

Robot umps getting first MLB test during spring training

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — A computerized system that calls balls and strikes is being tested during Major League Baseball spring training exhibition games starting Thursday after four years of experiments in the minor leagues.

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred is an advocate of the Automated Ball-Strike System, which potentially as early as 2026 could be used to aid MLB home plate umpires, but not replace them.

Starting in 2024, MLB focused testing on a challenge system in which the human umpire makes each original call. Data from the spring training test could cause MLB to make alterations to the system for Triple-A games this season.

How does the Automated Ball-Strike System work?

Stadiums are outfitted with cameras that track each pitch and judge whether it crossed home plate within the strike zone. In early testing, umpires wore ear buds and would hear “ball” or “strike,” then relay that to players and fans with traditional hand signals.

The challenge system adds a wrinkle. During spring training, human umps will call every pitch, but each team will have the ability to challenge two calls per game,

with no additions for extra innings. A team retains its challenge if successful, similar to the regulations for big league teams with video reviews, which were first used for home run calls in August 2008 and widely expanded to many calls for the 2014 season.

Only a batter, pitcher or catcher may challenge a call, signaling with the tap of a helmet or cap; and assistance from the dugout is not allowed. A challenge must be made within 2 seconds, and the graphic of the pitch and strike zone will be shown on the scoreboard and broadcast feed. The umpire then announces the updated count.

MLB estimates the process averages 17 seconds.

Where will ABS be tested?

MLB has installed the system in 13 spring training ballparks that are home to 19 teams. The Florida stadiums, all in the Florida State League, are the stadiums of Detroit, Minnesota, the New York Mets, New York Yankees, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Toronto, plus the ballpark shared by Miami and St. Louis.

Five test sites in Arizona all are shared: the Diamondbacks/Colorado, Chicago White Sox/Los Angeles Dodgers, Cleveland/Cincinnati, Kansas City/Texas and Seattle/San Diego.

About 60% of spring training games are slated for trial, although teams could play vastly different numbers of games with ABS testing. The Diamondbacks are slated for 29 ABS games, while the Cubs have just seven.

When did MLB first start using ABS?

MLB started experimenting with ball/strike technology at the independent Atlantic League in 2019.

A challenge system was tried in 2021 at eight of nine ballparks that make up the Florida State League. ABS was promoted to five Triple-A parks in 2022 and expanded to all Triple-A stadiums in 2023, the robot alone for the first three games of each series and a human with a challenge system in the final three. That system was in place at the start of 2024, but MLB switched to an all-challenge system last June 25.

How successful were teams with challenges last year?

Overall return rate over the full Triple-A season was 51%, with challenges by the defense winning 54% and by the offense winning 48%. Challenges with the two-challenge limit in place averaged 3.9 per game, including 2.2 by the offense.

The success percentage has been

slightly better for video reviews in the major leagues. Teams increased their success rate on video reviews to 53.7% last season, led by the Boston Red Sox at 67.9%.

Just 1.6% of first pitches were challenges, but the figure increased to 3.9% for two-strike pitches, 5.2% for three-ball pitches and 8.2% for full counts.

Challenge percentages were more likely later in the game. While 1.9% of pitches were challenged in the first three innings, 2.5% were challenged from the fourth through the sixth, 2.8% in the seventh and eighth and 3.6% in the ninth.

How has the computer strike zone changed over time?

MLB has changed the shape of the ABS strike zone several times.

It started with a 19-inch width in 2022, then dropped it to 17 inches — matching the width of home plate. Narrowing the strike zone led to an increase in walks and only small changes in strikeout rates.

The top of the striker zone was 51% of a batter’s height in 2022 and 2023, then raised to 53.5% in 2024 after pitchers’ complaints the top had been too low. The bottom of the strike zone has been 27% since 2022 after initially being set at 28%.

A batter’s stance is not taken into

account.

ABS makes the ball/strike decision at the midpoint of the plate, 8 1/2 inches from the front and 8 1/2 inches from the back. The contrasts with the rule book zone called by umpires, which says the zone is a cube, and a strike is a pitch that crosses any part.

Strikeout rates increased 0.5% and walk rates rose 1% in full ABS games and 0.8% in challenge games.

How will ABS impact broadcasts?

Concerned the strike zone box on broadcasts could tip whether to challenge and cause fans to yell at players to challenge, MLB plans to experiment with several broadcast alternatives, among them: show the box but not the ball; show the ball but not the box; and to show only corners of the box.

How can players give feedback?

Dugout iPads available to all teams will have an application called ProTABS that allows players to check pitches against their individual strike zone. Information will update after every plate appearance and players can give MLB comment on single pitches and the overall system.

Yanks, Boone agree to extension

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Aaron Boone and the New York Yankees agreed Thursday to a two-year contract extension through the 2027 season.

Boone is entering his eighth season as manager. The team had exercised his 2025 option in November.

“No other place I want to be. No other team, organization, group of people that I want to be doing this with,” Boone said. “And to get to do it in New York in front of passionate New York Yankee fans, this is the end result that I certainly wanted and glad it was able to work out.”



Aaron Boone

Boone has led the Yankees to a 603-429 record, three AL East titles and one pennant. New York reached the World Series last year for the first time since 2009, losing to the Los Angeles Dodgers in five games.

Boone became the third Yankees manager to lead the team to the post-season in six of his first seven years after Casey Stengel and Joe Torre but hasn’t delivered a title and understands the criticism, saying “if you can’t handle that, then it ain’t for you” and “I came in eyes wide open.”

“I don’t like that we haven’t won a championship yet, so that bothers me,” Boone said. “But I know what I signed up for when I got into this. We talk about it all the time, but I wouldn’t want it any other way. The

fact that it matters as much as it does here and that there’s such a high standard and there’s so much expectations, that so much beats the alternative in my view. I’m confident in what I’m doing. I feel that I’m pretty good at this.”

Boone succeeded Joe Girardi after the 2017 season and was given a three-year contract with a team option for 2021. He agreed in October 2021 to a three-year contract with a team option for 2025.

He was a major league third baseman from 1997 to 2009 and an All-Star in 2003, when New York acquired him from Cincinnati at the trade deadline. His 11th-inning home run off Boston’s Tim Wakefield in Game 7 of the AL Championship Series won the pennant.

Walton’s family selling items from HoF player’s career

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The family of Bill Walton is selling items from the late Hall of Fame basketball player’s career covering his days as a prep player in San Diego to starring at UCLA under coach John Wooden and his time in the NBA along with his broadcasting tenure.

Pennsylvania-based Hunt Auctions said Thursday it will hold the event in June. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the orthopedic department at UC San Diego.

Walton died of cancer last year at age 71.

Among the items for sale are rings from his 1977 NBA championship with Portland, his 1972 and ‘73 NCAA championships with UCLA, his 1986

NBA championship with Boston, his Hall of Fame induction and his NBA 50 Greatest Players. Other items include game-worn jerseys and sneakers.

The auction will feature items related to Walton’s well-known love of the Grateful Dead.

“Our family has been blessed with many priceless experiences as a result of Bill’s basketball career,” his widow Lori said in a statement. “It is in the spirit of the support that fans displayed to Bill throughout those many seasons that we are sharing some of his memorabilia with that same group of special people.”

A preview of select items will be held Saturday at Pauley Pavilion when the Bruins host Ohio State.

THE DAILY SCOREBOARD



Oil City’s 8th grade boys basketball team recently won the FCVAA Conference Championship on its way to finishing 21-1 on the season. Members of the team include (front, left to right) Brycen Fleming, Blake Sandrock, Body Fichter, Carson Reinsel, Ian Slider, Jacob Lingo and Carter Ruditis; and (back, left to right) coach Chris Delmonaco, Lucciano Bricca, Luke Hummel, Kaleb Vitka, Brady Fulmer, Easton Liederbach, Isaiah VanWomer, Joey Kiskaddon, Aiden Drozdo, Austin Kritikos and head coach Cade Cochran.

TRANSACTIONS
BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League ATHLETICS — Agreed to terms with RHP Dylan Turner on a minor league contract. NEW YORK YANKEES — Signed manager Aaron Boone to a two-year contract extension through the 2027 season. National League CHICAGO CUBS — Agreed to terms with INF Justin Turner on a one-year contract. Designated OF Alexander Canario for assignment. MIAMI MARLINS — Claimed RHP Seth Martinez off waivers from the Arizona Diamondbacks. Placed RHP Eury Perez on the 60-day IL. Minor League Frontier League DOWN EAST BIRD DAWGS — Signed RHP Greg Martinez and 1B Yassel Pino. EVANSVILLE OTTERS — Signed RHP CJ Backer. FLORENCE Y’ALLS — Signed RHP Conner Mackay. MISSISSIPPI MUD MONSTERS — Signed 2B Sami De La Rosa. OTTAWA TITANS — Signed RHP Arturo Alvarez and 2B Felix Valerio. Traded UTL Thomas Green to Fargo-Moorhead (American Association). WINDY CITY THUNDERBOLTS — Named Toby Hall interim manager. Signed RHP Greg Duncan and RHP Noah Stants. BASKETBALL National Basketball Association BROOKLYN NETS — Re-signed F Tyrese Martin to a 10-day contract. Waived F Bojan Bogdanovic. CLEVELAND CAVALIERS — Signed F Nae’Qwan Tomlin to a 10-day contract. DALLAS MAVERICKS — Signed C Moses Brown to a 10-day contract. NEW ORLEANS PELICANS — Waived G Javonte Green. UTAH JAZZ — Signed G Jaden Springer to a 10-day contract. FOOTBALL National Football League NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Re-signed OL Ben Brown and Demontrey Jacobs to exclusive rights contracts. HOCKEY National Hockey League CALGARY FLAMES — Placed D Tyson Barrie on waivers. COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS — Recalled C Joe Labate. NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Reassigned F Chase Stillman to Utica (AHL) and G Tyler Brennan to Adirondack (ECHL). Recalled G Nico Dawns from Utica. NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Placed D Dennis Chelowski on waivers. NEW YORK RANGERS — Recalled D Matthew Robertson from Hartford (AHL). Reassigned G Dylan Garand to Hartford. Reassigned D Zachary Jones to Hartford on a conditioning loan. ST. LOUIS BLUES — Recalled C Zachary Bolduc from Springfield (AHL). TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Reassigned F Gabriel Fortier to Syracuse (AHL).

LOCAL BOWLING
WEDNESDAY NIGHT MIX Standings — Billy’s Garage 57-39, Misfits 55-41, Linda Lou’s 52-44, Car Connection 49-47, Tonia’s Creation 46-50, Ausome Cre8tions 45-51, Country Grub 44-52, Pioneer Pins 35-60. Men’s high game — Jack Middleton 215, Gary Plappert 203, Rick Parson 197. Men’s high series — Rick Parson 576, Gary Plappert 537, Jack Middleton 533. Women’s high game — Mary Beth Hawkins 170, Wanda Osgood 163, Gloria Wolford 152. Men’s high game — Mary Beth Hawkins 467, Wanda Osgood 412, Gloria Wolford 372. LET’S TAKE A BREAK Standings — Loose As A Goose 29-7, Sweet ‘N Sassy 27.5-8.5, Pin Pals Express 19.5-16.5, Golden Girls 19-17, Bipolar Rollers 10-26. High game — April Shouey 187, Marilyn Williams 177, Cathy Runninger 160, Janet Aaron 160. High series — April Shouey 497, Marilyn Williams 477, Cathy Runninger 433, Vicki Brooks 433. THURSDAY MORNING LADIES Standings — Dafofdis 29-7, Uhl Tech 22-14, The Green Team 18-18, Sleepy Hollow 16-20, Doc’s Games 16-20. High game — Jill Mellring 171, Cathy Blair 164, Darla Uhl 157. High series — Cathy Blair 445, Jill Mellring 426, Patty O’Polka 424.

THIS DATE IN SPORTS
Feb. 21 1931 — In the first major league night game, the Chicago White Sox play the New York Giants in a 10-inning exhibition in Houston. 1960 — Philadelphia Warriors rookie Wilt Chamberlain sets an NBA record with his fourth 50-point game of the season, scoring 58 in a 129-122 victory over the New York Knicks. 1970 — Bobby Hull scores two goals, including the 500th of his career, in the Chicago Blackhawks’ 4-2 win over the New York Rangers. 1970 — Pete Maravich of LSU scores 64 points in a 121-105 loss to Kentucky. Dan Issel scores 51 for the Wildcats. 1976 — New York’s Red Holzman becomes the second NBA coach, after Red Auerbach, to win 500 games with a 102-98 victory over New Orleans. 1992 — Kristi Yamaguchi wins America’s first Olympic gold medal in women’s figure skating since 1976. Midori Ito of Japan takes the silver and Nancy Kerrigan of the United States wins bronze. 1996 — The Philadelphia 76ers have the worst NBA offensive performance in 41 years in their 66-57 loss to Miami. The 76ers tie the record for fewest points, set Feb. 27, 1955, by Milwaukee in a 62-57 loss to Boston during the first season of the 24-second clock. 2003 — Michael Jordan becomes the first 40-year-old in NBA history to score 40 or more points, getting 43 in the Washington Wizards’ 89-86 win over the New Jersey Nets. 2016 - 58th Daytona 500: Denny Hamlin wins closest finish in race history - by just 0.01s from Martin Truex Jr. 2018 - Winter Olympics: Jessie Diggins and Kikkan Randall become the first Americans in history to win a cross country gold medal (team sprint).

PRO GOLF
Mexico Open at VidantaWorld Par Scores Thursday At The Norman Course at Vidanta Vallarta Vallarta, Mexico Purse: \$7 million Yardage: 7,436; Par: 71 First Round Harry Hall 31-33—64 -7 Jeremy Paul 31-33—64 -7 Kris Ventura 33-31—64 -7 Brian Campbell 34-31—65 -6 Patrick Fichtburn 31-34—65 -6 Aldrich Potgieter 31-34—65 -6 Isaiah Salinda 32-33—65 -6 Alejandro Tosti 32-33—65 -6 Akshay Bhatia 32-34—66 -5 Ryan Gerard 33-33—66 -5 Ryo Hisatsune 34-32—66 -5 Stephan Jaeger 30-36—66 -5 Takumi Kanaya 35-31—66 -5 Francesco Molinari 32-34—66 -5 William Mouw 32-34—66 -5 Chandler Phillips 32-34—66 -5 Sami Valimaki 31-35—66 -5 Aaron Baddeley 31-36—67 -4 Santiago De la Fuente 33-34—67 -4 Will Gordon 30-37—67 -4 Ben Griffin 32-35—67 -4 Jake Knapp 33-36—67 -4 Matthew McCarty 34-33—67 -4 Henrik Norlander 34-33—67 -4 Vincent Norman 35-32—67 -4 Victor Perez 32-35—67 -4 Aaron Rai 33-34—67 -4 Chad Ramey 32-35—67 -4 Patrick Rodgers 33-34—67 -4 Kevin Yu 34-34—68 -3 Mason Andersen 34-34—68 -3 Blades Brown 34-34—68 -3 Ricky Castillo 34-34—68 -3 Joel Dahmen 34-34—68 -3 Ryan Fox 34-34—68 -3 Noah Goodwin 33-35—68 -3 Pdraig Harrington 33-35—68 -3 Joe Highsmith 34-34—68 -3 Rico Hovey 33-35—68 -3 Michael Kim 33-35—68 -3 Ben Martin 34-34—68 -3 Taylor Moore 31-37—68 -3 John Pak 32-36—68 -3 Andrew Putnam 34-34—68 -3 Davis Riley 33-35—68 -3 Kevin Roy 34-34—68 -3 Ben Silverman 33-35—68 -3 Hayden Springer 34-34—68 -3 Jesper Svensson 34-34—68 -3 Jose Luis Ballester 34-35—69 -2 Rafael Campos 36-33—69 -2 Frankie Capan 34-35—69 -2 Quade Cummins 33-36—69 -2 Cristobal Del Solar 33-36—69 -2 Taylor Dickson 33-36—69 -2 Steven Fisk 34-36—69 -2 Emiliano Grillo 34-35—69 -2 Nick Hardy 32-37—69 -2 Justin Hastings 34-36—69 -2

SPORTS SCENE
FRIDAY, FEB. 21 BOYS BASKETBALL PLAYOFFS District 9 Class 2A Coudersport at Keystone, 7 p.m. Port Allegany at Clarion-Limestone, 7 p.m. District 9 Class 3A Cranberry vs. Karns City at Clarion H.S., 6:30 p.m. GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYOFFS District 9 Class 1A Clarion-Limestone at Elk County Catholic, 7 p.m. District 9 Class 3A Karns City vs. Monteau at Clarion H.S., 8 p.m. Cranberry vs. Brookville at Clarion H.S., 5 p.m. SCHOLASTIC WRESTLING District 10 Class 2A Tournament at Sharon H.S. District 9/10 Class 3A Tournament at PennWest Clarion SATURDAY, FEB. 22 GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYOFFS District 10 Class 4A Conneaut Area vs. Franklin at Meadville H.S., 1:30 p.m. SCHOLASTIC WRESTLING District 10 Class 2A Tournament at Sharon H.S. District 9/10 Class 3A Tournament at PennWest Clarion2 DISTRICT 10 BASKETBALL GLANCE DISTRICT 10 BASKETBALL PLAYOFFS BOYS CLASS 2A First round Tuesday, Feb. 18 at Sharon H.S. Sharpsville 56, Union City 42 at Mercyhurst University Eisenhower 72, Wilmington 36 at Farrell H.S. Greenville 56, Cambridge Springs 49 at Meadville H.S. Cochran 69, Maplewood 39 Quarterfinals Friday, Feb. 21 at Meadville H.S. Rocky Grove vs. Sharpsville, 6 p.m. Lakeview vs. Cochran, 7:30 p.m. at Hagerty Center Saegertown vs. Eisenhower, 6 p.m. Mercyhurst Prep vs. Greenville, 7:30 p.m. CLASS 4A First round Tuesday, Feb. 18 at Meadville H.S. Farrell 67, Fort LeBoeuf 61 at Hagerty Center Harbor Creek 47, Girard 44 Slippery Rock 54, Fairview 44 at Sharon H.S. Grove City 56, Franklin 31 at Farrell H.S. Sharon 55, Conneaut Area 41 at Mercyhurst University Oil City 59, Warren 51 Quarterfinals Friday, Feb. 21 at PennWest Edinboro Cathedral Prep vs. Farrell, 6 p.m. Harbor Creek vs. Grove City, 7:30 p.m. at Farrell H.S. Sharon vs. Oil City, 6 p.m. Hickory vs. Slippery Rock, 7:30 p.m. GIRLS CLASS 2A First round Wednesday, Feb. 19 at General McLane H.S. Saegertown 43, Cambridge Springs 38 at Grove City H.S. Sharpsville 57, Union City 49 Mercer 41, Cochran 38, OT Quarterfinals Saturday, Feb. 22 at Farrell High School Kennedy Catholic vs. Saegertown, noon Wilmington vs. Mercer, 1:30 p.m. at Meadville High School Maplewood vs. Eisenhower, noon Lakeview vs. Sharpsville, 1:30 p.m. CLASS 4A First round Wednesday, Feb. 19 at Farrell H.S. Corry 44, Grove City 30 Hickory 45, Sharon 39 Quarterfinals Saturday, Feb. 22 at Hagerty Events Center Fairview vs. Corry, 1:30 p.m. Harbor Creek vs. Hickory, 3 p.m. at Meadville High School Conneaut Area vs. Franklin, 1:30 p.m. General McLane vs. Slippery Rock, 3 p.m.

SPORTS ON TV
FRIDAY, FEB. 21 3X3 BASKETBALL (WOMEN’S) 7:15 p.m. TNT — Unrivaled Basketball League: Rose vs. Lunar Owls, Medley, Fla. TRUTV — Unrivaled Basketball League: Rose vs. Lunar Owls, Medley, Fla. (DataCast) 8:30 p.m. TNT — Unrivaled Basketball League: Vinyl vs. Mist, Medley, Fla. TRUTV — Unrivaled Basketball League: Vinyl vs. Mist, Medley, Fla. (DataCast) AUTO RACING 3 p.m. FS1 — NASCAR CRAFTSMAN Truck Series: Qualifying, Atlanta Motor Speedway, Hampton, Ga. BASEBALL 6 a.m. MLBN — 2025 World Baseball Classic Qualifier: Spain vs. Chinese Taipei, Taipei, Taiwan 6 a.m. (Saturday) MLBN — 2025 World Baseball Classic Qualifier: Chinese Taipei vs. South Africa, Taipei, Taiwan COLLEGE BASKETBALL 4 p.m. MLBN — 2025 Andre Dawson Classic: Alabama St. vs. Grambling St., Vero Beach, Fla. 8 p.m. MLBN — 2025 Andre Dawson Classic: Missouri vs. Florida A&M, Vero Beach, Fla. COLLEGE BASKETBALL (MEN’S) 6 p.m. CBSSN — Bowling Green at Toledo 7 p.m. ESPN2 — Dayton at Loyola of Chicago ESPNU — Manhattan at Iona FS1 — Marquette at Villanova 8 p.m. CBSSN — Kent St. at Miami (Ohio) FOX — Michigan St. at Michigan 9 p.m. ESPNU — Milwaukee at Youngstown St. COLLEGE GYMNASTICS (WOMEN’S) 7 p.m. SECN — LSU at Kentucky 8:30 p.m. SECN — Auburn at Alabama 9 p.m. ESPN2 — Florida at Oklahoma COLLEGE HOCKEY (MEN’S) 6 p.m. BTN — Penn St. at Michigan St. 8:30 p.m. BTN — Notre Dame at Wisconsin COLLEGE WRESTLING 7 p.m. ACCN — NC State at Virginia Tech FIGURE SKATING 8 a.m. E! — ISU: Four Continents Championships, Seoul, South Korea (Taped) GOLF 5 a.m. GOLF — DP World Tour: The Kenya Open, Second Round, Muthaiga Golf Club, Nairobi City, Kenya 4 p.m. GOLF — PGA Tour: The Mexico Championship, Second Round, VidantaWorld, Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico 10:30 p.m. GOLF — LPGA Tour: The Honda LPGA Thailand, Third Round, Siam Country Club, Pattaya, Chon Buri, Thailand 4:30 a.m. (Saturday) GOLF — DP World Tour: The Kenya Open, Third Round, Muthaiga Golf Club, Nairobi City, Kenya HORSE RACING 2 p.m. FS2 — NYRA: America’s Day at the Races 4:30 p.m. FS1 — NYRA: America’s Day at the Races MLB BASEBALL 1 p.m. MLBN — Spring Training: Tampa Bay vs. N.Y. Yankees, Tampa, Fla. NBA BASKETBALL 7:10 p.m. ESPN — New York at Cleveland 9:35 p.m. ESPN — Minnesota at Houston SOCCER (MEN’S) 9:05 a.m. FS2 — Saudi Pro League: Al-Ahli at Damac 11:45 a.m. FS2 — Saudi Pro League: Al-Ettifaq at Al-Nassr 3 p.m. USA — Premier League: Brentford FC at Leicester City SOCCER (WOMEN’S) 3:10 p.m. CBSSN — UEFA Nations League: France vs. Norway, Toulouse, France 5:50 p.m. FS2 — CONCACAF U-20 Championship Group Stage: Trinidad & Tobago vs. Bermuda, Group E, Couva, Trinidad and Tobago TENNIS 8 a.m. TENNIS — Dubai-WTA, Doha-ATP Semifinals: Rio de Janeiro-ATP Quarterfinals