

OUT OF LEFT FIELD: Cardinals (48-44) vs. Reds (34-55)

<p>BRIGHT LIGHTS HAVE BLINDED CARDINAL QUARTET</p>	<p>They would make the playoffs (barely) if they started today, but make no mistake: The Cardinals have been disappointing. Paul Goldschmidt is having an MVP-type season and Nolan Arenado is on his way to a .300, 30-homer, 100-RBI year. You'd think just that would have them running away with the NL Central, but it hasn't happened. There are many reasons, but an inability to stand up to the heavyweights is certainly a big one. The Cards have dominated the Cubs, Pirates and Reds (16-8), but they are a combined 4-10 against the Mets, Braves and Dodgers, and they've gone just 3-8 against the mighty AL East despite not having seen the Yankees. Four guys who have feasted on lightweights and floundered against the big boys are Brendan Donovan (.372/.218), Tommy Edman (.326/.208), Juan Yepez (.300/.235) and Dylan Carlson (.290/.234).</p>
<p>NOW ENTERING THE GAME FOR THE CARDINALS ... UH OH</p>	<p>Yes, injuries have been a factor. But who can't say that? The Cards currently have Yadier Molina (more on him later), Paul DeJong and Harrison Bader out of the lineup. Backups Donovan (.281) and Yepez (.254) have filled in more than adequately (against the lightweights, anyway), but the problem is the backups for the backups. The Cards' in-game subs have hit .186 (22nd in majors); their pinch hitters have just 7 hits (their .127 average is the worst in baseball); and in an era when analytics are playing such a big role, their batting average goes down - .256 in the 1st 3 innings, .254 in the middle 3, .235 in the last 3 - as the managerial wheels start spinning fastest. The Cards have gone just 3-35 in games in which they trailed entering the 7th inning.</p>
<p>A CENTURY LATER, SISLER'S RECORD IN JEOPARDY</p>	<p>The Cards will be represented at the All-Star Game next week by four guys: Starting first baseman Goldschmidt, backup third baseman Arenado, legacy choice Albert Pujols and reliever Ryan Helsley. Here are some fun facts about them, starting with Goldschmidt ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * He leads the NL in batting (.331), on-base percentage (.413), slugging (.587) and OPS (1.001). * He was the 246th overall pick of the 2009 draft by the Diamondbacks; it was the same draft as Mike Trout (1st round, 25th by Angels) and Arenado (2nd round, 59th by Rockies) got picked. * Is hitting .444 against lefties (28-for-63 with 12 walks). The major-league record for highest average against lefties in a season (minimum 100 plate appearances) is .500 by George Sisler in 1922. Only 7 guys have hit higher than .444 for a full season (last: Ryan Braun, .451 in 2007).
<p>MAYBE NOSE TWITCH WOULD HELP ARENADO IN LA</p>	<p>Arenado was denied a starting spot when the fans favored Manny Machado in a close vote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * His dad Fernando's love of the game went so far that he named Nolan after one of his favorite players, Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan. * He played on the same high school team (El Toro in Newport Beach, CA) as Matt Chapman. The most famous non-baseball alums of El Toro include former Oklahoma softball star Lauren Chamberlain, Adrien Beard (the voice of Token Black on South Park) and the Murphy twins (Diane and Erin, who shared time playing Tabitha Stephens on Bewitched). * Note to All-Star skipper: Has entered 17 games as a sub in career, going 2-for-15 (both singles).
<p>DOUBLE TROUBLE: AL HAS OHTANI; NL HAS PUJOLS</p>	<p>Pujols played in his first All-Star Game on July 10, 2001. It was in Seattle, and at the time, current Mariners rookie All-Star Julio Rodriguez, now 21, was 6 months and 13 days old.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * He hit the first homer ever allowed by Gerrit Cole while with the Angels when Cole was breaking in with the Pirates on June 21, 2013. It was a solo shot. * On May 15, he pitched against the Giants with the Cards leading 15-2. He became the oldest to make his debut as a pitcher since player/manager Len Blackburne of the 1929 White Sox.
<p>HE'S AN UNDERDOG WHEN MEASURED AGAINST UNDERWOOD</p>	<p>Helsley on May 1 threw a fastball clocked at 103.1 mph, at that time the fastest pitch of the season thrown by anyone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Not all pitchers are athletes, but Helsley certainly is. In addition to playing baseball at Sequoyah High in Tahlequah, OK, he also played basketball and football, and took some time during the baseball season to run track as well. * He has appeared in the 7th inning 6 times, facing 11 batters, without giving up a hit. Has a 0.00 ERA in the 6th inning (2 games), 7th (6 games), 8th (16 games) and extra innings (1 game). * Making an MLB All-Star team is good for Q rating, but he has a ways to go before catching the most famous alum of Northeastern Oklahoma State: Carrie Underwood.
<p>TEAM HASN'T DONE SQUAT WITHOUT MOLINA</p>	<p>When Molina's knees were troubling him and he wasn't hitting a lick, the Cards were winners. In the last game he played on June 15, St. Louis was 37-28 and 1½ games up in the Central despite his .213 average. Instead of going on the IL, Molina went home to Puerto Rico. In St. Louis, things fell apart. The Cards have gone 11-16 without him and are now 3 games behind the Brewers. Even if Molina, who turned 40 on Wednesday, can't play, the Cards want him back, but they're going to have to wait. This week he announced he's shooting for early August.</p>