

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

MLB RULES CHANGES GIVE NEW MEANING TO 'PLAY BALL!'

Hank Aaron, considered one of the greatest baseball players in history (and a personal hero of mine), once said, "In playing ball, and in life, a person occasionally gets the opportunity to do something great. When that time comes, only two things matter: being prepared to seize the moment and having the courage to take your best swing."

In baseball today, seizing the moment has taken on a whole new meaning. If a player isn't in the batters' box before the pitch clock ticks down to the eight-second mark, they are given a strike. "You've just got to get up there and go," said San Diego Padres star Manny Machado.

It's one of several new rules implemented this season by Major League Baseball, intended to speed the pace of play and increase offense.

America's pastime, it seems, had become too long and boring.

Now pitchers must throw within 15 seconds when bases are empty (20 seconds with runners on base) and are limited to two

"disengagements," such as a pickoff attempt, per plate appearance. Breaks between batters and innings have also been restricted.

The new rules are making a difference. During opening weekend, the average game time was 2 hours, 38 minutes — 28 minutes shorter than last season's average. On Tuesday night, Tampa Bay beat Kansas City, 4-0, in less than two hours (1 hour, 53 minutes, to be exact).

Teams can no longer employ the shift, putting their players out of position against a batter who has a tendency to hit balls to a certain part of the field. Instead, all infielders must play in the infield, with two on each side of second base. Bases have gotten bigger, too, to increase stolen base attempts and reduce the likelihood of collisions.

The new rules come as baseball has slowly lost popularity. According to Statista data, regular-season attendance dropped from 73.76 million in 2015 to 64.49 million in 2022.

New York Times reporter Mike

Schmidt recently appeared on "The Daily" podcast, where he blamed the decline on baseball's addiction to the home run. It began with Babe Ruth, Schmidt said, and has only grown in the era of data analysis. Teams did whatever they could to optimize performance, rearranging their defense in ways that made it harder to get a base hit. It made the home run the preferred (if not only) way to score.

As baseball writer Steve Kettman put it, "The problem with that way of playing ball wasn't just the tedium — it was the death of possibility."

The success or failure of the new rules will lie squarely with baseball commissioner Rob Manfred. According to Schmidt, Manfred has been contemplating changes to the game practically since taking the helm in 2015.

But Manfred was an outsider — a labor lawyer who never played baseball or ran a team. He saw the folly in trying to hastily change a revered institution. So, Manfred launched what turned out to be a

seven-year "research project," getting input from all of baseball's constituents.

That idea — taking time to get the perspectives of others, even those with whom you disagree — is at the core of the work we do at the National Conflict Resolution Center. It's the best way to achieve a positive and enduring outcome.

Manfred put most stock in what fans said they wanted: quicker games, more balls in play, greater shows of athleticism by players. He tested the new rules in minor league play last year — 8,000 games in all. Of course, for Manfred and MLB, the stakes are high: Last year, baseball generated a record \$11 billion in revenue, despite declining attendance.

Beyond the rule changes, the league seems more willing to let players cut loose. Some are wearing mics on the field, offering colorful commentary. As Kettman wrote, "The more (players are) unleashed, the more fans are pulled toward caring. The continuing relevance of baseball

comes from its ability to represent, like movies or theater, a relatable glimpse into the everyday drama of being human."

Of course, there are many more games to be played, in this season and years to come. I wonder if the "faster, freer" version of baseball, as it's been described, will have lasting appeal for younger, instant-gratification generations. And I wonder if traditionalists will sour on an experience that might become more akin to watching a video game.

With any change — even a welcome one — there is a period of adjustment. On Tuesday, Machado struck out due to a pitch clock violation. He was ejected from the game for arguing the decision.

Next time at bat, he'll seize the moment.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com

RECOVERY

FROM B1 therapy, all of which are tailored to each individual's needs and mental health condition, clinical director Sean O'Neill explained.

"They're learning everything from basic relapse prevention to underlying mental health symptoms," he said, "along with all sorts of trauma, coping skills for depression and anxiety and communication skills."

Turner says in starting the center, he wanted to attract people struggling with the stigma associated with getting into treatment or getting help.

In addition to offering substance abuse and mental health treatment, both centers take a holistic approach, helping patients learn to live a healthy life and put that into practice on a daily basis by staying active.

Along with the skateboarding programs, there are other opportunities for clients to stay active, such as yoga, Pilates, music and art classes and gym memberships.

Dr. Igor Koutsenok, a psychiatry professor at the UC San Diego School of Medicine who specializes in addiction research, says exercise is a stress-reducing process that can aid those in recovery.

"When people are going through drug and alcohol recovery — particularly early when they're still in withdrawal — the amygdala in the brain is very active, and this is the reason why people are so anxious," Koutsenok explained. "So reducing the ac-



ADRIANA HELDIZ U-T PHOTOS

Members of the groups Healthy Life Recovery and West Side Recovery skate and hang out at the Encinitas Skate Park in Encinitas in January.

tivity of the amygdala, which typically happens when people exercise, can help in addressing the stress and the anxiety."

That's where skateboarding comes in, O'Neill and Turner say.

"That healthy release of endorphins is a real big piece of a successful recovery," Turner said. "It helps replace those 'cheat code' (endorphins) you get when using whatever substance you were abusing to get that instant gratification."

Creating culture of support

Every week, Turner takes clients from both centers to local skate parks to teach them the basics of skating

and help them keep temptations at bay.

From the discipline and patience to learn a new move to the self-esteem and relationships you build while doing so, he takes elements you have to focus on in skating and relate those to recovery, O'Neill said.

Key to the program is the skating culture and community, O'Neill said.

"A lot of people will say the opposite of addiction is connection," he said. "They spend a few hours together, building friendships, talking about things like recovery," he added.

Those like Ned Gittings, who works at West Side and grew up skateboarding, also

recognize the culture as one that fosters camaraderie.

"Everyone's accepted," Gittings said. "You're out here skating with your homies and part of a big crew. And anything goes — that's what skateboarding is."

Having struggled with addiction himself, Gittings said he was attracted to Healthy Life because of the skating program.

"One of the hardest things in recovery is opening up to getting better because you have a lot of guilt and shame," he said. He says the program helped him let go. "It was the best thing ever. It changed my life and everything in it."

Now, Gittings works with Turner, hoping to give others



The groups Healthy Life Recovery and West Side Recovery use skateboarding as a way of helping members work through their addictions.

help to turn their lives around.

He's not the only one who has been inspired to give back. After graduating from rehab in January, 27-year-old Gabriel Sanchez also started working with Healthy Life.

"It's a privilege to come out here and skate with everyone," said Sanchez, who is nearly 20 months sober now.

"I would not be here if it wasn't for Brandon Turner," he added. "His motivation and positivity make you want to get better — make me want to be a better skater, better person."

For Yalani Scippio, who had previously tried other treatment programs, it's being pushed to be active that has been motivating.

"It's definitely a change to just sitting in groups all day," she said. "They get you out, they teach you a new skill."

Cali Irwin was in a dozen different rehab programs before coming to Healthy Life.

Four months in, the 20-year-old said it's the program's balance of independence and accountability that he's finding helpful.

"I'm really lucky to be here," he said, smiling as he looked across the Encinitas Skate Park at Turner and other clients rolling around.

Among them was Zelayah Maytubby, who was celebrating after her first successful lap around the park. "I've been to rehab before, and it was nothing like this," she said.

It was her first time skating, and although it was scary, she said she instantly felt a "natural high."

"I was sitting (there), just drinking every day — so this is way different than my normal schedule," she said. "When you feel good ... you stay healthy; you don't relapse."

emily.alvarenga@sduuniontribune.com

SAND

cent by state grants, Greer said.

The second, completed in 2012, placed 1.4 million cubic yards of sand taken from offshore deposits on beaches at a cost of \$26 million. The state paid for 85 percent of that project, with the local jurisdictions contributing 15 percent.

State and federal agencies have declined SANDAG's requests to fund the initial stage of a third regional project, so the cities involved are being asked to contribute. However, state and federal money should be available for most of the other costs.

Coastal cities have Oceanside to thank for the agency's efforts to launch a third project, Greer said.

The "genesis for this" was

Oceanside's proposal to build a series of 600-foot-long rock groins, like jetties, to hold sand on the beach, he said. That idea created "a lot of concern" about negative effects the groins could have on cities downstream in the coastal currents that flow primarily to the south.

"We need to do this on a regional basis," Greer said, because all the coastal cities are in a similar situation.

"Everybody wants the same thing, which is sand on the beach," he said. "How you get that sand on the beach, that's where people have different perspectives."

Encinitas and Solana Beach have been working together for more than 10 years on a sand project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. That project has obtained funding and approval and is scheduled to begin next year.

The Encinitas-Solana Beach project is a long-range effort designed to replenish beaches in the two cities every five to seven years for the next 50 years. Greer said all the coastal jurisdictions need to realize that beach replenishment is only temporary.

"You've got to start thinking of the sand as a maintenance project," he said. "It's not going to be a one-time thing. You need a cycle of maintenance, periodically."

SANDAG hopes to coordinate with the Encinitas-Solana Beach replenishment to reduce the costs of the regional project, Greer said.

One of the biggest expenses is the use of a special dredge, like a floating crane, to extract the sand and send it to shore. The 2012 project required bringing a dredge from the East Coast,

through the Panama Canal, which increased the overall costs by \$5 million.

"Now there is a new one in Portland they can get," Greer said. "That's part of the planning studies we hope to have addressed."

With the right timing, the same dredge can be used for both the regional and the Encinitas-Solana Beach projects, he said.

San Diego County beaches have seen sand replenishment projects since at least the 1950s. However, most of these have been efforts to maintain the area's lagoon and harbors and did not take sand from the ocean.

San Diego Gas & Electric Co. began dredging the Agua Hedionda Lagoon in Carlsbad in the 1950s to keep the lagoon deep enough for the Encina power plant to draw seawater for cooling.

SDG&E continued the dredging once every few years, placing the sand on Carlsbad State Beach until recently, when NRG Energy built a new power plant that doesn't require seawater cooling. Since then, Poseidon Water has continued the dredging to keep the lagoon open for its desalination plant.

The Army Corps of Engineers has dredged the Oceanside harbor annually since it was built in the 1960s to keep the entrance clear for navigation. That sand has always been put on the beach south of the harbor, but Oceanside beaches south of the city's pier get little of that material and have eroded to narrow, cobblestone strips in recent years.

Oceanside's annual dredging is scheduled to begin within the next week, and this year's goal is 500,000

cubic yards of material, about twice what was placed on the city's beaches last year. The work usually concludes in time for the Memorial Day weekend.

"We will try to go as far south as possible," said Army Corps of Engineers Public Affairs Specialist Stephen Baack on Friday. "With this year's storms and heavy precipitation, there was more erosion than normal."

Other coastal cities get occasional sand replenishment from lagoon restoration and other opportunities such as building excavations.

All of Southern California's beaches have experienced increasing erosion, widely seen as an unavoidable consequence of climate change.

philip.diehl@sduuniontribune.com

SMOLENS

"Quantification Settlement Agreement" — or QSA to water aficionados — that went into effect in 2003 was the result of a Rubik's Cube of negotiations among a handful of water districts in Southern California with different needs and different legal rights.

Now, expand that to involve much of the western United States and the scope of the challenge comes into focus.

The Imperial Valley is one of the nation's great agricultural regions because of the Imperial district's senior rights to Colorado River water. The agreement resolved some disputes among the IID, the San Diego authority, Los Angeles-based Metropolitan Water District and the Coachella Valley Water District. The result is IID transfers water to the other districts.

San Diego gets the bulk — 200,000 acre-feet annually. An acre-foot of water equals about 326,000 gallons, enough water for at least two typical homes annually. San Diego gets additional water conserved by the lining of the All-American Canal.

Much of the other savings were initially generated from following farmland, but that part of the program was phased out by 2017 as more efficient irrigation technologies and improved water delivery systems were put into place.

This was done with billions in payments to the Imperial district from the other parties to the agreement. The IID says the transfers have taken place while "preserving and enhancing Imperial agriculture output...."

The bottom line is this kind of arrangement is expensive and hard to put together. But then the water source is being depleted,

and stretching it is not cheap.

However the dispute over the Colorado River is settled, it will increase costs for many, if not all, who use its water. That would be a concern everywhere. Many San Diego County residents currently are struggling with high water bills that are projected to increase.

Other jurisdictions are moving toward various water conservation programs. The Upper Colorado River Basin states of Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico launched a pilot program that involved following farm land on a partial-season basis, according to the Public Policy Institute of California.

It turned out there was more demand to participate in the program than there was funding available, according to Kristiana Hansen, an associate professor of agricultural and applied economics at the University of Wyoming.

The notion of leaving agricultural land idle to save water has become somewhat in vogue. Some funding would come from the federal Inflation Reduction Act, which set aside \$4 billion for Western drought aid.

But following land can cause detrimental ripple effects across agricultural communities, hurting farmworkers along with feed and equipment suppliers, among others. Extensive following, in theory, could increase food prices.

The heavy rain and snow haven't changed long-range water projections in California or on the Colorado River. It would take several years of this kind of winter for the river to recover from years of drought. Some water officials still say that a crisis is at hand.

The more immediate issue in California is flooding. Once-depleted reservoirs are so full that water is being released to make room for a spring snowmelt

that is expected to generate devastating floods. Flooding already has caused tremendous damage.

The flooding in the San Joaquin Valley that brought Tulare Lake back from the dead underscores just how much the situation has changed.

"There's a Lake's Meadow of water contained in California's snowpack right now," wrote Hayley Smith of the Los Angeles Times. That's a startling statement, especially when you look at a picture of the "bathtub rings" that show just how low the water level is at the nation's largest reservoir.

Yet, defying projections, Lake Mead's water level is on the rise, if only slightly so far.

Recent dueling proposals to manage the Colorado River showed — surprise — continued deep differences between California and the other states.

It would be nice to think

that more time provided by the phenomenal winter weather might lead to thoughtful, collaborative negotiations — perhaps with a QSA-type deal as part of the settlement.

But comity has rarely been part of the struggle over the Colorado River.

Tweet of the Week
Goes to George Conway (@gtconway3d), media commentator and noted Donald Trump critic.

"Noting that he had prosecuted Mafia cases in the past, @AWeissmann (Andrew Weissmann) said, 'You do not have this behavior from a mob boss. There is a rule in organized crime. You do not do this with respect to prosecutors. You don't do this with respect to the judge. You certainly don't go after their families. It's bad business to do that.' Leave it to Donald Trump to go where Mafia dons will not."

michael.smolens@sduuniontribune.com