

“Replay and Its Impact on College Baseball Umpiring”

As I sit here reflecting on years past and because it's the middle of January and with the 2018 college baseball season right around the corner, I think about how many changes we have executed in the way we officiate. Many rule changes and mechanical revisions have come and gone, but the biggest and most impactful change that is still being fine-tuned is that of replay in college baseball. When I was asked to write an article for my peers to read about I struggled at first to come up with a topic that I felt was relevant to the times we are in; in our industry and immediately, replay came foremost and central in my mind. So, by no means in writing this article does this make me an expert in replay but I (fortunately/unfortunately) have had my share of experiences with replay in college baseball even in it's infancy stages thus far. Replay in college baseball was introduced in 2012 at the College World Series but was not used until several years later and I will get back to that. The first-time replay was used was in 2014 at the West Coast Conference Tournament on a fair/foul call in the outfield down the left field line. The calling official (which happened to be yours truly) ruled the ball had landed foul and after being asked by the offenses team's head coach to take a closer look at it. I believe the head coach wanted to make history with the first ever review and upon review, replay confirmed on the field that the ball was indeed foul. In 2016 replay made its debut in Omaha at the 2016 College World Series on a very similar play. The calling official ruled that the batted fly ball landed just foul to the right of the line. Again, the head coach came out to ask for a replay review of the play and for the first time in the history of the College World Series replay was used and replay overturned the call on the field that day, and unlike my fair/foul in the WCC tournament this ball just nicked the chalk (versus mine that was obviously foul). Not trying to chase history, but again, I was on the field for this event (but not the calling official) and I am glad because even with replay, it was that close! Move forward to 2017, Super Regionals Gainesville, Florida. Runner on first and second, one out. Fly ball to medium right center field. At the last minute the center fielder turns his body, especially his glove side receiving side away from the calling official and next thing we know, the ball is on the ground! Again, replay was employed, and replay overturned our call on the field of "No Catch" This play is leading to a 2018 4-Man mechanic change because of the nature of the play and the impact of the call. And to answer your questions, yes, I was on the field for this one as well! So, by no means am I an expert on replay but I have had my share of replay experiences.



As a crew chief, my advice and instructions to my crew each time we go out and work a game and that even goes for a game that has replay, "work no different." Work to get into the best possible position you can. Work to gain the best angle and distance you can for the most accurate look in making that call. Replay should never be viewed as a crutch or a back up in making calls on the baseball field. And furthermore, should not be part of our umpiring mechanics. What I mean by this is, go out and umpire no different than you would if cameras were not on the field capturing footage of the game that allow us another look at the play. I never want to hear umpires at the collegiate level stating "Well at least we have replay to go to" No! That is not the mind set we should have at all. It should be one that is if replay is needed to confirm what we have called on the field than replay is our friend. I am a baseball purist and I am not a huge fan of replay, but as a realist, and I also want to make sure we (The umpiring community) have a valuable tool in helping us get it right. With conference championships on the line, regional bids at stake, super-regional advancement and College World Series titles in the balance, replay is that essential and vital tool for umpires under extreme pressure and demand to get each call right.

So, in conclusion, if there is a controversial call and we can review it with replay which either confirms the call on the field or even shows us information that see's things differently than replay is an asset for our umpiring future. But my thought is, if we are doing all the proper things that lead to "us" getting the call right on the field then replay will just be a tool occasionally used and not one often needed.

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