

'Robot umpires' debut in independent Atlantic League

By **ROB MAADDI**
Associated Press

YORK, Pa. — "Robot umpires" have arrived.

The independent Atlantic League became the first American professional baseball league to let a computer call balls and strikes Wednesday night at its All-Star Game. Plate umpire Brian deBrauwere wore an earpiece connected to an iPhone in his pocket and relayed the call upon receiving it from a TrackMan computer system that uses Doppler radar.

He crouched in his normal position behind the catcher and signaled balls and strikes.

"Until we can trust this system 100%, I still have to go back there with the intention of getting a pitch correct because if the system fails, it doesn't pick a pitch up or if it registers a pitch that's a foot-and-a-half off the plate as a strike, I have to be prepared to correct that," deBrauwere said before the game.

It didn't appear deBrauwere had any delay receiving the calls at first, but players noticed a big difference.

"One time I already had caught the ball back from the catcher and he signaled strike," said pitcher Daryl Thompson, who didn't realize the technology was being used until after he disagreed with a call.

Infielder L.J. Mazzilli said a few times hitters who struck out lingered an extra second or so in the batter's box waiting on a called third strike.

"The future is crazy, but it's cool to see the direction of baseball," said Mazzilli a son of former big league player and manager Lee Mazzilli.

The umpires have the ability to override the computer, which considers a pitch a strike when the ball bounces and then crosses the zone. TrackMan also does not evaluate checked swings.

Former big leaguer Kirk Nieuwenhuis doesn't like the idea of giving umpires veto power.

"If the umpire still has discretion, it defeats the purpose," said Nieuwenhuis, who batted .221 with 31 homers in 978 at-bats with the Mets, Angels and Brewers.

About 45 minutes before first pitch, the public address announcer directed fans to look up at the black screen hanging off the face of the upper level behind the plate and joked they could blame the computer for any disagreements over calls.

"This is an exciting night for MLB, the Atlantic League, baseball generally," said Morgan Sword, MLB's senior vice president of economics and operations. "This idea has been around for a long time and it's the first time it's been brought to life in a comprehensive way."

The experiment with radar-tracking technology to call balls and strikes was originally expected to begin at the start of the season but experienced some delays.

Atlantic League President Rick White said it's going to



AP Photo/ Julio Cortez

Home plate umpire Brian deBrauwere, left, huddles behind catcher James Skelton, of the York Revolution, as the official wears an earpiece during the first inning of the Atlantic League All-Star minor league baseball game Wednesday in York, Pa.

be implemented league-wide over the next few weeks.

"After that, we're relatively confident that it's going to spread through organized baseball," White said. "We're very excited about what this portends not only for our league but for the future of baseball. What we know is technology can help umpires be more accurate and we're

committed to that. We think the Atlantic League is being a pioneer for all of the sport."

Sword said MLB hasn't received much pushback from umpires.

"One of our focuses is not to replace the umpire," Sword said. "In fact, we're trying empower the umpire with technology. The home plate umpire has a lot more to do

than call balls and strikes and he's going to be asked to do all of that. We're in touch with our umpires' union and this is the first step of the process."

DeBrauwere had no issue with it.

"This is just another plate job and I just get a little help on this one so I feel very relaxed going into this one," he said.

Strike zones are determined according to the average for players of that height unless there's already information on a player's particular strike zone if they've played in the majors at some point.

Pitcher Mitch Atkins noticed pitches higher in the strike zone were called.

"Technically, they're strikes, but umpires never called them," Atkins said.

MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred said there's no timeline on when the technology will be used in the majors.

"We need to see how it works, first in the Atlantic

League and then probably other places, meaning other parts of minor league baseball, before it comes to Major League Baseball," Manfred said. "Kind of gets back to the question that I was asked earlier about the baseball, we hear all the time from players, why don't we have an electronic strike zone, why don't we have an electronic strike zone? We try to be responsive to those sorts of expressions of concern. We have spent a lot of time and money on the technology. It's not just to address player concerns."

"It obviously has broadcasting uses. That same technology can be used in our broadcast, which has value to our fans. But we feel it's incumbent upon us — people that play the game raised this as something that could make the game better. We kind of feel it's incumbent on us to figure out whether we could make it work. And that's what we're doing."



AP Photo/Sean D. Elliot, File

In this June 11, 2019, file photo, Washington Mystics forward Elena Delle Donne pulls down a rebound next to Connecticut Sun guard Layshia Clarendon during a WNBA basketball game in Uncasville, Conn.

Elena Delle Donne and A'ja Wilson are All-Star captains

By **DOUG FEINBERG**
AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK — Las Vegas will have a lot of its hometown players to root for at the WNBA All-Star Game on July 27.

Reigning rookie of the year A'ja Wilson is one of the team captains. She'll be joined by Aces teammates Liz Cambage and Kayla McBride in the starting lineup. Wilson may feel pressure to draft her two teammates for the game when her team faces a group led by Elena Delle Donne, who is a captain for the second straight season.

Wilson and Delle Donne will select their teams from the other starters chosen by the fans, media and players.

Other frontcourt players include Phoenix's Brittney Griner, Seattle's Natasha Howard and Connecticut's Jonquel Jones.

The four starting guards are Los Angeles' Chelsea Gray, Seattle's Jewell Loyd, McBride and New York's Kia Nurse.

Fans make up 50 percent of the vote to determine the starters, while current WNBA players and a media panel accounted for 25 percent each.

The WNBA also announced Las Vegas' Bill Laimbeer and Washington's Mike Thibault as the coaches of the game. The two teams have the best records in the league as of Thursday.

Laimbeer will coach

Delle Donne's team as the Aces have the best record in the league and Thibault will lead Wilson's since the Mystics have the second-best mark.

The league's coaches will vote for the 12 reserves — three guards, five frontcourt players and four utility choices. Those will be announced Monday. Coaches can't vote for their own players.

Delle Donne and Wilson will pick their rosters beginning with the starters and then the reserves. Delle Donne gets the first pick of the starters and Wilson gets first choice of the reserves. Delle Donne's team lost to Candace Parker's squad last year in the All-Star Game. The Washington Mystics star led the fan balloting, receiving 32,460 votes followed by Wilson with 26,475.

Griner tied with Mercury teammate DeWanna Bonner in the overall voting, but Griner was given the All-Star starting nod by having more fan votes.

Delle Donne and Griner were chosen for their sixth All-Star Game. Cambage, McBride and Gray have made it for the third time. Loyd, Jones and Wilson are All-Stars for the second time. Howard and Nurse will be making their All-Star debuts.

The WNBA added festivities for the night before the All-Star Game with a 3-point shootout, skills competition and beach party.



LATEST PHONES FREE

— WHEN YOU SWITCH —

PLUS
\$200
GUARANTEED
ON TRADE-IN

SAMSUNG
Galaxy S10e



Google
Pixel 3

It's bigger than big

Promotional pricing requires Total Plan with Unlimited Plus Data, new line, port-in, credit approval, qualified smartphone purchase, Device Protection+, qualifying smartphone turn-in and comes via monthly bill credit on a 30-mo. Retail Installment Contract. Taxes, fees and additional restrictions apply.

Things we want you to know: New consumer or small business (25 lines or fewer) Total Plan line with Unlimited Plus Data and port-in required. Purchase of a qualifying device via 0% APR 30-month Retail Installment Contract (RIC), credit approval and Device Protection+ required. Tax due at sale. All data on Unlimited Plus Plans automatically shift to 2G speeds when each line reaches 25GB. A Regulatory Cost Recovery Fee applies; this is not a tax or government required charge. Additional fees, taxes, terms, conditions and coverage areas may apply and vary by plan, service and phone. Offers valid at participating locations only and cannot be combined. See store or uscellular.com for details. Device Protection+ starts at \$9.99/month per smartphone. A service fee/deductible per approved claim applies. You may cancel anytime. Property insurance is underwritten by American Bankers Insurance Company of Florida and provided under a Master Policy issued to U.S. Cellular. You will be the certificate holder on U.S. Cellular's Master Policy for loss/theft benefits. Service Contract Obligor is Federal Warranty Service Corporation in all states except CA (Sureway, Inc.) and OK (Assurant Service Protection, Inc.). Limitations and exclusions apply. See an associate for complete details. Offer Details: New devices eligible for offer are: iPhone X, XR, XS and XS Max; Samsung Galaxy S10, S10+, S10e and Note9; Google Pixel 3 and 3XL; and LG V40 Qualified. Offer applies to base model and memory only. Bill credit amount for new smartphone and device turn-in is \$31.67/month and comes via monthly bill credit on a 0% APR, \$0 down 30-month RIC. Bill credit applied within three bill cycles and ends when balance is paid. Line must remain in good standing with required price plan for entire 30-month RIC. Customer may lose bill credit if price plan is changed. In the event of cancellation of service, customer will be responsible for the entire RIC balance. The Early Upgrade Program is not available with this offer. Devices that qualify for turn-in are: iPhone 7, 7 Plus, 8, 8 Plus, X, XR, XS and XS Max; Samsung Galaxy S8, S8+, S9, S9+, S10e, S10, S10+, Note8 and Note9; Google Pixel 2, 2XL, 3 and 3XL. Device must power on and cannot be pin locked. Device must be in fully functional working condition without any liquid damage or broken components, including, but not limited to, a cracked display or housing. Kansas Customers: In areas in which U.S. Cellular receives support from the Federal Universal Service Fund, all reasonable requests for service must be met. Unresolved questions concerning services availability can be directed to the Kansas Corporation Commission Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Protection at 1-800-662-0027. Limited-time offer. While supplies last. Trademarks and trade names are the property of their respective owners. ©2019 U.S. Cellular