35	.05	.08	81	81	.05	.00	.39	.15	-1	-7	9	-3	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Adam Kennedy has had two straight years of fine line drive hitting (and three out of four). Give him credit: he hits the ball on the nose, though without much power. And the guy should avoid ground balls—he's lucky to bat .200 on grounders.

Lots of offense in Philly, the second easiest place to hit a homer this year.

Shane Victorino

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	462	12	8	45	21	34	.23	.06	66	88	.08	.10	.36	.10	1	10	3	-12	1
2007	510	12	9	47	17	36	.11	.09	68	88	.09	.08	.44	.12	3	9	2	-7	6
2008	627	11	8	45	19	36	.17	.08	66	92	.08	.11	.46	.08	2	15	10	-17	10
2009	578	11	10	45	22	33	.18	.06	71	84	.11	.08	.44	.13	6	8	15	-10	19
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The Shane 2009 Report: More walks, more line drives and fewer outs on outfield flies. The negatives: a lower batting average on grounders and a fondness for infield flies.

Jimmy Rollins

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	758	11	8	44	19	37	.11	.11	75	88	.09	.04	.44	.17	2	1	11	0	14
2007	778	11	7	36	20	44	.08	.10	71	85	.07	.07	.44	.17	0	6	15	11	31
2008	625	9	10	45	24	31	.12	.08	79	81	.13	.02	.36	.17	7	-5	11	-4	9
2009	587	10	6	41	18	41	.14	.10	78	87	.06	.03	.35	.15	-3	-3	-4	-2	-11
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Just two years removed from his MVP season, Rollins was a big disappointment to Phillise fans in the first half of the year. Line drives are down, walks are down, infield flies are up and outs on outfield flies are up. It's also a bit surprising to me that Rollins has had poor batting averages on ground balls the last two years. At this stage, there's not a lot to recommend the guy. Things change, don't they?

In contrast to Philly, San Diego was the worst hitter's park in the majors. By far.

Adrian Gonzalez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	631	18	9	44	23	33	.02	.15	80	79	.04	.00	.43	.27	-2	-8	13	14	17
2007	720	19	9	37	19	44	.06	.14	77	79	.04	.04	.40	.27	-2	-3	2	25	21
2008	700	20	12	43	20	37	.05	.22	78	86	.05	.01	.40	.32	3	-7	2	24	22
2009	564	16	18	40	20	40	.06	.24	81	82	.13	-.01	.35	.37	19	-9	-2	30	39
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Pitchers avoided Gonzalez at all costs this year. In fact, that was the entire reason for his increased productivity vs. last year.

Kevin Kouzmanoff

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	61	20	8	59	9	32	.29	.30	77	71	.02	.03	.05	.47	-1	0	-3	2	-2
2007	534	18	8	41	18	41	.04	.12	79	80	.03	.02	.38	.22	-3	-4	-2	11	1
2008	668	21	6	40	22	39	.06	.11	76	84	-.01	.03	.40	.19	-12	-5	4	3	-10
2009	535	18	7	44	19	37	.06	.12	83	75	.01	-.03	.35	.26	-6	-13	-4	11	-11
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

I guess this is all we're going to see from Kevin Kouzmanoff. Low walk rate, terrible groundball hitter, doesn't hit enough line drives or fly balls.

And now for the premier groundball hitter of our day, though the key to Ichiro's improvement this year was increased flyball productivity.

Ichiro Suzuki

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	752	9	7	51	22	28	.13	.06	66	81	.09	.10	.35	.12	1	21	9	-13	18
2007	736	10	7	56	20	24	.09	.04	63	86	.07	.12	.40	.06	0	30	12	-22	20
2008	749	9	7	57	20	23	.14	.05	68	86	.10	.09	.35	.07	3	22	4	-23	6
2009	555	10	5	58	17	25	.08	.07	63	83	.04	.13	.41	.14	-3	26	6	-7	22
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Russell Branyan

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	282	32	13	29	19	52	.03	.23	82	85	.02	.00	.36	.34	-1	-4	-5	15	5
2007	194	36	15	29	18	53	.06	.21	82	89	.03	.00	.44	.28	0	-3	-3	5	-2
2008	152	28	13	22	21	57	.12	.26	85	85	.03	-.01	.44	.38	0	-2	0	11	9
2009	505	30	13	33	17	50	.03	.22	78	84	.03	.03	.45	.32	0	-5	-5	23	14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Fly balls are all Branyan is about—he's another guy who should avoid grounders, and he does.

The Giants' Pablo Sandoval's ground ball out rate has risen to 68 percent (it was 64 when we looked at it in June), but the Giants still boast one of the best groundball hitters in the game.

Frederick Lewis

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	11	27	0	63	25	13	.00	.00	60	0	-.11	.13	.64	.48	0	1	1	0	1
2007	180	18	12	55	15	30	.14	.09	65	83	.07	.10	.44	.17	2	4	-1	-2	3
2008	521	24	10	54	18	28	.01	.09	68	79	.02	.09	.51	.21	-3	10	5	-1	10
2009	313	25	12	52	22	26	.12	.09	63	83	.04	.12	.42	.18	0	8	2	-5	6
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

I'm not entirely sure why Freddy Lewis has been relegated to the bench and pinch-hitting duty. It was to make room for this kid:

Nathan Schierholtz

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	117	16	3	44	15	41	.15	.00	64	76	-.05	.11	.45	.11	-3	3	0	-2	-2
2008	81	10	7	46	30	24	.00	.06	77	80	.09	.04	.42	.11	0	0	4	-2	3
2009	265	18	5	44	21	35	.06	.07	73	84	-.02	.05	.39	.15	-5	0	1	-2	-5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Schierholtz was batting .295 with just four home runs before an injury sidelined him in July. I don't follow the Giants enough to know why they benched Lewis for Schierholtz, but I know I like Lewis' batting profile better.

You know all about Pujols, right?

Ryan Ludwick

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	339	21	10	37	16	47	.17	.16	62	84	.03	.13	.38	.24	-1	6	-4	7	8
2008	617	24	11	27	26	47	.09	.21	71	82	.04	.07	.43	.32	0	-1	13	29	42
2009	442	19	9	31	18	51	.11	.13	74	86	.04	.05	.41	.18	-1	-1	0	6	3
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Ludwick lost his mojo during the offseason; his line drive and home run hitting strokes just stayed in hibernation. Meanwhile, his teammate Skippy continued to hit almost nothing but ground balls and line drives.

Skip Schumaker

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	60	10	8	57	13	30	.00	.07	81	92	.10	.00	.34	.05	0	-1	-2	-2	-4
2007	188	11	4	54	19	27	.14	.05	74	69	.02	.04	.46	.23	-2	1	4	0	3
2008	594	10	8	58	22	20	.04	.09	76	76	.09	.03	.34	.20	2	1	5	-6	3
2009	485	12	8	60	23	17	.08	.07	76	72	.08	.05	.37	.21	1	4	8	-7	7
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Only Luis Castillo hit ground balls more often than Schumaker.

Moving onto Tampa Bay, we've already discussed Evan Longoria, Ben Zobrist and Jason Bartlett, but how about some other mighty Rays?

Carlos Pena

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	37	27	11	48	17	35	.00	.13	73	86	.02	.04	.56	.20	0	0	0	0	0
2007	612	23	18	37	18	45	.08	.32	78	85	.09	.02	.40	.47	16	-5	-4	46	54
2008	607	27	18	32	18	50	.10	.21	74	81	.07	.04	.41	.33	11	-4	-6	25	26
2009	557	28	17	29	16	55	.10	.26	86	84	.06	-.03	.43	.40	7	-10	-9	34	22
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Pena is hitting only .228, but that's been caused by the highest groundball out rate in the major leagues (86 percent). He's still as effective as he was last year. See how his fly ball tendencies have grown the past three years? That, and an increasing strikeout rate, would seem to hint at an ever-growing single-minded purpose behind his plate appearances.

Carl Crawford

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	653	13	6	52	18	30	.09	.13	66	81	.04	.11	.33	.23	-4	19	-4	4	16
2007	627	18	6	48	20	32	.05	.08	69	73	.00	.07	.44	.23	-8	8	9	8	18
2008	482	12	7	49	21	30	.07	.07	75	88	.05	.04	.40	.10	-2	0	6	-10	-6
2009	569	15	8	52	18	30	.07	.10	68	81	.05	.09	.40	.20	-1	12	2	1	13
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Carl Crawford is back, as shown in his rejuvenated batting average on ground balls.

How's about the boys in Texas, where pitching and fielding are winning ballgames? In early May, we noted that Michael Young was blasting home runs at a 28 percent pace. Here's his updated profile:

Michael Young

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	748	13	7	48	25	27	.04	.08	70	85	.04	.07	.36	.15	-4	10	16	-6	16
2007	692	15	8	48	27	24	.02	.07	71	78	.04	.06	.34	.17	-3	6	15	-6	12
2008	708	15	8	47	23	31	.04	.07	72	84	.04	.05	.35	.14	-2	3	5	-7	0
2009	572	15	8	45	22	32	.02	.16	71	80	.05	.06	.38	.28	-1	4	8	16	27
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The home run rate has come back to earth, and he hasn't been quite the prodigious line drive hitter he was in 2006 and 2007. Overall, however, this is his best year at bat in the past four.

Joshua Hamilton

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	337	19	11	45	22	33	.01	.23	74	81	.05	.05	.37	.38	1	0	2	16	19
2008	704	18	10	46	21	33	.02	.20	72	83	.05	.07	.37	.31	1	7	5	22	35
2009	355	21	7	36	22	42	.03	.09	80	84	.00	.02	.45	.15	-5	-4	6	0	-3
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Josh Hamilton and Ryan Ludwick's home run strokes are apparently off enjoying themselves somewhere together, somewhere far away from the ballpark. The decline of Hamilton's plate discipline is also a cause for concern.

Toronto, where the season started with such lofty hope…

Adam Lind

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	65	18	8	35	19	46	.05	.10	59	74	.02	.14	.56	.25	0	2	2	3	6
2007	311	21	5	45	19	37	.11	.15	85	75	-.02	-.03	.36	.30	-6	-8	-3	7	-9
2008	349	17	5	51	19	30	.05	.12	74	84	-.01	.04	.42	.20	-5	1	2	0	-2
2009	557	18	9	43	20	37	.09	.21	79	78	.04	.01	.45	.36	0	-5	8	25	28
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Lind arrived this year, posting an excellent home run rate though he hasn't yet learned to emphasize the fly ball, Carlos-Pena-style.

Marcos Scutaro

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	423	16	12	44	21	36	.17	.06	72	81	.08	.05	.36	.14	4	1	1	-6	0
2007	379	11	10	39	20	41	.11	.06	71	89	.11	.05	.32	.08	3	0	-1	-9	-7
2008	592	11	10	43	23	35	.10	.05	71	92	.11	.07	.31	.04	6	5	0	-20	-10
2009	613	11	14	38	20	43	.05	.05	72	88	.14	.06	.44	.07	13	2	8	-11	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Scutaro is one of those "Easy Fly Outs" that we discussed earlier this year, though he did manage to bring down his infield flies this year. The biggest difference for Scutaro this year has been his increased walk rate and slightly higher line drive power.

It's hard to believe we've gone through most of the season without discussing Adam Dunn.

Adam Dunn

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	683	28	17	28	24	49	.08	.23	84	88	.06	-.02	.41	.32	10	-11	1	23	23
2007	632	26	17	35	19	47	.11	.26	82	81	.07	-.01	.48	.40	10	-9	1	35	37
2008	651	25	20	36	18	46	.05	.22	75	87	.09	.04	.40	.32	18	-3	-7	24	32
2009	561	27	19	31	20	50	.09	.25	74	81	.07	.04	.41	.40	12	-3	-2	34	40
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The Three True Outcome Tsar, Dunn has had another typical season of strikeouts, walks and home runs.

Joshua Willingham

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	573	19	11	43	16	41	.10	.18	67	83	.06	.08	.37	.29	3	6	-6	19	22
2007	604	20	14	36	21	43	.13	.14	74	83	.07	.04	.42	.23	7	-2	3	8	16
2008	416	20	15	39	19	42	.11	.12	70	85	.09	.08	.49	.19	7	3	4	1	15
2009	405	20	15	36	23	41	.07	.21	72	82	.09	.07	.33	.33	8	1	0	17	26
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Josh Willingham is Adam Dunn, only less so. And right handed, too.

Doubling Up

By Dave Studenmund

September 12, 2009

Albert Pujols was the hitter of the week (again), posting eleven runs above average. As you'll see in this week's spreadsheet, he's now up to 76 runs above average. I'll probably post his Batted Ball Profile one last time, but not quite yet.

The second-hottest hitter of the week was Colorado's left fielder Seth Smith. Smith is now batting .316/.400/.561 with 15 home runs in 331 plate appearances. As you might expect, he's got an extreme home/road split, batting .366 at home and .264 on the road. He's shown some plate discipline, hasn't hit many infield flies and sports a good home run rate.

Seth Smith

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	8	13	0	29	57	14	.00	.00	0	0	-.11	.48	.19	1.09	0	1	1	1	2
2008	123	19	12	45	21	34	.00	.14	63	88	.07	.12	.25	.20	1	3	-2	1	3
2009	331	16	13	38	21	42	.06	.15	70	88	.09	.07	.53	.22	4	2	9	7	22
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

But perhaps the most noteworthy thing about Smith's profile this year has been his runs created per line drive (.53 runs). According to Baseball Reference, he's batting .865 on line drives, which is a very high rate—even for liners. That may be partly a Coors Park factor (Coors has added about .03 runs per line drive this season) or there may be something about Smith's game, but it's probably mostly just one of those things.

There's not a lot of evidence yet that Smith is clearly an above-average major league hitter, but there's not a lot of evidence that he isn't, either.

Kansas City's Billy Butler was this week's fourth-best hitter (Hanley Ramirez was third) and I should have posted his Profile before now. The young first baseman seems to be fulfilling his promise this season by hitting .305/.358/.492 with 45 doubles. But his Profile reveals that much of that success has been built on a favorable outfield fly out rate.

Billy Butler

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	360	15	8	47	21	33	.13	.10	74	86	.05	.05	.45	.16	-1	2	7	-3	5
2008	478	12	7	49	17	35	.10	.09	74	84	.05	.03	.36	.16	-2	-1	-3	-2	-8
2009	573	15	8	48	19	34	.07	.12	74	75	.04	.04	.42	.26	-2	1	5	12	17
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Butler has the tenth-lowest outfield out rate among all qualified major league hitters. That won't continue next year, but the kid does have some power. He needs to increase his flyball rate to make a true mark in the majors.

I have questions about his double total. In fact, I've been thinking a lot about doubles lately and wondering, what makes a good doubles hitter? Butler hit 22 and 23 doubles the last two seasons (in fewer at bats) so I'm not convinced he is a "true" doubles hitter. But who is? Is anyone a natural "doubles hitter?"

What follows is a short inquisition into the subject. We'll start with a table of the batters who have hit the most doubles the past four years:

Batter	2B
Brian Roberts	177
Matt Holliday	169
Hanley Ramirez	167
Michael Young	160
Robinson Cano	158
Nick Markakis	158
Jimmy Rollins	157
Mark Teixeira	156
David Wright	156
Miguel Cabrera	155

At first glance, it appears that there is a combination of speed and line drive hitting involved in hitting doubles, coupled with a relatively low rate of home runs (though there are exceptions). Before we dive into the Batted Ball Profiles of our doubles hitters, however, some background…

Where do doubles come from? Here's the 2006-2009 distribution:

- Line drives: 16,996 (49 percent)
- Fly balls: 13,567 (39 percent)
- Ground balls: 4,346 (12 percent)

Line drives and fly balls, of course, but don't forget that there are more fly balls than line drives, so the doubles rate per batted ball type is…

- Line drives: 17 percent
- Fly balls: 7 percent
- Ground balls: 2 percent

…which makes sense. We know that line drives are less likely to be home runs and outfield flies that aren't home runs tend to be caught. Nothing new here.

In case you're interested, here are the top ten batters in ground ball doubles:

First	Last	Total
Hanley	Ramirez	29
Jorge	Cantu	25
Shane	Victorino	25
Albert	Pujols	25
Alfonso	Soriano	25
Matthew	Holliday	24
David	Eckstein	24
Placido	Polanco	24
Orlando	Cabrera	24
Mike	Lowell	23

The more numbers I churn, the deeper my appreciation for Hanley Ramirez (despite what Dan Uggla says). And Pujols? He's everywhere.

There's another type of batted ball, however—one we haven't discussed before. A few years ago, Baseball Info Solutions moved beyond fly balls and line drives and started tracking a third category of air ball called the "fliner." Fliners are the kind of batted balls that fit in that gray area between line drives and flies. They're the balls that are hard to typecast. BIS hoped to overcome the "what's a line drive and what's a fly ball?" question with the fliner. I'm not sure they did, but it does give us more data to play with.

Typically, we merge our fliner data with our line drives and fly balls (BIS gives us the info to do so), but I'm going to break them out into a "hit type" table. Here they are in these batted ball totals from 2006 to 2009, broken into outcomes:

Type	Out	1B	2B	3B	HR	Total
Grounder	172,940	48,819	4,346	241	0	226,346
Line Drive	15,989	37,057	8,627	635	89	62,397
Fliner	34,337	22,028	15,730	1,586	4,430	78,111
Fly Ball	126,357	3,375	6,206	1,131	15,128	152,197
Total	349,623	111,279	34,909	3,593	19,647	519,051

Lots of numbers for you to chew on. Let's make it easier by showing the distribution across batted ball types, where you can see, for instance, that 20 percent of fliners are doubles…

Type	Out	1B	2B	3B	HR	Total
Grounder	76%	22%	2%	0%	0%	100%
Line Drive	26%	59%	14%	1%	0%	100%
Fliner	44%	28%	20%	2%	6%	100%
Fly Ball	83%	2%	4%	1%	10%	100%
Total	67%	21%	7%	1%	4%	100%

And let's also show the distribution across outcomes, where, for instance, 45 percent of all doubles are fliners.

Type	Out	1B	2B	3B	HR	Total
Grounder	49%	44%	12%	7%	0%	44%
Line Drive	5%	33%	25%	18%	0%	12%
Fliner	10%	20%	45%	44%	23%	15%
Fly Ball	36%	3%	18%	31%	77%	29%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

There's a nice and easy progression between batted ball types and outcomes. Singles steadily decrease, doubles and triples go up and down and home runs rise as the ball trajectory rises. The bottom line for our purposes, however, is that fliner totals can help us capture and picture doubles hitters.

As an "FYI," here are the run values for each type of batted ball using some simple linear weights:

Type	Run Value
Grounder	0.04
Line Drive	0.37
Fliner	0.35
Fly Ball	0.11

Fliners and Line Drives are virtually even when it comes to run production. The increased number of home runs from fliners offsets the increased number of outs.

Here are the players who have hit the most fliners the last four years:

First	Last	Total
Orlando	Cabrera	372
Michael	Young	371
Freddy	Sanchez	349
Placido	Polanco	338
Jimmy	Rollins	335
Miguel	Tejada	326
Brian	Roberts	326
David	Wright	322
Alexis	Rios	322
Robinson	Cano	314

There's a pretty good match between our doubles and fliner lists, but not a perfect one. There's a surprise at the top of the fliners list, Orlando Cabrera. What's up with that?

Orlando Cabrera

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	675	9	8	39	17	44	.14	.04	70	85	.11	.08	.40	.07	3	8	2	-15	-2
2007	701	9	7	43	18	39	.14	.03	67	82	.09	.09	.38	.08	1	13	3	-16	0
2008	730	10	8	46	21	33	.14	.05	74	84	.09	.05	.34	.09	2	3	3	-18	-11
2009	603	10	5	46	19	35	.10	.04	73	85	.05	.05	.35	.08	-4	2	-1	-16	-19
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

It turns out that Cabrera hits a lot of fliners, but he doesn't hit them well. 50 percent of his fliners have been outs, which is higher than the major league average of 44 percent, and only 5 percent have been doubles (compared to 20 percent for the majors). Like all batted balls, not all fliners are equal. It's just a coincidence that Cabrera had one of the ten-highest number of ground ball doubles. I think…

Well, Brian Roberts has hit the most doubles the last four years and he's hit 326 fliners. What's his Profile look like?

Brian Roberts

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	630	10	9	44	21	35	.03	.06	72	90	.10	.06	.39	.07	3	5	8	-14	2
2007	716	14	12	36	20	45	.05	.05	72	81	.10	.06	.40	.13	10	2	4	0	16
2008	704	15	12	40	24	36	.07	.05	67	86	.09	.10	.42	.10	8	11	16	-11	24
2009	616	15	10	36	20	44	.08	.08	75	79	.07	.05	.36	.18	2	-1	0	7	9
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Roberts does a good job of not hitting ground balls and he also has a below-average infield fly rate. He hits home runs at less than the major league average. And note the outfield fly out rate: It was 90 percent when he hit "only" 34 doubles in 2006. It seems to me that fliners are a key element of Roberts' success.

Matt Holliday has the second-highest number of doubles the last four years, yet he's not in our list of top ten fliner hitters. In fact, he's hit only 255 fliners the last four years, the 68th-highest total among all major leaguers. We've already seen that he hits a fair share of groundball doubles. Can we spot anything else?

Matthew Holliday

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	667	16	9	45	21	34	.06	.19	70	82	.05	.07	.47	.31	1	6	16	23	46
2007	713	18	10	44	20	36	.04	.19	67	78	.06	.08	.48	.34	3	8	15	33	59
2008	623	17	13	46	22	33	.09	.16	65	83	.09	.11	.44	.26	9	14	12	9	45
2009	585	14	12	44	15	41	.11	.15	66	81	.10	.10	.43	.26	8	11	0	16	35
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Holliday hit 45 and 50 doubles in 2006 and 2007, respectively. His doubles totals have been in the 30's the last two years. Looking more deeply into the data, it seems he hits more doubles for every type of batted ball: 20 percent on line drives, 25 percent on fliners, 6 percent on fly balls. So it's not that he's a fliner hitter. He's somehow just a good doubles hitter.

Hanley Ramirez has hit the third-most doubles and the 18th-most fliners. We also know he's number one in groundball doubles…

Hanley Ramirez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	700	18	9	44	21	35	.13	.10	67	86	.03	.11	.47	.16	-3	14	13	-5	19
2007	706	13	8	40	18	42	.11	.13	67	76	.06	.09	.46	.26	1	10	10	24	45
2008	693	18	14	46	17	37	.10	.19	68	85	.09	.09	.52	.28	12	11	9	16	49
2009	566	15	10	39	20	41	.09	.13	56	79	.07	.16	.44	.24	3	18	10	16	48
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Holliday and Ramirez are actually two very similar batters. They both have relatively average batted ball distributions but consistently high runs per event for each type of batted ball. Holliday was at least a line drive/non-infield fly batter in 2006 and 2007, but Ramirez looks very normal in all columns until you get to the ground ball out column. With four years of data, I think we can safely conclude that these are not flukes. These guys stand out because they create more runs in every type of batted ball.

Only a few other batters fit this profile of having run rates above average for all types of batted balls. Kevin Youkilis does. Ryan Zimmerman. David Wright. Miguel Cabrera. Maybe Pablo Sandoval. Perhaps a few others, but that's it. And you know what? All of these guys are doubles hitters.

So we've hit on a couple of clues here. One, doubles hitters are more likely to be fliner hitters. Secondly, doubles hitters are more likely to be all-around run producers instead of batters who have one or two particular strengths.

There's a lot more we could get into here, but let's wrap by returning to the question of Billy Butler. Is he a legitimate doubles hitter? Well, 22 percent of his batted balls have been fliners this year vs. the major league average of 23 percent. And if you go back and look at his profile, you'll see hints of a good all-around bat, but not in the league of a Ramirez or Holliday. My guess is that his outfield fly out rate will rise next year and his doubles rate will sink.

(Almost) Year-End Win Shares

By Dave Studenmund

September 19, 2009

Adam LaRoche and Joe Mauer were the hottest hitters of the week, but we've profiled them before. The third and fourth hottest hitters of the week have been ignored by our analytic eye, however, and they are a couple of case studies in, well, something or other.

Vernon Wells batted .303/.357/.542 with 40 doubles and 32 home runs in 2006, signed a $126 million contract extension, and then tanked. What does his Batted Ball Profile say?

Vernon Wells

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	677	13	8	42	18	40	.12	.16	69	86	.06	.08	.44	.24	1	7	8	15	31
2007	642	14	8	39	17	44	.19	.08	75	85	.06	.04	.41	.14	-1	-1	-2	-7	-11
2008	466	10	7	47	17	36	.15	.16	70	88	.08	.06	.43	.22	0	5	5	5	15
2009	620	13	7	43	15	42	.15	.07	69	88	.05	.07	.51	.09	-2	6	4	-14	-5
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

The first thing I notice is that Wells is a "flyball out" guy. He hits infield flies and has a high outfield out rate. Plus, he doesn't hit line drives and doesn't walk. The only good news is that he's a pretty good groundball hitter, with out rates below major league average in three of the last four years.

These were all tendencies you could spot in 2006, but he's gotten worse in virtually every category I've just mentioned. This slide obviously wasn't predictable from the data, but some of the initial weaknesses were there to see.

I also want to profile the swingtastic Kansas City backstop.

Miguel Olivo

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	452	23	4	42	19	39	.15	.12	73	77	-.05	.05	.40	.24	-13	0	-1	4	-9
2007	469	26	3	43	17	40	.17	.12	79	81	-.06	.01	.48	.22	-15	-6	-2	1	-22
2008	317	26	3	38	17	44	.21	.15	73	79	-.06	.05	.47	.27	-10	-1	0	5	-7
2009	386	31	5	45	15	40	.06	.25	76	77	-.05	.04	.39	.42	-13	-2	-8	21	-2
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Miguel Olivo has been a two true outcomes hitter this year, sporting the K and the HR. Here's the interesting thing I see: Olivo hasn't hit infield flies this year at nearly the rate he has in the past, and his out rate on outfield flies has been good each year. Is he someone who actually gets more out of his outfield flies than the average batter? Has he got a flyball trick up his sleeve?

The net result of these fascinating positives and negatives is a wash: Olivo has profiled as a league-average hitter overall. His home run rate will drop in the future and he'll be below average again, but he's had a nice little run this season, stretching what he does as far as he can.

Among pitchers, Colorado's Jorge de la Rosa had a couple of good starts, playing a role in the Rockies' recent resurgence. De la Rosa has lowered his ERA a full run since mid July. It's now at 4.21 and he's showing that he can at least be a major league-average pitcher.

Jorge de la Rosa

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	367	18	15	41	20	39	.09	.16	74	87	.10	.04	.35	.23	7	-1	-2	4	9
2007	589	14	10	41	20	39	.06	.12	73	83	.07	.06	.42	.20	3	3	8	10	23
2008	571	22	12	46	20	34	.11	.12	72	78	.05	.06	.39	.22	2	2	-2	0	2
2009	749	24	11	45	21	34	.08	.13	77	81	.03	.04	.41	.23	-1	-3	-1	2	-4
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

After spending several years with the Brewers and Royals, de la Rosa has really learned how to blow his considerable fastball by batters and he's also inducing a lot more ground balls than he used to. According to Fangraphs, he started emphasizing his slider over his curveball the last two years and the results have followed.

One other hot pitcher this week worth mentioning ('cause I haven't mentioned him yet) is the young Brett Anderson of Oakland.

Brett Anderson

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	686	20	7	49	15	35	.11	.12	71	84	.00	.06	.41	.20	-9	4	-8	0	-14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Anderson is a lefty with a 92-mile-an-hour fastball and a slider that he throws more than 30 percent of the time (only Ryan Dempster has thrown a slider more often). The result is a very nice K/BB ratio, some ground balls and a low line drive rate. If he can keep that up, we're looking at a star.

With just two weeks of regular season baseball left, it's time to count our Win Shares. I'll run them for you at the very end of the season, too, but I wanted to run them through Friday's games so that we can pick the Win Shares MVP, Cy Young and All-Star teams.

The top 10 in Win Shares Above Bench overall…

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Pujols	STL	1B	28	41	1.136
Ramirez	FLA	SS	23	35	1.063
Mauer	MIN	C	23	32	1.246
Fielder	MIL	1B	21	33	.940
Greinke	KC	SP	20	25	1.113
Gonzalez	SD	1B	20	31	.928
Utley	PHI	2B	20	32	.916
Braun	MIL	OF	20	32	.916
Hernandez	SEA	SP	19	25	1.048
Bay	BOS	OF	18	28	.944

WSAB is Win Shares Above Bench, WS stands for Win Shares and WSP is Win Shares Percentage, where an average player is a .500 player.

There are probably no big surprises for you on this list, though I do feel that Prince Fielder's great season is kind of lost behind King Albert. Not to mention Adrian Gonzalez. And if you've been keeping track, you're probably aware that we haven't profiled Felix Hernandez all year long. Let's rectify that situation right now:

Felix Hernandez

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	816	22	8	58	18	25	.08	.17	74	80	.01	.05	.39	.28	-8	5	-5	1	-7
2007	807	20	7	61	16	23	.08	.16	73	70	.00	.05	.38	.35	-11	7	-8	7	-4
2008	857	20	10	52	18	29	.08	.11	74	84	.04	.04	.42	.18	-1	-1	-1	-7	-10
2009	884	22	8	53	17	30	.06	.08	76	86	.01	.03	.37	.13	-11	-3	-12	-17	-43
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Hernandez has been one of the most watched young pitchers in recent history, an Internet phenomenon. His NIP impact has rebounded to pre-injury levels (though his groundball tendency is now only good instead of great) and his home run ratio has been under control this year. Plus, his outfield fly and line drive out rates have really improved the last two years.

Overall, Win Shares ranks Hernandez (16-5, 2.45 ERA) as one of the 10 most valuable players in the majors this year. People talk a lot about Greinke winning the Cy Young and perhaps even the MVP, but Hernandez' Batted Ball Profile has been just as good.

Here are the National League leaders in WSAB:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Pujols	STL	1B	28	41	1.136
Ramirez	FLA	SS	23	35	1.063
Fielder	MIL	1B	21	33	.940
Gonzalez	SD	1B	20	31	.928
Utley	PHI	2B	20	32	.916
Braun	MIL	OF	20	32	.916
Lincecum	SF	SP	18	22	1.178
Haren	ARI	SP	17	22	1.132
Kemp	LAN	OF	16	28	.826
Wainwright	STL	SP	16	21	1.083

It's good to see Matt Kemp make it onto this list. Obviously, Pujols is the league's MVP, but Hanley Ramirez and Fielder deserve a lot of recognition as well.

The American League leaders are:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Mauer	MIN	C	23	32	1.246
Greinke	KC	SP	20	25	1.113
Hernandez	SEA	SP	19	25	1.048
Bay	BOS	OF	18	28	.944
Suzuki	SEA	OF	17	28	.874
Youkilis	BOS	1B	16	26	.951
Verlander	DET	SP	14	20	.881
Cabrera	DET	1B	14	25	.785

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Abreu	LAA	OF	13	24	.771
Halladay	TOR	SP	13	19	.807

I know, I know. There are no Yankees on our top 10 list. The problem is that the Yankees are so dominant that no one player stands out. For what it's worth, the top five Yankees in WSAB are…

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Teixeira	NYA	1B	13	24	.736
Sabathia	NYA	SP	13	18	.795
Jeter	NYA	SS	12	24	.716
Matsui	NYA	DH	11	18	.985
Rodriguez	NYA	3B	11	20	.810

If you include only position players, it's a tossup between Teixeira and Jeter. Look, don't worry about the Yankees. Do the right thing and pick Mauer for MVP, all you BBWAA voters out there reading this.

After Mauer, it hasn't been a strong year for catchers. Brian McCann and Jorge Posada are the only ones with a WSAB in double digits, though Victor Martinez's Win Shares include only his time in Cleveland. I should try to fix that someday…

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Mauer	MIN	C	23	32	1.246
McCann	ATL	C	10	20	.727
Posada	NYA	C	10	17	.851
Molina	STL	C	8	19	.636
Suzuki	OAK	C	7	17	.587
Martinez	CLE	C	7	14	.654
Ruiz	PHI	C	6	14	.658
Laird	DET	C	6	13	.598
Montero	ARI	C	5	13	.561
Baker	FLA	C	5	12	.573

Posada is one of the all-time great catchers, but it should be said that his late-career surge has been sparked by his new home park. He has 14 home runs and a .319 average at home; 7 HR and .241 BA on the road.

Jorge Posada

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	544	18	14	38	20	42	.05	.14	74	80	.09	.04	.38	.25	8	-1	1	16	23
2007	589	17	14	40	22	37	.05	.11	67	74	.09	.07	.45	.25	10	5	14	16	44
2008	195	19	13	40	21	40	.04	.06	75	85	.07	.02	.48	.11	2	-1	3	-3	1
2009	407	23	11	36	20	43	.07	.19	76	78	.04	.01	.41	.33	0	-5	1	18	14
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Onto the major leagues' best first basemen…

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Pujols	STL	1B	28	41	1.136
Fielder	MIL	1B	21	33	.940
Gonzalez	SD	1B	20	31	.928
Youkilis	BOS	1B	16	26	.951
Cabrera	DET	1B	14	25	.785
Teixeira	NYA	1B	13	24	.736
Lee	CHN	1B	12	23	.732
Berkman	HOU	1B	12	21	.770
Votto	CIN	1B	11	20	.757
Howard	PHI	1B	11	23	.658

What can I say? A great group of hitters. I think we've talked about each one at some point in the season.

Second basemen…

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Utley	PHI	2B	20	32	.916
Zobrist	TB	2B	13	23	.799
Kinsler	TEX	2B	12	22	.752
Hill	TOR	2B	10	22	.646
Pedroia	BOS	2B	9	21	.639
Roberts	BAL	2B	9	20	.621
Izturis	LAA	2B	8	15	.733
Polanco	DET	2B	7	18	.583
Kendrick	LAA	2B	7	13	.730
Hudson	LAN	2B	7	18	.549

Zobrist has played a lot of outfield, but he's spent the most time at second. It's funny to see two Angels on this list – they are really good! Actually, Kendrick was sent to the minors in June because he was batting so poorly, but he's been on fire since returning to the majors. Here are a couple of breakouts.

Player	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	Out/GB	Out/OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
As of June	18	6	58	13	29	.00	.10	75	79	.01	.04	.27	.22	-3	1	-6	0	-7
Now	17	6	54	19	27	.01	.12	71	78	.00	.06	.40	.25	-4	6	2	3	6

Kendrick has been a line drive machine since returning from the minors; look at the huge difference in his line drive run rate! Plus, he's made fewer outs on his ground balls. One last thing: Check out his very impressive infield fly rate. Kendrick sure looks like a hitter, and it's good to see that he regained his stroke.

The leading third basemen:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Sandoval	SF	3B	14	25	.780
Figgins	LAA	3B	13	24	.722
Longoria	TB	3B	12	23	.730
Rodriguez	NYA	3B	11	20	.810
McGehee	MIL	3B	10	16	.893
Wright	NYN	3B	9	20	.649

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Ramirez	CHN	3B	8	14	.851
Reynolds	ARI	3B	8	20	.596
Blake	LAN	3B	8	19	.618
Kennedy	OAK	3B	8	17	.641

What a fantastic year for Sandoval, he of the peculiar Batted Ball Profile. And I just realized that I haven't profiled Alex Rodriguez all year long. Here it is, without comment:

Alex Rodriguez

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	674	21	15	42	18	40	.12	.22	70	81	.08	.06	.41	.35	10	2	-1	26	37
2007	708	17	16	41	17	42	.12	.29	74	86	.11	.04	.51	.42	18	-1	8	45	70
2008	594	20	13	42	18	40	.09	.24	68	80	.07	.07	.42	.38	7	4	2	31	43
2009	490	18	17	43	20	37	.08	.22	76	85	.11	.02	.43	.32	13	-3	4	16	30
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Shortstops?

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Ramirez	FLA	SS	23	35	1.063
Jeter	NYA	SS	12	24	.716
Escobar	ATL	SS	12	22	.745
Bartlett	TB	SS	12	21	.777
Scutaro	TOR	SS	9	21	.621
Tulowitzki	COL	SS	8	19	.605
Aybar	LAA	SS	8	17	.641
Cabrera	SD	SS	7	14	.700
Cabrera	CLE	SS	7	16	.609
Andrus	TEX	SS	6	15	.568

Hanley Ramirez is the guy and it's not even close. Yunel Escobar isn't exactly chopped liver, either. His .288 average last year was held down by his outfield fly out rate. This year, his groundball out rate is tripping him up. Still, he's a line drive hitter who doesn't hit infield flies and has a bit of pop. Only Tulowitzki can make a claim to be the second-best shortstop in the league this year.

Yunel Escobar

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2007	355	12	9	56	21	23	.03	.08	68	73	.08	.09	.34	.23	2	10	2	0	14
2008	587	11	11	58	17	25	.04	.09	70	90	.12	.06	.40	.12	8	8	1	-11	6
2009	540	10	11	49	20	31	.03	.11	79	78	.13	.00	.40	.22	8	-7	5	6	12
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Win Shares doesn't break outfielders into left, right and center. It puts them all in one big pot and rates them. Here are all outfielders with at least 10 WSAB this year:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Braun	MIL	OF	20	32	.916
Bay	BOS	OF	18	28	.944
Suzuki	SEA	OF	17	28	.874
Kemp	LAN	OF	16	28	.826
Werth	PHI	OF	14	26	.776
Bourn	HOU	OF	14	25	.752
Abreu	LAA	OF	13	24	.771
Hunter	LAA	OF	12	21	.887
Dunn	WAS	OF	12	23	.712
Ludwick	STL	OF	11	21	.752
Ramirez	LAN	OF	11	18	.864
Choo	CLE	OF	11	21	.693
Victorino	PHI	OF	11	23	.652
Damon	NYA	OF	10	21	.709
Ethier	LAN	OF	10	22	.628
Coghlan	FLA	OF	10	19	.708

I've developed a little system for predicting a player's Win Shares. It's different from other systems in that it includes the player's expected Win Shares (remember, expected Win Shares are the number of Win Shares you'd "expect" an average player to contribute, given a specific player's playing time. It's essentially an average baseline.). The system looks at how the player did the last three years compared to his expected Win Shares and then "predicts" how he should have done this year, given the expected Win Shares he did gather.

I found some interesting things. The average rookie contributes 80 percent of his expected Win Shares. The average second-year player typically attains about 95 percent of his expected Win Shares, and all other players—the veterans—hit their expected Win Shares figure (actually, a little more) on average.

Once a player has been in the majors three years or more, you can weight his previous three years performance vs. average on a 3/2/1 scale to predict this year's Win Shares. The specific formula I used was:

Expected Win Shares, plus
.45 X last year's WSAA, plus
.3 X WSAA from two years ago, plus
.15 times WSAA from three years ago.

The formula leaves a little regression to average in there. Given this approach, I can tell you the players who were most surprising this year, and the ones who were most disappointing. The biggest surprise of the year was Houston's Michael Bourn. Over the last three years, Bourn had 0, 4 and 7 Win Shares. Given his playing time, our model would predict 14 Win Shares for the speedster this year. However, Bourn has totaled 25 Win Shares and 14 WSAB to rank as the sixth most valuable outfielder in the majors. Seriously. You could knock me over with a feather.

The other most surprising seasons have been turned in by:

- Prince Fielder (33 Win Shares vs. 22 predicted)
- Josh Johnson (21 vs. 11)
- Felix Hernandez (25 vs. 15)
- Ben Zobrist (23 vs. 13)

Let's also rank the top five designated hitters:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Matsui	NYA	DH	11	18	.985
Kubel	MIN	DH	11	18	.853
Lind	TOR	DH	11	20	.755
Thome	CHA	DH	7	12	.777
Cust	OAK	DH	5	13	.571

It's easy to overlook sweet line-drive hitting Jason Kubel. The guy can't run, but he's got a line drive/home run stroke designated for hitting.

Jason Kubel

		% of PA		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	PA	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	235	19	5	49	21	31	.06	.16	81	86	-.02	-.02	.33	.23	-4	-6	-2	1	-11
2007	466	17	9	43	22	35	.02	.11	78	79	.05	.02	.36	.22	-1	-4	3	6	4
2008	517	18	9	40	20	41	.05	.14	77	84	.04	.03	.38	.22	-1	-3	0	10	6
2009	509	17	10	40	20	40	.06	.17	80	78	.06	.01	.47	.30	1	-6	9	21	26
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Speaking of DHs, the most "disappointing" player this year was Boston's David Ortiz, with only eight Win Shares vs. a predicted total of 21. The second most disappointing was B.J. Upton (9 and 20) and, skipping the injured Brandon Webb, the fourth-most disappointing was Vlad Guerrero (7 and 17).

The starting pitchers with 12 or more WSAB:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Greinke	KC	SP	20	25	1.113
Hernandez	SEA	SP	19	25	1.048
Lincecum	SF	SP	18	22	1.178
Haren	ARI	SP	17	22	1.132
Wainwright	STL	SP	16	21	1.083
Johnson	FLA	SP	16	21	1.139
Cain	SF	SP	15	20	1.033
Rodriguez	HOU	SP	15	19	1.075
Verlander	DET	SP	14	20	.881
Carpenter	STL	SP	14	18	1.135
Halladay	TOR	SP	13	19	.807
Sabathia	NYA	SP	13	18	.795
Jackson	DET	SP	13	18	.840
Lester	BOS	SP	13	18	.858
Jimenez	COL	SP	12	17	.913
Jurrjens	ATL	SP	12	16	.892

So many pitchers we could discuss, so low on energy! Let's call out the surprising Josh Johnson from Florida.

Joshua Johnson

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2006	659	20	11	46	19	36	.09	.09	76	84	.05	.04	.36	.15	1	-1	-8	-8	-15
2007	82	17	15	44	33	22	.17	.10	71	67	.10	.04	.52	.26	2	0	6	0	8
2008	365	21	8	48	21	31	.09	.07	77	73	.01	.02	.39	.21	-4	-3	1	-1	-7
2009	789	22	7	51	17	32	.13	.09	73	81	.00	.05	.31	.17	-11	1	-16	-12	-39
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Great command of the plate, good ground ball rate and a favorable home run rate. But what the heck has happened to his line drives? Batters aren't hitting them and, even when they do, they're not producing runs with them. There's some sleight of hand here, but the guy is still very good.

Finally, relief pitchers with six or more WSAB:

Player	Team	POS	WSAB	WS	WSP
Bailey	OAK	RP	9	14	.931
Aardsma	SEA	RP	8	13	.902
Broxton	LAN	RP	8	13	.894
Franklin	STL	RP	7	11	.947
Nathan	MIN	RP	7	12	.861
Rivera	NYA	RP	7	12	.863
Valverde	HOU	RP	7	10	1.069
Street	COL	RP	7	11	.955
Papelbon	BOS	RP	7	12	.808
Bell	SD	RP	6	11	.835
Guerrier	MIN	RP	6	10	.932
Wilson	SF	RP	6	11	.792
Thornton	CHA	RP	6	10	.931
Masset	CIN	RP	6	9	1.006
Hoffman	MIL	RP	6	9	.939
Lyon	DET	RP	6	9	.926
Cordero	CIN	RP	6	11	.779

Brett Anderson was Oakland's top-ranked prospect coming into this season. Andrew Bailey was 23rd. But, talk about surprising, Bailey has been the Win Shares relief ace of the year. Check out the kid's line drive rate.

Andrew Bailey

		% of BFP		% of Batted Balls					Out %		Runs per Event				Total Runs vs. Avg.				
Year	BFP	K%	BB%	GB%	LD%	FB%	IF/F	HR/OF	GB	OF	NIPR	GBR	LDR	OFR	NIP	GB	LD	Fly	Tot
2009	307	28	8	42	13	45	.10	.06	76	85	-.01	.03	.29	.11	-6	-2	-12	-7	-27
MLB Totals		*17*	*10*	*44*	*19*	*37*	*.10*	*.11*	*74*	*83*	*.05*	*.04*	*.39*	*.18*	--	--	--	--	--

Andrew Bailey hasn't had the same leverage opportunities other closers have had, but he's done the best with what he's been given. According to Fangraphs, he leads the majors in WPA/LI.

Listen, I've got a book to produce, so I'm not going to have much to say the rest of the season. I'll continue to create the stats the rest of the year and write a little bit, but this is the last lengthy missive you'll receive. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the THT Annual.