

MLB SLUGGERS CHASING HISTORY

It has been a baseball season to remember for a number of sluggers, but Aaron Judge, New York Yankees' No. 99 — who shows absolutely no disrespect to that royal athletic number — is probably having the most unforgettable campaign.

Zeroing in on the American League home run record for one season, Judge was on pace in mid-September for 65 home runs, which would surpass the 61 HRs hit in 1961 by Roger Maris of the Yanks. That number has been long surpassed by three National League hitters — Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa — but their accomplishments are questionable given the steroid implications surrounding their seasons of hammering baseballs into outer space.

Judge has no such negativity surrounding his sensational season. He's a 6-foot-7, 282-pound Samson of a man who launches baseballs as if they were sitting on a tee, just waiting for his bat to make contact. At last look, Judge had 57 homers and was 18 ahead of his nearest MLB rival, Kyle Schwarber of the Phillies. Judge's dominance in the home-run statistical column is reminiscent of the Wayne Gretzky era in the National Hockey League, when the Oilers' No. 99 was 79 points ahead of the runner-up (Paul Coffey) in 1983-84. A fluke? Not really, Gretzky won by 73 points (208 to second-place Jari Kurri's 135) the following season.

Judge, however, isn't the only slugger in MLB to have an unforgettable season. Shohei Ohtani and Mike Trout of the Angels have done some amazing things; Freddie Freeman has quieted the critics who suggested his stats might fall off after leaving Atlanta; St. Louis Cardinals' Paul Goldschmidt is proving that some hitters just get better with age; and the amazing Albert Pujols just keeps on slugging.

Ohtani, who has no peer as an all-around superstar, is among the American League leaders in home runs, pitching victories and earned-run average; three-time MVP Trout was close to an A.L. record in September by hitting home runs in seven consecutive games; Freeman, MVP for the Braves two years ago, leads the National League in hits and doubles and his Dodgers are the runaway leaders in victories; Goldschmidt has an outside chance at winning the N.L. triple crown, with impressive mid-September numbers of 35 home runs, 112 runs-batted-in, and a .322 batting average; and the 42-year-old Pujols is playing like a kid, averaging a home run every five games for the Cardinals, and he's closing in on the exclusive 700-homer club, of which Bonds, Hank Aaron and Babe Ruth are the only members. If he falls short this season, watch for him to return next year for as long as it takes to get to 700.

The way Judge is hitting, maybe the Yankee slugger will get there first.

- Comedy writer **Brad Dickson** of Omaha, in the aftermath of Nebraska coach **Scott Frost**'s firing: "A number of UNL students are reportedly hoping for a new football coach who's already won a national championship ... I didn't realize hallucinogenic drugs were popular on campus these days."
 - New York Post reader **Lloyd Stone**, during a recent NFL televised game: "Is there any way to watch this in black and white? Seattle's garish green uniforms should be restricted to prisoners on trash patrol along the Jersey Turnpike."
 - Comedy guy **Steve Burgess** of Vancouver: "Congratulations to (Saskatchewan QB) **Cody Fajardo** who became a father this week. In his honour, the Riders laid an egg."
 - Headline at the onion.com: "Referees call for replay to admire great call."
 - **Scott Ostler** of the San Francisco Chronicle, suggesting yet another MLB rules change: "If there are five or more people in line at a beer stand, everyone in line gets free beer. Hire more damn vendors. If we want to stand in line, we'll go to Disneyland or the DMV."
 - Portland State football coach **Bruce Barnum**, to JohnCanzano.com, sizing up the Washington roster after losing 52-6: "I got a good look at everybody except their punter."
 - **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com, on Forbes pegging the Knicks as the most lucrative NBA team at \$5.8 billion: "Who would guess there could be so much value in laughing stock?"
 - **Mike Bianchi** of The Orlando Sentinel, on Broncos coach **Nathaniel Hackett** opting for a 64-yard field goal instead of trusting **Russell Wilson** on fourth-and-five: "This was the dumbest decision since Prohibition."
 - **Bianchi again**: "Please tell me Nebraska wouldn't sell its soul and consider hiring **Urban Meyer**. If it happens, they should just change their name to the Scornhuskers!"
 - Washington State Dept. of Natural Resources, on Twitter: "Remember that fantasy football and tsunami evacuation both start with a strong run game."
 - **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "The Banjo Bowl outcome: Blue Bombers 54, the flu-ridden Roughriders 20. Saskatchewan QB **Cody Fajardo** said many Riders were so ill they couldn't keep anything down — including, it seems, the score."
- Care to comment? Email brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca*