



June 12, 2019

Analytics, Projections and Cannonballs into the River

DIGITAL & TECHNOLOGY

BY SCHNEIDER DOWNS PROFESSIONAL

Most fans would agree that statistics and analytics are more prevalent in Major League Baseball than in any other sport, and have become especially pertinent with the increased deployment of the shift. Thanks to those shifts, singles are down for the fifth consecutive year and are now more rare than at any time in baseball history. There's now, for instance, a greater percentage that an at bat will end in a homerun, walk or strikeout. Strikeouts increased for the 14th consecutive season; walks have reached their highest rate in 19 seasons; and the percent chance of a homerun, walk or strikeout has increased to 36% in 2019, compared to 31% in 2015. One might ask if "small ball" is nonexistent.

In 2018, MLB teams utilized a defensive shift about 18% of the time, with the Houston Astros moving around the most at 37%. The Pirates, at 14%, were near the middle of the pack at 18th highest in the league. So far, though, numbers for the 2019 season are even higher, with teams putting on a defensive shift about 25% of the time. The Astros are still shifting the most at a staggering 48%, and the Pirates have more than doubled their shift percentage, which currently stands at 30%, 11th in the league.

Needless to say, there are a wealth of MLB analytics available, and you could certainly spend hours looking at trends, graphs and projections, but here are some fun numbers for us fans of the local club. You may have heard that the Pirates' Josh Bell was named the National League Player of the Month for May. Over his past 30 games, the slugging first baseman hit 12 home runs and drove in 32. Based on numbers so far, he's projected to finish the season with 50 home runs and 148 RBIs, which would put him third all-time for home runs and first all-time for RBIs in a season in franchise history.

Not only did Bell have a special month, he also became the fourth and fifth player to hit a ball into the Allegheny River on the fly. Currently, he's knocked 0.29% of his plate appearances at PNC Park into the drink. So if he stays with the team, how many more cannonballs into the Allegheny can we expect? Well, consider: the average player gets about 550 plate appearances a year, which translates to 275 plate appearances on home turf. Let's say Josh Bell plays 10 more years. That's 2,750 plate appearances at PNC Park over the course of his career, so he would end up hitting eight more shots into the river. While that may seem like a lot, compare that number to Barry Bonds, who hit 35 homeruns into San Francisco's McCovey Cove over his career.

Josh, then, appears to have a long way to go. He would have to hit cannonballs into the river at a rate of 1.32% of his plate appearances a year for the next 10 to catch Bonds. Considering, though, that he hit the river twice in one month, that

jump to 1.32% might not be too difficult a leap. So if you're an optimist, pull out the kayak and wait on the river for your chance to catch the next Bell blast.

For more data on the Pirates, MLB or – more importantly – on how Schneider Downs can help provide data-driven solutions for your business, contact Eric Davis at 412-697-5445 or edavis@schneiderdowns.com

You've heard our thoughts... We'd like to hear yours

The Schneider Downs Our Thoughts On blog exists to create a dialogue on issues that are important to organizations and individuals. While we enjoy sharing our ideas and insights, we're especially interested in what you may have to say. If you have a question or a comment about this article – or any article from the Our Thoughts On blog – we hope you'll share it with us. After all, a dialogue is an exchange of ideas, and we'd like to hear from you. Email us at contactSD@schneiderdowns.com.

Material discussed is meant for informational purposes only, and it is not to be construed as investment, tax, or legal advice. Please note that individual situations can vary. Therefore, this information should be relied upon when coordinated with individual professional advice.

© 2024 Schneider Downs. All rights-reserved. All content on this site is property of Schneider Downs unless otherwise noted and should not be used without [written permission](#).