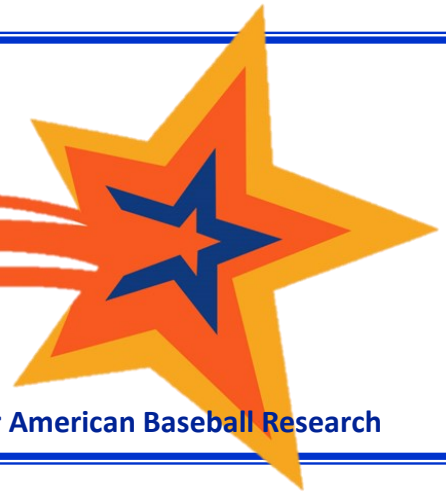


Houston Baseball

Shooting Star Express

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



Volume 3 Number 4



Spring 2023

President's Message

By Joe Thompson

One of my biggest joys as a Larry Dierker SABR member has always been the annual chapter Astros win contest. The rules of the contest are simple. Each chapter member guesses how many wins the Astros will have during the regular season. Those entering the contest must submit their guesses before the first pitch on opening day. The winner of the annual contest would often get special recognition and sometimes a prize at an October or November chapter meeting once the season ended for the Astros. Mark Wernick was crowned the winner of the inaugural 2011 contest when his guess (I do not recall his actual guess) was the closest to the 56 wins that the Astros had that year.

In case two or more people guess the same number of Astros wins, there is a tiebreaker. Some of the tiebreakers put in place over the years have been rather interesting. President Emeritus Bob Dorrill announced in 2011 that the first and second tiebreakers were for chapter members to "name the player with 300 at bats who has the highest batting average" and "to name the pitcher with the most wins." The next year the tiebreaker was for members to predict Albert Pujols's batting average for the year. In the last several years, the Astros win contest tiebreaker was the number of wins for the Sugar Land Skeeters/Space Cowboys club during

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Astros Look to Cement Their Dynasty

By Bill Brown

The 2023 Houston Astros are attempting to become the first team in this century to repeat as World Series winners with both titles in this century. The New York Yankees were the last team to repeat, winning the World Series in 1996, 1998-1999-2000, and losing the Series in 2001 and 2003. Before that, the Toronto Blue Jays repeated in 1992-93.



Bill Brown

The Yankees also repeated in 1977-78. To highlight how difficult this task has been throughout history, the 1975-76 Cincinnati Reds have been the last National League team to repeat.

As Cincinnati General Manager Bob Howsam predicted when he accepted the 1976 trophy, free agency was about to make the task of keeping a great team together much more difficult. As Justin Verlander said in March 2023 after moving from the Astros to the New York Mets, "You don't really keep the band together that long. I guess I've been around long enough to know that's just natural and the way things go. Guys kind of move on."

One of the Astros' greatest

strengths has been their ability to sustain the loss of star players through free agency. They have lost Dallas Keuchel, Charlie Morton, Jason Castro, George Springer, Carlos Correa, Gerrit Cole, Verlander, and others. The loss of Verlander is substantial. Although Verlander will be hard-pressed to duplicate his 18-4 season in 2022 with a 1.75 ERA, the Astros also will be challenged to replace his 175 innings of Cy Young production. The additional loss of Lance McCullers and Jose Altuve for the first part of the season will add to the challenge.

Although Framber Valdez, Cristian Javier, Jose Urquidy, and Luis Garcia offer an excellent starting rotation, they will be relied on for the same production they supplied in 2022. Hunter Brown qualified for a spot in the rotation as spring training progressed. But without Verlander

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Articles Solicitation



Want to get into the game? Tired of sitting on the bench? Play ball with us by sending in articles for future newsletters! Give your fellow chapter members, and other SABR'ites, solid hits of wisdom, wonderment, and wit in an article of your choice that relates to baseball, especially Houston baseball. Rookies are welcome; our cracker-jack editors will tone up your prose into major league quality. Just send your articles, from 200 to 1000 words, to umpire / editor Tony Cavender at anthony.cavender@pillsburylaw.com by July 15 for our Summer issue. Start writing your opening pitch; join the lineup!

The editorial board would like to honor the Hall of Fame players who passed away within the past two years by having our chapter members write personal remembrances of them. If you have unique experiences or memories with any of the recently departed players or managers, please send your stories to our umpire/editor and we will publish them in future newsletters. For each article, please provide your photo and any artwork that goes with your story. We cannot promise that we will use all the stories, but we'll try.

Editorial Board

Tony Cloninger — A Pitcher with Pop

By Phil Boudreaux

With the American League's great experiment starting in 1973, the call to have the designated hitter universally used around baseball lasted for nearly half a century. Now that pitchers not named Ohtani no longer hit, it is a good time to remember when they did. Though they were far between, history shows that on certain days some pitchers could really swing the stick.

One such extraordinary day was July 3, 1966. In front of a Sunday afternoon crowd, the Giants and the Braves squared off at Candlestick Park. Future Astro Joe Gibbon was pitching for the Giants against Tony Cloninger. Cloninger was coming off his best season, a 24-win season for the Braves while they were in Milwaukee. Cloninger and the entire Braves pitching staff were still adjusting to the relatively high altitude of their new home in Atlanta.



Phil Boudreaux

Gibbon was also in new surroundings, coming over the Pirates along with catcher Ozzie Virgil from outfielder Matty Alou. Giants manager Herman Franks had been using Gibbon as a swing man and spot starter. On this afternoon, Gibbon did not have it. After retiring the leadoff batter, Felipe Alou, Gibbon failed to get another out.

Catcher Joe Torre had put the Braves up 3-0 with a three run homer. After a couple of more hits, Gibbon gave way to reliever Bob Priddy. Priddy yielded a couple of hits before walking another future Astro, Denis Menke. Cloninger got ahead of Priddy before connecting on a homer to center field, in nearly the same spot as Torre's homer.

In the fourth inning, Cloninger would get another shot at a grand slam. While the Braves had increased their lead to 9-0, Bob Priddy yielded way to the Ray Sadecki. After a couple of hits and a fielding error, Menke again came up and was walked to load the bases. Cloninger walked to the plate with bases loaded again. He did not miss his date with history as a hit an opposite field homer to right field to put the Braves up 13-0. Cloninger later added an RBI single to give him nine RBIs in the game.

Cloninger had five homers in the 1966 season along with 23 RBIs. He finished his twelve-year career with 11 homers. He would go on to be the pitching coach for several seasons with the Yankees. Cloninger was the fifth player to have two grand slams in the same game, and the only pitcher to do so. Of course, Fernando Tatis hit two grand slams in the same inning on April 23, 1999. Fernando's father, Fernando Antonio Tatis, played in the Astros farm system in the 1970s making it to the AAA level before entering coaching.



Larry Dierker
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The Chapter Officers and Editorial Board thank Matthew Stevens and Meghan McCroskey for designing the logos for the masthead and this box, respectively.

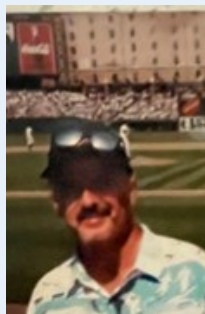
Lifelong Fan Rates the Ballparks, Old and New

By Jimmy Scruggs

I'm very fortunate to have visited stadiums in every city where Major League Baseball is played. Here are some of the stories about those parks that I hope you will find interesting. More notes about other parks will be recounted in future newsletters.

Sportsman's Park, St. Louis, Mo. (1960 & 1963) – A cozy little ballpark with a lot of history. Multiple WS Championships. Slaughter's mad dash in 1946 series Game 7. Stan the Man ruled. My father and I

rode a train from Memphis in '60 and car trip in '63 with my best friend. In the '60 trip, we saw both the Milwaukee Braves and Los Angeles Dodgers. I remember seeing Hank, Billy Bruton, and a young Frank Howard. The right field fence was only 354 feet, but you had to hit it over the roof onto Grand Avenue. In '63, Tim McCarver hit one over the roof off someone named Koufax.



Jimmy Scruggs at Camden Yards

Busch Stadium, St. Louis, Mo. (1974) – Again, a visit with some good friends. Multi-purpose with Astro Turf that they were building at

Numerology

By Mike McCroskey

In 1961, with a game temperature of 61 degrees, Right Fielder, # 9, Roger Maris (5 letters in the first name, 5 letters in the last name), hit his record setting 61st Home run in the Yankees 161st game of the season.

61 years later, in 2022, Right Fielder, # 99, Aaron Judge, (5 letters in the first name, 5 letters in the last name), came to bat in the Yankees 161st game of the season and hit #62, breaking the AL Single Season Homerun record that had stood for 61 years!

that time. We saw Lou Brock steal five bases in a double header and Mike Schmidt put on a power display. During the Big Mac era, the club reduced the seating and had an area for him to hit them out. This helped the appeal.

Busch Stadium, St. Louis, Mo. (2008) – Nice view of the arch and great entertainment area around the ballpark. However, it doesn't make my list of top 10 new parks.

The Trop, St. Petersburg, Fl. (2009) – We all know the story. The city of Tampa was bamboozled by the

White Sox. Build it, we will come. Yeah, right. It's better in person than on TV. Second worst.

MetroDome, Minneapolis, Minn. (2003) – I have a customer in the Twin Cities. When I told him I had seen a game there, he apologized for the park. Spoke with Frank Viola years ago and asked him how loud was game 7 in the 1987 WS. "Jimmy, the game was on Sunday. My ears were ringing on Tuesday." The Worst of the parks.

Target Field, Minneapolis, Minn. (2015) – They did a good job. You can ride the metro. Statutes of "The Killer" Kirby Puckett and others. Good bars around the ballpark. The new Vikings stadium is close by.

The K, Kansas City, Mo. (Multiple visits) – In my opinion, the most underrated MLB park. Fountains. Great history. Lots of parking, as they share a lot with Arrowhead, which is next door. Easy in and out. If you want to visit, hurry. They are planning to build new one downtown.

Harold Jones Passes

Harold Jones, a member of SABR and the Larry Dierker Chapter for over 30 years, passed away on March 31, 2023 at the age of 90. Harold served in the Korean War and later resided in Racine, Wisconsin. He moved to Houston to join Tenneco where he became associated with SABR through his good friend, Bill Gilbert. Harold met and enjoyed meeting the legendary umpire Joe West at one of our Chapter gatherings.

Ballparks continue on page 5

Baseball



Trivia

1. Who started more games than Nolan Ryan's 773 and how many?
2. Who is the only pitcher to win consecutive MVP awards and when?
3. What three teams fired Hank Bauer as manager?
4. What was Whitey Ford's first name?
5. What team did Connie Mack manage before the A's franchise and when?

Prepared by John Lloyd

Answers on page 6

Jose Altuve's Chase to 3,000 Hits

By Carl Grijalba

Jose Altuve has 1,935 career hits in the 12 years he has been playing for the Houston Astros. He needs 1,065 hits to be a member of the 3,000 Hit Club. After playing 12 years, the 32-year-old Altuve currently has the same number of career hits as Ty Cobb after he had played 11

years, and Dave Winfield after he had played 13 years.

It took the 28-year-old Cobb and the 34-year-old Winfield another six and seven years respectively to reach 3,000 hits. And for comparison to Altuve's career hits total, Pete Rose's career totals, and the other Astros' 3,000 hit club member Craig Biggio is included in the chart below:

The Order column is the 3,000 hits club ranking of their total career hits. The Years column is how many years it took the player to reach Altuve's career total hits.

The Additional Years column is how many years it took the player to reach or surpass 3,000 hits. And the last column is the Total Career Hits.

Altuve has been averaging 161.25 hits per year. Since he needs

Career Order	Name	Years	Age	1,935 Hits	Additional Years	Age	3,000 Hits	Career Hits
1	Pete Rose	11	32	2,152	5	37	3,164	4,256
2	Ty Cobb	11	28	1,935	6	34	3,053	4,189
22	Dave Winfield	13	34	1,935	7	42	3,014	3,110
25	Craig Biggio	13	34	1,939	7	41	3,060	3,060
?	Jose Altuve	12	32	1,935	6.5?	39?	?	?

1,065 hits, at his current pace, he would be able to reach 3,000 hits in about 6 1/2 years, at 39 years old.

This would be about the same number of years it took Cobb (6), Winfield (7), and Biggio (7).

The next chart compares Altuve's 1,935 career hits in relation to

hits-per-year. The first column are the HOF members' hits-per-year to reach Altuve's career total.

The second column is how many hits it took them after the year was completed to reach or surpass 3,000 hits. The third column shows the hits-per-year from reaching or

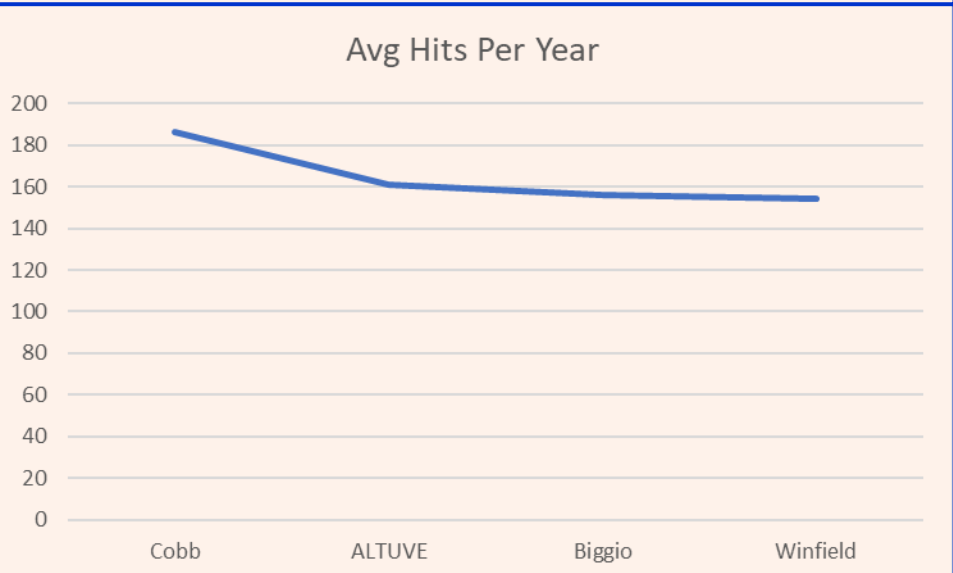
surpassing 3,000 hits to the ends of their careers. And the last column shows the increase or decrease between hits-per-year to reach Altuve's current career hit total and reaching or surpassing 3,000 hits. This column includes the hits to the end of their careers that did not affect the overall hits-per-year.

Name	Hits-per-year to reach Altuve's 1,935 Career hits	Hits needed to reach 3,000 hits: completed year	Hits-per-year to reach 3,000	+/- Differential Hits per Year
Ty Cobb	175.90	1,118	186.33	+10.43
Dave Winfield	148.85	1,079	154.14	+5.29
Craig Biggio	151.46	1,091	155.86	+4.40

The graph to the right shows the comparison of Altuve, Cobb, Winfield, and Biggio, the average hits per year to reach 3,000 hits. Altuve's 161.25 is his current hits-per-year.

Altuve can reach 3,000 hits if he can avoid major injuries and long batting slumps, and can maintain his career 161.25 hits per-year average.

Other factors include how the Astros perform over the same period of time and/or if he plays his entire career in an Astros uniform. Reaching 3,000 hits would make him a sure lock for the Hall of Fame.



Ballparks continued from page 3

Camden Yards, Baltimore, Md. (2000) – You have to give them extra credit as they were the first of the throwbacks. No one to copy. Babe Museum next door. Boog’s Bar-B-Q. Huge build up around the park is in the works. Good friend of mine is lead radio guy for the O’s.

Pro Players, Miami, Fl. (2003) – A football stadium where they played baseball.

Marlins Park, Miami, Fl. (2014) – It’s OK but stuck in a lot of office buildings. Difficult in and out.

Atlanta Fulton County, Atlanta, Ga. (1969) – Multi-purpose Astro turf.

ea where you could watch Cartoon Channel on huge screen. Awful parking.

Truist Park, Atlanta, Ga. (2017) – The best group of bars, shopping, etc. around any ballpark. The Battery. Good job with team history. Getting in and out is not easy.

Oakland Coliseum, Oakland, Cal. (1998) – Horrible. Only positive is the retired numbers. Go if you must complete your visits with this one.

T Mobile Park, Seattle, Wash. (Multiple visits) – You can take a water taxi, as my wife and I did on our first visit. On a clear day, you can see Mt. Rainier in one seating section. Nice one.

Lineup of Upcoming Events:
May 13: Special Meeting: Sugar Land Space Cowboys pre-game at Constellation Field
June 12: Monthly Meeting: Bailey Hall on stats and technology at Spaghetti Western and Zoom
July 5-9: SABR 51 Conference, Chicago

The Ted, Atlanta, Ga. (2005) – I liked it. Many didn’t. Great kids ar-

Coors Field, Denver, Co. (2009 & 2015) – In my Top 5. Has it all. The Rock Pile copies center field at Wrigley. Row of seats in upper deck painted purple, telling you that it’s a Mile High. Plenty of entertainment close along with 16th street. Mall within a mile of the park.

Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles, Cal. (1998) – Has held up well from the 1962 opening. Built for \$23 million.

Repeat continued from page 1

and McCullers, the 2023 rotation seems thin.

With a top-notch offense, perhaps the pitching will not be forced to perform as well as it did under pressure in many games in 2023. Adding first baseman Jose Abreu to the mix of Jose Altuve, Michael Brantley, Alex Bregman, Yordan Alvarez, Kyle Tucker, and Jeremy Pena gives the Astros as strong a top seven in the lineup as there is in the sport. Chas McCormick and Martin Maldonado round out the starting lineup.

But without Altuve, the lack of depth on the bench leaves GM Dana Brown scrambling to find a better option at second base than Mauricio

Dubon or David Hensley, to say nothing of the question mark in the leadoff spot.

The bullpen returns intact after the best postseason run in history by a relief corps, including a 0.83 ERA with only 23 hits allowed and 70 strikeouts in 54 innings. With an 87-8 record with a lead after six innings in 2022, the Astros were a lock to protect games.

Closer Ryan Pressly got a break sometimes with setup man Rafael Montero saving 14 games. Bryan Abreu proved to be unhittable, leaving Ryne Stanek and Hector Neris rested many nights. That allowed manager Dusty Baker the luxury of entering most games with top-quality rested arms for the late innings.

Welcome New Members

- Cole Baggett.....Belton, TX
Geoffrey BeiermeisterSugar Land, TX
Adam BrodieHouston, TX
Hunter Clark.....
Marina Clarke SchulteSugar Land, TX
Jacob Cornwell
Evan DrellichSunnyside, NY
Sarah GellesHouston, TX
Tim HealeyHouston, TX
Ian Kleppinger.....Houston, TX
Hank Lott.....Chicago, IL
Ian OliverHouston, TX
Cesar SaldiviaKaty, TX
Chase SmithRichards, TX
Jessica SmythLawrenceville, GA
Marlene VogelsangSan Leandro, CA
Lena Westerfeld.....Houston, TX

Jack Murphy, San Diego, Cal. (2000) – Boring multi-use.

Petco, San Diego, Cal. (2014) – In a nice area of downtown. Not Top 10 of the new ones but has charm.

Oracle, San Francisco, Cal. (2000 & 2014) – Numero Uno. Views of the bay, McCovey Cove. Great job with history. Can take mass transit to get there. Many food options. If you’re going to one new park, this is the one.

When the Yankees of the 1990s ran off their dominant streak, they relied on a core of Andy Pettitte, Derek Jeter, Jorge Posada, Bernie Williams, Tino Martinez, and Paul O’Neill. Roger Clemens,

David Wells, David Cone and other pitchers joined that group in some of the years of that era.

Eventually the players aged and the group yielded to a less talented team. It’s typical for dominant teams to slip into a regrouping status, but the Astros are trying to avoid that trend by acquiring a few upper-tier free agents while reloading their farm system.

What 2023 brings will determine how long the Golden Era lasts.

Message continued from page 1

the upcoming season.

The first year I can recall, and my email inbox can confirm, that I entered the contest was 2013. For those who painfully remember, 2013 was the absolute low point of the Astros rebuild. Out of the 48 entries the chapter received that year, I was the most optimistic about the club. The guesses

ranged from 76 wins (my guess) to 38 wins. Those who know me can attest to how optimistic I have always been with my beloved Astros.

Boy, was I wrong that year. The team finished with a 51-111 record that year, the worst finish in franchise history. The team lost their last 15 games in a row. The year 2013 was a hard one for an Astros fan. I cringed while I listened to the club lose game after game that year. I hoped and wished almost every day that painful season that the current Astros rebuild would soon end.

Times sure have changed since 2013 and so has the Astros win contest. This year I thought it would be appropriate to change things up when it came to the tiebreakers. Chapter members were asked to submit not only their Astros win total, but as a first tiebreaker, how many home runs Yordan Alvarez will hit and, as a second tiebreaker, how many stolen ba-

ses Kyle Tucker will have. I added the second tiebreaker mostly because Major League Baseball's rule changes should, in my opinion, revive baseball's running game. At the time of this writing, it seems that the running game has come back with a storm.

This year, the chapter received 37 Astros predictions. All those who submitted projections had the Astros



Fast forward 10 years from that dreadful 2013 season and the Astros baseball landscape has dramatically changed.

This era of Astros baseball has turned a former joke of a franchise into one that has achieved remarkable success on the field.

A run that started in 2015 has led to the Astros winning two World Series titles, four American League pennants, and six straight trips to the American League Championship series.

The Astros fanbase and Houston SABR chapter members are living in the moment.

Astros Win Contest Entrants with Predictions

Name	Wins	HRs	SBs	Name	Wins	HRs	SBs
Jim Currie	103	48	35	Grant Sovereign	96	35	35
Bob Dorrill	103	39	33	Fred Soland	95	42	36
Phyllis Mira	102	39	24	Lou DeScioli	95	40	35
Billy Moore	101	48	35	Chris Roblin	95	40	30
Fernando Battaglini	101	38	35	Scott McCay	95	40	30
Mike McCroskey	101	37	26	Vinnie Vrotny	95	39	38
Josh Sullivan	101	28	22	Tim Healey	95	39	36
Wesley Story	100	42	36	Wayne Roberts	95	27	20
Kevin Fontenot	100	38	36	Paul Geisler	94	42	37
Mark Hudec	99	43	41	Phil Boudreaux	94	33	21
Bob Stevens	99	41	30	Ken Lilley	94	32	33
Maxwell Kates	98	39	62	Herb Whalley	93	43	35
Joe Thompson	97	45	40	Mike Vance	93	42	43
Roland Bassett	97	34	34	Larry Dierker	93	33	33
Greg Moore	96	48	35	Chris Chestnut	92	39	18
Francis Kinlaw	96	43	38	Carl Owens	91	33	30
David Preston	96	41	28	Bill Brown	91	32	30
Craig Estlinbaum	96	37	32	Geoffrey Beiermeister	89	36	26
Koby Farries	96	37	31	Avg Prediction	96	39	33

winning anywhere from 89 to 103 games, having Yordan Alvarez hit anywhere from 27 to 48 home runs, and Kyle Tucker stealing from 18 to 43 bases.

My predictions were as follows: 97 wins, 45 homers for Yordan, and 40 stolen bases for Tucker. If my Kyle Tucker stolen base prediction is correct, and Tucker also hits 40 home runs, Tucker will become the Astros first ever 40/40 player.

As President Emeritus Bob Dorrill said when he submitted his predictions for this year, "Let the good times roll."

Trivia Answers

1. Cy Young with 815
2. Hal Newhouser in 1944 and 1945
3. Kansas City A's, Baltimore, Oakland
4. Edward
5. Pittsburgh Pirates from 1894 - 1896