

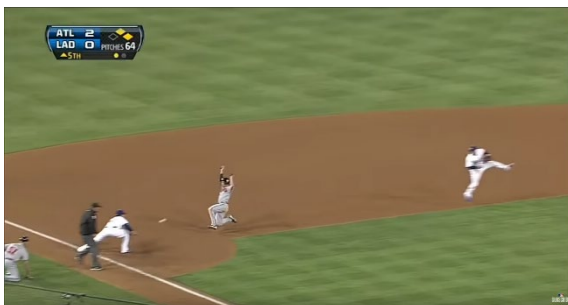
Tootblan: Short for Thrown Out On The Basepaths Like A Nincompoop, a tootblan describes a play in baseball where a runner makes a base running mistake that causes him to be called out. An example of this is taking an ill-advised attempt at an extra-base, forgetting how many outs there were in the inning, or overrunning the bag.

The Initial history of a Tootblan

Tootblan was created in 2008 by a Chicago Cubs sports blogger in determining the value that Ryan Theriot had on the basepaths. (Jewell) While Ryan was decently good at getting on the basepaths, he had a penchant for removing himself from the basepaths. Whether that was being caught attempting to steal a bag, not having the awareness to get back to the bag before a pitcher throwing over or attempting to advance a base when he could easily have been safe and stayed at the current base. “Theriot fans repeatedly pointed to his high on-base percentage in 2008 - and it was quite high. Detractors noted his limited range in the field and shoddy base running to make their case. I mean, what good is getting on base if you just get picked off or thrown out on a grounder to short with an open base?” (Jewell) This was developed into a formula RTAOBP (Ryan Theriot Adjusted On Base Percentage) which in its creation needed a way to describe ill-advised attempts, tootblan, as a metric to penalize one's percentage when they create outs that is their own fault. RTAOBP did not catch on in the sabermetrically inclined community, however, the component of tootblan did since it described baserunning in a way that was never cataloged before.

Examples of a Tootblan

For instance, scouting reports on new players could not reveal just how strong an outfielder's arm is, which could lead to a base coach sending a runner with the thinking that the outfielder fielding a ball is unable to make a strong enough throw to get the runner out. If the runner is close to being called safe, it is most likely not called a tootblan by a casual fan. If the runner is out by a large margin, a good estimate is that the runner sliding into the bag would not have made a difference, this would be dubbed a tootblan. For instance, On June 8th of 2013, Andrelton Simmons of the Atlanta Braves was thrown out attempting to take an extra-base on a newly called up Yasiel Puig of the Los Angeles Dodgers. While he was thrown out by a large margin, there most likely was little data to truly understand how strong of an arm that Puig had since he was only recently called up to the major leagues. This muddies the exactness of whether it was a baserunning error or a result of not having enough knowledge to make an accurate prediction. With time this play looks more like a tootblan as we now know how strong of an arm Yasiel Puig had, where at the time it would have been looked at as a smart advancement that was nullified by a good throw.



*This is the end of the Puig throw. While to batter is going to be out by a large distance, at the time one would not have known how strong of a throw Yasiel Puig would have, leading it to not be a tootblan.
Screenshotted from Youtube.*

Another example of a tootblan occurred on August 29th, 2020 at the bottom of the 12th inning to end a game between the Cleveland Indians and the St. Louis Cardinals. With a runner at 3rd, a ball was hit sharply to the 1st base bag where it was fielded. After an out is made at 1st, the ball is thrown to the 3rd. The runner had assumed that the ball had gone foul and was no longer in play and was caught halfway between 3rd and home, leading to him being tagged out after a short run down. The runner should have committed to heading towards a base once the ball was hit and it was confirmed foul. This mental lapse caused him to be recorded as having a tootblan.

Tootblans and their Ability to be tracked.

Tootblans are in a weird position of being both a statistic, but one that has no quantitative data to back them up. In baseball, almost every statistic has an event or data that backs it up to make it so that each play can be described in detail. A strikeout occurs when a batter receives 3 strikes, a barrel is determined by a batted ball whose launch angle and exit velocity have to lead to a minimum .500 batting average and a 1.500 slugging percentage, wOBA (Weighted, On-Base Average, basically it creates a rate statistic for the value of a hit based on the amount of bases a batter receives on the hit.) Each component used to determine it, (All 10 distinct statistics including one that is subject to change because it is an average of all major league players in a given season). Tootblan does not have solid set of data to back it up. It relies purely on the “eye-test” which is in turned based on a viewers interpretations. The only other point of data commonly used that has this issue is fielding errors, which come from the scorekeeper's discretion, and even then, errors are slowly being discouraged in their use as they are subjective. Since tootblans are also left up to viewer interpretations they are rarely kept track of. Baseball-reference.com, a major source of statistics from the entire history of all organized baseball, does not keep track of tootblans. Instead, they keep track of OOB, Outs On Basepaths. Which would include tootblans, but also scenarios where the runner made a good decision to attempt the advance the base, however, was thrown out by a small margin. This is why the term is used more as a descriptor of certain plays. It's not specific enough to be counted while other methods of data can describe a player's ability on the basepaths.

Tootblans and their Ability to Describe Baserunning

One might assume that a team that commits more tootblans is actually detrimental to a team's ability to run the bases. While this might be true, teams that are aggressive on the basepaths will most likely be able to gain more bases allowing them to be more valuable. A side effect of this is that these aggressive teams will commit more tootblans. If a team on 100 batted balls commits no tootblans but also doesn't attempt to advance runners an extra base, would have decent team baserunning. If a different team had those 100 batted balls, but advanced on all of them, but committed 5 tootblans. They would be a better baserunning team. Having tootblans doesn't automatically make players poor baserunners. For instance, in 2016 the Pittsburgh Pirates committed a tootblan. “The Pirates made one of the greatest TOOTBLANS of all time in San Francisco last Wednesday when Travis Snider and Gaby Sanchez somehow ran into two outs when one of their teammates walked.” (O'Neill) and many players were committing high

number of tootblans. The pirates were actually the 3rd best baserunning team. “Baseball Prospectus gives the Pirates a lot of credit for advancing on ground balls and taking extra bases on hits.” (O’Neill) Tootblans are a symptom of poor baserunning mistakes but are not an overall great indicator of baserunning success. If we use Baseball-Reference’s Outs On the Basepaths, while not perfect does give a good indicator of a teams ability to commit tootblans even if it includes non-tootblan plays, and Fangraphs BsR (This averages team performance in relation to the rest of the league on their ability to steal bases, advancing or committing outs on the basepaths) to determine their tootblan/ability to run their bases we see that there are a few discrepancies. While the Los Angeles Dodgers committed the 4th most OoBs (Baseball-Reference) in 2018 with 64, They were actually net positive in BsR with 11.4 (Fangraphs) which was the 5th most valuable baserunning in the entire league that year. Which also means they were actually more valuable than the 5/6ths of all major league teams at baserunning.

Team	OoB	BsR	League Rank
Chicago Cubs	70	2.2	15
Tampa Bay Rays	64	-0.3	17
Toronto Blue Jays	64	-27.1	30
Los Angeles Dodgers	64	11.4	5
Pittsburgh Pirates	63	-13.3	28
Colorado Rockies	62	3.2	11
St. Louis Cardinals	59	12.9	3
Houston Astros	59	-7	24
Los Angeles Angels	58	2.8	13
Boston Red Sox	58	-5.1	20
Arizona Diamondbacks	57	7.1	9
Cleveland Indians	56	13.7	2
Milwaukee Brewers	56	8.2	7
Minnesota Twins	56	0.6	16
New York Yankees	54	14.6	1
Washington Nationals	54	8.4	6
Chicago White Sox	54	-7.2	25
San Diego Padres	53	-5.7	21
Atlanta Braves	52	12.6	4
Texas Rangers	51	7.2	8
Kansas City Royals	50	-7.4	26
Cincinnati Reds	49	-1.9	18
Baltimore Orioles	48	-9.6	27
Detroit Tigers	48	6.4	10
Miami Marlins	47	-15.8	29
New York Mets	45	2.6	14
Oakland Athletics	42	-5.8	22
Seattle Mariners	40	-7	23
Philadelphia Phillies	35	2.9	12
San Francisco Giants	32	-2.9	19

A table featuring baserunning statistics from 2018 organized by how many outs on the basepaths a team committed., As you can see, if OOB’s are somewhat a good indicator of baserunning issues but are not perfect. If they were, we would see teams towards the bottom of this list be ranking higher than the teams towards to the top. Data from Baseball-Reference and Fangraphs. Table created by author.

Tootblans!

Since they are not aa great statistic for determining a person or teams ability to run the bases, what has caused them to endear themselves into the fans lexicon? It comes down to its pronunciation. Tootblan is just fun to say, and its ability to describe a base running gaffe has cemented it in baseball culture. It is a funny sounding word that people like to say. Once understood about it’s meaning it quickly develops into the day-to-day baseball terminology. “It’s an amazing acronym that is an onomatopoeia in that it sounds like what it means. A TOOTBLAN just sounds like a dumb mistake. And spelled out 'Thrown Out On The Basebaths Like A Nincompoop' is just amazingly descriptive and accurate. It grew because it was a real baseball stat that has value. And because it’s fun to say TOOTBLAN. Still cracks me up.” (Jewell) The word is supposed to be lighthearted and describes a play that is humorous to look at.

Tootblan is adding a fun element in describing a serious game. With it describing a very specific interest in plays, one that is rarely seen in scorebooks, these plays do happen. Calling them tootblans pushes them into their own realm, instead of saying they were out on the basepaths.

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