

The Designated Hitter Is Another Blow to American Culture

Last week Major League Baseball announced its upcoming return, but they've implemented a few new rules, including forcing the designated hitter rule upon the National League, by which pitchers are denied an opportunity to hit in favor of a batter who does not play a position on the field. This implementation is another brutalist blow against America and its culture – all in the name of maximum efficiency.

Those who gripe about a pitcher's low batting average miss the point. Americans have not merely loved baseball for the past 175 years because of home runs and high scoring games. The most hallowed and memorable games come from a distinct *lack* of offense. Since the 1870's, there have been over [219,000 MLB games played](#), and only [23 of them been perfect games](#). I can't imagine any single item a sporting fan would be more blessed to watch unfold.

Yet some still love the designated hitter. David Harsanyi is one of these individuals, and I'm convinced his inordinate love of the designated hitter must spring from their shared set of initials. In my mind, there's no better explanation for his ill-informed attack on the National League in his [nationally-syndicated column](#).

"Listen, you can pretend that managers are tackling quantum physics every time they pull a double switch," Harsanyi writes, "but it's really not that complicated or interesting."

It might not be that interesting for the average denizen of the 21st century, with their goldfish-like attention span, but they wouldn't find the perfect game very interesting either.

When the greatest accomplishment of a sport is achieved when nothing happens, you have to realize you're engaged in a different sort of pursuit.

We don't need more home runs, we added more than 10 percent to the previous MLB record just last year.

So why should the designated hitter stay out of the baseball lineup?

For starters, the designated hitter brings a Soviet-style job creation system to baseball, one where one person's job is divided into ever smaller parts. Why not have eight designated fielders to go along with the pitcher? The lineup could then be staffed with nine hitters who couldn't run from first to third without taking a short stop to rest. Perfect job-creation strategy.

Yet the proverbial five-tool player loses his sheen when we go this route. When did the philosophy of baseball become so brutally efficient that we ask less of our players and leave no room for artistry or the unexpected? We don't even let pitchers take [their shot at a no-hitter anymore](#).

In doing these things, we fall into coddling, attempting to insulate world class athletes – who get paid millions of dollars to use their bodies to entertain us – from the possibility of injury. That's an impossibility when it comes to any level of sport.

To argue, as Harsanyi does, that pitchers are bad at batting and are “getting worse every year” is to reveal a *condition* of the implementation of the designated hitter, not a reason *for* its implementation. College level baseball has the designated hitter rule, as do many of the minor leagues. If a pitcher is not expected – or even allowed – to hit from college ball until he reaches a National League team's AA affiliate, he is stripped of his ability to hit by lack of opportunity. How then can we expect them to preform against

the best of the best in MLB?

In any event, the 1973-2019 system served the public quite well. Let the goldfish watch the American League, while those of us who appreciate nuance and tradition can enjoy the National League. [Based on 2019 attendance numbers](#), the National League has not been in any danger of fading away due to fan disinterest. Six of the top 10 teams in total attendance were National League teams, while eight of the 10 worst attended teams belonged to the American League.

After all, what is more exhilarating than watching a pitcher like the Brewers' Brandon Woodruff [hit a home run](#) off of a three-time Cy Young Award winner during a playoff game? It is that pure joy of the unexpected that makes it worth watching and re-watching.

Most egregious of all is Harsanyi's flouting of tradition, which he justifies by misusing history:

"Moreover, can anyone seriously argue that the New York Yankees or the Boston Red Sox or Cleveland Indians or Detroit Tigers have less claim to the rituals and traditions of baseball than do the Arizona Diamondbacks or the Colorado Rockies, neither of which even existed when the designated hitter was first implemented?"

To which I enjoin: No of course not, but can you seriously argue that the Atlanta Braves or the Chicago Cubs have less claim to the rituals and traditions of baseball than do the Toronto Blue Jays, Tampa Bay Rays, or Seattle Mariners, none of which existed in 1971, at the Braves centenary and one year after the Cubs'? The National League itself pre-dates the American League by a quarter-century. Harsanyi's selective historicism pays lip service to the importance of tradition, but is all too ready to sacrifice it on the altar of "improvement."

An all too oft-repeated phrase in our modern world is that

something must be changed either to fit the current demands of the public's mood, or, more insidiously, to save the institution itself. In baseball, as in all other aspects of life, we should proceed with caution when contemplating overhauling centuries old rules and the established order. Sometimes, and perhaps especially in baseball, it is the connection to the past that is the very thing that makes something valuable at all.

As Ron Bloomberg, MLB's first ever designated hitter [put it](#): "I screwed up the game of baseball. ... I never thought [the DH] would last this long."

—

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#) and Gab [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!

Image Credit:

Wikimedia Commons-Parker Harrington, CC BY 3.0