

SABR-L Digest - 21 Mar 2018 to 22 Mar 2018 (#2018-67)

3/22/2018 7:01 PM

SABR-L automatic digest system via SABR members only] Society for American Baseball Research [moderated
To sabr-l@apple.ease.lsoft.com

There are 8 messages totaling 384 lines in this issue.

Topics of the day:

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2. 1920's doubleheaders
3. Hitting foul balls as skill (3)
4. The new minor league rule....
5. Four Balls and You're Out
6. On the effort to build a Louis Sockalexis statue

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Date: Wed, 21 Mar 2018 16:29:46 -0700
From: Hayford Peirce <tahiti@POST.HARVARD.EDU>
Subject: Subject: four foul balls and you're out

Jack Smiles wrote:

"I think purposely fouling pitches is an overrated "skill." If batters were able to hit balls where they want to they'd get a lot more hits."

That certainly SOUNDS sensible at first glance, but I gave it a little second thought, with tennis in mind, since I played a lot of that game for more than a half century.

I think that any of you who have ever played any tennis at all would agree with me that if you are standing on your baseline, say, and you have (chronologically) Bill Tilden, Pancho Gonzales, Rod Laver, or Roger Federer on the other baseline directing rockets at you from various angles, that it would be a LOT easier to just get your racquet onto the ball and hit it ANYWHERE except back over the net in a direction and a speed that would make it a winning point for YOU. You could hit it out of bounds along either sideline. You could hit it behind you (that would be trickier, of course), or you could hit it deep into the grandstands on the sides of the court. After a while, exasperated, MAYBE the great player on the other side would give you a floater of sorts and then you could pound it back over the net, into the other court, and get a winning point out of it. It would take SOME skill, of course, to be able to hit all of these sideline shots in the first place, but not as much, I think, as it would take to hit an outright winner.

Hayford Peirce, who recognizes that arguing by analogy is always a tricky business

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Date: Wed, 21 Mar 2018 19:25:30 -0500
From: Bruce Bumbalough <blbtigers34@GMAIL.COM>
Subject: 1920's doubleheaders

All,

In researching an article for the upcoming Babe Ruth SABR book, I came across mentions of doubleheaders with morning games and afternoon games. I am wondering if these doubleheaders were like the day-night doubleheaders of today -- with the stadium emptied between the games and fans required to buy tickets to each game.

Thanks in advance

Bruce Bumbalough
Watauga, Texas

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Date: Wed, 21 Mar 2018 18:10:30 -0700
From: Merritt Clifton <Animals24.7@FRONTIER.COM>
Subject: Hitting foul balls as skill

I think purposely fouling pitches is an overrated "skill." If batters were able to hit balls where they want to they'd get a lot more hits.

This theory & the skill of hitting foul balls come from points in time separated by more than 100 years, the average velocity of a major league fastball having increased by about 20 mph in the interim, and along the way Babe Ruth et al having completely transformed the art of baseball offense.

Back when place hitting dominated the game, during the deadball era and earlier, when few players were big or strong enough to hit the ball out of the park even if they tried, good batters would typically go to the plate having in mind not just what pitch to look for, but what pitch they wanted in order to "hit it where they ain't."

The purpose of fouling off strikes was not just to "get a good pitch to hit," but to get a good pitch to hit to a specific area of the field.

Gents including Willie Keeler, Eddie Collins, & Ty Cobb were masters at this, but as fastball became faster, and as the variety & velocity of breaking balls increased, trying to hit them where they ain't came to pay off a lot less than cocking the bat, as few batters did earlier, & swinging from the heels, sacrificing bat control for bat speed.

What did batters do before they cocked the bat?

Pick up a bat from the dead ball era or earlier & you'll realize that it wasn't even made to be cocked. It was much longer and heavier, especially relative to the average size of the hitters, tapering much less

from handle to hitting surface, made to be wielded more like a cudgel than a club, to direct the ball rather than drive it.

The taped handle part of the bat would typically extend up about 30 to 40% of the total length of the bat, because that's how much batters would use back in the era of choked grips, split grips (like Cobb's, which was not unique until the very end of his career), and sliding the hands to square into the ball, rather than gripping the bat at the very end to swing with maximum leverage.

Merritt Clifton

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Date: Thu, 22 Mar 2018 09:37:30 -0400

From: Cliff Otto <ottoc.bb.etc+sabr@GMAIL.COM>

Subject: Re: Hitting foul balls as skill

Merritt Clifton makes some good points about the length/weight of bat and the increase of pitch speed but there are a couple of other things that should be included.

First of all, pitching was underhand for some time and the batter could call for the location of the pitch. Then there were the rules.

1884 (from Spalding's Baseball Guide) [somewhat paraphrased]

Rule 35. A Strike is:

- (1) swing and a miss
- (2) called by umpire within the strike zone.

Rule 36. A Foul Strike is a ball batted by the batsman when he is not entirely within the batter's box.

Rule 51. A Batsman is out:

- (3) He makes a Foul Hit, and the ball is momentarily held by the fielder before touching the ground.
- (4) He makes a Foul Strike.

Rule 52. The Batsman becomes a Base Runner

- (3) Instantly after three Strikes have been called by the umpire.

That is as early as I can go back with my resources but the rule was changed in the NL for the 1901 season and the AL for the 1903 season, where Strikes (Rule 44, Section 3) reads:

A strike is a foul hit ball not caught on the fly, unless two strikes have already been called (Reach's 1903 Baseball Guide).

It appears to me, if I am understanding correctly what I read, that until 1901 batters could foul off balls at their will, say by pushing bunts foul. Perhaps some 19th century specialist can conform this or set me on the right path to understanding.

Clifford Otto

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Date: Thu, 22 Mar 2018 16:13:46 +0000
From: Richard Hershberger <rrhersh@YAHOO.COM>
Subject: The new minor league rule....

Bobby Plapinger wrote: "While starting a runner on 2nd base in the 10th inning may be a horrible idea for the major leagues, please remember - it's being instituted in the MINOR leagues - NOT the same thing. The goals of minor league baseball players, managers & others are not identical to those of major leaguers."

I agree that there are good arguments that marathon games are undesirable. For what it is worth, I think these arguments apply to both the majors and the minors. My critique of the rule is with the solution being tried for the problem. It simply adds a random element to the game. The batting side now has merely to partially achieve the actions usually required to score a run. It also won't prevent marathon games. It will merely reduce their frequency.

A better solution, in my opinion, is to embrace the tie game. If, after eleven (or whatever) innings the score is tied, then that is the result. Ties have an ancient and honorable place in baseball history. The rules have, over the past few decades, been tweaked to nearly eliminate the tie, but this is essentially an aesthetic judgment. There is no intrinsic reason to reject tie games, and this would do less violence to the spirit of the game than arbitrarily placing runners on base.

Richard Hershberger

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Date: Wed, 21 Mar 2018 16:03:45 -0400
From: Cliff Otto <ottoc.bb.etc+sabr@GMAIL.COM>
Subject: Re: Four Balls and You're Out

On the blog PayOff Pitch, NufCed had an article about Luke Appling and his legendary ability to foul off pitches, noting that Appling, himself, related to Rob Neyer:

No one could deliberately foul off pitches as deftly as Chicago White Sox shortstop and Hall of Famer Luke Appling.

He once fouled off an incredible 24 pitches in one at-bat. It happened in 1940 when the New York Yankees were whipping the Sox, 8-2. "I figured since we weren't going to win anyway, I'd have me a little fun and see if I couldn't wear out Red Ruffing," Appling recalled. "So I started fouling off his pitches. I took a pitch every now and then. Pretty soon, after 24 pitches, old Red could hardly lift his arm and I walked. That's when they took him out of the game and he cussed me all the way to the dugout."

In a game with the Detroit Tigers three years later, Appling pulled off a similar foul feat. Batting against Dizzy Trout, Appling fouled off 14

consecutive pitches. Trout was so ticked off at Appling that on his next pitch, he threw his glove instead of the ball. Recalled Appling, "I fouled off that one, too."

NufCed stated [in regard to the 24-pitch foul-off extravaganza] that "I should mention that it is almost certain that this never happened, and Appling's teammate Ted Lyons said he fouled off ten straight pitches against Ruffing once, but what do you want to believe?"

However, NufCed also mentioned that "In 1943 the American League released a study that found on average, Luke Appling fouled off 14.1 pitches per game." <http://payoffpitchblog.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-142-no-133-luke-appling.html>

mentalfloss.com has an article by David K. Israel, 26 July 2010, titled 6 Epic At-Bats, that describes two of Appling's at bats in 1940, one in which happened with two outs in the 9th when he was trying to break up Feller's no-hitter on opening day. He fouled off 15 pitches (11 according to some) before he walked.

The other story was about the 24 fouls against Ruffing (for which Israel said he could find no written proof). <http://mentalfloss.com/article/25285/6-epic-bats>

Seems to me that the 1943 AL study might still exist and that newspapers covering the Indians opener in Chicago in 1940 might shed some light on the matter.

Clifford Otto

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Date: Thu, 22 Mar 2018 09:29:16 -0700
From: Joyce Hatcher <stevejoycehatcher@GMAIL.COM>
Subject: Re: Hitting foul balls as skill

Prior to 1920, the spit ball and it's cousins were a common practice; and given the fact they were difficult pitches to hit, I have to question the allegation that batters were not strong enough to hit balls out of the park. I also have to question the apparent style of play as something on the order of slow-pitch softball. Babe Ruth who had one of those heavy bats referred to hit just 29 homeruns in 1919 in a 130 games.

I think fans love foul balls especially when they land in the stands.

Steve Hatcher

-----Original Message-----

From: Society for American Baseball Research [moderated, SABR members only] [SABR-L@APPLE.EASE.LSOFT.COM] On Behalf Of Merritt Clifton
Sent: Wednesday, March 21, 2018 6:11 PM
To: SABR-L@APPLE.EASE.LSOFT.COM
Subject: [SABR-L] Hitting foul balls as skill

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Merritt Clifton

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Date: Thu, 22 Mar 2018 15:47:54 -0700

From: [J. G. Preston](mailto:J.G.Preston)

Subject: On the effort to build a Louis Sockalexis statue

"The Friends of Sockalexis are forming a nonprofit group to begin raising funds for the memorial now"...

<http://mainepublic.org/post/group-raising-funds-build-statue-first-native-american-baseball-pro#stream/0>

J.G. Preston
Santa Fe, NM

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