



Inspired by an annual article in SABR's *Baseball Research Journal* by Al Kermisch, we present four unrelated essays from a researcher's notebook.

I. A Canadian Baseball Connection to Hollywood

The Town was a 2010 heist thriller starring Ben Affleck and Jeremy Renner in which the climax was a robbery of Fenway Park. About an hour and twenty minutes into the movie there was a one-minute scene in which the main characters did some reconnaissance at the stadium, and it was clearly filmed while a Major League game was taking place. Which game was this?

A detailed review of this single minute from the two-hour-long movie was completed to uncover the pertinent pieces of information needed to determine the game in question. Note that the times shown below are from the DVD of the film and other media may have slightly different times.

1:21:22: The sequence started with the gang leader, played by Pete Postlethwaite, laying out the plans for the scheme. When referring to the robbery of Fenway he said, "...taking down the cathedral of Boston...Priceless."

1:21:27: This was followed by about 15 seconds of aerial shots clearly establishing the venue as Fenway Park. It is also noticeable that this was a night game.

1:21:37: Then came about 25 seconds of dialogue between Affleck and Renner with a game going on in front of them. Fans were wearing T-shirts and light jackets, likely precluding an April game, and the scoreboard was visible in the background. This, however, was out of focus and the details were unreadable and can't be used in this review.

1:22:02: The camera shifted to the field for just three seconds, but there was a lot of information available:

- The Red Sox were wearing red jerseys with white pants,
- The Red Sox were at bat,
- A left-handed batter was at bat,
- The Red Sox had a runner at first base and the other two bases were unoccupied (Boston's third base coach can be seen to the right of the base, a position unlikely for a base runner),
- The other team was wearing grey uniforms with dark caps,
- The pitcher was right-handed, and
- The defense had shifted three infielders to the first base side of the infield.

1:22:05: The scene jumped to a bar with the game being shown on a television. The announcers can be heard, albeit rather faintly, and it requires a few viewings to properly hear that dialogue. A major assumption is necessary at this point: that the game on the television was the same as the one that Affleck and Renner were attending. Nothing confirms this, but all the pieces fit.

Details of the game can be found at the top of the television screen: The opposition was Toronto, they had a 3-0 lead in the bottom of the fourth inning, there was a runner on first base, there were no outs, and the count was 0-1. It's blurry but the TV also shows that the pitcher had a long name, his number started with a 4 and it may have been 45 or 48.

The batter hit the ball and the broadcast cut to the outfield with a voiceover stating, "...lined into right field, a base hit, Youkilis is headed to third base. Snider takes it up, Youkilis stands at third, first and third, nobody out, in the Boston 4th inning."

From this point the plot of the movie continued and there were no additional details to help determine the game. But there is enough information to figure it out.

What is known?

- It was a night game, and it doesn't appear to have been a cold night,
- The Red Sox were wearing red jerseys with white pants,
- There was a Red Sox runner on first base, with second and third bases unoccupied,
- A left-handed batter was at the plate for the Red Sox,
- The opposing team had gray uniforms, and we see that it was the Toronto Blue Jays,
- The defense had three infielders to the first base side of second base,
- Youkilis was the runner on first base,
- The count was 0-1,
- Snider (or Snyder) fielded the hit in right field,
- Youkilis made it to third base on the hit,
- After the hit the Red Sox had runners on first and third with no outs in the fourth inning,
- Toronto was ahead 3-0 at the time of the play, and
- The pitcher was right-handed, had a long name and his number started with a 4.

The first step to narrow the search is to find a reasonable time frame for the game. This can be done by identifying the two named players: Youkilis and Snider (or Snyder).

- The only Major Leaguer with the surname Youkilis was Kevin Youkilis. He made his Boston debut on May 15, 2004, so that is the earliest possible date for the game. He remained with the Red Sox through June 24, 2012.

- The other player to be named was the right fielder named Snider or Snyder. The only players with these surnames to have played for the Toronto Blue Jays were Cory Snyder in 1991 (predating Youkilis's debut) and Travis Snider, who made his Major League debut on August 29, 2008, and played for Toronto through July 30, 2012.
- IMDB.com shows that the movie had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival on September 8, 2010. The movie was certainly filmed and edited well before then, but those dates are unknown. The movie's premiere is the latest possible date for the game that can be confirmed.

The game in question was therefore played between Travis Snider's debut on August 29, 2008, and the movie's world premiere on September 8, 2010. The Blue Jays' games in Boston during this period were reviewed to find those when Travis Snider was the right fielder:

2008: Toronto played in Boston on April 29, 30, May 1, August 16, 17, September 12, 13, 13, and 14. The first five games took place before Snider's debut and Snider did not play on either September 12 or 14. He was the left fielder in the first game of the double header on September 13, and he played right field in the nightcap.

2009: Toronto played in Boston on May 19, 20, 21, August 28, 29, 30, September 28, 29, and 30. Snider didn't play on either May 19 or 21 and he played left field on May 20. He played in right field in each of the three August games, and he played in left field in the three September games.

2010: Toronto played in Boston on May 10, 11, 12, August 20, 21, 22, September 17, 18, and 19. The last three games were played after the movie's premiere so they can be ignored. Snider played in right field in each of the three games in May, he played left field on August 20 and 21 and right field on August 22.

Travis Snider appeared in 15 games in Boston in the search period, but he only played in right field in eight of them:

- the second game of a double header on September 13, 2008,

- August 28, 29, 30, 2009,
- May 10, 11, 12, 2010, and
- August 22, 2010.

The play-by-play of each of these games can be found at Baseball Reference and the only one in which Toronto took a 3-0 lead into the bottom of the fourth inning was the game of Friday, August 28, 2009.

Now that the game is known, the information identified earlier can be confirmed. The main resource for this is the play-by-play of this game from Baseball Reference.

- It was a night game:
 - The game started at 7:13 PM and sunset in Boston that day was at 7:26 PM.
- It doesn't appear to be a cold night:
 - The game was played in late August and the game time temperature was 66 degrees Fahrenheit (19 degrees Celsius).
- The Red Sox are wearing red jerseys with white pants:
 - The Red Sox started wearing the red alternative jersey at select home games starting in 2003 and continue to do so to this day.
- There was a Red Sox runner on first base with no outs:
 - The broadcast tells us that it is Kevin Youkilis, and the play-by-play confirms that he led off the inning with a single.
- A left-handed batter was at the plate for the Sox:
 - David Ortiz followed Youkilis in the lineup.
- The opposing team had a gray uniform with a dark cap:
 - This is confirmed by the diagram of the Blue Jays' uniforms for 2009 found on *Dressed to the Nines, A History of the Baseball Uniform*, an exhibit on the web site of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.
- The defense had three infielders to the first base side of second base:
 - This defensive shift didn't become popular for several years, but David Ortiz was one of the early victims.
- Snider (or Snyder) fielded the hit in right field:
 - Travis Snider played the full game in right field for the Blue Jays.
- Youkilis made it to third base on the hit:
 - Confirmed.
- The count was 0-1 when the batter hit the single:

- Confirmed.
- After the hit the Red Sox had runners on first and third with no outs in the 4th inning:
 - Confirmed.
- Toronto was ahead 3-0 at the time of the play:
 - Confirmed, although this would change soon afterward.

The Red Sox scored three runs in the inning to tie the game. The teams swapped two-run homers in the fifth inning, Boston's hit by Canadian Jason Bay, and the Red Sox took the lead in the bottom of the eighth. Toronto loaded the bases in the top of the ninth inning, but the game ended when Travis Snider struck out on a 2-2 count, Boston winning 6-5. That put their record at 74-54, leaving them six games behind the division leading Yankees. The Jays fell to 58-68, in fourth place, 21 games behind.

Finally, who was the Blue Jays' right-handed pitcher with the long name and the number that started with 4? Vancouver, British Columbia's own Scott Richmond, who wore number 48 in 2009.

II. Vladimir Guerrero's Unbeatable Home Run Record Players Hitting Ten Home Runs in Multiple Stadiums in a Season

(An abridged version of this article was published in the Spring 2023 SABR Baseball Records Committee newsletter, edited by Trent McCotter.)

Due to COVID-19 cross-border travel restrictions the Toronto Blue Jays were based in three stadiums in 2021: TD Ballpark in Dunedin, Florida, Sahlen Field in Buffalo, New York, and Rogers Centre in Toronto. They were the first AL/NL team to have three home fields in the same season since 1903, and these moves permitted their top home run hitter, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., to achieve a rather obscure first: he became the first player to hit at least ten home runs in three different stadiums in one season.

The minimum requirement to hit ten home runs in three stadiums is, obviously, to hit at least 30 home runs in a season. Based on a Stathead Baseball search, the first Major Leaguer to do this was Babe Ruth in 1920 and, through 2023, there have

been 1,507 player-seasons of 30 or more home runs. All recognized Major Leagues were considered in this review, including the various Negro Leagues, but only American League and National League players have ever reached the 30-home run plateau in a season. The Ballparks data for each of these seasons were reviewed in the respective players' Baseball Reference Splits pages and this information was entered into an Excel spreadsheet to be sorted by various criteria.

It is a very rare feat to hit ten home runs in more than one stadium in a season. Prior to expansion, teams played 22 games against each of their league rivals, usually 11 at home and 11 on the road. Hitting ten home runs in 11 games is a difficult achievement and, even in the seasons with the highest home run totals, no player achieved this in a stadium away from home. Some came close: Lou Gehrig of the New York Yankees hit nine home runs in St. Louis in 1931, Jimmie Foxx of the Philadelphia Athletics matched this in Detroit in 1932, and Willie Mays of the New York Giants hit nine in Brooklyn in 1955. None of them exceeded five home runs in any other ballpark. There were ten other pre-expansion player-seasons with eight home runs in a road stadium and none exceeded five at any other field.

Expansion added more teams, thereby spreading the road games among more ballparks, and interleague play compounded this, making it even more difficult for a player to reach double figures in any road stadium. Barry Bonds hit 73 home runs in 2001, with 36 coming on the road, but his team visited 18 stadiums that season with no more than ten games in any one of them. Bonds did manage to hit six home runs in only three games in Atlanta plus five more in both Arizona (ten games) and San Diego (seven games) but that was a long way from ten. In 2022, when he hit 62 home runs, Aaron Judge participated in ten games in Tampa and nine apiece in Toronto and Baltimore, but he failed to hit more than five home runs in any road stadium. Since expansion, only five players have hit as many as eight home runs in a road stadium in a season, and 18 others hit seven.

No player has ever hit ten home runs in a season in a stadium that was not his home field. However, players have hit at least ten home runs in multiple stadiums in one season. This has only been done when the player had multiple home fields in the same season and one of two things had to have happened to make this possible:

1. The team used multiple home stadiums in one season, or

2. The player was traded, released, or had his contract sold during the season.

Multiple home stadiums

As noted, other than the 2021 Toronto Blue Jays, no team has used three home stadiums in one season in well over 100 years, but many have used two. Neutral site games are becoming a regular part of the baseball landscape, but these are usually one-time events (e.g., the Field of Dreams game) or short series (e.g., two or three-game series in Tokyo or London). Given that we're looking for players with ten home runs in one stadium, teams using a field for fewer than five games have been excluded from this review. Since 1920, when the 30-home run plateau was first reached, quite a few teams have used two home fields for at least five games in the same season. These can be categorized as either temporary or permanent moves:

Permanent Moves

1. St. Louis Cardinals, 1966 – 10 games at Sportsman's Park and 71 at Busch Stadium,
2. Cincinnati Reds, 1970 – 36 games at Crosley Field and 45 at Riverfront Stadium,
3. Pittsburgh Pirates, 1970 – 42 games at Forbes Field and 40 at Three Rivers Stadium,
4. Toronto Blue Jays, 1989 – 26 games at Exhibition Stadium and 55 at SkyDome, and
5. Seattle Mariners, 1999 – 39 games at Kingdome and 42 at Safeco Field.

Temporary Moves

1. Philadelphia Phillies – 1927 (12) and 1938 (46) games played at Shibe Park instead of their usual home, the Baker Bowl,
2. Boston Red Sox – 1929 (17), 1930 (20), 1931 (15) and 1932 (6) games played at Braves Field instead of their usual home, Fenway Park,
3. Cleveland Indians – 1932 and 1937 to 1946 played between 29 and 63 games at League Park and between 15 and 49 games at Cleveland Stadium,
4. Brooklyn Dodgers – 1956 (7) and 1957 (8) games played at Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City, New Jersey instead of their usual home, Ebbets Field,

5. Chicago White Sox – 1968 (9) and 1969 (11) games played at County Stadium in Milwaukee instead of their usual home, Comiskey Park,
6. Oakland Athletics – 1996 played 6 games at Cashman Field in Las Vegas instead of their usual home, Oakland-Alameda County Stadium,
7. Montreal Expos – 2003 (22) and 2004 (21) games played in Estadio Hiram Bithorn in San Juan, Puerto Rico instead of their usual home, Olympic Stadium, and
8. Toronto Blue Jays – 2021 played 21 games in TD Ballpark in Dunedin, Florida, 23 games at Sahlen Field in Buffalo, New York and 36 games at Rogers Centre, Toronto.

This information was found at Retrosheet.org in the Alternative Site Games list.

In addition to Guerrero Jr. in 2021 these stadium shifts allowed Johnny Bench in 1970 (15 home runs at Crosley Field and 15 at Riverfront Stadium) and Ken Griffey Jr. in 1999 (13 home runs at Kingdome and 14 at Safeco) to both hit at least ten home runs in each of two stadiums. Bench topped out at three home runs in two other parks and Griffey Jr.'s next highest total was five home runs at Minnesota. There have been 46 player-seasons of 20 or more home runs in which the players' teams played in multiple home stadiums for five or more games; 30 of them involved a double-digit home run total in one stadium but, other than Guerrero Jr., Griffey Jr. and Bench, nobody else exceeded seven at the second venue (a total reached by Tony Perez and Lee May with Cincinnati in 1970 and Alex Rodriguez with Seattle in 1999).

Players changing teams during the season

The other way to have a significant home run total at multiple home stadiums is to be traded, released, or have your contract sold during a season, and the closer to the mid-point of the season the better. There have been 46 player-seasons where a player was transacted while hitting a total of 30 or more home runs plus another 158 such player-seasons with 20 to 29 home runs, including two in the recognized Negro Leagues. Five players hit at least ten home runs in each of their home fields in a season in which they changed teams:

1. Mark McGuire, 1997 – 17 in Oakland and 13 in St. Louis,
2. David Justice, 2000 – 14 in New York (AL) and 10 in Cleveland,

3. Steve Finley, 2004 – 16 in Arizona and 11 in Los Angeles (NL),
4. Alfonso Soriano, 2013 – 11 in Chicago (NL) and 11 in New York (AL), and
5. J.D. Martinez, 2017 – 16 in Arizona and 11 in Detroit.

Five others hit at least nine home runs in each of two stadiums and seven hit at least eight home runs in two stadiums. None of these 17 players exceeded four home runs at a third venue.

In 2021 Vladimir Guerrero Jr, became the eighth player to hit at least ten home runs in multiple stadiums and none of the other seven exceeded five home runs at a third ballpark. Guerrero Jr. also became the first player to hit as many as eight home runs in three or more stadiums, breaking the record of seven at a third stadium held jointly by two players:

- Mickey Mantle, 1956 – 27 in New York (AL), 7 in Detroit and 7 in Cleveland, and
- Carlos Beltran, 2004 – 8 in Kansas City, 7 in Houston and 7 in Chicago (NL).

In addition, there have been another 14 player seasons with at least six home runs in three different stadiums. Lou Gehrig is the only player to have accomplished this more than once (1927 and 1930) and Frank J. Thomas is the only player to have hit at least six home runs in four stadiums in the same season (1958).

Guerrero Jr. also hit five home runs in Boston and in New York (AL) in 2021, matching the record of five stadiums with at least five home runs apiece, first accomplished by Eddie Mathews in 1953 and matched by Brady Anderson in 1996. There have been another 14 seasons in which a player hit five or more home runs in four stadiums, accomplished twice each by Eddie Mathews (1954 and 1959 in addition to his five-stadium feat of 1953), Roger Maris (1960 and 1961) and Barry Bonds (2001 and 2002). Toronto's Marcus Semien hit at least five home runs in each of the team's three home fields in 2021 plus five home runs in New York (AL), making him and Guerrero Jr. the only teammates to do this.

Unless another team is put in the situation of the 2021 Blue Jays and is forced to split their home games between three venues, Vladimir Guerrero Jr.'s record of hitting ten or more home runs in three stadiums in one season should stand for a long time.

III. The First Québécois Battery

In his autobiography *Game Over, L'Histoire D'Éric Gagné*, Canadian Cy Young Award winner Éric Gagné caused some controversy by claiming that 80 percent of his teammates used PEDs. That book included a photograph of himself with Russell Martin with this caption: “Le 6 juin 2006, alors que Russell Martin et moi nous apprêtons à former la toute première batterie québécoise de l'histoire du baseball majeur.”

Roughly translated, Gagné noted that he and Russell Martin formed the first Québécois battery in Major League history. But did they? It depends on how one determines who is Québécois. Here are a few definitions for clarification:

- French-speaking: someone who speaks French, not necessarily as their mother tongue.
- French Canadian, or Canadien: a Canadian whose first language is French.
- Québécois: based on a motion passed by the Canadian federal government in 2006, “...the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada”.

Éric Gagné is from Mascouche, Québec and his family name is one of the 10 most common in Québec. He can reasonably be considered as Québécois. Russell Martin, however, was born in East York, Ontario. His mother, Suzanne Jeanson, is Franco-Manitoban and his father, Russell Sr., is Afro-Canadian with ancestors from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Russell Martin lived in Québec for part of his childhood but is he Québécois? Martin's mother's heritage allows us to categorize him as partly French Canadian but, even if we define Québécois as a culture rather than something determined by one's birthplace, it is difficult to characterize him as Québécois as Gagné did.

The Québécois diaspora creates an interesting dilemma for determining the heritage of Major Leaguers. Rural poverty in a predominately agricultural society led to significant emigration from Québec to industrialized New England starting in the mid-nineteenth century and by 1930 over 900,000 people had left Québec for those six states. In the 1980 US Census 13.6 million Americans claimed to have French ancestors. Because of this we can find many other Major Leaguers with close ties to Québec, including Hall of Famers Napoleon Lajoie and Leo Durocher.

Considering that the term Québécois refers more to one's culture than place of birth, an argument can be made that the first Québécois battery did not play in 2006 with the Dodgers but rather with the Detroit Tigers 93 years earlier.

Pitcher Jean Joseph Octave Dubuc was born in St. Johnsbury, Vermont to Québécois parents. Despite his place of birth Dubuc had many connections to Canada: the family moved to Montréal after the death of Dubuc's mother when he was twelve, he was educated at the Seminary of St. Theresa in Montréal, he pitched for Montréal in the Eastern League for two seasons, he ran the successful Palace Bowling Alley and Pool Room in Montréal and he was a part owner of the Montréal Wanderers hockey team.

Dubuc made his Major League debut with Cincinnati in 1908 but his best years were with Detroit from 1912 to 1916 when he averaged 14 wins and over 200 innings pitched per season with a league average earned run average. He was also a decent hitter with a .230/.266/.314 slash line, good for an OPS+ of 72 in the middle of the Deadball era. His hitting prowess was such that the Tigers used him as a pinch hitter over 100 times.

Catcher Henri Joseph Rondeau was also born in the United States to Québécois parents. Rondeau's mother, father and three older siblings were all born in Canada and the family emigrated in 1885, two years before Henri's birth in Danielson, Connecticut.

The mother tongue of the teammates was not overlooked by the fourth estate:

“Jennings' French Battery, Now Here, to Talk Signals in French”

“Henry [*sic*] Rondeau and Jean Dubuc, of the Detroit Tigers, are said to form the only battery in the world that can talk French on both ends. No more confabs halfway for these two; they can exchange secret signals on stentorian voice without fear of their being stolen.”

“Jean and Henri Can Cross 'em up...Give Signals in Parlez Vous”

Oscar Stanage caught most of Detroit's games each year from 1909 through 1917. His 1912 backups were sub-par, and replacements were sought for 1913. One newcomer was Rondeau, setting the stage for a Québécois battery.

Stanage caught the most innings of Detroit's 1913 receiving corps; Red McKee was his main backup and Rondeau was the third option. Despite this third-string status, there were some opportunities for a Québécois battery. Dubuc and Rondeau appeared in the same box score 19 times: two Dubuc pitching appearances when Rondeau played first base, two other Dubuc outings when Rondeau pinch hit, six games when Rondeau caught and Dubuc pinch hit and seven games when they both played but neither manned a battery position. They did, however, twice form a battery.

The first game was on May 16 at home against the Washington Senators. They both started and Dubuc won 5-2 with a complete game despite issuing seven walks. He also contributed a single and a home run.

The other game was a 5-4 loss in Boston on June 19. The Red Sox led 5-1 after four innings, but the Tigers fought back only to have a ninth inning rally, featuring a walk to Rondeau and an RBI double by Dubuc, fall short. Dubuc was wild again and gave up eight walks in as many innings.

He wasn't known for his control but the fifteen free passes in seventeen innings with Rondeau as his catcher were his worst two outings of the season. One wonders if the "...signals in parlez vous" were really an advantage.

Through mid-July Rondeau had caught 16 games, played first base six times and pinch hit in 12 games, appearing in 34 of Detroit's first 85 contests. That level of action, however, ended abruptly. A case of heat stroke in spring training presaged another bout on July 13 in Detroit. It was severe enough to send Rondeau home to Rhode Island to recover and he was gone for a month, not returning until a pinch hitting appearance on August 22. His comeback was short-lived, and he was soon traded to Minneapolis of the American Association, for whom he played 19 games in September. He must have enjoyed his time there because he remained with the Millers through 1924, appearing in over twelve hundred games, interrupted only by two brief stints with the Washington Senators in 1915 and 1916.

After his five seasons in Detroit Dubuc played for Salt Lake City of the Pacific Coast League before a late-season acquisition by the Red Sox got him into the 1918 World Series. He ended his major league career with the New York Giants in 1919. There were rumors that Dubuc was involved with those fixing the 1919 World Series, or at least had some knowledge of it. Eliot Asinof wrote in *Eight Men Out*,

“[Giants’ pitcher Rube] Benton, though denying his own betting, was prepared to admit his knowledge of the fix. He told how he was in the room of another Giant pitcher, Jean Dubuc, at the Hotel Ansonia, a week or so before the Series. A telegram arrived from Bill Burns advising Dubuc that the White Sox would lose the Series.”

In 1919 Dubuc was a teammate of noted game-thrower Hal Chase and he had played with three of the Black Sox: Chick Gandil (Montreal 1911), Lefty Williams (Detroit 1913 and 1914) and Fred McMullin (Detroit 1914). Despite these connections and testimony about the conspiracy, Dubuc was never punished for his potential knowledge of the fix.

He played for Toledo of the International League in 1920 then, after the Black Sox scandal broke in September of that year, he participated in Montreal’s Atwater Park Twilight League in 1921, perhaps to avoid the notice and punishment of Judge Landis. He was back in organized baseball by 1922 with Syracuse of the International League and played and managed throughout the 1920s. He became the baseball coach of Brown University, founded a team in the American Hockey League and was later a Major League coach and scout. His greatest claim to fame in the latter role was signing Hank Greenberg for the Tigers. He retired from baseball in the 1930s and died in Florida in 1958.

Were Dubuc and Rondeau a Québécois battery? Perhaps, if we define Québécois as a culture rather than something defined by place of birth. But, given that Russell Martin was born in Ontario and neither of his parents are Québécois, Dubuc and Rondeau have a much stronger claim to the honour than is claimed by Gagné.

IV. Bob Steele, Baseball Vagabond

Left-handed pitcher Robert Wesley “Bob” Steele was born on March 29, 1894, in Cassburn, Ontario, halfway between Montreal and Ottawa. As was the case with a lot of Canadian-born big leaguers of the era, Steele’s family moved south of the border when he was young, and he lived in Vermont from ages 7 to 14. As was not the case with a lot of big leaguers from this era however, the family returned to Canada.

Steele started his professional baseball career pitching for Moose Jaw of the Western Canada League in 1913, then joined Victoria of the Northwestern League the following year, pitching over 240 innings with a winning record in each season.

The St. Louis Cardinals took notice and invited him to spring training for 1915. They signed him and farmed him out to St. Paul of the American Association, where he won 20 games while pitching over 300 innings. He made the Cardinals’ roster for 1916 and appeared in 29 games, 21 of them starts, with a record of 5-15 and an ERA well below league average for a team that tied for last place. Steele started the 1917 season with St. Louis but was traded to Pittsburgh in June. His overall record was 6-14 in 39 games, 25 of them starts, and an ERA at the league average in about 220 innings, most of which were with the last place Pirates.

Despite three stellar minor league seasons, after two big league campaigns Steele had lost three quarters of his decisions and had a subpar ERA with two last-place teams. Regardless of this record, the Pirates re-signed the 24-year-old in mid-March to be a lefty swingman for 1918. Through the team’s first twenty-five games Steele had only pitched fourteen innings in four outings, but after he tossed a complete game victory in an exhibition match against the Brooklyn Dodgers on May 19, manager Hugo Bezdek decided to give him a regular season start on May 24 against the Boston Braves. Steele didn’t take advantage of the opportunity however, as he only lasted into the fifth inning, giving up five runs on nine hits, and the Pirates lost 6-3.

Pittsburgh’s backup catcher in 1918 was Irish-born, Canadian-raised Jimmy Archer. Archer had caught Steele during a relief appearance on May 8 and they formed the starting battery on May 24. Archer’s family arrived in Canada when he was an infant and he was raised in Toronto, so depending on how one defines nationality, Steele and Archer formed a rare all-Canadian battery for two games in 1918.

Steele was relegated to the bullpen for the next month but his season seemed to turn around in late June: He pitched a six-hit shutout against Chicago on June 21, and he lost a 1-hitter to St. Louis on June 30 when his own error resulted in the only runs in a 2-1 loss. Those games, however, turned out to be his last in a Pittsburgh uniform. The Pirates had acquired two players from Kansas City of the American Association in 1917 for players to be named later and, almost a year after the deal, Steele ended up being one of those players.

When Steele heard that the Blues were going to cut his salary he jumped from Organized Baseball and joined the Harlan & Hollingsworth team of Wilmington, Delaware in the Delaware River Shipbuilding League. With the First World War raging, this and other industrial leagues signed players who took jobs in the defense industry rather than join the armed forces under the “work or fight” order. This eight-team league was one of the best and Shoeless Joe Jackson and Hall of Fame pitcher Chief Bender were among its notable participants.

Steele’s first outing with his new team was a relief stint in which he surrendered 6 hits and 2 walks in 12 innings with 11 strikeouts. He also contributed 2 of his team’s 6 hits at the bat, but he surrendered the tie-breaking run in the 16th inning for a 2-1 loss. He was even better in his next outing, as he pitched a complete game 1-hitter with 1 walk and 12 strikeouts; only one of the runs he gave up was earned, but he lost as his mound opponent pitched a no-hitter.

In a three-week span with Pittsburgh then Harlan & Hollingsworth Steele had made four appearances totaling 38 innings, striking out 32 and surrendering only 14 hits and 13 walks for a 0.71 WHIP and an ERA of 0.24. The Cincinnati Reds expressed an interest in Steele, whose rights were still owned by Kansas City, but the Reds balked at the Blues’ demand of \$2,500. The Giants, however, seemed impressed by Steele’s recent success; they paid the transfer fee and Steele was wearing a New York jersey on July 20.

When Steele joined the Giants from the Shipbuilding League the Canadian who had caught more games to that date than any of his compatriots was there to greet him: George Gibson. Gibson broke in with the Pirates in 1905 and he was their regular catcher for the next decade, but his career in Pittsburgh ended in 1916 when he was claimed off waivers by New York. After initially declining to report, Gibson joined the Giants to start the 1917 season as a player-coach. Gibson

returned to the Giants for 1918 and his regular season catching duties were limited to four games as a late-inning replacement in blowouts, never playing before the seventh inning and never appearing in a game decided by fewer than eight runs. His only other playing time was starts in four exhibition matches, including one in Toronto on August 14, but he otherwise spent the season as a coach and not as a player.

Steele pitched on a regular basis after joining New York, going 3-5 in 12 games, seven of them starts, with a good ERA. The stars aligned on August 20 to put Gibson into a game with him. Steele was ineffective and surrendered five runs through the first three innings, but manager John McGraw kept him in the game, and he wound up going the distance in a 10-2 loss in Pittsburgh. This was the Giants' last game in Pittsburgh in 1918 and McGraw allowed the former Pirate catcher to play one last time in Forbes Field. The *Pittsburgh Daily Post* noted, "...the fans cheered the popular ex-Pirates iron man" and "George Gibson doubled in his only time at bat and got a glad hand from the fans." Gibson replaced starter Bill Rariden in the bottom of the eighth inning and for four batters he and Steele formed the sixth Canadian-born battery. Steele has the distinction of being the only Canadian-born pitcher to throw to two catchers who would be future inductees into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame.

Gibson never played in another big league game after catching Steele but that wasn't the end of his baseball career. He managed the Pirates for two and a half seasons starting in 1920, the Cubs for part of the 1925 season and Pittsburgh again in the early 1930s, compiling a .546 winning percentage in 759 games. Bill Watkins and Arthur Irwin are the only Canadian-born managers to exceed this total, and Gibson was the last full-time Canadian-born Major League manager until Rob Thompson took over the reins in Philadelphia in 2022.

Steele pitched two more games before the season ended then he had a single relief appearance for the Giants and twenty-seven outings for Indianapolis (American Association) in 1919. He returned home to British Columbia in August to be with his sick wife and later that year decided to retire and move to Oil City, Pennsylvania to run a confectionary and tobacco store.

San Francisco, of the Pacific Coast League, acquired Steele's rights for 1920 and offered him a bonus to report for training camp, but he held firm with his

retirement plans. He remained in Oil City and sold score cards and rented seat cushions at the local team's games, while making the occasional pitching appearance. This participation with an outlaw team landed Steele on Organized Baseball's ineligible list but it didn't end his playing career. He played in the unaffiliated Midwest League with Casper, Wyoming in 1921 and Kenosha, Wisconsin in 1922, staying in the area throughout the 1920s.

Steele was reinstated to play in Organized Baseball in 1929 where he latched on with Milwaukee of the American Association, but he only appeared in four games with an ERA over 10.00 before finishing his career with a team in Sioux City, Iowa.

Bob and his wife Gladys had three daughters but were divorced in 1942. He then married Helen in 1944 and lived in Burlington, Wisconsin, running a tavern, a motel, and a bowling alley. He retired to Ocala, Florida at age 65 and died there two years later, on January 27, 1962, just shy of his 68th birthday.

Bob Steele played for three Major League teams over four seasons at the end of the Deadball era, but his pitching career lasted 17 years and took him to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Victoria, British Columbia, St. Paul, Minnesota, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Wilmington, Delaware, New York, Indianapolis, Indiana, Oil City, Pennsylvania, Casper, Wyoming, Kenosha, Burlington, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Sioux City, Iowa. He was a true baseball vagabond.

David Matchett
November 2023