

Realignment and Why the DH is Likely Coming to the National League

Written by Maury Brown
Thursday, 04 April 2013 16:34



Former Reds owner Marge Schott might be screaming from the afterlife if the DH comes to the National League

Call it what you will. Say it's the further erosion of the history of the game of baseball, but it's time for the American League and the National League to come together on the use of the Designated Hitter. This isn't some far flung discussion about the merits of pitchers hitting or not (although, there's ample articles and discussions about that), it's about what realignment has and hasn't done.

For the first time in MLB history, a National League team in the Astros has moved to the American League. This allowed for a balanced scheduled and put the AL and NL at 15 clubs a piece. The flip side is, because of the odd number, interleague is now spread out across the entire season. And while there's been talk of addressing the DH for sometime, this balancing to 15 clubs a piece might be a forcing function.

The only way that you get away from daily interleague due to the odd numbers in each league would be the addition of one club in each league (don't even think about contraction), and in speaking with several executives, that doesn't seem in the cards in the near future. As one exec said, "Expansion of the league is something that has to be done carefully. There doesn't seem to be a push for it currently."

There are concerns about the use of the DH across both leagues, and it's more concrete than

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just a matter of holding to traditions. This is about increases in player payroll that come with the position leaping over to the National League.

According to the MLBPA's annual report on average salaries that comes out each December, for 2012, there were seven DHs in the AL that played in 80 or more games with an mean salary of \$8,009,112; a sizeable sum. That group included Billy Butler, Adam Dunn, Edwin Encarnacion, Kendrys Morales, David Ortiz, Luke Scott, and Delmon Young. It's here that National League execs will certainly focus. While Ortiz and Dunn skew the mean, it highlights the costs associated to the position. By comparison, the average DH salary for 2011 in the MLBPA report was higher still at \$9,324,807. Historically, the DH has been the focus of veteran players, which makes some sense as career longevity is increased by not having them in the field on defense. Of the players listed in the MLBPA report, the average major league service time was 6.935, which is above the free agency threshold. Here are the players from the report by service time and salary in 2012:

| Player |
|--------|
|--------|

| Club ('12) |
|------------|
|------------|

| ST ('12) |
|----------|
|----------|

| 2012 Salary (millions) |
|---------------------------|
|---------------------------|

| Notes |
|-------|
|-------|

| |
|-------|
| Ortiz |
|-------|

| |
|-------|
| R Sox |
|-------|

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13.048

\$14.575

FA Arb

Dunn

W Sox

10.074

\$14.000

Butler

Royals

4.102

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\$8.000

Arb

Young

Tigers

5.034

\$6.750

Arb

Encarnacion

B. Jays

6.085

\$3.500

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Morales

Angels

4.057

\$2.975

Scott

Rays

6.144

\$2.750

FA signing

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And while NL owners and GMs may fret about the additional salary they would take on at the DH, it is one part of the reason that the MLBPA would back the move of the DH to the National League as opposed to removing it from the American League. The move would increase salaries for players, extend career life (not only for position players, but potentially pitchers in the NL that could get injured on the base paths). Conversely, the union for the players is never going to allow the DH to go away as it lowers average salary across the league, and puts players out of work.

So, the purest be damned, the DH is most likely coming to the National League. Expansion doesn't seem to be in the cards anytime soon, the clunky matter of playing interleague everyday due to the 15-15 balance of teams after realignment is moving you closer to it, and let's be honest, it's not like this hasn't happened in other sports. Yes, it's baseball with its sense of quirky history which is endearing and makes it unique. But, if the NFC-AFC merger in the NFL can happen, well, it's a precedent that somewhere, someone is bringing up to make a case for the DH in the National League.



Maury Brown is the Founder and President of the [Business of Sports Network](#) , which includes The Biz of Baseball, The Biz of Football, The Biz of Basketball and The Biz of Hockey. He [writes for Baseball Prospectus](#) and is a [contributor to Forbes](#)

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