



# America's Wait Problem

→ BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

→ **Tim Hudson stood** in the Giants' clubhouse Sunday, talking about pitching in his first World Series in a 16-year major league career, and he knew he was lucky. Fans in Section 334, in the upper deck in leftfield of AT&T Park, had traveled all the way from Kansas City to San Francisco just to chant "Let's Go, Royals!" After a 28-year World Series drought, they knew they were lucky too.

But did anybody realize how lucky?

Championship droughts are not what they used to be. They are longer, drier and more painful. Every major sports league has expanded to at least 30 teams, but they all still only give out one championship trophy per season. In many cities sports fans will be on hold. Enjoy the music while your party is delayed.

We made such a big deal of Kansas City making the playoffs for the first time since 1985 because it's been a really long time, and for most of that stretch the Royals were terrible. There were moments when they did not seem to understand things like the infield fly rule or why home plate was where it was. A 29-year gap between playoff appearances may be unusual, but in an era of 30-team leagues, 29 years between championships is nothing.

There are 30 major league teams (and 30 in the NHL and NBA too; the NFL has 32). Let's assume leagues resist the urge to further expand. If every league distributes championships equally, the average wait for a title will be 30 years. But that's just the average wait. Factor in variables such as competence and some teams will be cooling their, say, Jets longer than others.

So how long would you have to wait for your parade? Despite my advanced math skills, I found somebody else to answer the question: Jeffrey Rosenthal, a professor of statistics at the University of Toronto and the author of the bestselling book *Struck by Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities*.

Rosenthal completed some statistical calculations under the assumption that all 30 teams had an equal chance of winning. The result: a team would have a 25.8% chance of going without a title for 40 years, with an 18.4% chance that the drought would extend to 50 seasons. The probability of not seeing your team win another World Series before 2100 would be 5.4%.

Sound bad? Reality is worse. That model assumes all teams have the same shot. But if all things were equal, cucumbers would taste like chocolate cake. We don't live in that world. We live in a world where the Spurs somehow land both David

Robinson and Tim Duncan, brilliant coach Bill Belichick finds brilliant quarterback Tom Brady, LeBron James teams up with his buddies in Miami and the Yankees charge fans \$100 for Officially Licensed Used Tobacco, then spend that money on payroll. Some teams will be consistently better than others, for reasons that are mental, financial, geographical or coincidental. That sound you hear is Cubs fans crying.

In Rosenthal's model, the most likely number of champions in an 18-year span is 14. In the 18 baseball seasons before this one, 10 franchises won championships. The chance of that happening, if all teams were equal, is 1.0%.

We live in an era of instant everything, but many sports fans have to wait longer than ever for their share of happiness. Millions of us can expect to spend at least 40 years in the desert, hoping there is good Wi-Fi there.

The Royals have a young team, with more talent on the way, but that only guarantees pretty preseason predictions. And Giants fans should enjoy this era because they are unlikely to see anything like it again. The Giants went 56 years without a championship, then won in 2010 and '12 before making the World Series again this season. The 56-year wait seemed excruciating. In the future it will seem normal.

Still, you should keep hope alive, and while you're at it, keep yourself alive. Americans are now expected to live an average of 78.8 years. I'm not saying there is a good chance you will die before your favorite team wins a championship. But I strongly advise you to eat your vegetables. □

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