

## YOUNG BASEBALL STARS BLOSSOM

Who was better? Hank Aaron or Mike Trout? Babe Ruth or Reggie Jackson? Carl Yastrzemski or Rickey Henderson?

Pick an era of Major League Baseball and you're apt to find two or three players — often a trio — who stand above the rest. That's playing out this year as three young stars are performing at a sensationally high level and destined for superstardom and, eventually, the Hall of Fame.

Ronald Acuna, Jr., of Atlanta Braves and Juan Soto of Washington Nationals were 2018's superstar rookies, with Acuna winning the Rookie of the Year award in a tight race. That studly duo has now been joined at the upper echelon of youthful stardom by Fernando Tatis, Jr., of the San Diego Padres.

Tatis, Jr., hit 17 homers as a rookie in this year's 60-game regular season. Eleven of them were swatted in September when baseball fans in North America began to notice that this guy was no ordinary freshman. In his third year, Soto won the National League batting title and led the league in OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging average), while Acuna missed 14 games and still finished in the top 20 in most of the NL's key offensive categories.

While Soto, Acuna, Jr., and Tatis, Jr., may come to dominate baseball headlines for the next decade or so, it's fun to look back on other eras for comparison. Such as the trio of Mike Trout, Bryce Harper and Mookie Betts, who were the alpha males five or six years ago until the aforementioned three flashy kids came along.

Baseball fans won't forget 1988, when the trio of Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa played out a season-long home run derby that eventually was determined to have been spiked by performance enhancing drugs. The 1980s had George Brett, Tony Gwynn and Rickey Henderson, all of whom are currently in the Hall of Fame. Maybe the 1970s trio of Yastrzemski, Johnny Bench and Reggie Jackson is the best threesome in baseball history. Anyone my age might argue that the 1960s trio of Mickey Mantle, Hank Aaron and Willie Mays has no peer.

Ten years from now, Soto, Acuna and Tatis will be yesterday's news, and a fresh crop of superstar youngsters will be smashing home runs, running down outfield liners and gathering millions of Twitter followers. And more than a few old-timers will still be maintaining that these kids today couldn't carry Mantle's cleats.

- **RJ Currie** of [sportsdeke.com](http://sportsdeke.com): "The Nebraska State Fair broke a record for the longest parade of old tractors when over 1,100 showed up. In Canada, that's just part of the last-minute Labour Day crowd at Mosaic Stadium."

- The late MLB outfielder **Jay Johnstone**, who died of COVID-19 at age 74: "When there's no game, Philly fans go to the airport to boo bad landings."

- **Patti Dawn Swansson**, aka the River City Renegade: "Hendrick Motorsports was fined \$100,000 recently for spending too much time in a wind tunnel. **Curt Menefee** can relate. He has to sit beside **Terry Bradshaw** for five hours every weekend on Fox NFL Sunday."

- **Gary Gramling** of [SI.com](http://SI.com), writing about **Philip Rivers'** 400th career touchdown: "Of his *career*, not of the *game*. (He was playing the Jets, so that clarification is necessary.)"

- Headline from [theonion.com](http://theonion.com): "**Rob Manfred** Confident MLB Doing Enough To Market Stars Like **Mike Trout** And The Japanese Guy"

- Another [onion.com](http://onion.com) headline: "**Mitch Trubisky** Studying Game Tapes In Hopes Of Discovering What Bears Saw In Him In First Place"

- **Patti Dawn Swansson** again: "I think (Jets' **Blake**) **Wheeler** is still a useful player, but a year from now he'll be slower than a sports writer reaching for the bar tab."

- Swansson, on Tampa Bay Lightning's boat parade to celebrate their Stanley Cup, replacing the traditional motorcade: "In keeping with the water theme, coaches and players drank American beer."

- Reader **Steven S.**, responding to **Sean McIndoe's** [TheAthletic.com](http://TheAthletic.com) story on the 1977 NHL draft, where it was pointed out **Larry Robinson's** brother **Moe** was drafted by the Habs in the third round: "I think the big question is who drafted **Curly Robinson**?" Reader **Tim M.** countered with: "I could have sworn he played for the Canyuk-nyuk-nyuks."

- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**, after **Tom Brady** lost track of how many downs he had left in a recent game: "Five!" What **Tom Brady** yells when he hits into the group in front of him on the golf course."

- From [Fark.com](http://Fark.com): "**Swiss Skydiver** wins Preakness. Odd, would have thought a horse would win."

- Dwight Perry of the Seattle Times: "With the Cowboys yielding 36.5 points and 430.5 yards a game, just gotta ask: When will allas get its D back?"

- @rslashpatriots, via Twitter: "The Jets are 750:1 to win the Super Bowl, meaning if you bet \$100 on it, you would lose \$100."

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