



So, it's easily doable. And in spring training, just as was the case in the minor leagues, it's cutting about 25 minutes off the average time of a game. So, it isn't just the length of the game, it's the pace of the game. And by outlawing shifts, not only does the game look the way it always has looked, the kind of symmetry that you have with the outfielders, more or less being where they're supposed to be and the infield, there's two of them on either side of second base. But the most important thing is that through spring training, ground ball hits are up significantly.

So, that's going to increase offense. It puts more runners on base. The larger bases, people have said they look like pizza boxes. And yeah, it's a little weird, but the effect is along with limiting the number of pickoffs to two per at bat, guys on first base during this at bat, you can only throw over a couple of times that will increase stolen base attempts.

What surveys of fans reveal is that, yeah, they like home runs, but they want the ball in play. They want exciting plays like the stolen base or the ball hit in the gap, or a guy trying to go from first to third, or score from first on a double.

So, I think all those things are going to be more part of baseball. It's kind of a back to the future thing where we go back not to the dead ball era, not to when games were on TV and black and white, but to the '80s and '90s, to the appropriate and pleasing leisurely pace that baseball has always had, but not the too often plotting lethargic pace it's had in recent years, which is not good for the game and certainly not good for the business of baseball.

John Boccacino:

I'm glad to hear as a baseball purist like yourself and someone who is one of the world's most passionate fans and foremost experts in the sport, because I was wondering how a purist and a traditionalist like yourself viewed some of the changes. And it's great that baseball is willing to make these decisions and do a lot of research to study ways to improve the game because it really felt like baseball had a problem with pace of play. And also with the loss of small ball. Like you mentioned, the return of stolen bases and the hit and run. So, do you think this is going to really help bring baseball back to maybe make it a more entertaining product for younger fans possibly to get into it?

Bob Costas:

Yes. I'm sure that it will do that. To what extent, remains to be seen. But it absolutely will help. When it comes to small ball though, now that we have the universal DH, maybe we'll see more hit and run stuff now, maybe certainly we'll see more stolen bases. But I believe that the sacrifice bunt is on the endangered species list because no more pitchers batting.

And it used to be incumbent upon pitchers, they didn't all do it, but they should have all been able to do it to lay down a bunt. And in the National League more than the American League, there were situations where you might bunt. Now, you'll see a guy occasionally bunt for a hit, but the sacrifice, you'll see it now and then, but it will not nearly be as frequent a part of the game as it used to be.

John Boccacino:

It's been said that baseball has really changed from being a national sport to having regional teams, regional markets, and people are interested in the team in their town, but it's not as rabid of a sport as it used to be. Like when you were growing up when New York City was the heartbeat of baseball with Jackie Robinson, with Willie Mays, with Mickey Mantle and these powerhouse teams, when you look at baseball as we currently stand, how would you describe the state of this sport that you love so much?

Bob Costas:

Now,

No wonder it's such an



So, I never really did any broadcasting at all until I got to Syracuse as an 18-year-old freshman. And my first thought, John, after I did a sportscast on WAER and heard the tape back, my honest first thought was, I am doomed. I've got to rethink my whole plan. There's no way in the world that I can be a 10th as good as the people that I grew up listening to and wanting to emulate.

My voice was very thin. There were still vestiges of a New York accent. The pace and the rhythm were anything like what I imagined a good broadcast should be. But I guess I learned pretty quickly and you're going to have more of a maturation curve between your late teens and your early 20s than some other four-year cluster of seasons and years in your life.

So, I guess I got better, significantly better with all the reps that I had at WAER. And then by the time I was a senior, I landed a job at WSYR in Syracuse, calling minor league hockey games on the radio. Being a hockey announcer was not my ultimate ambition, but I was smart enough to know that you take any job early on that gives you experience and gives you a notch on your resume.

So, by that time, by the time I was in my early 20s, I certainly wasn't as good as I hoped that I became at some point, but I was good enough that some professors at Syracuse told me that I had a chance if I worked at it, but I had the potential to be good. And so, at that point, I had enough confidence to pursue it.

John Boccacino:

What helps too, coming to Syracuse, not everybody can get the experience working with the Syracuse Blazers and having a story that is inspired by the movie Slap Shot. I'm not sure if our audience knows the full context of this great story, but do you mind diving in a little bit to your encounter with Bill Goldthorpe and the inspiration for a great hockey movie Slap Shot?

Bob Costas:

Slap Shot's, one of those movies like Major League in baseball that appeals across the generations and it still shows up on cable TV. So, it's entirely possible that someone who's 20 years old has seen Slap Shot and the character Ogie Oglethorpe is directly modeled on Bill Harpo Goldthorpe of the Syracuse Blazers. And he and I were rookies in the Eastern Hockey League in the '73-'74 season together.

And Goldie, who is truly a legendary figure in minor league circles, was arrested by his own account more than 40 times over the course of his life. He was banned from six different leagues, including a senior league at one point, which would be a bit more gentlemanly. And even though he had ability, he was a winger, he could skate, he could score at least at the minor league level. But his primary thing was that he was an enforcer. It was a bad game if he didn't have at least one fight.

And I think he more or less judged people based on whether or not they could win a fight in a bar, in an alley, or better yet on the ice. And he correctly assessed that I didn't really fit that model. So, he and I had an uneasy relationship. I had no problem with him pretty much, but he seemed to have a problem with me.

So, we are on the bus, and of course it was a bus league. If you played in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, you got on the bus at 8:00 in the morning, you stopped at some greasy spoon somewhere so the team could have lunch, seven-hour ride. You wound up at the

And so, I happened to be on this occasion reading the New York Times and he's peering over my shoulder. And the very fact that I'm reading the New York Times must have enraged him. So, he reaches over my shoulder and he snatches the paper out of my hand and he looks around and makes sure that everyone on the bus is watching and that he rips it to shreds and lets it fall on the floor of the bus, like New Year's Eve confetti. And I think I have to have some kind of response to this.

So, I look up at him and I say, "Hey, Goldie, don't be jealous. I'll teach you to read." And few of the players laughed at that, but he was not among those who were amused. And he yanks me out of my seat and he slams me up against the wall of a moving bus. And he reaches up into the rack and pulls down a hacksaw. And a few people, when they hear the story, they say, "What is a hacksaw doing on the bus?" Well, players then had to be their own equipment man, and they used the hacksaw to trim









John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast. My name is John Boccacino, signing off for the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast.