

Batting average takes backseat in today's baseball

BY JAY COHEN
AP BASEBALL WRITER

GLENDAL, Ariz. — Batting average was a priority for Andrew Benintendi when he first broke into the major leagues in 2016. He batted .312 in the minors on the way to his debut.

Going into his fourth season with the Chicago White Sox and 11th overall, he is more focused on his OPS and power numbers.

"The game kind of changes where the money is, I guess," Benintendi said. "So players obviously will chase that."

The significance of batting average has been in decline for years, replaced by on-base percentage and slugging percentage, along with the OPS metric that combines the two. Batting average treats all hits as the same, while OPS accounts for power and other methods of reaching base.

But the diminished importance of what was once one of the majors' marquee statistics was thrown into sharp relief by the free agency of Luis Arraez over the winter.

Arraez, a three-time batting champion who turns 29 in April, hit a career-low .292 with eight homers and 61 RBIs in 154 games for San Diego last season. The infielder also led the NL in hits for the second straight year. But he doesn't hit for power or walk very much, and he has defensive limitations.

So, even with his .317 career batting average — tops among active qualified players — Arraez was on the market until right before spring training, when he agreed to a \$12 million, one-year deal with San Francisco. Arraez said he had some multiyear offers, but the



MORRY GASH/Associated Press

Nico Hoerner, who hit .297 for the Chicago Cubs last season, makes contact during a recent spring training workout in Mesa, Ariz.

Giants gave him an opportunity to play second base.

"I don't care who (is throwing). I don't care if he's a Cy Young (Award winner)," he said. "I have a bat, and I want to go up there and compete."

The MLB-wide batting average has remained fairly steady since the pandemic-shortened 2020 season. It was .248 in 2023 — marking a successful debut for a package of rule changes that included a pitch clock, bigger bases and limits on infield shifts — .243 in 2024 and .245 last year, according to Sportradar.

While New York Yankees star Aaron Judge won the 2025 AL batting title with a .331 average, just seven qualified big leaguers hit .300 or better, matching the previous year for the fewest since a record-low six in 1968. Philadelphia's Trea Turner won the NL batting title with a record-low .304 average.

"We look at more of the advanced metrics and the expected outcomes based on the quality of the at-bat, the process metrics, but you

can start with batting average and say this guy's doing something well," said Chris Young, the president of baseball operations for the Texas Rangers.

"It's a preliminary indicator, but we dig pretty deep in terms of understanding the profile of a player and what we can expect and predict."

Batting average is "not something that we look at at the beginning of an evaluation," said Jed Hoyer, the president of baseball operations for the Chicago Cubs.

"I think there's a lot of things that are much more important," Hoyer said, "but I do think that a guy like a Nico Hoerner or Luis Arraez, I do think in a world that values a strikeout, in a world that has so much incredible stuff, I think that the players that can truly put the ball in play at an elite level, I do think there's something to that."

Hoerner hit .297 for the Cubs last year, helping the team reach the playoffs for the first time since 2020. He batted a team-high .371 with runners in scoring position.

The 28-year-old Hoerner, who is going into the last year of his contract, said he thinks players still take some pride in their batting average.

"I think it's telling that if you ask the player what he hit last year, he still understands that that's batting average, right?" Hoerner said. "They don't say like, oh, I hit .840 OPS. I hit .270 or whatever it is."

"Players are aware of what's valued and what gets them on the field and yeah, I don't think batting average is particularly high on that list. But I do think it is a reflection of quality of contact that guys make."

It has changed the way players like Benintendi approach their game. From 2016-23, he hit .276 and averaged 14.1 homers per 162 games. In two years since, he is batting .234 and averaging 25.8 homers per 162 games.

"I think it's more slug, OPS is what outweighs batting average now," Benintendi said, "because say you hit .250 but you have 50 homers, would you rather have that or a guy who hits .315 with 10 homers? So I mean it's kind of give and take depending on the player."

The future of batting

average also belongs to the game's youngest players, and it still holds some allure to them as well.

Cincinnati infielder Sal Stewart, one of the preseason favorites for NL Rookie of the Year, hit .309 over two minor league stops last year before making his Reds debut in September. Stewart said batting average didn't come up very often during his development process, but it means something to him.

"I mean I'm not like, 'Oh average is the king; you know, but I look into it,'" he said. "But I really like on-base the most."



LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Notice is hereby given that the Elizabethtown Planning Commission will hold public hearings on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the City Council Chambers, located at 212 West Dixie Avenue, Elizabethtown, Kentucky. The hearings will be held to consider the following: Adoption of the Downtown Master Plan as an amendment to the Elizabethtown Comprehensive Plan. Hearing No. 2026-PC-06

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BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSIONERS

BID NUMBER 2026 - 002

HARDIN COUNTY WATER DISTRICT NO. 2 (the "District") will receive sealed bids on a thirty (30) inch Horizontal Auger Boring Machine at the District office, located at 1951 West Park Road/P.O. Box 970, Elizabethtown, Kentucky 42702, until 10:00 a.m. local time on Thursday, March 12, 2026.

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