



AUG 14, 2006

GRIME PAYS

PHILLIES SECOND BASEMAN CHASE UTLEY HAS PUT UP SOME FILTHY NUMBERS IN 2006, PROVING HE'S MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER PRETTY FACE IN AN UGLY UNIFORM. IN FACT, HE'S SI'S CHOICE AS THE DIRTIEST PLAYER IN BASEBALL (AND WE MEAN THAT IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY)

MICHAEL FARBER

Phil Sheridan has been taking care of the Philadelphia Phillies' laundry since 1992, which makes him privy to all the dirt on the team. When he comes to uniform number 26, Sheridan, the team's assistant clubhouse manager, no longer bothers to check for nasty stains, he just dumps it into a bucket with an industrial protein-release solution for a 30-minute soak. He knows that in a typical game, number 26 can hit for the rinse cycle: dirt, grass stains, pine tar and, occasionally, blood. "He's behind [ex-Phillies outfielder Lenny] Dykstra because he doesn't chew--Lenny was a self-made mess--but this is more natural, especially the grass stains," Sheridan says. "Even if this guy doesn't get a hit, he still gets his uniform dirty. I mean, it's filthy." During the soak Sheridan periodically stirs the grubby uniform around the bucket with the barrel of a broken bat, then sprays any remaining splotches with a stain remover before washing it in even more protein release, mixed with detergent. Introducing Chase Utley, number 26 in your programs, the prince of Tide. "Chase is a dirt ball," Sheridan says. "In the best possible way. He's a good dirt ball."

The game has been deconstructed relentlessly by seamhead scientists, but no one has been able to place a value on a dirty uniform, to formulate a grass-stain coefficient. If Utley had played during the black-and-white-TV generation, he would have been known simply as a guy who hustles. But as the appeal of this virtue has diminished in baseball's current culture of cool, baseball's lexicon has overcompensated by growing more colorful in descriptions of it. Players who dirty their uniforms every game are referred to as dirt balls or dirt dogs. Maybe playing hard and playing right in the bigs deserves no more than a grudging nod, but as the schedule slouches into the dirt-dog days of August, note the sloth: New York Mets pitcher Aaron Heilman lollygagging to first base on a dribbler in a July 23 game against the Houston Astros; Boston Red Sox slugger Manny Ramirez waving at a ball off the wall that turns into an inside-the-park home run for the Seattle Mariners' Adrian Beltre that same afternoon; innumerable outfielders who apparently think a cutoff man is that SUV cowboy on the interstate. And in an exchange that will live in Philadelphia lore as Bloody Sundae, pitcher Cory Lidle publicly questioned the Phillies' commitment to winning after being traded to the New York Yankees on July 30. That drew a riposte from reliever Arthur Rhodes, who assailed Lidle for devouring ice cream in the clubhouse after starts rather than running or lifting weights.

If some Phillies do lack big league industriousness--former closer Billy Wagner leveled the same charge after signing with the Mets in the off-season--Utley is beyond reproach, conspicuous in his effort. The 27-year-old second baseman dives for all grounders in his zip code. He grinds out at bats and bursts out of the box as if someone had fired a starter's pistol, even when he's not trying to extend a hitting streak. (His 35-game hitting streak, the longest in the majors this season, was snapped by the Mets last Friday.) Yankees third base coach and former Phillies manager Larry Bowa says, "He plays every game like it's the seventh game of the World Series." The old-school player with a name out of an old school (Chase Utley? Wasn't half the Yale class of '73 named something like that?) is an antidote for indolence, an All-Star who goes home every night with a dirty uniform but a clean conscience. He has a host of dirt ball confederates (see box, page 46), but Utley is SI's choice as the game's dirtiest player. In the best possible way.

"You never want to take anything for granted," Utley says. "As soon as you start taking the game for granted, that's when it bites you in the ass."

His approach is more feral than it is Will Ferrell. Phillies beat writers were doing their dogged best to interrogate the guarded Utley about the streak after he had launched his third home run in two days against Arizona in late July and neared the midway point to Joe DiMaggio's record of 56, but Utley was not about to grace them with a quip, or even a decent quote about the streak. Boastfulness isn't his way, and his reticence is understandable, given that the one butt-bite of Utley's young career has not sufficiently healed.

In the eighth inning of a round-robin game against Canada at the World Baseball Classic in March, Utley cracked a deep fly to center, flipped his bat aside and raised his arms in celebration of an apparent go-ahead, three-run homer. Instead, the presumptive homer nestled in the glove of Adam Stern on the warning track for the third out. "I thought for sure it was a homer," says the chastened Utley. "I got text messages from my buddies about it. I'd have given myself crap too. You definitely won't see that again from me."

That loud out in the WBC has been the only fly in Utley's ointment. Since becoming a regular in June 2005, he has impressed most baseball people. "Having talked to guys on other teams and other managers, [it's clear that Utley] gets everybody's attention," Diamondbacks manager Bob Melvin said. No one more than Dodgers catcher Russell Martin. After doubling in the tiebreaking run at Dodger Stadium on June 4, Utley broke hard to the plate from third on a chopper to first baseman Olmedo Saenz and barreled into Martin with a forearms-leading, headlong dive, wallpapering the catcher as the ball squirted free. The throw was far enough up the first base line that he could have slid and avoided a collision, but in Utley's uncompromising world, if he's in for a penny, you're in for a pounding.

That collision was seismic; his hustle on another decisive play a week earlier had a more subtle impact. Leading off the fifth inning of a 2-2 game against the Brewers, Utley beat out a grounder to second by an eyelash. Two outs later Ryan Howard hit a two-run homer. "The harder you play this game, the more you get out of it," said Utley, who had a .391 on-base percentage (including .442 against lefties) and was leading all second basemen with 21 home runs. "I never want to look in a mirror and say, What if? What if I had run harder? What if I had dived for that ground ball?"

Phillies' assistant G.M. Mike Arbuckle, who scouted Utley in high school in Long Beach, Calif., contends that aggressiveness like Utley's must be innate or developed at a young age. Utley's drive to be first-team all-grass stains is probably in his DNA, but it was nurtured in the Wiffle ball games on the lawn of neighbor Denny Mayfield's house on Ashbrook Avenue. Mayfield, who also served as Utley's first T-ball and Little League coach, was the neighborhood game's commissioner, pitcher and arbiter of its unique rules, which included retiring base runners by hitting them with the ball. "The boys," recalls Dave Utley, Chase's father, "enjoyed exchanging welts." Mayfield, a longshoreman, was one of those lionized youth-league coaches: intense without being insane, positive without being pushy. He would pepper the kids with phrases like "Be a star!" Utley soon was showing what he had five times a week in the Lakewood Batting Cages, five miles from his home. His parents would give him \$20 and drop him off at the machines. He would hit until his hands hurt or his money ran out. He was such a cage rat that the owners, who gave him odd jobs, often would turn on the machines and let him hit for free.

Emerging from the School of Base Knocks at the batting cages, and later from UCLA, was a lefthanded swing as sweet as a Mother's Day card. With a hands-high open stance adapted from watching future teammate Jim Thome on television, Utley can flick his hips and yank a pitch to right or stay back and drill it to left center. "His swing has been very consistent," Phillies manager Charlie Manuel says. "What he's hitting, he's crushing."

His stroke is orthodox, but his fielding is idiosyncratic. Despite an alarming 12 errors, he is less an indifferent second baseman than he is a work in progress. The Phillies, who tried their 2000 first-round draft pick at third in the minors, judiciously have allowed Utley to sort out how to play the position through hard work. "Ryne Sandberg was a jabber," says John Vukovich, a special assistant to general manager Pat Gillick, of the Hall of Fame second baseman's habit of stabbing at ground balls. "One coach in Chicago wanted to change him, but [then manager Don] Zimmer said he hadn't seen a jabber like that since Jackie Robinson. The message was clear. Leave him alone. That's Chase. He's shown he can be special down the road. Let's just let him do it at his own pace, which happens to be all-out."

His hustle has entranced Philadelphia. He is a polyestered, pinstriped Johnny Depp: Women adore him and men envy him. (The upper deck of Citizens Bank Park is dotted with Chase's Chicks and Utley's Ugleys fan clubs.) In a legendarily critical town--ex-Phillie Jay Johnstone once said that when games are rained out, fans head to the airport to boo bad landings--Utley is bulletproof. Well, almost. In his first major league start, in 2003, he hit a grand slam against the Colorado Rockies. "Grand slam, I'm really pumped up; standing ovation; great," Utley says. "Next at bat, we're up six runs, I strike out and get booed. They're yelling at me to go back to the minors. It keeps you on your toes."

Certainly Utley has kept fans on theirs, for ovations. He hit .405 during the streak and established himself, with Howard, as a beacon of hope for a franchise so lacquered in futility that its one championship in 123 years makes the solipsistic Cubs look like the Yankees. Relief pitcher Ryan Madson has a pair of Utley bobbleheads, a full-page newspaper picture of him, a scorecard with Utley's likeness and a Chase T-shirt in his locker, which is just two candles and an incense holder short of a shrine. "Hey," Madson says, "I'm a fan too." And he's not the only Utley acolyte in the Phillies locker room. Manuel compares Utley's swing to those of Ted Williams and Wade Boggs. Reds reliever Rheal Cormier references Nomar Garciaparra because Utley never gives away an at bat. And closer Tom Gordon sees a resemblance to George Brett. "Like George, he makes the pitcher work," Gordon says. "Different swing patterns--George was swinging more down and in, Chase sprays the ball--but with Chase having such a good idea of what he wants to do every at bat, he's way ahead of himself. With George Brett, you think 3,000 hits. If this kid continues to prepare and play the way he does, he could accomplish that."

Even if seamhead science suggests that Gordon's prediction is fanciful--Utley would have to average 216 hits a season until age 39 to hit 3,000--it will all come out in the wash for this rare type of player. Among the dirt dogs, Utley is best in show.

APR 9, 2012

SECOND TO NONE

CHASE UTLEY WAS BUILDING A CASE FOR COOPERSTOWN BEFORE HE BROKE DOWN. THE PHILLIES—AND THE GAME—ARE FEELING THE LOSS

BEN REITER

Superstars, like all athletes, experience two deaths, but at least they often have a say over the first one: the end of their careers. The Braves' Chipper Jones, for example, announced last month that this will be his final season, initiating a six-month valedictory tour for the 19-year veteran and 1999 NL MVP.

It appears increasingly unlikely that another NL East star, 33-year-old Chase Utley, will ever enjoy such a send-off. For a five-year stretch, from 2005 to '09, the Phillies' second baseman, perennially underappreciated come awards time, was by some metrics the second-most valuable player in the game. During that span he averaged 29 home runs and hit .301 with a .922 OPS, numbers rarely witnessed at his position, and according to baseball-reference.com only Albert Pujols (43.2) had a higher WAR than Utley (32.4). Utley was a spectacular defender and the game's savviest base stealer. It was the type of peak that lands you in Cooperstown.

But the years to follow have been less kind. Before last season, Utley developed a host of chronic knee conditions, which now include chondromalacia—a degeneration of cartilage—and bone inflammation. He missed the first 46 games in 2011 and hit just .259 with 11 homers when he returned. The outlook for 2012 is worse: With both knees aching, Utley didn't play in camp and will again start the season on the DL. More concerning is that he showed no improvement over the course of the spring. "He never really engaged his lower half at all," says a scout who watched Utley take batting practice eight to 10 times. "You could see he was in pain."

Utley's absence presents an immediate problem for the Phillies, who will start the season with an offense that is painfully thin, particularly until slugger Ryan Howard recovers from surgery to repair a torn left Achilles. Apart from outfielders Hunter Pence and Shane Victorino, the everyday lineup is full of players who are past their offensive primes (Jimmy Rollins and Placido Polanco), those who have not yet approached them (John Mayberry Jr. and Utley's replacement, rookie Freddy Galvis) and those who never really had them (Ty Wigginton, Carlos Ruiz).

It's too early to eulogize Utley's career: He might yet make it back, and if he does, opines the scout, he'll be "a player that plays hard and is a good at bat when it counts." However, the scout adds, "I don't think we'll ever again see the Chase Utley we fondly remember. When you don't have that lower half, you're not going to have the power." This is disconcerting for the Phillies and sad for Utley, whose talent made him an elite player for half a decade, but whose body might keep him from becoming a legend.

FORWARD MARCH

Spring training stats are notoriously illusory. Here are three players, though, who had hot springs this year—and should keep it up

FRANCISCO LIRIANO

SP, Twins

Liriano's 2011 spring augured things to come: He had a 4.82 ERA and then a brutal regular season. This spring he had a 2.45 ERA over 22 innings.

CHRIS SALE

SP, White Sox

The lefthanded ex-reliever, 23, improved as he learned to manage games like a starter. A sparkling 22--2 strikeout-to-walk ratio suggests he'll be an ace.

ERIC HOSMER

1B, Royals

Hosmer, 22, hit .408 with 29 RBIs through Sunday, and that's no fluke. "He's got superstar written all over him," says a scout. "A very advanced hitter."

PHOTO

Photograph by MARK GOLDMAN/ICON SMI

CHASE IN THE HOLE Utley may well play this season, but scouts say that his chronically damaged knees make it unlikely that he'll ever again be the elite player he was from 2005 to '09.

PHOTO

PORTER BINKS (HOSMER)

AUG 31, 2015

THE CASE FOR ... CHASE IN COOPERSTOWN

SI STAFF

WHEN RIGHT-ANKLE inflammation forced then Phillies second baseman Chase Utley to the disabled list on June 23, he carried MLB worsts in batting average (.179) and OPS+ (48), raising doubts about whether his career—and his Hall of Fame chances—were over. Yet while his traditional career numbers would seem to make Utley unworthy of a spot in Cooperstown, the advanced metrics suggest the 36-year-old second baseman has already done enough to earn enshrinement.

After returning from a 37-game absence, Utley (right) also proved he's far from finished, going on a 15-for-31 binge that generated widespread interest among contending teams with suboptimal second base situations. On Aug. 19 the Dodgers acquired Utley for two minor leaguers (superutilityman Darnell Sweeney and righty John Richy), ending his 13-season run in Philadelphia.

Through Sunday, Utley has 1,625 hits, 233 home runs, 142 steals and a .282/.366/.481 batting line, plus six All-Star selections, and he played a pivotal role in the Phillies' five straight postseason appearances from 2007 to '11. Those counting stats are suppressed in part because Utley, blocked at second base by Placido Polanco, didn't play regularly until age 26. And while he's glaringly short of awards, having won neither an MVP nor a Gold Glove, Utley was frequently a strong candidate for both.

From 2005 to '10, Utley led NL second basemen in Defensive Runs Saved and Ultimate Zone Rating four times apiece; none of the Gold Glovers at the position led in the years that they won. His overall contributions at bat, with the glove and on the bases as measured by Wins Above Replacement ranked him among the NL's three most valuable position players every year from 2005 to '09, yet his highest finish in NL MVP voting was seventh.

The advanced stats also paint a more favorable picture of his Cooperstown chances. My JAWS (Jaffe WAR Score) system attempts to identify worthy candidates by comparing each to the average Hall of Famer at his position. This is done by calculating the average of a player's career WAR and his peak total (defined as a player's best seven seasons). By that formula Utley rates as the 12th-best second baseman in history, two spots ahead of 2015 inductee Craig Biggio. Utley's 49.1 peak WAR is eighth among all second basemen, 4.7 wins above the average Hall second-sacker's 44.4; as with other short-career Hall of Famers such as Hank Greenberg and Ralph Kiner, that alone could justify enshrinement. Because Utley's 61.5 career WAR is 7.8 behind the average Hall of Fame second baseman's, his 55.3 JAWS is still a bit short of the 56.9 average of those 20 already enshrined at the position. But his recent rebound suggests that score can yet improve.

Still, Utley faces an uphill climb. Neither the BBWAA voters nor the various iterations of the Veterans Committee have elected any post-1960 position player who had fewer than 2,000 hits. Hall voters have long underrated candidates for whom OBP and defense form a crucial part of their value, such as Ron Santo (seventh in JAWS among third basemen) and Bobby Grich (seventh among second basemen, the highest outside the Hall).

It took 37 years after his retirement—and one year after his death—for Santo to be elected, in 2011, and Grich, 66, is still waiting for his Hall call. Utley should be helped by an evolving electorate that better understands DRS, UZR, WAR and JAWS. Still, continuing his resurgence for another season or two would help convince the remaining skeptics of what should already be clear: Chase Utley is a Hall of Famer.

12th

Utley's ranking among 2B in MLB history, according to JAWS

6

All-Star selections in his 11 full seasons

0

Post-1960 position players with fewer than 2,000 hits elected to the Hall

PHOTO

BOB LEVEY/GETTY IMAGES

NOV 10, 2008

PARTY ANIMALS

CRINGE-WORTHY MOMENTS FROM VICTORY PARADES

SI STAFF

CHASE UTLEY is a feared hitter and a fine second baseman, but as the Phillies revel in their championship this off-season, he should think twice about accepting any appearance offers that involve live television. During Philadelphia's World Series rally last Friday, Utley (right) grabbed the mike and shouted to the crowd that the Phils were "world f----- champions!" Few Philadelphians seemed to mind the profane slip, and Utley said he didn't plan to swear. (He probably wasn't intending to work blue during this year's All-Star Home Run Derby, either, but when Yankee Stadium fans gave him a Bronx cheer, ESPN viewers heard Utley, who was wearing a microphone, say, "Boo? F--- you.") Embarrassing? Sure, but Utley isn't the first athlete to make a spectacle of himself at a championship celebration.

Pat Riley

After the Heat wins the 2006 NBA title, Shaquille O'Neal asks the throng in Miami, "Who wants to see Coach Riley dance?" The crowd cheers—presumably they had never before seen Coach Riley dance. Riley (left) shimmies and does his best white man's overbite. Perhaps not coincidentally, he undergoes hip surgery the next season.

Juan Pierre

At the Marlins' 2003 rally in Miami, the outfielder launches into a spirited but nearly incomprehensible rap about Florida's unlikely postseason run. Sample line: "We got them Cubs, and you know it's all about them loves." Pierre hasn't been on a championship team since—nor has he been invited to any parades.

Mark Madsen

The Lakers' benchwarmer takes to the mike in 2001 and asks, "Who let the dogs out?"—but that's not the embarrassing part. Later, with Shaquille O'Neal rapping, Madsen (right) either launches into arrhythmic dancing or has a seizure. The motion, in any case, becomes Madsen's trademark: He repeats it when L.A. wins another title in '02.

Nancy Kerrigan

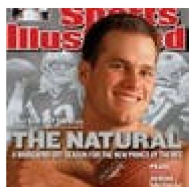
During a 1994 parade at Disney World honoring her for winning an Olympic silver medal, the figure skater (left) is filmed by a TV station muttering, "This is so corny. This is so dumb. I hate it. This is the most corny thing I've ever done." The clip becomes front-page news, sealing Kerrigan's rep as an ice queen.

Dwight Gooden

The Mets ace is a no-show for the team's 1986 World Series ticker-tape parade in Manhattan. The Mets say he overslept, but Gooden (right) later admits that he was hung over from a previous, less-family-oriented, celebration.

X

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DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES (RILEY)

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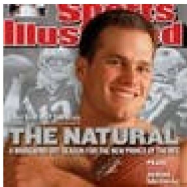
PETER COSGROVE/AP (KERRIGAN)

PHOTO

RAY STUBBLEBINE/AP (GOODEN)

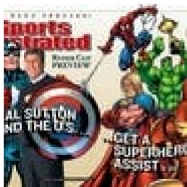
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THE LEAD

The Chase Utley stories: Tales of a Phillies life and legacy

Matt Gelb (/author/matt-gelb/) Sep 27, 2018

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It was rare to hear Chase Utley address a large group — his most famous speech did feature an expletive on live television — and this is why David Montgomery thinks about spring training in 2012. The Phillies did not know then, but it was the beginning of dark days. Montgomery, the team president, was invited into the clubhouse because Utley wanted to address the team. This was the chondromalacia spring when Utley spent most of his time constrained to a blue step stool because the pain in his knees was too great.

Utley wanted to talk about Jim Thome. He wanted his teammates to know how important it was that Thome, a future Hall of Famer in the twilight of his career, shared a room with them while he attempted to reprise a role as a position player at age 41.

Utley missed the first 76 games of the season. Three days after he returned, Thome was traded. The Phillies went 81-81. They have not enjoyed a winning season since.

This is something that Montgomery thinks about a lot.

“He felt bad that after he spoke he couldn’t do it,” said Montgomery, who’s now the Phillies’ chairman. “You know what I mean? He was somebody who for his whole life was silent and backed it up with his play. The one time he was outspoken, he wasn’t there to do — in his mind — his job.”

This is the last week of Utley's career. He will retire after 16 seasons in the majors and he leaves a legacy in Philadelphia that is almost unparalleled. He was not the greatest player to ever play for the Phillies. He did not win the most championships. The only two franchise records he owns are hit by pitches (173) and stolen base percentage (88.6). But he is among the most popular players this franchise has ever known.

"From the day he came here to the day he left, Chase Utley personified this city," Montgomery said. "It was amazing. He was just in the right place at the right time."

Everyone has a Chase Utley story. Here, in their words, are those tales.

PAT BURRELL, former Phillies outfielder

The thing I can't get past, nobody understands this play. But we were in Atlanta. I was on deck. I was right there. It was 2005 or 2006. We had had a lot of trouble getting a guy in from third with less than two outs. We had this big meeting. Of course, now we're putting pressure on ourselves. It hasn't been working.

There's a guy on third with less than two outs. Chase hits a ground ball to Adam LaRoche, who is playing first base. Now, Adam is playing in. He's going to throw to home plate for the out. Chase hits the ball and he runs on the field, out of the base line, to get in the line of fire. He fucking jumps, as if to either get hit by the throw or whatever. Of course, LaRoche threw it high to avoid hitting him. It went off the backstop and a run scored.

I'm on deck. I put my shit down. I go into the box and (Braves catcher Brian) McCann's there. I go, "Are you fucking shitting me? Did you see what I saw?" He goes, "That was unbelievable. He was trying to wear it." Yeah, he was trying to get hit to get the run in. Nowadays, they would call him out. I don't think a lot of people even paid attention.

It was just a different kind of intensity with Chase Utley. He was the toughest guy we had around here.

CHARLIE MANUEL, former Phillies manager

(Utley made the team in 2003 out of spring training as a bench player. He batted once in the season's first five games, then was demoted to the minors when the Phillies needed an extra bullpen arm.)

Manuel, hired as a special assistant to the general manager, was summoned to the meeting with Utley and top club officials.)

First year I was there. Ed Wade was talking to him. They were sending him to Triple A. He looked at us, right straight in the eye, and said: “You fuckers must not want to win.” Just like that.

Actually, that’s the first time I was really getting to know him. I thought he was serious. I thought he was dead serious.

SCOTT SHERIDAN, Phillies head athletic trainer

My first year was 2007. We were in Kansas City. He makes a play behind second base and he ends up rolling around on the ground. He gets up. I’m the new trainer. He comes into the dugout. I walk over and go, “Hey, man, are you OK?” He goes, “I’ll fucking let you know if I’m OK. You don’t need to fucking see me.” Something like that. I was like, “All right.”

After the game, I’m pissed. I was trying to help this guy. What the hell? Is this what it’s like to be in the big leagues? And he actually came in later and said, “Hey, I’m sorry.” I said, “Not a problem. Let’s just come to an agreement. If you’re hurt, you’ll let me know. How about that?” That was the beginning of it all.

BRETT MYERS, former Phillies pitcher

I came up with Chase in Triple A. They put him in a new spot. He was playing third. They were trying to make him the next Scott Rolen. That’s exactly what it was.

We were in Ottawa, Canada. I’ll never forget this and I always bust his chops about it. They were scraping snow off the field. It was before we played Opening Day in Ottawa. I was pitching pretty good. I threw a complete game and lost. We lost, 1-0, on a ground ball hit to him. He was playing third base for the first time. He picked it up and threw it over the damn fence. I still remember that to this day. I find it funny because I still bust his chops about it. “I’m 0-1 because of you, Utley!” We joke about it. I don’t blame him. It was hard to throw that ball over the plate. I’ll never forget.

Who would have known he’d turn out as good as he is? That’s so impressive.

RUBEN AMARO JR., former Phillies general manager

This is 2001 when he was down at Clearwater. People are going, “Wow. This guy may not be able to play defensively. Where the fuck are we going to play him?” He was making some errors. My dad, at the time, was the minor-league infield coordinator. I remember calling my dad.

I’m like, “Dad, what’s the story?” And he said, “Ruben, relax. He’s going to be just fine. He’ll be fine at second base. Leave him there. He’ll be fine.”

But he kind of throws a little different —

“Ruben, Chase Utley will figure out how to play second base, don’t you worry about it.” And he did.

It speaks to his makeup. He would figure out, however it was going to happen, how to do it. How to be the best base runner, which he was. How to be the best hitter, which he was at times. How to be as good an infielder as he possibly could, and he was a World Series second baseman.



(Brad Mangin / MLB Photos via Getty Images)

JIM THOME, former Phillies first baseman

What he brought every day rubbed off on everyone — even veteran players like me. He was truly out of that old-school kind of mentality. The grand slam at The Vet, I was on base. His first hit. The coolest part of that, and still explains who he really is, is how he ran the bases on a grand slam. Watch how quick he gets around the bases. I don't think that ever stopped — from the first hit to if he hit one tonight. He would do the same thing.

It was his look. I call it, “The Look.” You could see “The Look” in someone's eyes when they have a tunnel-vision focus. He had that. The first hit shows it. It showed how he wanted to be a big leaguer. And I don't think that ever (changes) until he leaves the game.

He's the one guy I look back and go, “God, if you could play like someone, it would be Chase Utley.”

JIMMY ROLLINS, former Phillies shortstop

Everybody knows how stoic Chase is. He's never up. He's never down. You'll see anger. You'll see fire. You'll see him get hit by a pitch, grit his teeth and his jawbones stick out, and he's on first base.

So, it might have been 2006. Charlie comes out to pull a pitcher. What people didn't know is I got Chase to smile a lot on the field. It's just that he'd always have his glove over his face. You don't know if he's cursing out an umpire, you don't know what's going on. But a lot of times, it'd be a smile. He just didn't want you to see it.

Charlie takes the pitcher out. I've been trying to work on Chase for a little while. I'm like, “Chase, we have to get you to smile, man. The city loves you. They want to make you a star. Let them make you a star! Smile. Look like you have fun playing the game. Enjoy it. Just smile! You're good-looking, you're white, and you play baseball. You have everything going for you!” He just goes, “Ahh, fuck, ahh. Nah.” Just trying to fight it. I mean, he fought it tooth and nail. But, although he never really smiled, I think I made the impression on him to look like he was having fun. I'm always smiling. I'm not saying to be like me. But, from that point on, he thought it was OK if I was able to make him laugh and smile on the field.

I could look at him. We had that look. And I knew behind that glove he was smiling.

GEOFF JENKINS, former Phillies outfielder

Me, him and Jayson Werth rented a house together in spring training 2009. We didn't want to go out. We decided to buy a video game called Rock Band. OK? We played Rock Band together. Chase was on the drums. Werth was the guitarist. I was the singer. Our group was called *The Dianetics*. It was because we were in Kirstie Alley's house. We rented her house. She's a Scientologist. We were looking through cabinets for some plates one day and we found L. Ron Hubbard's "Dianetics" books. So our group was *The Dianetics*.

Chase played the drums. And he was really good. He could hold a tune. So we played video games and watched reality TV that spring.

RICH DUBEE, former Phillies pitching coach

It's my last year (2013). We were in spring training. We'd do it once and a while where we hit after a game. We had a guy or two or three guys who wanted to hit. It was the first or second inning. Charlie goes, "Hey, Doobs. Utley wants to hit after the game. He wants you to throw him." Well, I just threw batting practice to the pitchers that morning. But Chase is going to hit? OK, I'll throw.

So we go out there and they put the cage up and the L-screen up. I'm throwing to him. I had my watch going to see how long he'd hit. I knew it might be a while. About 20 minutes into it, he steps out of the batter's box and takes a deep sigh.

I said, "You all right?"

"Yeah, you OK?" he said.

I said, "Yeah, I'm good."

So I start throwing to him again. And now we hit to about 42 minutes and I'm going, "Jeeeesus." He steps out. He takes a big breath. He's just not comfortable yet. He's not feeling where he's hitting the ball, his contact point. He's working like a dog. He wants to get it. Finally, he says, "You got anything left?" I looked at him and I said, "I'm not done until you're finished." He ends up going for 54 minutes and, finally, that's it. I was a limp noodle going in afterward. It was unbelievable.

That's him.

GREG DOBBS, former Phillies infielder

I remember watching him in the cage during my first spring training with the Phillies in 2007. How methodical he was with his tee work. He's one for routine, as we all are. We become creatures of the routine. But his routine, I remember sitting there and he was so focused. There could have been a whirlwind of things happening around him but it was just him, in the cage, with the tee. He was so precise in doing the work that he did. I didn't say anything.

But I asked him afterward what he was doing. He said, "I'm just trying to hit the outside part of the ball. I'm just trying to hit line drives over the shortstop's head." And that's all he did for like 15 minutes straight. He didn't do anything else. He was setting himself up for success on the field by being specific and focused. He didn't deviate for 15 minutes.

Finally, he was done. He looked up. He's like, "Oh, Dobber, did you want the cage?" Uh, sure. I'm good. That's Chase.



(Rob Tringali / SportsChrome / Getty Images)

MATT STAIRS, former Phillies outfielder

Chase had such a good routine. He'd get there at noon. He'd do his work. He'd go straight to the video room. He had everything right down to the minute. He would go down and get his peanut butter sandwich and he'd sit at the same TV and the same computer and study. He'd be watching something, a good swing, and he'd grunt. That's him. That was the way he was. You didn't mess with him when he was in the video room. He had both feet up. He was watching the big-screen TV and he didn't talk to you. You left him alone. He was getting so engaged in the game.

I won't tell you what he watched. But he was getting so engaged.

BRAD LIDGE, former Phillies reliever

It's my first spring training with the Phillies. I could tell Chase was pretty serious before the game. It's about a half hour before a spring training game. I went up to Chase. It might have been our first home spring game. I was asking him something about the other team's starting pitcher. It was somebody I knew.

I went up to him. "Hey, Chase, what are you looking for here?" He turned around at his locker and he looked like he was possessed by a demon. His eyes. He saw through my soul. I was like, "Nevermind." No response. Nothing. I was walking away and someone — I think it was (Jayson Werth) who said, "Yeah, you don't talk to Chase before games." What the hell was that? He looked right through me.

JAYSON WERTH, former Phillies outfielder

So my locker was next to Chase's the whole time. It's like an hour and a half before the game — and this is daily — you'd be sitting there. You come in from BP, and you change your clothes and you're sweating. You're just going to take some time to hang out, you know. It was every day. The guy was a creature of habit. He comes in off the field, storms in. I don't even know if he actually changes his clothes. He just throws his game uniform on like an hour and 15 minutes before the game and grabs his stuff, gets his coffee and his two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and off to the video room. Daily.

(Greg Casterioto, Phillies director of baseball communications: You're sitting there in your underwear. You're lounging in your chair. He's in his perfect uniform. He's all ready and Jayson is sitting there and there goes Chase. Jayson's like, "Have a good game, Chase!" He's like an hour away from even

being close to being ready.)

Yeah, I'm not even on the same page. It's like, alright. But that's Chase, though. He's going to go watch an hour of video and know everything about everything. And that's who he was.

BRIAN SCHNEIDER, former Phillies catcher

We're playing the Nationals. Their first-base coach, Chase thought he was giving signs in the middle of an at-bat. He was paranoid. In the middle of the at-bat, I hear him screaming. I stopped and I looked. I saw Chase looking at the first-base coach. (*Motions fingers pointing at eyes*) "I see you!" He was screaming at him. The first-base coach is looking around, like, "Who the fuck is he talking to?"

Chase looks at him. "You! You!"

The coach says, "Me?"

"You! Stop it. I see you."

So we're just laughing. The third out is made. Guys are jogging off the field. But Chase makes a mad dash. He's sprinting. It looks like he's going to fucking run the coach over. He runs right in front of the coach. What the fuck! Chase looked right at him.

No one understood. I'm sure the guy was flustered. No one knew what was going on. It was the shit like that he did. We were all laughing. He cut him right off. Oh my god.

AARON ROWAND, former Phillies outfielder

Chase would never talk to the opposing team. He was hellbent on it. It didn't matter whether you were one of his best friends or somebody he didn't like. During the course of a game, he would not talk to the other team. Even if there were runners on base or if he was on base. He wouldn't talk to the other team's first baseman.

We were playing in San Francisco. It was the first year after I had gone to San Fran. The Phillies came in. I hit a double to right-center and I'm standing on second base. Charlie came out to take the pitcher out of the game. So, knowing that Chase doesn't talk to anybody, I would always try to talk to him while I was on base. I was like, "Chase, what's up, man? What's happening?" And you know how he always puts his head down, he's hovering his cleats over the dirt. He's scraping up the dirt a little bit.

He noticed that I was trying to get his attention. I could see him smiling, too. He picks his head up, turns around, and starts walking toward the first-base line to get away from me. I'm like, "I know you hear me! I know you hear me!" He was shaking his head.

He was the most intense competitor that I've ever been around in my life.



(Brian Garfinkel / Getty Images)

KEVIN CAMISCIOLI, Phillies director of video coaching services

In the first year of instant replay, 2014, we didn't have a call go our way. I was taking it rough during the game. I have the one screen that has all of the video feeds on it. He was sitting over my shoulder. He was leaning over. He was right on my shoulder. He could tell I was sour about it. I probably said something. He said, "Fuck. You gotta shake it off. Fuck. You gotta shake it off. It's over. Move on."

I'm just sitting there. I'm a video guy, right? It was just the funniest thing. The thing about it is, to this day, I think about that little thing that he said. That was him. *You gotta shake it off*. It was just funny as hell. Now, when we have our assistant, Marc (Sigismondo) doing replay, I'll say, "You gotta shake it off." I find myself doing it!

LARRY BOWA, former Phillies manager and bench coach

He was struggling in the field. It was toward the end of his time with the Phillies. (Ryne) Sandberg was the manager. We had taken the lead. It was a one-run game. He made the last out and it was, like, the seventh inning. So we double-switched. He comes in and he goes, "What the fuck's going on?" Sandberg was taking the lineup card up. I said, "We're double-switching. We want at least one inning out of this guy." So he started getting demonstrative. I said, "Come here." So we went down the stairs.

The reason we took him out, basically, was he was struggling defensively. He goes, "Bo, why the fuck are you doing this?" I said, "For defense." He looked at me. His eyes got big as shit. (*laughing*) I thought, oh shit, he's going to start swinging here. He goes, "What?" I said, "For defense right now." And he got the ass, man.

Then, the next day, he comes to me and says, "I understand what's going on." But, man, his eyes got huge. I had to take the bullet there. He goes, "That's bullshit." I said, "Yeah, you're right."

It wasn't funny at the time. But when I look back on it, I knew he would have the ass. He wanted to play every inning of every game no matter what the score was. He could rub you the wrong way a little bit if you didn't know his personality. I told him, "To be really good at this game, guys need pricks on the team." He goes, "Yeah, I know you were." I said, "Well, so are you." We had a good back and forth. He has such a dry sense of humor.

JOE SWANHART, Phillies clubhouse assistant

We had a game and they announced the trade (to the Dodgers) after. But he didn't leave until the next day, and it was an off day. So he comes in and he's packing up his stuff. He took all of his bats and I laid them out for him. He signed one for every coach and player and trainer and clubbie on the team. He personalized them for every guy.

I was the only guy here. So I said, "Can I drive you to the airport?" Instead of just taking a cab, you know. He's like, "No, no." Yeah, I'll take you. Just let me know when you want to go. The flight was supposed to be in the early afternoon, like 2 p.m. or something.

After he was delayed like four times, he's like, "Just go home. It's your off day. You're finished up. Go home. I'll take a cab." No, I'm going to take you to the airport. I have nothing else to do. He got delayed so long that we wound up having dinner together here. I went across the street and got some food. Just the two of us. We had dinner together in the clubhouse kitchen. We talked about life.

Finally, the plane was going to leave. It's around 6:30. I take all of his stuff out to my car and load it up. I drive him over. I'm like, "You know this is really a sign. Philly doesn't want you to leave." When you think about it, that's the way I interpreted the whole afternoon. We spent hours together and we didn't have anybody around. There wasn't anything about baseball. It was good times.

I just thanked him for everything. He's done a lot for me, personally, over the years. He was good to my family. I said, "Go win a ring."

> *Philly Specials series: The Utley Play* (<https://theathletic.com/371447/2018/05/29/philly-specials-series-the-utley-play/>)

(Top photo: Jeff Gross/Getty Images)

What did you think of this story?



MEH



SOLID



AWESOME

Matt Gelb ([/author/matt-gelb/](#)) is a senior writer for The Athletic covering the Philadelphia Phillies. He has covered the team since 2010 while at The Philadelphia Inquirer, including a yearlong pause from baseball as a reporter on the city desk. He is a graduate of Syracuse University and Central Bucks High School West.



57 COMMENTS

Patrick S. Sep 27, 4:56pm

Every team needs a Chase Utley

37

Glenn T. Sep 27, 5:03pm

Hate the Phillies. Love Chase Utley. What a player. Probably the most underrated player of my lifetime.

20

Scott B. Sep 27, 5:03pm

Matt, this was a fantastic column. I enjoyed it greatly , this Braves fan has always respected Chase and I expect him to be in HOF.

29

John A. Sep 27, 5:08pm

Chase Utley is something...the reason they call him "the whip"

10

Anthony E. Sep 27, 5:09pm

I never met this man in my entire life. You are what people say you are though...and this article has people saying things about Chase Utley that embody what we want to teach kids about being competitive, hard working, and dedicated. We all have a lot to learn about being the best in our respective crafts. Thank you for a glimpse into a hero of this Phillies franchise, city, and sport. He'll always be our world phucking champion.

14

Matthew W. Sep 27, 5:38pm

@Anthony E. You want to teach your kids to end a guy's career on a takeout slide?

 7 

Anthony E. Sep 27, 5:49pm

I can see your point. We can emphasize the good in someone without emphasizing the bad. I'm not saying we ignore it...but we can replicate the good and be aware of the bad.



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Paul P. Sep 27, 6:32pm

"End a guy's career"... Well, Tejada is still playing today.



Also, that was how the game was meant to be played at that point. With the rules now, it's different, but yes I would teach my kid to play the game as hard as Chase Utley did within the rules, which is what Chase did.

A true legend. Thank you, Chase.

 24 


Steve S. Sep 27, 8:33pm

@Matthew W. If Daniel Murphy makes a decent flip to Tejada instead of hanging him out to dry, Tejada avoids the slide and nothing happens. Utley was doing what baserunners did in those days. He had no way of knowing that Tejada would have to reach for the ball. By the standards of the day, it was a good baseball play.

 18 

Cal M. Sep 27, 5:10pm

Best article ever put on this site.

 26 

Mike P. Sep 27, 5:23pm

The best baseball player I ever saw. I'm not talking about raw talent but making the most of what he had and giving 110% every step of the way with a baseball IQ that is off the charts. The best base runner by far. He probably doesn't care at all, but he needs to be in the Hall of Fame. Hopefully the sportswriters in five years remember all the little things he did between the lines...



Dave N. Sep 27, 7:44pm

I agree 100% with this. I've been watching baseball since 1973. I always thought Pete Rose played the game harder than anyone, but after I saw Chase Utley play, my mind was changed. He is "The Man".



EK W. Feb 25, 6:42am

Oh, he had a ton of talent with the bat. To watch him from UCLA on was to know the guy was special the way he barreled up good pitchers and generated power with that swing. No beef.. Just saying, this wasn't some average player doing scrappy, overachiever things. He was a sure fire 1st round pick. The Man



Nick S. Sep 27, 5:31pm

The best there ever was.



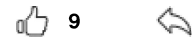
Margaret S. Sep 27, 5:31pm

Legend, now and forever



Michael L. Sep 27, 5:34pm

Great article, Matt. Thanks for putting it together.



Chris S. Sep 27, 5:35pm

Bravo. An absolute gem of an article



David C. Sep 27, 5:39pm

Great article about a true throwback player, hopefully they bring him onto the staff for 2019 to show these young guys how to play.



Alex B. Sep 27, 5:44pm

The current Phillies team needs a man like Chase. He could be the Preparation Coach. The current culture would be good to have him come back and teach them what big league baseball requires on an ongoing daily basis.



Thomas S. Sep 27, 5:48pm

The man had character. His team had character. Definitely miss it.



G C. Sep 27, 5:57pm

Great article. Would've loved an anecdote from Mac though.



Evan E. Sep 27, 6:13pm

As a lifelong Mets fan I despised him, but I respect him nonetheless.



Mark T. Sep 27, 6:22pm

Wonderful work Matt. He was my favorite of that era.(Duh).



Evan C. Sep 27, 6:30pm

What a fantastic article. Loved Jenkins' story



Edward C. Sep 27, 6:55pm

I read an article this morning on The Athletic about Manny Machado and how he was going to "just be chill" and not give his all while running the bases. Compare that attitude with Chase Utley's attitude in giving the game everything you've got, every chance you get. Baseball was lucky to have him, and he will be missed.



David Y. Sep 27, 6:59pm

Good grief I've gotta do something about the dust around here



Drew M. Sep 27, 8:08pm

Not a Phillies fan but Chase Utley was the player I always wanted to be when I played Little League (I'm older than him). He's the epitome of what I love about baseball. Fuck the Eagles.



Stuart J. Sep 27, 8:09pm

The man



Michael P. Sep 27, 8:49pm

I love how unfiltered it is.



Phil W. Sep 27, 9:32pm

Loved everything about this being the last week of his career. As a rational Dodger fan, you may be correct. Hope I am wrong and he can win 11 (or 12) more games once the reg season ends.



J H. Sep 27, 9:49pm

Hey Matt,

Accidentally gave a wrong review. Meant to say, I really enjoyed it. If theres a way to take it back, please let me know!



Nicholas K. Sep 27, 11:47pm

Surprised Werth didn't say anything about enjoying utleys wife



Tom S. Sep 28, 12:04am

Thanks for this article Matt. It was really needed on so many levels.



CHRIS M. Sep 28, 12:49am

I want more articles like this. Human and not swimming in numbers.



Jimmy G. Sep 28, 1:26am

Great job!



Brandon K. Sep 28, 1:36am

The man



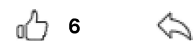
Eric K. Sep 28, 2:53am

One of the best things i've read on this site. Thank you.



Adam C. Sep 28, 3:10pm

The moment I realized Chase Utley was the man was during the All-Star Game in New York. Everyone is Booing the hell out of him when he was walking on the field and you can hear him say "boo me? fuck you." That was a great moment.



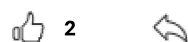
Phil M. Sep 28, 4:25pm

So lucky I was able to grow up watching the man



J B. Sep 28, 4:56pm

This is a fantastic read. through and through. Thank you.



Donald B. Sep 28, 5:02pm

WFC forever!



Nick F. Sep 28, 5:47pm

"He was not the greatest player to ever play for the Phillies"

OK, he's not Mike Schmidt, but this comes off (almost certainly unintended) that he was a longtime roleplayer for the club. Utley has the fourth highest WAR in Phillies history, the second highest position player WAR in Phillies history, and was usually the best player during the run they had from the 2000s-early 2010s.



David S. Sep 28, 7:54pm

As a twelve or thirteen year old I was at the game Thome talked about. I turned to my dad before Chase's first at bat and said he would be the best player ever. He proceeded to hit a grand slam. He will forever be one of my favorite players. Gonna have to hold back tears watching him retire.



Frank M. Sep 28, 7:56pm

excellent excellent piece. Must have been a hoot collecting the information and all the additional stories told. Thanks!



Joe H. Sep 28, 9:23pm

I would love to hear from that Nats coach.



Jason K. Sep 28, 9:33pm

Awesome stories! THIS is why I subscribe to The Athletic.



Thomas R. Sep 29, 4:53pm

Great article. In my list for top 10 articles of the year for "The Athletic".



1



Lisa B. Sep 29, 6:17pm

No anecdote from Ruben Tejada?



Joe A. Sep 29, 11:40pm

Few years ago my dad and I got to go to a game. We rarely get to go, a buddy hooked us up with diamond club. It was Chase's first game back from a long hiatus. First AB: no-doubt homer. If anybody would hit a bomb fresh off the DL, it would be Utley.



Levi B. Sep 30, 3:38am

Matt you could not have done better except if you had added a few stories I have heard from Dodger players since he has been out there. Kiki Hernandez has a few that he usually brings when he is on MLB Network that are really good. His T-shirt collection is killer.



Josh Z. Oct 1, 2:06am

Smiled my whole way through this article. Guys like Chase make baseball what it is



Debbie A. Oct 1, 2:25pm

Chase Utley will always and forever be The Man in Philadelphia. He has meant so much to baseball in the city. Every town should be so lucky to have a guy play like him. Thank you, Chase



Benjamin W. Oct 1, 3:05pm

This was so good!



Glen M. Oct 3, 1:22pm

why all the #%\$&*@# words



Yishmeister .. Oct 9, 4:03pm

I had been on vacation for two weeks so didn't come across this one until today Matt....Great effing job on this article!

Patrick S. is right every team needs a Chase. The one guy who puts the fear of god into the other team by just a look. The funny thing is even in life or a normal work environment you need a person like that around you.

The Rollins, Manuel and Dobber stories were hilarious. I actually remember him rolling around on the field in 07 when we made that improbably run for the Division and was incredibly glad he was out there on the field right away after. The Swanhardt story definitely pulled at my emotional strings.



Victor L. Jan 27, 10:15am

damnit, clicked solid when i meant outstanding, didnt see it till it was gone. legend utley



Brian J. Jun 22, 3:20pm

Do Pat the Bat next.



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MAY 15, 2015, AT 6:00 AM

Chase Utley Is The Unluckiest Man In Baseball

By Rob ArthurFiled under Baseball

Philadelphia Phillies' Chase Utley walks back to the dugout after striking out against St. Louis Cardinals starting pitcher Michael Wacha, not pictured, during the first inning of a baseball game Tuesday, April 28, 2015, in St. Louis. The Cardinals won the game 11-5. (AP Photo/) BILLY HURST / AP

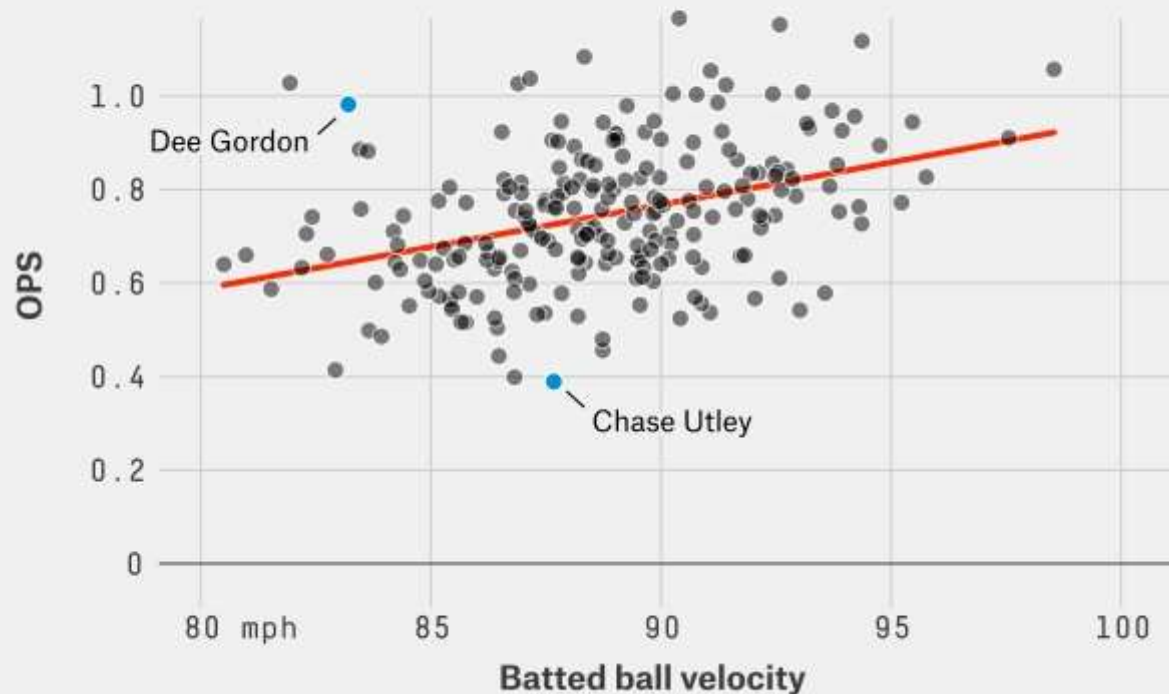
This early in the baseball season, most hitting statistics are worthless. Numbers like on-base percentage and slugging percentage — the core components of a hitter's value — [mean little](#) in samples as small as 100 plate appearances. Without the usual tools, baseball columnists have to turn to other, more reliable (but offbeat) stats. Last week [it was catchers' pitch framing](#). This week: it's how much a guy can punish a ball.

Until recently, hard hits were the kind of thing you could see but not always quantify. Fortunately, Statcast has come [to the rescue](#). The new camera tracking technology, installed in all Major League Baseball ballparks in 2015, isn't just about dissecting defense. It also offers an unparalleled view of hitting. Its cameras track a ball's speed as it leaves the bat, allowing us to see when a hitter makes good and bad contact.

It's good to smoke the ball. All else being equal, pitches that are struck harder [tend to become hits](#) more often¹ and are [more likely to fall for extra-base hits](#).

It's A Hard Hit, To Deep Right Field ...

OPS (on-base plus slugging) vs. batted ball velocity for all players with more than 20 tracked batted balls in 2015



FIVETHIRTYEIGHT

SOURCE: BASEBALL SAVANT

Each additional mile per hour of batted ball velocity equates to an 18-point increase in OPS (on-base plus slugging). In other words, a hitter who smokes the ball tends to be better.²

Even so, some hitters have managed to escape their expected OPS. Either they have been the beneficiaries of good luck, or they've found some way to perform that doesn't depend on hitting the ball hard. In most cases, we should expect their OPS to come back to what it should be, given how well they hit the ball.

Let's take a look at some of the players who are outperforming their velocities the most.

PLAYER	BATTED BALL VELOCITY	OPS	PREDICTED OPS	DIFFERENCE
Chris Young	81.9	1.028	0.622	0.406
Adrian Gonzalez	90.4	1.166	0.775	0.392
Bryce Harper	88.3	1.084	0.738	0.346
Nelson Cruz	92.6	1.153	0.814	0.338
Dee Gordon	83.2	0.982	0.645	0.337

Dee Gordon stands out on the list of overachievers.³ This analysis isn't quite fair to Gordon, because we aren't taking into account running speed, and that's Gordon's calling card. Gordon's legs turn lightly struck grounders into hits and stretch singles into doubles. They allow him to make the most of his otherwise mediocre defense and fringe bat.

Even so, we shouldn't expect Gordon to keep up this kind of OPS. His current batted ball velocity is 10th-worst among the 225 regulars I examined, placing him in some poor company: the likes of Alberto Callaspo (OPS of .640), Omar Infante (.633), and Marlins teammate Ichiro Suzuki (.660).⁴ Most of the hitters with batted ball velocity as low as Gordon's have substantially worse performance than him, suggesting that Dee Gordon's speed **is uniquely effective** or that he's in line for some regression. Both statements are probably true to some extent: Gordon has thrived on speed for as long as he's been in the majors, but this is a new and unsustainable level.

But just as Gordon has exceeded all expectations, others have fallen behind.

PLAYER	BATTED BALL VELOCITY	OPS	PREDICTED OPS	DIFFERENCE
Chase Utley	87.7	0.389	0.726	-0.336
Rene Rivera	86.8	0.399	0.710	-0.311
Everth Cabrera	88.7	0.456	0.745	-0.289
Mike Napoli	93.0	0.542	0.822	-0.280
Jordy Mercer	88.7	0.480	0.745	-0.265

Meet Chase Utley, the unluckiest man in baseball. The Phillies second baseman is cursed with a .115 batting average on balls in play (BABIP), meaning that about a tenth of the balls he puts on the field get him safely to base. An average BABIP mark is about .300, and while there is some variation between players, it's usually on the order of a few dozen points, not 200.

Some have argued that Utley **ought to be benched**. Given his age (36) and the wear and tear second basemen face, Utley **could be** in a steep decline. Statcast's batted ball statistics say otherwise. Utley's batted ball velocity is a little below average, not elite — but below average would be an incredible improvement from Utley's .389 OPS. (Since I started writing this article, his BABIP has already increased by 12 points and his OPS by 14.)

Utley's Statcast readings present an interesting contradiction with other kinds of batted ball data. Others have noticed that Utley might be hitting **fewer line drives** and **making**

[weaker contact](#), but these analyses rely on guys in the stands who [manually diagnose each batted ball](#). These manual data collection efforts have [proven error-prone](#) in the past.

In contrast, the batted ball velocity data comes from automated camera tracking. The technology is still young, and undoubtedly there are hidden problems to be worked out. Already, [Jeff Sullivan](#) has noted that some batted balls have been assigned implausible velocities, indicating that we need to take these numbers with a grain of salt. It's possible, too, that hitters' batted ball velocity will regress to meet their OPSs, instead of their OPSs regressing to what we'd expect given their hit velocity.

In Utley, we have a player whose Statcast data doesn't match the conventional narrative. If the commentators and traditional data sources are correct, Utley is headed toward a premature retirement. If Statcast is right, Utley has an about average bat, one that should recover. The Phillies just have to stick by him long enough to let him do it.

Footnotes

1. Preliminarily, it appears that batted ball velocity tends to stabilize much more quickly than the traditional offensive numbers. Velocity reaches a correlation of 0.7 with itself in [as few as 15 batted balls](#).
2. With an R2 value of 0.1475, this is a significant relationship.
3. Gordon's excellence extends to FanGraph's wins above replacement metric, where he's first.
4. Numbers current as of the writing of this article.

AUG. 20, 2015, AT 10:11 AM

Chase Utley's Case For The Hall Of Fame

By Neil PaineFiled under Baseball

Second baseman Chase Utley, who has been traded from the Phillies to the Dodgers, heads for first base in a game against the New York Mets on Opening Day in April at Citi Field in New York City. ELSA / GETTY IMAGES

For a 13-year stretch that ended with Wednesday's [trade to the Los Angeles Dodgers](#), Chase Utley served as the Philadelphia Phillies' [gritty, hard-nosed, tone-setting leader](#).

He grinded out at-bats and played through pain. He was in the starting lineup for the [sixth-most victories](#) in franchise history.¹ But Utley has only modest [traditional statistics](#) — a mere .282 lifetime batting average, to go with only 1,623 hits and 233 home runs. So does he fall into the same category as other plucky middle infielders, such as David Eckstein, whose grittiness was often extolled by sportswriters and [mocked by sabermetricians](#)?

As we saw [with Ben Zobrist](#), sometimes the analytics adore the most unlikely of players. And Utley's advanced statistics are great enough to propel him to borderline Hall of Fame status, despite that thin conventional résumé.

The metric [JAWS](#),² for instance, considers Utley to be [right on the border](#) of Hall of Fame worthiness. JAWS attempts to put a sabermetric stamp on Hall voting by balancing the number of [wins above replacement](#) that a player generated at his peak³ with the amount of WAR he compiled over his entire career, synthesizing the two counts into a single figure. In JAWS creator Jay Jaffe's conception, a player's JAWS should then be compared to the average score for current HOF members at the same position, which will theoretically help maintain the existing standard for enshrinement going forward.

And by virtue of his peak performance, which ranks [eighth](#) of any second baseman in major league history, Utley is only a few WAR shy of that standard. In fact, according to JAWS, Utley's career has been of roughly the same quality as [the great](#) Jackie Robinson's. It's been superior to those of HOF second baseman Roberto Alomar and the [recently inducted](#) Craig Biggio.

If such a lofty placement seems surprising, it's because Utley is [one of the biggest outliers](#) in MLB history when it comes to disparities between JAWS and traditional numbers. When my colleague Harry Enten and I were [researching the career of Adrian Beltre](#),⁴ we looked at the relationship between JAWS and a quartet of [metrics](#)⁵ devised by Bill James to measure a player's conventional HOF qualifications. For most players, the numbers are in sync, but Utley had the third-biggest differential of any qualified player between his real-life JAWS and the JAWS we would predict from James's metrics.

Among the many factors driving the discrepancy is Utley's all-around excellence, which is sometimes difficult to appreciate without the nuance of advanced metrics. [Even more than the versatile Zobrist](#), Utley has shined in every aspect of the game: hitting (for both power and contact), plate discipline, [baserunning](#) and [defense](#). Among second basemen of his era, he's been the majors' [second-best](#) on offense and its [best](#) on defense. Aside from a proneness to injury as Utley entered his early to mid-30s, there were no weaknesses in his game.

Even so, it's extremely unlikely that Utley will ever get anything close to the votes required for the Hall of Fame. Early this season, I attended a Phillies game with a [bunch of statisticians](#) who uniformly scoffed when I pointed out Utley's JAWS-based Hall qualification. If numberphiles like them can't even get behind Utley's case, it's truly a

hopeless cause. (Less anecdotally, Utley also [falls woefully short](#) of the average Hall of Famer in all of James's HOF metrics.)

But if they ever open a Hall of Fame for sabermetric darlings overlooked by Cooperstown, expect the newest member of the Dodgers to be one of the first players voted in.

Footnotes

1. Franchise history going back to 1914, when Baseball-Reference.com's database begins.
2. This stands for "Jaffe WAR Score," after Sports Illustrated's [Jay Jaffe](#).
3. Specifically, his best seven seasons.
4. Another advanced-stat darling whose career might be sold short by the conventional numbers.
5. Namely, the Hall of Fame [Standards](#) and [Monitor](#) tests, as well as the [Black Ink](#) and [Gray Ink](#) tests.



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'Chase Utley, you are the man!'

He may not have won an MVP Award, but he was Most Valuable Phillie during championship era



By Paul Hagen

August 20, 2015



PHILADELPHIA -- First baseman **Ryan Howard** won the National League Most Valuable Player Award in 2006. Shortstop **Jimmy Rollins** won it in 2007.

Chase Utley never took home that hardware. But it's not a stretch to suggest that he meant more to the Phillies in those years than Howard or Rollins or **Cole Hamels** or Pat Burrell or

anybody in that era.

Phillies deal Utley to Dodgers for two prospects

"He was flanked by league MVPs, left and right," said Ed Wade, the general manager when Utley was drafted. "But I think if you boil down his decade worth of performance in a Phillies uniform, I don't think it would be overstating to say he was the MVP of that era. As good as that core nucleus was, what all those guys did, there was sort of a performance and a heartbeat level that was happening at second base."

That's not hyperbole. As calculated by baseball-reference.com, Utley's WAR is fourth in franchise history. Among position players, it is second only to Hall of Famer Mike Schmidt.

Utley waived his full no-trade protection and was traded to the Dodgers on Wednesday night. Plaques and numbers are one thing. No player was more quickly adopted or fervently embraced by Philadelphia's blue collar fan base, a group that values unrelenting effort above any other quality in its professional athletes.

He becomes the third member of the Phillies nucleus to say goodbye in the last eight months. Rollins was traded to the Dodgers last December, Hamels to the Rangers just before the non-waiver Trade Deadline last month.

Now only Howard and **Carlos Ruiz** remain as links to the greatest run of sustained excellence in franchise history: five division titles, two pennants and a World Series championship from 2007 through 2011. It's a sobering reminder of how fleeting athletic glory really is.

Chase Utley's career statistics

All good things must end. Utley had more staying power than most. For 13 Major League seasons, he played for the same team. "There aren't many guys who have been able to wear just one uniform through a fairly long career," Utley said after signing his most recent contract extension. "Especially nowadays with the amount of movement there is and the amount of money there is in baseball ... So, something that I've always wanted to do."

It didn't work out that way, but he did join a select list of the longest-tenured Phillies ever. Only Schmidt (18 years), Granny Hamner (16), Steve Carlton and Rollins (15) and Robin Roberts and Chris Short (14) had more continuous service.

It wasn't just that he was around for a long time that made him such a civic fixture. It wasn't just the six All-Star Game appearances. It wasn't just his good works along with wife Jennifer, much of it focusing on pet adoption and raising money for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Video: TOR@PHI: Utley addresses media after trade to Dodgers

It wasn't even that he became the best second baseman the Phillies, who opened for business 132 years ago, have ever had. Just as Rollins was the best shortstop, Howard the best first baseman and Hamels the best pitcher the organization had developed in 60 years.

No, it was more intangible than that. The rugged good looks that made women swoon. The strong-but-silent demeanor that men admired. The countless hours studying video, part of his leadership by example. The understated derring-do and the sense that, no matter what, he was giving everything he had at all times.

If there's one vignette that sums it up, it came on Aug. 9, 2006, at Turner Field in Atlanta. Trailing in the top of the seventh, the Phillies took the lead on a bases-loaded double by Utley. Howard followed with a dribbler to the right side that pitcher Macay McBride fielded in front of the base and flipped to first.

Utley, running all the way, scored from second on an out that was hit, maybe, 70 feet. In the broadcast booth, Hall of Fame announcer Harry Kalas couldn't contain himself. *"Chase Utley, you are the man!"* he yelled into the microphone.

That became a rallying cry, a short-hand for everything he meant to the team and, now, an epitaph.

He signed that last contract two years ago and it ran through 2018 when he'll be approaching 40. But, to protect the team, the last three seasons were \$15 million options that would vest with 500 plate appearances the previous year. That was prudent considering the knee problems that dogged him in 2011 and 2012.

In the end, it took a perfect storm to end Utley's Phillies career. He injured his ankle working out before the season, but tried to play. He was batting .179 when he finally went on the disabled list on June 23. In his absence, **Cesar Hernandez** took off for an organization that by now was in full rebuilding mode.

When Utley came back, he had no chance of guaranteeing his option. He also had to prove he could still hit, which he did by batting .484 (15-for-31) with a 1.227 OPS. That encouraged contenders to make offers. Finally, the front office needed to iron out the complicated details with a team he would also be willing to go to.

It had to be an emotional ordeal for Utley, who remained publicly stoic throughout the process.

That, too, demonstrated consistency. He shared little of his private life and few of his thoughts, which only added to his mystique. That's one reason it generated such a reaction when he referred to the Phillies as "world [bleeping] champions" in the giddy post-parade celebration at Citizens Bank Park following the 2008 World Series. It was one of the rare times he bared his emotions for the world to see.

Once again, Philadelphia watches as a baseball icon who was signed and developed and helped the franchise reach unprecedented heights has been traded. It's best for the Phillies,

who are retooling. It's best for Utley, who gets another shot at the postseason. But that doesn't make it any easier.

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8 great Utley moments for former Phillie's visit



By Todd Zolecki

August 15, 2016



PHILADELPHIA -- It is unlikely **Chase Utley** will shed a tear as he steps into the batter's box Tuesday night at Citizens Bank Park.

Expressing his feelings is not his style. In fact, standing and chatting inside the Dodgers' dugout last week at Dodger Stadium, Utley only allowed that his first trip to Philadelphia since the Phillies traded him last August "might be a bit emotional."

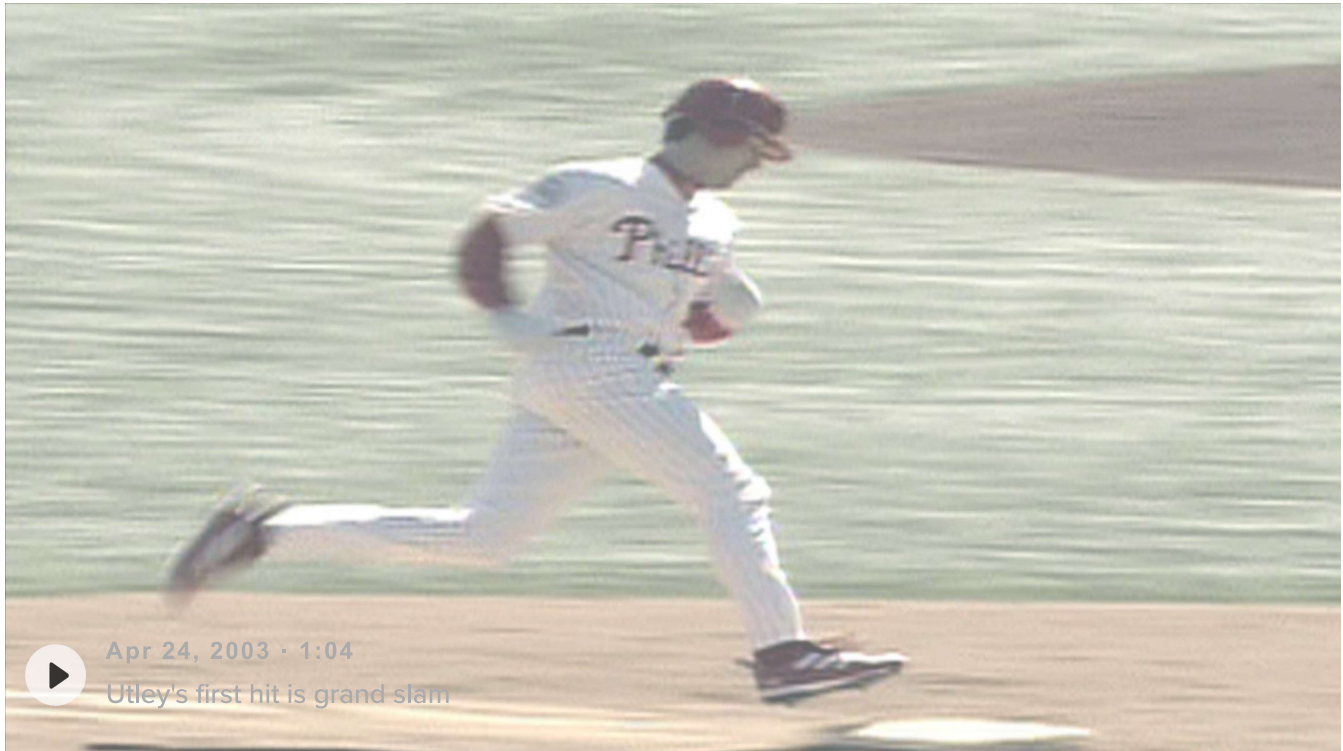
There should be more than a few standing ovations and a few tips of the cap as the

Phillies and Dodgers play a three-game series this week. In preparation for a week of Utley memories, here are eight of Utley's greatest moments with the Phils:

1. Utley's first hit

April 24, 2003

In his first career start in his second career game, Utley hit a grand slam against Colorado's Aaron Cook in the third inning at Veterans Stadium. It was the first of Utley's five grand slams with the Phillies.



2. The Streak

June 23- Aug. 3, 2006

Utley had a 35-game hitting streak, which is tied for the 11th longest in baseball history.

3. The Speech

Oct. 31, 2008

The tightlipped Utley gave one of the most memorable speeches in Philadelphia history following the team's World Series championship parade. He announced to the crowd at Citizens Bank Park that the Phillies were "world champions" -- only he inserted an expletive in the middle to accentuate the exuberance of a fan base that

had not enjoyed a championship from one of its professional sports teams in 25 years. Utley still hears the famous line from that famous speech.

"I hear it here at this stadium," Utley said at Dodger Stadium. "There are Phillies fans all over the country. I see at last one or two Phillies jerseys every game, to be honest, and occasionally they say that statement. That was a good time back in 2008, for sure."

4. Beat the Mets, beat the Mets

Aug. 30, 2007

Utley tormented the Mets in his career, but this one sticks out because it contributed to the Mets' collapse as the Phillies won their first National League East title since 1993. The Phils trailed the Mets by one run in the ninth, but with the game tied, Utley ripped a single against Mets closer Billy Wagner to right field to score Tadahito Iguchi from second base. It was the fourth of Utley's five walk-off hits with Philadelphia.

5. Game 1 of 2009 World Series

Oct. 28, 2009

Many Phillies fans remember Game 1 of the 2009 World Series for Cliff Lee's excellence, but Utley hit two home runs in the 6-1 victory. Utley hit five home runs in the series, matching Reggie Jackson for the most in a single Fall Classic.

6. Game 1 of 2008 World Series

Oct. 22, 2008

Utley hit a two-run home run in the first inning against Rays left-hander **Scott Kazmir** to give the Phillies a 2-0 lead. It was the perfect start to the series for the Phils, who would win their first World Series title in 28 years.

7. "Chase Utley, you are the man!"

Aug. 9, 2006

Utley made plenty of hustle plays in his Phillies career, but this one is immortalized

because of Harry Kalas' call. Utley stood on second base when **Ryan Howard** chopped a ball into the air. Braves pitcher Macay McBride caught the ball and tossed it to first baseman Scott Thorman. Meanwhile, Utley never stopped running and scored from second on a ball that never left the infield. The best part of the play besides Utley's hustle and Kalas' call? Charlie Manuel smiling as he kept looking into the dugout as if to say, "Can you believe he just did that?"

8. Utley outsmarts the Rays

Oct. 29, 2008

In a decisive Game 5, the Phillies and Rays were tied in the seventh inning at 3. Jason Bartlett stood on second base when Akinori Iwamura hit a ground ball up the middle. Utley fielded the ball with his momentum carrying him toward left field. He had no play at first, but he pump-faked a throw there anyway. The fake convinced Rays third-base coach Tom Foley to send Bartlett home. But Utley threw a one-hopper to **Carlos Ruiz**, who applied the tag for the out to end the inning. It was vintage Utley, always thinking one step ahead of the action on the field.

Todd Zolecki has covered the Phillies since 2003, and for MLB.com since 2009. Read his Phillies blog **The Zo Zone**, follow him on **Twitter** and listen to his **podcast**.

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Chase Utley didn't stay with Dodgers in New York during NLCS, family reportedly received death threats following Ruben Tejada takeout slide

By PETER BOTTE

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | MAY 27, 2016



FEEDBACK

Chase Utley broke Ruben Tejada's leg with his Game 2 slide. (Sean M. Haffey/Getty Images)

Mets pitchers didn't throw any retaliatory pitches in Chase Utley's direction during a four-game series in Los Angeles earlier this month, but according to a report, some Mets fans were so angry that they issued death threats to his family back in October.

Citing people familiar with the situation, [the L.A. Times reported that Utley's family](#) received the ugly threats and that he didn't stay at the team hotel while the Dodgers were in New York.

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FEEDBACK

Utley broke the leg of since-waived Mets shortstop Ruben Tejada with a [hard takeout slide in Game 2](#) of the NL division series at Dodger Stadium last October, prompting [MLB to amend its sliding rules](#) in the offseason. Utley initially was suspended for two games, but upon appeal his ban was [overturned in March](#).

Utley returns to Citi Field this weekend for the first time since last season's NLDS.

The former Phillies second baseman did not play in either of the two games in New York in the NLDS, meaning Friday's game likely will be his first in-game appearance back in Flushing since the incident.

"Looking back on it, knowing that (Tejada) was going to spin, he wasn't going to get off his feet, I would have done things differently, knowing that he was going to get hurt," Utley told the [Los Angeles Times](#) earlier this week. "But I can't take that back. So I imagine the fans will let me have it."

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"I enjoy winning. So whatever that does, I'm all for."

Although he didn't play, Utley was heavily booed during pre-game introductions before Game 3 last October. Mets fans chanted "We Want Utley" and one held a sign that read "Chase Utley (Hearts) ISIS."

Dodgers bench coach Bob Geren told the Times that the Utley slide was just baseball.

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"Your player got hurt, so everybody was upset about it," Geren — a member of Terry Collins' staff last year with the Mets — said in the story. "But you look at it, and that was just the way the game has been played since I played. In fact, I've seen some of the other ones in the '70s that were incredible."

Geren also further complimented Utley's hard-nose style, adding: "I'm trying to think, in all my years, if I know anybody I've ever either played with or coached or managed that's a better baseball player. I can't think of one."

Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw, who stood next to Utley on the field during introductions before Game 3, also defended his teammate in the report.

"I have a lot to say. I just don't know if I should or not," Kershaw said. "Chase was playing the game the way he's always played.

"Obviously, you never want anybody to get hurt. The game being in the playoffs, and all that stuff, magnified everything. But there's been a whole lot of slides a lot worse than that over the course of baseball (history)... Some of the stuff he had to go through, it wasn't fair."

Topics: [chase utley](#), [ruben tejada](#), [clayton kershaw](#), [los angeles dodgers](#), [new york mets](#), [mlb](#)

Peter Botte

Sports Columnist



Peter Botte joined the Daily News sports department in 1997. The Boston University graduate has covered the Yankees, Knicks and Islanders as a beat reporter, as well as all of the local pro teams, college basketball, golf and tennis as a general assignment reporter. The Long Island native began writing his Botte Shots column in 2016.

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