

# Five Questions for the 2013 Baseball Season

Lincoln Mitchell, Harriman Institute, Columbia University

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Baseball is, among other things, a game of questions. Before each season the battery of questions include which players will see their skills erode suddenly due to age, which second-year players will build on successful rookie years, which rookies will make an impact and, of course, which team will win the World Series. Each team also faces many questions including: will the pitching hold up, will the top prospect make it in the big leagues, will an aging veteran come back after an injury or off year.

As each new year begins there are also significant questions facing baseball that address deeper issues facing the game. This year five of these question are:

*How will new technologies continue to change how the game is understood?* This is an exciting time to be a baseball fan. Not only is it possible to hear or see most games over the Internet, but it is now possible to track where every ball is pitched, hit and fielded during every big league game. Baseball is transforming from being a game that was largely enjoyed through the written word and numbers such as those in box scores to one which is enjoyed through video images and deeper data. For fans this means more data to examine, debate and enjoy, but for the people who are run teams and make decisions, it can mean more informed, or differently informed decisions. This will likely lead to more sophisticated ways to assess defense as well as innovations and advances in scouting and talent assessment.

*Will the Los Angeles Dodgers change the balance of power in baseball?* It is easy to see the Dodgers as the Yankees of the west, but the question is, which Yankees? Will they be like the Yankees of the late 1990s which won championships due to extremely solid and deep teams, or like the Yankees of much of the following decade which were loaded with big name stars but underperformed in the post-season most years? The Dodgers are one of the most well-known teams in baseball with an important history and potentially huge fan base. A good Dodger team locked in a rivalry with the San Francisco Giants will be good for baseball. Years of bad contracts, foolish free agent signings and washed up former stars will not be as good for the game. It is not yet clear in which direction the Dodgers are heading.

*Are we in the post PED era yet?* The steroid era is frequently referred to in the past tense, but that may be a triumph of hope over reality. The [Biogenesis PED story](#) has linked big stars like Alex Rodriguez and Ryan Braun to PED use. Nothing has yet been proven, but this is not the first time Rodriguez or Braun have been linked to PED use. Rodriguez is an aging star who, despite an enormous contract, is unlikely to be an important on-the-field presence again. In this respect, Rodriguez's association with Biogenesis is the least damaging for the MLB. More troubling are reports that Nationals pitcher Gio Gonzalez, a 27-year-old rising star, and Mariners catcher-DH, Jesus Montero, a player who many see as having a bright future in the game, also had ties to Biogenesis. This suggests that a new generation of players are dabbling in PEDs and that the problem is not going away soon.

*Will any teams experiment with new approaches to pitch limits?* One of the strangest baseball stories of 2012 was the Nationals [decision](#) to not use ace pitcher Stephen Strasburg during the post-season because he had already pitched 159 innings. While concern about overuse and keeping an eye on pitch counts are important tools for helping pitchers avoid arm injuries, the Nationals badly damaged their chances of winning the World Series by removing their best pitcher from competition at a key time. Pitch counts are not going away, but some smart teams may begin to explore other approaches to limiting work loads. This may include, using a six-man rotation at times, removing pitchers from games after 90 pitches if the score is not close, resting pitchers for a week or so at various points in the season or other ideas. Pitch counts and concern about arm use have changed how pitchers are used, but pitcher usage and pitching staff construction has not fully adapted to this yet.

*What will happen to the Hall of Fame?* The BBWAA elected nobody to the Hall of Fame this year, but they also did little to resolve the problems and challenges around steroids that led to that decision. The next Hall of Fame ballot will, like this past one, be overcrowded, have several known steroid users, several players viewed as unlikely to have used steroids and several around whom a cloud of suspicion exists. It is likely that Greg Maddux, who has never been accused of steroid use, will get elected this year, but the rest is uncertain. More significantly, little has been done to address the issue of the backlog on the ballot and little guidance has been offered regarding how to treat steroid era players. Thus, the confusion, rancor and righteousness felt by different fans and writers will likely continue this year. This is not necessarily a major problem, but it creates a danger that the Hall of Fame and Hall of Fame voting will become an arena for squabbles that are too frequently, petty, personal or grounded in rumor rather than fact.

It is unlikely that any of these questions will be definitively answered in 2013, but they will help define the baseball stories for the year.