

An illustrated guide to MLB's new rules

Changes step up the league's efforts to create more offense and shorten baseball games

JIM SERGENT/USA TODAY

Some of the biggest Major League Baseball rule changes in history roll out in the 2023 season, but they might ultimately be imperceptible to a casual fan – except for a few digital ticks and a little more action on the field.

Of the three major changes, two represent major philosophical shifts. Together all could combine to produce a few more hits, runs and stolen bases and help fans get home a little sooner.

UMPIRE

AFTER A HIT, OUT OR OTHER OUTCOME

30 seconds

The home plate umpire determines when a play is over. At that point, the next batter has 30 seconds to enter the batter's box.

CLOCK MANAGEMENT

1 Umpires can direct the clock operator to start, stop or reset the time as necessary.

2 Umpires can eject anyone who argues with or challenges their clock management.

A BUZZING TIMER, TOO

Umpires will not need to watch one of four digital clocks placed around the field while also trying to call balls and strikes. They will wear a small device, which straps to an arm or leg, that buzzes when the pitch clock expires.

Spring training results encouraging

According to MLB, the pitch clock shortened spring training games. As of March 22, the length of a spring training game fell by 25 minutes to 2 hours, 36 minutes, and players have adjusted their approaches to the clock. The number of pitch clock violations dropped from two per game in the first week to one per game in the final full week.

BATTER

8 seconds

After the pitcher receives the ball, the player has 8 seconds to be alert to the pitcher – essentially looking in his direction.

NOTE Batters are allowed one timeout per plate appearance.

VIOLATION Automatic strike



PITCHER | WITH BASES EMPTY

15 seconds

The pitcher must begin his pitching motion within 15 seconds of receiving the ball.

VIOLATION Automatic ball



20 seconds

Pitchers get extra 5 seconds with runners on base.

2 pick off throws

Pitchers may stop the pitching process twice during an at-bat – either stepping off the rubber or throwing to a base.

VIOLATION Automatic balk



New pitch clock

- Clock restarts after each "disengagement"
- The limit is reset if a runner advances

No more infield shifts

In 2015, teams shifted their infield players once every 10 pitches. By last season, the percentage of shifts grew to about a third of all pitches, according to MLB's Statcast database. Over the same time, offensive production fell. According to Baseball Reference, the league's combined batting average fell as offenses produced 2,431 fewer hits – about one per game.

SPECIFICS

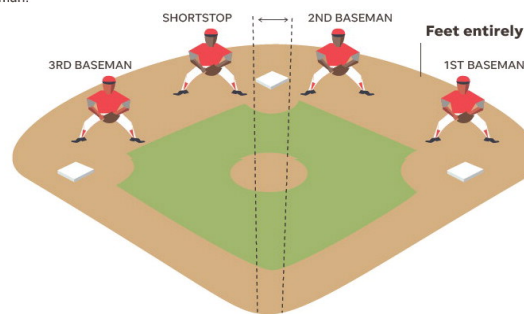
Teams aren't even allowed to swap players if, say, they consider their shortstop a better defender than their second baseman.

However, teams are allowed to deploy an extra infielder – if they're willing to risk just two players in the outfield.

2 players on each side of infield

Shortstop and second baseman must start completely to their sides of second base.

VIOLATION Automatic ball



TEAMS THAT SHIFTED THE MOST IN 2022

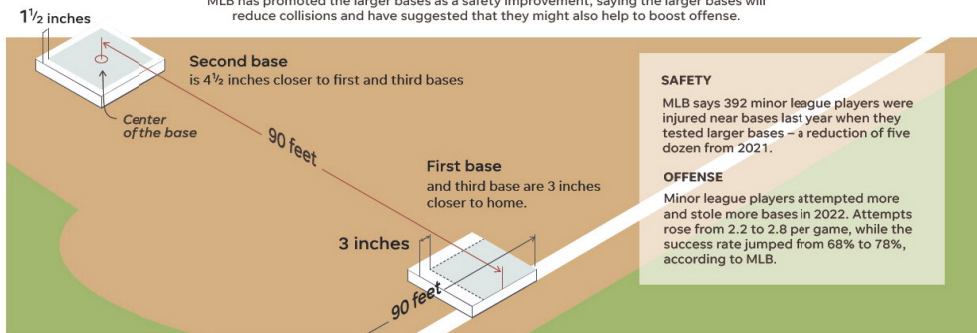
	Pitches	Pct.
1 Dodgers	11,945	53%
2 Blue Jays	11,741	51%
3 Astros	11,515	50%
4 Twins	10,529	45%
5 Mariners	10,370	45%
6 Marlins	10,445	44%
7 White Sox	9,552	39%
8 Cubs	9,275	38%
9 Angels	8,913	38%
10 Mets	8,818	38%
11 Tigers	8,783	38%

TEAMS THAT SHIFTED THE LEAST IN 2022

	Pitches	Pct.
30 Rockies	4,543	19%
29 Guardians	5,085	22%
28 Padres	5,650	24%
27 Yankees	5,653	24%
26 Orioles	5,646	24%
25 Brewers	5,991	25%
24 Royals	6,561	27%
23 Phillies	6,332	27%
22 Diamondbacks	6,425	27%
21 Rays	6,538	29%
20 Cardinals	6,841	29%

Bases increase from 15-inch squares to 18 inches

MLB has promoted the larger bases as a safety improvement, saying the larger bases will reduce collisions and have suggested that they might also help to boost offense.



SAFETY

MLB says 392 minor league players were injured near bases last year when they tested larger bases – a reduction of five dozen from 2021.

OFFENSE

Minor league players attempted more and stole more bases in 2022. Attempts rose from 2.2 to 2.8 per game, while the success rate jumped from 68% to 78%, according to MLB.