

7thinningstretch



TSNumbers

.900 Tigers CF Roger Cedeno's career average (9-for-10) against Indians pitcher Dave Burba.

11 Consecutive wins for the Red Sox in games started by David Cone.

13 Games the Mets have won in their last at-bat, including two last week against Philadelphia.

23-9 The Padres record against the Brewers since 1998. They never have lost a series to them.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

It's not too early to ask: Can the Mariners set a record for wins? They'll have to put up 115 to set the A.L. mark, 117 to set the major league mark. They're on pace to win 117. Let's assume they don't pack it in after clinching the A.L. West—didn't they clinch

back in June, anyway? Starting Wednesday, they face 11 teams in their final 56 games. Four of those teams (19 games) can be called playoff contenders. A prediction: The Mariners will coast to the record

after going 17-4 in September against Tampa Bay, Baltimore, Texas and Anaheim. ... The Atlanta-Houston series (August 7-9) could be a playoff preview. Watch **Greg Maddux**. He "struggles" in August (3.38 ERA since '98, his worst month). He's 3-1 with a 4.59 ERA in his last five starts against the Astros.



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

PROSPECTWATCH

Chin-Feng Chen OF, Dodgers

Chen zoomed to the top of the Dodgers' organizational depth charts in 1999 when he became the first player in the history of the Class A California League to have 30 homers and 30 stolen bases in the same season. However, last season at Class AA San Antonio, his offensive numbers dropped. Chen began the season as a DH at Class A so an injured right shoulder could heal. He is back in the outfield at Class AA Jacksonville, where his numbers again are impressive (.324, 12 homers, 29 RBIs). Chen is considered a five-tool talent and has the best power of any Dodgers prospect. He could be in the majors by the end of the 2002.

The book on Lance Berkman

If there is a secret to his success, it hangs some years back on a chain, draped from a tree limb behind a house near Austin, Texas.

If there is a secret to his success, it is black and stamped and smudged by the same tool Lance Berkman has used to make his mark throughout his baseball career: his bat.

If there is a secret to his success, it takes the shape of an old tire, one that Berkman's father, Larry, hung from the tree when **Lance** was a boy.

Berkman used to take hacks at the tire after school. Actually, there were several tires because 100 swings every day—50 from each side of the plate—put a lot of wear on the rubber.

Larry picked up the idea from a scout he encountered while playing at the University of Texas. It was meant to build arm strength in young hitters without the dangers of lifting weights.

Berkman didn't start lifting weights until he was a junior in high school, but he was switch hitting from the time he started playing the game at age 6.

Whether batting from the right side or the left against the tire, **Berkman** had to drive through the hitting zone when taking his cuts because tires don't give way in collisions as even the best fastballs do.

All the work in the backyard, plus countless hours spent hitting off a tee, helped **Berkman** refine his swing. The same swing that led him to a scholarship to Rice, brought him All-American honors as the Owls first baseman and convinced the Astros to take him in the first round of the 1997 draft.

In fact, Berkman's swing, and the results he gets with it, have remained fairly constant ever since. He struggled in his September call-up in 1999, the result of putting too much pressure on himself, but when the team handed him an everyday job a month into last season, he showed what he could do, hitting 21 home runs in only 353 at bats.

This year, Berkman made the All-Star team and is among the league leaders in hitting. Defensively, he doesn't have a great arm and still is learning the nuances of outfield play, but he is far from a liability and continues to improve.

Still, it's his offense that is turning heads. So much so, it's hard to keep anything about **Berkman** a secret. —Steve Walentik



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

The best players who aren't hitting their weight.

1 Mark McGwire (.202; 250 pounds). McGwire's Gaedellian batting average means he probably won't get 70 hits this year. The Cardinals' already-slim chances will disappear if McGwire doesn't deliver. Seven hits in a row, over nine games, were homers, a sign his timing finally might be back.

2 Tim Salmon (.202; 231). The outfielder barely is hitting two bills and is striking out almost once per game. Salmon thinks his problems are between his ears. That's especially evident in his average with runners in scoring position—.114.

3 Todd Hundley (.177; 199). It's debatable to say the Cubs needed him back from a minor league rehab assignment, considering he'd have to go on Body Solutions to get his weight below his batting average. If he can contribute *anything* in the final two months, the Cubs are in.

4 Dave McCarty (.195; 215). With Jermaine Dye gone, McCarty will get more of a chance. He'll have to lay off the barbecue—and the breaking stuff—to pull his average closer to his weight.

5 Doug Mirabelli (.176; 218). He always has been weak offensively, but at least he has thrown out 39 percent of potential basestealers, which has helped the Red Sox.

Golden batter

Roberto Alomar already has nine Gold Gloves. This season, he seems to be a good bet to win his first batting title. Alomar leads the American League with a .356 average, 12 points better than his closest competitor.

If he hangs on in the batting race and wins the Gold Glove, he will be the first second baseman to win both in the same season. First baseman Keith Hernandez is the only infielder to win both awards in the same season. He did it in 1979.

The others to pull off the double are Roberto Clemente (four times); Carl Yastrzemski (three times); Dave Parker, Tony Gwynn and Larry Walker (two times each), and Hank Aaron, Pete Rose, Fred Lynn, Willie McGee, Kirby Puckett and Bernie Williams. —Steve Walentik