

Selig Tries to Speed Up the Game -- Again

Written by Jordan I Kobritz
Tuesday, 03 June 2008 03:27



"There you go again." □

Ronald Reagan uttered that famous line in a 1980 presidential campaign debate against Jimmy Carter. But the same could be said of MLB Commissioner Bud Selig.

Selig created an uproar in baseball circles, particularly among the players, when he recently announced that the league intended to take action to speed up the game. Few think the game – on steroids for at least the past decade – needs any further juicing. But Selig and the owners beg to differ.

We've heard it all before. This is attempt number (insert your own number here) since 1995 to speed up a game that needs no speeding up. The only major team sport without a clock, baseball is unique in its timelessness. As the late Commissioner Bart Giamatti wrote in his classic tome on baseball, *From a Great and Glorious Game*, "The game begins in the spring...it blossoms in the summer...and then...it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone."

If it appears as if some games take an entire season from opening pitch to the last out, the facts suggest otherwise. According to the Society of American Baseball Research, average game time in 1960 was 2:38. In 1990, game time had crept up to 2:48, based on figures compiled by the Elias Sports Bureau. This season, the average nine inning game has been played in 2:51, according to STATS LLC. With all the efficiencies technology has bestowed on the world in the past 50 years, surely fans can tolerate an additional 11 minutes for the playing of a masterpiece.

Selig Tries to Speed Up the Game -- Again

Written by Jordan I Kobritz
Tuesday, 03 June 2008 03:27

The main culprit in the increase in game times is greed on the part of the owners. In 1985, baseball added an additional 30 seconds – up to 2:25 in national games, 2:05 for local broadcasts - of commercial time between innings. More ad time meant higher broadcast rights fees. But when teams and TV took liberties with the new ad rules, the result was an additional 11-15 minutes in the length of games.

Exactly who is complaining about game times is unclear. Jimmie Lee Solomon, MLB's executive vice president of baseball operations, said "We've gotten complaints from fans and members of the media. Our sponsors and broadcast partners really want to get the games rolling."

As mentioned above, it's the media that's primarily responsible for the increase in game times. And fans don't seem to care. The Boston Red Sox have played the longest games in the majors this year, 3:06. But they've sold out Fenway Park for the past five years and are the second biggest road draw in all of baseball.

The quickest games are played by the San Diego Padres, at 2:41. The Red Sox and Padres are also on opposite ends of the spectrum record wise - the Red Sox have the second best record in the American League, while the Padres possess the second worst record in the National League. Which begs the question: Is there any correlation between game times and success on the playing field?

While Selig was roundly criticized for his comments on speeding up the game, it should be noted that the commissioner emphasized that rules already on the books would now be enforced. For example, with no runner on base, Rule 8.04 requires the pitcher to deliver a pitch within 12 seconds of receiving the ball. That rule has been on the books since 1998, but has been enforced as infrequently as the truth emanates from Roger Clemens' mouth.

The focus on shortening game times will be on the players, with the umpires acting as the Gestapo. But it seems absurd to burden the umpires with additional duties - including using a stopwatch to time the pitcher – when the men in blue should be focusing on their own responsibilities, like calling the strike zone. Most umpires ignore the rule book and shrink the strike zone to the size of a postage stamp, resulting in – you guessed it – longer games.

If Selig truly wants to improve the game, there are a number of issues that warrant attention,

Selig Tries to Speed Up the Game -- Again

Written by Jordan I Kobritz
Tuesday, 03 June 2008 03:27

including instant replay, the dangers of maple bats, and baseball's shameless and shameful alliance with the gambling industry. Those issues should keep the commissioner busy enough to allow the players to play the game.

Jordan Kobritz is a regular contributor to the [Business of Sports Network](#). He is a former attorney, CPA, and Minor League Baseball team owner. He is an Assistant Professor of Sport Management at Eastern New Mexico University and teaches the Business of Sports at the University of Wyoming. Jordan can be reached at n n jkobritz@mindspring.com.