



Turning Two

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To most people, 6 – 4 – 3 could be their lucky *Pick Three* lottery numbers or their PIN number, but to baseball people it means only one thing: a double play from the shortstop (6) to the second baseman (4) to the first baseman (3).

The lore of the double play has become etched into American baseball culture, immortalized by Franklin Pierce Adams in his 1910 poem *Baseball's Sad Lexicon*, describing the exploits of the Chicago Cubs' double play combo – Tinker to Evers to Chance. The double play involving the two middle infielders and the first baseman has become familiar to even the casual baseball fan.

But when was the last time you saw a double play involving an outfielder? Even a hard-core baseball fan would have trouble recalling an outfielder being involved in a double play with any regularity. So what are the odds of having a single outfielder involved in anywhere from four to six double plays per season? And that's not for a single season, but for season after season after season.



For twenty-two seasons between 1907 and 1928, **Tris Speaker** roamed the pastures in American League ballparks as an outfielder for Boston, Cleveland, Washington and Philadelphia. During that time he appeared in 2,789 games and was involved in 139 double plays as an outfielder (he was involved in another 19 double plays in 18 games playing first base). This calculates to a double play every 20 or so games or a little over six double plays per year for 22 years.

Speaker was involved in 12 double plays in a single season on two occasions – once in 1910 and again in 1914. Despite spending much of his career in the shadow of Ty Cobb, Speaker was also quite adept with a bat, posting a .345 lifetime average. He also holds the career mark with 793 doubles.

But it was his shallow positioning in centerfield that allowed him to record 450 assists and 139 double plays, both atop the career list.

The following table provides information on the top ten outfielders involved in double plays during their careers.



Double Plays by Outfielders

Player	Years	GP	DP	DP/G	DP/Yr	Best Seasons for DP
Tris Speaker	22	2,789	139	20.1	6.3	12 DP in 1909, 1914
Ty Cobb	24	3,035	107	28.4	4.5	12 DP in 1907
Max Carey	20	2,476	86	28.8	4.3	10 DP 1912, 1916
Tom Brown	17	1,786	85	21.0	5.0	13 DP in 1893
Harry Hooper	17	2,309	81	28.5	4.8	8 DP in 1918, 1924
Jimmy Sheckland	17	2,122	80	26.5	4.7	14 DP in 1899
Mike Griffin	12	1,511	75	20.1	6.3	12 DP in 1895
Dummy Hoy	14	1,796	72	24.9	5.1	9 DP in 1890
Jimmy Ryan	18	2,012	71	28.3	3.9	10 DP in 1890
Fielder Jones	15	1,788	70	25.5	4.7	11 DP in 1902

Source: *Baseball Encyclopedia*

No one will deny that Tris Speaker and Ty Cobb were outstanding outfielders. Speaker had a lifetime .970 fielding percentage as an outfielder while Cobb had a .961 career fielding percentage. Both were elected to the Hall of Fame – Cobb in 1936 and Speaker in 1937. There are two other Hall of Famers on the list: Max Carey (1961) and Harry Hooper (1971) who both had .966 career fielding percentages.

But it's safe to say that these records will stand for quite some time. For one thing, you'll notice that almost all of these players spent their entire careers in either the 19th century or in the Deadball Era (1901 – 1919). It goes without saying that it was a different game in those days, played with a different ball, and requiring a different strategy on the part of the players. The likelihood that today's outfielders will challenge anyone on this list, playing as deep as they have to in order to run down the line drives and deep fly balls which come their way in today's game, is highly improbable.