



Expanded replay is coming to Major League Baseball. In the social media age of instant information, there have finally been enough damning screenshots to get Major League Baseball to institute policies to fix the blown call epidemic affecting the sport. Whether you agree or disagree with the policy, which will involve manager challenges similar to the current NFL replay system, anything is a step above the human element impacting the game with incorrect calls.

While said slightly in jest, the above point about screenshots and .gifs highlighting umpire mistakes before the game is over has made an impact. Perhaps more than that, players and managers have made their feelings known in interviews or in Twitter rants, essentially forcing Commissioner Bud Selig and the owners into action.

Interestingly, as Colin Wyers of BaseballProspectus [noted on Twitter yesterday](#), the proposed changes would take effect in the final year of a five-year agreement between Major League Baseball and the World Umpires' Association. As Wyers points out, the institution of replay would have to fit within the [collective bargaining agreement](#) signed back in 2010. By having the trial period of instant replay completed in 2014, MLB has plenty of leverage for replay expansion when they negotiate with the umpires on a new collective bargaining agreement for 2015. This is a situation to keep an eye on because it's not out of the realm of possibility to see some sort of lockout or strike in 2015.

The [proposed plan](#), which will be up for an owners vote in the very near future, would allow a manager one challenge over the first six innings and three challenges total. If the first challenge results in an overturned call, the manager will not forfeit that challenge. A team of people at the MLB offices in New York will make the final determination, hopefully in a rapid manner that will

not slow down a game that is already criticized for being too slow. If approved, the plan is expected to be implemented for the 2014 playoffs, with a post-playoff evaluation to determine if it will be used for the 2015 regular season. It has yet to be announced what, exactly, will be reviewable. Home runs are currently reviewed by instant replay, which is likely to continue.

A couple months back, I [advocated a similar policy](#), but I simply wanted one challenge per game. Three is way too many. We, the players, coaches, and fans, want the right calls to be made, but there's a point where fixing a problem becomes too much. If the current plan is upheld, managers will get one challenge in the first six innings and two challenges from the seventh on. What will stop momentum better than an opposing manager challenging a play that wasn't all that close in the heart of a rally? Managers are absolutely going to use replay as a stalling tactic to get a pitcher warmed up. The hope would be that it would be a minor delay, akin to a pitching change, with a crew monitoring the games from the MLB Offices, but some plays will clearly have to be examined more closely.

Umpires are going to take this change to heart. It's an insult to them. Some of them may publicly say the right things regarding the integrity of the game or how the important thing is to reach a correct decision, but Big Brother hovering over the umpires' shoulders will undoubtedly create more problems. Some umpires already bait players, using their authority to change the game by ejecting a player or manager. With some of their discretion taken away by video replay, what other way will the egomaniacal umpires use to show their authority? A quicker trigger finger on ejections, perhaps. Manipulating the strike zone? Although it hasn't been announced, it's very, very unlikely that balls and strikes will fall under the replay umbrella.

If this was a minor change, such as one challenge per team, umpires may be more sympathetic to the cause. But, the opportunity to prove an umpire wrong six times per game seems excessive. Those that want to control the game will find other means to do it and, more often than not, it may be out of spite.

Umpires certainly needed to be held accountable and clear video evidence will help. But such a sweeping change sends an extremely negative message to all umpires, not just the repeat offenders. Again, I've been in favor of some kind of change to the current system, and any change is better than no change at all, but it would seem that this could have been more discreet and more understanding of the umpires' position.

Why not just add a fifth umpire to each crew to make instantaneous judgments on close calls

while in the ballpark and watching on a closed-circuit television? Rotate that five-man crew throughout the series instead of the current four-man system. It's really, really difficult to justify making the wrong determination on replay, so determine a policy to reprimand and discipline umpires who fail to make the right call upon review. These guys are a brotherhood and want to stand up for each other, but it's nearly impossible to stick up for a guy who makes a bad call when you'd be responsible for the consequences of an incorrect replay ruling.

I still believe the best course of action, along with some expanded replay, is to do performance evaluations on umpires to keep them from sitting in their cushy jobs until retirement. The umpires' union is entirely too strong and umpires are essentially in lifelong positions unless they decide to do something else or retire. Some umpires, like CB Bucknor, Joe West, Angel Hernandez, and others should have been fired years ago for incompetence. It would seem that standard performance reviews would be expected in every job. These wouldn't undermine the umpires like sweeping replay changes, but rather force accountability through standard means. Who knows, maybe performance evaluations are done. But given the guys who are perennially employed as umpires, I have to assume they're not very in depth, if performed at all.

Short of having robot umps on the bases making calls, this was the only viable option for Major League Baseball. We'll have to wait for all of the details to unfold and see what is reviewable and what isn't, and that will go a long way in determining my final opinion. For now, however, I think it's just too much. If a manager had one challenge, he'd have to seriously pick and choose his spots to use it. With three challenges, it takes a little of the gamesmanship out of the equation.

Something had to be done and Major League Baseball and the owners acknowledged that fact. It would be inexcusable for a World Series championship or a playoff spot to be determined by an incorrect call by an umpire. Somewhere in the course of history, I'm sure that has happened. But with all of the technology available today and the tidal wave of backlash that would come from such an outcome, this was almost a no-brainer.

Unfortunately, we have to trust a rather inept commissioner and a league that still operates with a severe financial chasm between teams that has never really been addressed to get it right.