

## Ready, set, pitch ... and hurry up!

Get ready for a wild and wacky Major League Baseball season in 2023.

'Pitch clock' was trending on Twitter after just two days of the pre-season schedules in Florida and Arizona, as MLB's new rules to speed up play were enacted.

Worried that baseball games were dragging on too long and that fans were either abandoning the sport, or just falling asleep, the powers-that-be in baseball decided that a pitch clock in every MLB park would speed things up.

Early returns say it's working, but it's also causing a bit of chaos.

On Day 2 of pre-season action, a game between Atlanta and Boston ended with a Braves' batter being called out for not being ready (in his batting stance and facing the pitcher) with eight seconds left on the pitch clock. The umpire called an automatic strike, a third strike, against the batter, and a 3-2 count, bases-loaded situation with the game tied came to a rather quiet conclusion. Spring training games don't go into extra innings and this one ended 6-6.

Did the fans go home happy? No. They booed, but at least they were on time for their dinner reservations.

"I don't think this (rule) was intended for a game to end like that. ... It's a good thing that we're starting (to use the rules in spring) because you never know what might happen," Braves' manager Brian Snitker told USA Today after the game. "That instance right there, it kind of shows you what could happen."

On Day 2 of spring training games, the longest contest went three hours and six minutes; the shortest was a Usain-Boltian 2:15.

The rules call for 15 seconds between pitches, with bases empty. Twenty seconds between pitches are allowed when runners are on base. The batter has to be facing the pitcher and ready to hit with eight seconds left. A violation by the pitcher calls for an automatic ball; if the hitter breaks the timing rule, an automatic strike is called.

Another new rule bans infield shifting — the overstocking of defensive players on a particular side of the field to attempt to foil a hitter with a proclivity for hitting the ball a certain way. In theory, more base hits because of a ban on infield shifts will lead to more rallies, more runs and ... longer games?

At least these potentially longer games could be fan-friendly 9-8 or 14-11 contests rather than 2-1 or 1-0 snoozefests.

So, in 2023, we'll have faster-paced games, more offence and probably more drawn-out arguments between managers and umpires. At least it won't be dull, which is the adjective MLB is trying to eliminate from its game descriptions.

• Comedy guy **Steve Burgess** of Vancouver: "Baseball is back, with new rules. Going to take awhile to get used to the Benny Hill theme playing between pitches."

• Comedy writer **Gary Bachman**: "A 7-year-old baseball umpire seeks Guinness record as world's youngest. His strike zone is from the knees to the shoe tops."

• Comedy writer **Brad Dickson** of Omaha, after **Gov. Jim Pillen** said Nebraska is the greatest place in the world to live, and has the greatest people: "If he'd said this when he was playing football he would've been diagnosed with a concussion."

• Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: "The frisbee dog at the halftime of the University of Louisville basketball game took a big No. 2 on the court. He got the idea from watching the Los Angeles Lakers play."

• And from fark.com, on the same event: "Dog invited at halftime of game to catch frisbees delivers an unmistakable metaphor for entire Louisville season."

• Another one from Kaseberg: "A video shows **Donald Trump** driving his golf cart on the green. In pool this would be the equivalent of taking a shot while standing on the table."

• **Jack Finarelli** quoting from the Official Dictionary of Sarcasm: "Baseball: A spectator sport known as 'the great American pastime' largely because so much time passes while waiting for each game to end."

• **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "I'm not saying the Winnipeg Jets' Stanley Cup championship hopes seem to be going down the drain. But lately the cushions selling in their gift shop are shaped like toilet seats."

• Another one from Currie: "Satellite-imaging shows Greenland's retreating Jakobshavn Glacier moves at a speed of 12 feet per hour. It recently gained consideration as earth's slowest moving body — after the retirement of **Tom Brady**."

• fark.com headline after L.A. Kings' goalie **Jonathon Quick** was traded twice in two days — first to Columbus and then to Vegas the next day: "Quick moved quickly."

• fark.com again: "**Bob Richards**, three-time Olympian and first athlete to ever be featured on a Wheaties' cereal box, pole vaults into the great beyond at 97."

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