

Baseball aims to ban collisions at home plate

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In this file photo, Florida Marlin Scott Cousins (top) collides with San Francisco Giants catcher Buster Posey in the 12th inning of a baseball game in San Francisco. The collision broke a bone in Posey's leg and injured his ankle, ending his season. Photo: AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Major League Baseball plans to stop players crashing into catchers at home plate. The rule against such collisions could happen as soon as next season and will be in effect no later than 2015.

New York Mets general manager Sandy Alderson made the announcement Wednesday at the winter meetings. Alderson is the head of the league's rules committee. The major factors driving the decision were player safety and concern over concussions. Research is showing concussions can do more damage to the brain than previously believed.

"Ultimately, what we want to do is change the culture of acceptance that these plays are ordinary and routine and an accepted part of the game," Alderson said. The risk to players' health and safety is too great to just keep doing something because it's a tradition.

For a sport defined by its traditions, a ban will be a major step.

The Rose-Fosse Collision

Not everybody agrees with the move.

"You're not allowed to pitch inside. The hitters wear more armor than the Humvees in Afghanistan," Pete Rose said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. "Now you're not allowed to be safe at home plate? What's the game coming to? Evidently, the guys making all these rules never played the game of baseball."

Rose famously bowled over catcher Ray Fosse in the 1970 All-Star game. Rose insists Fosse was blocking the plate without the ball, which is against the rules.

Rose was banned for life in 1989 following a baseball gambling investigation.

"Since 1869, baseball has been doing pretty well," Rose said. "The only rules they ever changed was the mound (height) and the DH. I thought baseball was doing pretty good. Maybe I'm wrong about the attendance figures and the number of people going to ballgames." DH refers to the designated hitter in an American League lineup who does not play a position in the field.

Alderson said the wording of the rules change will be presented to team owners for approval next month.

The wording of how the rule will be enforced is still being figured out, he said. "We're going to do a fairly extensive review of the types of plays that occur at home plate to determine which we're going to find acceptable and which are going to be prohibited."

Concussion Concerns Throughout Sports

Approval of the players' union is needed for the rule to go into effect. The union is the group that represents the players.

The union declined comment while a review of the proposed change takes place.

Discussion to limit or ban collisions has gotten more serious since May 2011, when San Francisco Giant Buster Posey was injured by Florida Marlin Scott Cousins. Posey, an All-Star catcher, broke a bone in his lower left leg and tore three ligaments in his ankle. The injury kept him out of the game for the rest of the season.

Posey returned to win the National League batting title and Most Valuable Player award in 2012. He led the Giants to their second World Series title in three seasons.

"This is, I think, in response to a few issues that have arisen," Alderson said. "One is just the general occurrence of injuries from these incidents at home plate that affect players, both runners and catchers. And also kind of the general concern about concussions that exists not only in baseball but throughout professional sports and amateur sports today. It's an emerging issue, and one that we in baseball have to address, as well as other sports."

The National Football League reached a settlement last summer in a lawsuit by former players who got concussions. The NFL agreed to pay the players \$765 million. Last month, a group of hockey players sued the NHL.

It Could Get Complicated

Former catchers Joe Girardi, Bruce Bochy and Mike Matheny attended Wednesday's meeting. All three of them now manage major league teams.

"I don't think it's completely sparked by anything that's happened in baseball as much as what's happening outside of baseball and how it's impacting people and impacting the welfare of each sport," said Matheny.

Not all the catchers were in favor banning the collisions.

"I lost time as a catcher being run over a couple different times, but I thought it was part of my job and I enjoyed the contact," said Girardi, the New York Yankees manager. "Now I'm not so sure that everyone enjoys contact. But I love football, so I liked it."

MLB intends to have varied levels of punishment.

"I think there will be two levels of enforcement," Alderson said. "One will be with respect to whether the runner is declared safe or out based on conduct. So, for example, intentionally running over the catcher might result in an out call." But enforcement may also carry over off the field, he explained, in the form of fines and suspensions.

But writing out the rules will likely be complicated.

"Does it include at every base or just home plate?" Baltimore Orioles manager Buck Showalter asked. "What's considered blocking the plate and how do you define all of it?"