

On the Large Number of Strikeouts in Baseball

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From a recent Phil Mushnick column in the New York Post;
“Giants-Yankees . . . of the 51 outs, well more than half — 32 (63 percent) — were strikeouts.”

To understand what’s going on, it helps to take into account that the distance from the pitcher’s mound to home plate, set 130 years ago, is still 60’6” despite pitchers in the 1920s throwing 89 MPH tops (the estimate for fireballer Walter Johnson) versus, commonly, 98 in recent times.

A big reason for the velocity difference, pitchers are much bigger now. Note the heights and weights of the ’27 Yankee pitching staff:

Walter Beall	5-10	178
Joe Giard	5-10½	170
Waite Hoyt	6-00	180
Wilcy Moore	6-00	195
Herb Pennock.	6-00	160
George Pipgras	6-01½	185
Dutch Ruether	6-01½.	180
Bob Shawkey	5-11	168
Urban Shocker	5-10	170
Myles Thomas	5-09½	170

Compare that with the current Yankee staff or any other in the major leagues. Gerrit Cole, who reaches 100 and struck out 11 on opening day, is 6'4" 225 and he isn't an outlier. Twins pitcher Jhoan Duran, who throws it 103, is 6'5" 230. Shohei Ohtani, 6'4, 210, who touches 100, struck out 10 on opening day. And they throw from the same distance Yankee pitcher Walter Beall did in 1927. And they fire their Zeus lightning bolts down at the hitter from a mound that hasn't been lowered in over a half a century (a big reason for it then, Bob Gibson, 6'1" 190—big but not like today).

Scolding major league hitters for not shortening up their swings isn't going to do the trick. They are seasoned professionals doing the best they can within their circumstance. The distance from the mound to home plate needs to be lengthened, and it's time to take a serious look at lowering the mound.