



There are few places where the past and future dance around each other more than they do in Major League Baseball.

Few entities combine a strict adherence to the laws of the past, written and unwritten, with landscape-altering gimmicks that completely break from the past.

Baseball is the sport that can't implement a salary cap, thanks to more than 100 years of contentious labor relationships between players and owners, and that baggage it has packed to this day. So while the NFL, NBA and NHL have succeeded to a degree in leveling the competitive balance between small market and big market teams, baseball is still a sport in which the privileged few spend about 90 percent of the time ruling over the less-privileged many.

Baseball is the sport with two leagues playing by two different rules because, roughly 40 years ago, American League owners liked the idea of having a professional hitter designated specifically to take the pitcher's turn in the batting order, with the idea that it would increase offense. The National League decided against it, and since 1973, the designated hitter has

been a battle line in the war between new school and old school.

Baseball is the sport that embraced artificial turf first, but it's the sport that loathes the memory of the symmetrical, cylindrical multi-purpose stadiums that kept the artificial turf industry afloat for more than 30 years.

Baseball introduced interleague play in 1997, then counteracted it with the introduction of the unbalanced schedule a few years later. Now, the Indians sacrifice dates with the Yankees and Red Sox not only to play the Reds and Pirates, but also to play the Tigers and Twins 19 times a year.

Baseball is also the sport in which umpires still have virtually unquestioned authority. And Wednesday night in Detroit, unchecked human error crept into the equation in the Tigers-Indians game, robbing Detroit pitcher Armando Galarraga of a perfect game.

Replays showed that Tribe hitter Jason Donald was out, and it really wasn't that close. With two outs in the top of the ninth, Donald hit a grounder to first for what would have been the 27th and final out of the game. Detroit first baseman Miguel Cabrera picked the ball cleanly, and delivered a throw to Galarraga covering first.

The throw was a little low, but Galarraga corralled it with little difficulty and put his foot on the bag. A freeze-frame showed Donald's lead leg was about a half-step away from the bag when Galarraga had the ball in his glove and his foot on the bag. But umpire Jim Joyce -- an accomplished umpire with more than 20 years on the job -- called Donald safe.

It was a flat-out blown call. An honest mistake, to be sure, but a major mistake. One that corrupted what should have been a historic night.

It would have been a continuation of one of the great statistical anomalies that make baseball distinctive. Heading into this season, 18 perfect games had been thrown in the history of Major League Baseball. Dallas Braden threw the 19th on Mother's Day. Roy Halladay threw the 20th this past Saturday. Galarraga should have had the third perfect game in less than a month. But Joyce's error, and baseball's unwillingness to put processes in place to correct it, left Galarraga with what is likely the most hollow one-hitter in baseball history.

Jim Leyland and every Detroit coach, player and fan within audible distance emphatically disputed Joyce, who argued back. Confronted later with the evidence, Joyce was quick to admit his error.

"I just cost that kid a perfect game," he told a reporter afterward. "I thought he beat the throw. I was convinced he beat the throw, until I saw the replay."

But once Joyce's arms went out in a "safe" signal, there was no turning back.

Perhaps Bud Selig and the rest of baseball's policymakers feel that, by putting 100 percent of the burden on umpires to get the call right, they're forcing the umpires to stay sharp by promoting total accountability. What baseball doesn't want is a setup like the NFL, where replay all but drives officiating, where side judges will routinely get out-of-bounds and possession calls wrong, seemingly guessing on the right call, knowing that coaches will challenge the call and replay will correct any mistake.

But what baseball has is a replay policy that has changed little from the days of Honus Wagner and Napoleon Lajoie. In the past two years, baseball has begrudgingly instituted replay on home run calls, allowing umpires to review whether a ball was fair or foul, or if it hit above the line that separates the outfield wall from the stands.

But on questions of balls and strikes, safe or out, not much has changed from the horse and buggy days.

Balls and strikes are, admittedly, another animal altogether. Baseball couldn't possibly institute a system in which every questionable ball and strike call is reviewed, or games would take six hours. But on the bang-bang play at first, the swipe tag on the stolen base attempt, the diving catch that TV replays showed to be a trapped ball -- in this era of high definition television feeds and 12 different camera angles, there is just no excuse to get those calls wrong anymore.

It's time for baseball -- the sport of the designated hitter, interleague play and the all-star game that determines homefield advantage in the World Series -- to cease clinging to the archaic ideal that replay technology will somehow corrupt the purity of the game, or turn umpires into robots. Because the only thing that's getting corrupted is history in the making.

Jim Joyce failed Armando Galarraga on Wednesday. But the office of the commissioner failed Joyce. Now Joyce is shamed and Galarraga might never scrape so close to greatness again.

That's a crime. But the real crime occurs when Selig and his cronies avert their eyes and continue to pretend that it's a bygone era where nothing can be done about it.