



## Pizza Boxes

*April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.*

- T.S. Eliot

Not even T.S. Eliot, when he wrote his epic poem *The Waste Land*, could have foreseen the Oakland A's starting off their 2023 Major League Baseball season losing 18 of 22 games in April.

That is cruelty.

At the beginning of this century, the Oakland A's franchise was the epicenter for competing with the George Steinbrenner Yankees of that time. The team never won a World Series, and rarely won playoff games if they made the playoffs, but the strategy and reliance on numbers became part of the game.

(A's is short for Athletics, a team that originated in Philadelphia, moved to Kansas City, and then to Oakland - where their one-time general manager had the bases colored gold, matching the gold of the A's green and gold uniforms. So, changes in

bases, which is one of the new rules in baseball this season, are not unusual for the A's. Of course, dating back to the 1920s in Philadelphia and some years in Kansas City, losing lots of games is not unusual either.)

Back to Mr. Steinbrenner, who as team owner spent money as if it was water, buying the best players and multiple world championships for the most storied franchise in baseball history.

The A's didn't have the money to compete, so the team's manager - Billy Beane (played by Brad Pitt in the movie "Moneyball," based on the book by Michael Lewis) dug into the statistics known as "sabermetrics," outlined by Bill James (not the jazz pianist).

James created the Society for Baseball Research, which went into agonizingly detailed inspection of a player's on-field ability. The longtime basics of baseball numerology, things like "batting average" and "earned run average" were replaced by on-base percentage, slugging percentage, and something called "spin rates."

The result?

Burdensome and cumbersomely long games where players "shifted" (a word that will come up again) to one side of the diamond or another to take away hits from batters, based on the percentages of where they usually sent the ball off the bat.

Lots of "throws over to first" so that baserunners were held in place instead of racing around the infield.

Insane pitcher changes, sometimes three or four times in an inning, **SOMETIMES TWICE TO THE SAME BATTER!**

A four-hour baseball game was not unusual in 2019.

Major League Baseball, to its credit, has amended many rules for 2023.

For me, the biggest and most positive difference, at least 1/6 of the way into the schedule, is the pitching clock. A pitcher has 15-to-20 seconds to get the ball, decide what pitch to use, and then throw it.

No more looking out toward the center field scoreboard, then picking up the rosin bag and tossing it around, then toeing the mound, moving dirt around by sliding his cleats in the dirt, wiping his brow, taking two deep breaths, then staring at the catcher for a minute while his outfielders, 250-feet behind him, take a nap.

This is old-time baseball, really, and harkens back to the Baltimore Orioles pitching coach in the 1970s, Ray Miller. He was very successful for an Orioles team that had an incredibly profound pitching staff with a very basic philosophy: work fast, change speeds, **THROW STRIKES**.

Amen.





So, this season, whether you're watching a ballgame on TV, computer monitor, or humongous-flat-screen-3 million pixel with high definition clarity, you can see and feel the cultural movement.

For example: are those pizza boxes on the infield? Did someone order three new "diamond vision LED screens" for the ballpark? WHAT IS WITH THE BIG BASES?

None of the above.

That's the first, most obvious rule change: the bases are bigger. The reason is to protect player safety so that there will be fewer "bang-bang" plays and less possibility for getting hurt.

So far, 24-25 games into the new season, I don't see much difference in double plays, stolen bases, or debilitating injuries. So bigger bases? Who really cares?

Except I just know there is a meme coming with a player ordering a Domino's sausage and cheese, then having it delivered out by second base - with players opening the box and taking a slice during put outs, double-plays, and pitching changes.

"The shift," which had become so prevalent as to be part of every single at-bat during some games, has basically been outlawed.

Good.

Both leagues now utilize the "Designated Hitter," whereby the

pitcher never bats (unless he's named Shohei Ohtani), allowing teams to send their best nine hitters up to the plate every game.

It's a new world for the national pastime (I'm not so sure baseball is the national pastime any more, but I'll go with it for this newsletter).

There have already been some oddities.

The games are often less than 3 hours long (there have been quite a few clocking in at 2 hours and 20 minutes, unheard of a couple of seasons ago).

Coors Field in Colorado, notorious for being a "hitters' ballpark" has already seen a couple of 1-0 games (*ONE TO NOTHING IN COORS FIELD!?!? WHAT'S NEXT!?!? SNOW IN JAMAICA?!?*). And pitchers are staying in games longer.

My takeaway? Baseball is better.

My book, IRREVERSIBLE by Taylor Mason, is available at [amazon.com/irreversible](https://www.amazon.com/irreversible) and every online retailer.

Thanks for reading!

Taylor



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