

The Guide to Elevating Your Baseball Play-by-Play Prep

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Off-Season Prep

Whether you are broadcasting a college or minor league season or a six-month major league marathon, getting an early start on next season's prep work can be vital. You should take the requisite time off to recharge from the schedule you just endured, but after a few weeks of rest, be ready to get back to the business of mining information for the next season.

You may find that there really isn't a whole lot of new information available on players until later in the off-season, but you can at least start to formulate your templates until that info starts to become available. Player articles and features usually don't start rolling in until later in the winter months, but it's always a good idea to search anyway. This is also a great time to zero in on what type of system you want to use for the upcoming season. More on some examples of game prep that I have used a little later, but understand that the more you accomplish in the off-season, the less you will have to deal with as the season approaches.

If you are scheduled to broadcast spring training games, the off-season is an important time to get an early jump. I used much of the off-season to formulate my spring training prep as the team rosters began to take shape. I made sure to have a player bio worked up on everyone on my club's 40-man roster as well as minor leaguers that received an invite to spring training. This info didn't typically become available until January or February, but the sooner you can knock this out, the better.

As for prep regarding regular season games, I found that I gathered a lot of great feature material on players in the off-season. News outlets (internet and print) tend to produce a lot of feature material because club's want to keep their teams in relevant in the winter months, so they will push feature articles to the local writers.

My system in the winter consisted of checking the out-of-town newspapers for any stories that may have been written about players on other teams. In other words, I would check the Baltimore Sun every day for information on Orioles players, or the St. Pete Times for anything on Rays players, etc... I typically would save each article in a folder I created for each team. As the season approached I could then go through each folder to read each article and use the information as I wanted.

I also found that the off-season was a good time to delve into statistical trends from the previous season. I was never really interested in overloading the broadcast with too many stats, but I believe some numbers can tell an interesting story. I would spend a lot of time on FanGraphs to verify certain trends that I may have noticed during the season. For example, I would research the percentages of each pitch a starter would throw, first-half numbers compared to second-half, opponents average vs lefties, etc...

The main point to remember in your preparation is to get as much of it completed as possible before the spring rolls around. You'll have plenty on your plate when the new season arrives and you'll be happy you lightened the load with your off-season prep.

Utilizing The Internet

Game preparation today is a much easier process than it was when I first broadcasted professional baseball in the mid-80s. Back then, my prep consisted of scouring the stat sheet and hanging around the batting cage and locker room flushing out nuggets of information. That is still a vital part of game prep. However, the volume of information available on the internet today has taken game prep to a new level.

The following sites provide a wealth of information if you want to delve into analytics for major league players: **fangraphs.com**, **baseballsavant.com**, **baseball-reference.com** and **retrosheet.org**. These sites are good for statistical analysis for major league players. If you are broadcasting minor league baseball, independent baseball or college baseball, your best option is to utilize hometown newspapers and outlets. Aside from scouring the newspapers from the individual town the teams play in, here is a list of other websites that provide coverage for a league you may be broadcasting in:

Independentbaseball.net--News and information on professional independent minor league baseball leagues.

Baseball-reference.com/register/affiliate.cgi--Information on every club's minor league affiliates can be found in one spot at: <https://www.baseball-reference.com/register/affiliate.cgi>

Baseballamerica.com--Provides coverage of baseball from the major leagues down to the high school level. Subscription is required for the best coverage, but it is well worth it.

Milb.com--Coverage of minor league baseball with news, stats and scores.

[D1Baseball](http://D1Baseball.com)--A terrific site dedicated to covering Division 1 baseball schools.

Baseballprospectus.com--A strong collection of baseball information including features, prospect rankings and more.

It is also worth mentioning that more focused information on most players can be found by simply conducting a search with your preferred search engine. If for example, you seek information about specific player, regardless of the level, simply entering their name in a search will provide the latest information about that player. It seems simple, but it is an often overlooked method of getting the latest info on players. Setting up keyword alerts is also a great way to make sure you are made aware of information that can be of great use to you. For instance, setting up keywords for each team you will cover and their opponents can send information to your mailbox. If you are broadcasting for a minor league club or a college team, set up a keyword for your team and every other squad in the league or conference.

Utilize apps such as **[Pocket](http://Pocket.com)** to store articles so that you can filter through them at a later time to utilize the information.

Make It a Daily Routine

It takes discipline to prepare for a lengthy baseball season. Major league seasons include a 162-game schedule and minor league schedules cover 142 games. Even college baseball schedules can be busy. To be prepared for the long haul, you must be disciplined enough to invest the time necessary to make sure you are sufficiently armed with enough prep to keep your broadcasts interesting.

I found that creating a routine was the best way to make sure I got my work done. It's like exercising, if you carve out a certain time every day to get your work in, it becomes a habit. Forming a research habit will help you reach your goals.

Every day during the off-season, I would set aside an hour or so to research the team I was covering and others in the league. During the season, I would do the same thing, however the time was rarely consistent because of travel and the game schedule. The main point though, was that I made sure I was disciplined enough to do it each day. At least as much as was humanly possible. The honest truth is that life often gets in the way and schedules have to be adjusted. You won't be able to get it done every single day, but again, forming the habit will help to keep you on track.

Make sure to form small habits first and then build upon them. For instance, start with researching your team everyday. Then, as you form that habit, incrementally add to it. Begin to add other clubs and so on. Then add specific players or topics. Secure the small habits first and then add to them.

You Still Need to Work The Clubhouse

One of the most important sources of information is the locker room. Cultivating relationships with players, coaches and the manager is probably more important than any information that you can find on the internet. While it is important to gather information from the sites provided above, nothing will match the insights you will get from the relationships you form with those that play the game.

The locker room can be an intimidating place. The sooner you become comfortable interacting with players on their home turf (the clubhouse), the better off you will be. My first year broadcasting in the major leagues was 1995 with the Angels in Anaheim. To be honest, I was intimidated walking into a major league locker room my first year. I had eight years of experience in the minor leagues to that point, but this was a different level. I had seen these guys play on TV for years. The biggest names in the game were in these clubhouses. Roger Clemens, Derek Jeter, Mark McGwire, Barry Bonds and Alan Trammell to name a few. I'll admit, I tiptoed around the clubhouse in the beginning.

Then while walking into the Angels clubhouse one day, Angels outfielder Garret Anderson pulled me aside and suggested that I introduce myself to more guys and walk around with more confidence. He could sense that I was a little intimidated. I'm grateful for his advice because it gave me confidence and realized that I belonged.

It was a turning point for me because some of the best game prep I gathered came from the conversations I would have over the years with players and coaches. It is important to utilize their expertise. No one can give you better insights than those that play the game. Stats are important, but humanizing the players is more important in my opinion. Learn what they are all about and what makes them tick. It will help you connect with listeners and viewers when you humanize the players and tell their stories.

One other point regarding clubhouses. The opponents have one too. Make sure to visit both clubhouses so that you are prepared to tell both team's stories.

Keep a Notebook From Day One

Understanding that the baseball season is a marathon is important with how it relates to your game prep. In other words, a whole lot will happen between the first game of the season and games played late into the summer. It's important to preserve your early notes so that you can refer to them later in the year.

Keep a book of your notes in a system that is easy for you to refer to as the season progresses. You'd be surprised at how many times a piece of information that you gather early in the year will become useful in a month or so. Therefore, look at your prep as a whole as opposed to individual notes for individual games. You will build on your collection of information with each passing game. What was said last week by a player or manager may have implications on a future game, not just the day it was stated.

Your system can be as simple as using a single notebook and adding to it daily, to segmenting your notes by opponents. Simply make sure that whichever system you choose, you are able to easily refer to your notes quickly.

My system was to segment notes by opponents as opposed to keeping a running ledger on the season. That system has its pros and cons. I was easily able to refer to notes quickly as it related to the season series against the current opponent, but it was more of a challenge if I wanted to refer to a note I had made earlier in the year against a different opponent.

Whichever system you prefer, make sure to highlight important notes throughout the year so that you can easily access them as the season progresses. Invariably a comment that a manager or coach makes about a player or specific strategy will almost certainly be useful or pertinent later in the season.

Find a System That Works For You

All of the game prep in the world will not make a difference if you can't find what you are looking for when you need it. When you are in the throws of broadcasting a game, you must be able to access your notes as quickly as possible or your broadcast may suffer.

I had plenty of instances early in my career when I fumbled through a pile of notes while I was on the air, only to forgo locating a nugget of information because I had to call the game. If I had a system in place to help me seamlessly find information quickly, my broadcasts would have been a lot better.

I finally settled on a document for each team that included player bios, starting pitchers information and more. Here is an example of the document I used for the Tampa Bay Rays in 2019 when I was broadcasting for the Red Sox.

Tampa Bay Rays (90-72 3rd A.L. East)

****2013 last time in the post season.** 4 Times in the post season under Maddon

****The Rays used a team record 23 rookies** last season. They received 604 innings-nearly half the team's innings-from **rookies**.

****Rays were 51-30 at Tropicana Field** last year. Only the Red Sox and Yankees had more home wins in the majors.

Additions: Mike Zunino, Avisail Garcia, Charlie Morton, Yandy Diaz, Emilio Pagan.

Subtractions: Mallex Smith, Romo, Jake Bauers, C.J. Cron, Carlos Gomez.

The Opener: Cy Young winner Blake Snell made 31 starts, no other regular starter pitcher made more than 17. Ryan Stanek, Sergio Romo and Hunter Wood all started games. The Rays ERA decreased after the strategy was employed.

Attendance: Rays averaged 14,259 per game-lowest in the American League.

Payroll: Team with lowest payroll in baseball by far at \$56 million won 90 games. Highest paid player this year is Charlie Morton at \$15 million.

Not much Power: Lost out on Nelson Cruz and Edwin Encarnacion and designated C.J. Cron. Acquired Yandy Diaz but he hasn't hit many homers.

Prospects: Wander Franco ranked among the top prospects in baseball. Shortstop is 18 Yrs

Four outfielders:-Not only shifting lefties with high pull percentages but they are playing four outfielders leaving the entire left side of the infield empty. They have done it to Chris Davis, Justin Smoak and Bryce Harper this year. **When Maddon managed the Rays** he used 4-man outfield against David Ortiz and Jim Thome. "Get into a hitters head."

Spring Home: Tampa has been the spring home of seven Major League clubs: **Chicago Cubs** (1913-16), **Boston Red Sox** (1919), **Washington Senators** (1920-29), **Detroit Tigers** (1930), **Cincinnati Reds** (1931-42; 1946-87), **Chicago White Sox** (1954-59) and **New York Yankees** (1996-).

Tampa Products

The Tampa Bay area has produced a multitude of Major Leaguers, including Hall of Famers **Al Lopez** and **Wade Boggs**, **Lou Piniella**, **Tony LaRussa**, **Dwight Gooden**, **Gary Sheffield**, **Fred McGriff**, **Tino Martinez**, **Howard Johnson**, **Dave Magadan** and **Brad Radke**.

Starters: Had a streak of 35 2/3 scoreless innings by starters. Longest streak since Nationals 47 1/3 in 2015

Blake Snell 6-4 215 26 Yrs Seattle, WA

FB (95), CV, CH, SL—Curveball usage way up thin year

Rays first round pick in 2011

Rays renewed him to a contract barely above major league minimum but eleven days later signed him to a **five-year, \$50 million** contract in late March.

Struck out 13 Rockies batters in his 2nd start of the year, tying a career high. Followed that with an 11K performance in a win over CWS

Made 31 starts last year (21-5 1.89) winning the Cy Young Award in a close vote over Justin Verlander (169-154). Also finished 9th in MVP voting.

Won his last 9 straight decisions of 2018. (9-0 1.03)

Lefties hit only .135 against last year. **Changeup** 19% last year. Opponents hit a career low .195 against his changeup last year. Only Marco Gonzalez and David Price threw more changeups last year. **Fastball** reached 98 MPH last year. Averaged 95.8 MPH, third highest in the A.L. behind Severino and Cole.

Threw **more sliders and curveballs** last year making his elevated FB more effective.

Close friends with Chris Archer, spending a lot of time together away from the ballpark. Credits Archer for a lot of his success

Owns 225-250 pairs of shoes. Has over 5000 subscribers on his twitch channel to watch him play video games. (Twitch is an online service that allows you to broadcast video game plays).

As a teen he was 5'6" with a size 13 shoe. His dad Dave, a former minor league pitcher, told him he would grow into his body. By his junior year in HS he was 6'3". Before the 2015 season his dad told him he had to get more serious about his work ethic or he wouldn't make it. He went 15-4 that year 1.41 ERA at three levels and was named Minor League Player of the Year.

Bullpen

****Rays pen lead all of baseball in strikeouts last year with 754**

Chaz Roe 6'5" 190 32 Yrs Steubenville, OH. FB, SL (64%)

- Grew up a pirates fan-great Uncle is Bill Mazeroski (Game 7 of the 1960 WS with a HR vs Ralph Terry-won 8 gold gloves)
- Rays are his 10 organization-Big league time with NY, AZ, BAL, ATL, TB
- Wicked slider, opponents hit only .170 against last year

Jose Alvarado 6'2" 245 23 Yrs Maracaibo, VZ. FB (98) SL (92) CV

- Hunts iguanas in the off season
- Made 70 appearances last year 2.39 ERA
- Strikeouts per nine of over 11 last year
- Hit 100 MPH last April against the Red Sox
- Had a 1.47 ERA against the Red ox and Yankees last year.

Diego Castillo 6'3" 250 25 Yrs Cabrera, DR. FB (98) SL

- Youngest of 10 children (6 brothers and 3 sisters)
- 43 appearances and 11 starts in 2018 3.18 ERA
- Had a strikeouts per nine of over 10
- WHIP of 0.95last year

Yonny Chirinos 6'2" 240 25 Yrs VZ. FB (94) SL SPLT

- Made 18 appearances and 7 starts in 2018
- Threw 5 scoreless innings at Fenway last April in his first start of the year

Jalen Beeks 5'11 200 25 Yrs Fayetteville AR. FB (92) CT CV CH

- Acquired from the Red Sox in Nathan Eovaldi trade last year
- 12 round by the Red Sox in 2014
- Ryan Stanek's teammate at Arkansas
- Was 5-0 for the Rays after the trade

Wilmer Font 6'4" 250 28 Yrs VZ. FB (94) SL CV SPLT

—TX, LAD, OAK

—Prone to the HR (12 in 44ip last year)

Jake Faria 6'4" 225 25 Yrs La Palma, CA. FB (92) SL CV CH

—Grew up five minutes from Angels Stadium. In HS modeled his delivery after Jared Weaver

—Gahr HS in Cerritos, CA also produced Chris Devenski, Shane Mack, Kris Medlen

Adam Kolarek 6'3" 215 30 Yrs Baltimore, MD. FB (89) SL CH

—Originally selected by the NYM in the 11th round 2010 out of Maryland

—Has been released twice, a rule 5 pick and twice signed as a free agent

—Dad Frank played professionally in the A's organization in the 70's and 80's

—Played first base for one batter, so he could stay in the game then moved back to the mound to face two left handed hitter

Hunter Wood 6'1" 175 25 Yrs Rogers, AR FB (92) CT CH

—Appeared in a career high 29 games last year 3.73 ERA

—Made 8 starts

—Averaged a strikeout per inning in the big leagues last year

Emilio Pagan 6'3" 205 27 Yrs Simpsonville, SC. FB (96) SL CV—Fairly even split

—Father was born in PR so he played for Puerto Rico in the 2017 WBC

—Acquired from Oakland in a three team trade with Texas in December

—In three stints with the A's he made 55 appearances last year.

—Averaged a strikeout per inning last year

Michael Perez- Cash says he has an elite arm. Adequate framer, block balls well.

I only included the bio sheet for Blake Snell who started that night, but a sheet was made for every starter in the rotation. I found this system worked for me because it featured all of my pertinent information in one, easy to use, document. In addition to this prep, I would also notate hitters streaks and trends on that night's scorecard.

It took me many years to find a system that worked well for me. I did everything from creating index cards for each player to finally settling on creating a Word document for each team that we would play. It's not a one size fits all. I have seen announcers who still use individual index cards and I have seen others that have everything neatly formatted on their computers. It all comes down to personal preference and what works best for you. I tried many different methods before I realized that I was most comfortable using my computer to set up prep pages for each team and player I would cover. Don't be afraid to ask other announcers what system they use. You might find that they do something different that may fit your needs.

You'd Rather Have Too Much

You can never have too much prep when it comes to baseball. There is no clock to control the time of the game. You could be broadcasting a two-hour game or be saddled with a four-hour marathon. You just don't know. My approach was to expect a marathon when prepping for each game.

Most nights you will use 20% to 50% of the material you have prepared. I can't tell you how many times I have cultivated storylines or dug up background information that I swore would make it on the air, only to have it end up a lonely side note on my scorecard that never saw the light of day. It's part of the business. There are nights when the game does not allow you to use everything you have prepared.

The game is either too engaging or fast paced. That's ok. Save it for another broadcast. There are also nights where I have used every piece of prep before we have gotten out of the first inning because the inning took 45 minutes to play. You can never predict the pace of the game you will call that night. Your only defense is to be over prepared.

On days where you have an abundance of prep at your disposal, fight the urge to jam it in during the first couple of innings the game, especially if you have additional games left in the series.

Build Your Base And Keep Adding

Make sure to preserve your prep once your season is over. Whether you are broadcasting for a college team, in the minors or the big leagues, you are bound to have many of the same players the following season. Keep your base of prep and add to it each year. You will always find room for your past information with each passing season.