

# Pro sports teams use tablets

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.07.16

Word Count **815**



In this August 2014 file photo, New York Giants running-backs coach Craig Johnson (left) uses a Microsoft Surface tablet beside Rashad Jennings (23) during a game against the Buffalo Bills in the Pro Football Hall of Fame exhibition football game in Canton, Ohio. Photo: AP/David Richard, File

Since at least the 1930s, Major League Baseball clubs have kept phones in their dugouts and bullpens. Historians are not really sure when the first one appeared, but the earliest mention was in a 1930 article in *The Sheboygan Press* about Yankee Stadium.

Managers use the phones to call the bullpen to tell pitchers to get ready to enter the game. The bullpen is the area on the baseball field where pitchers warm up. In the 1930s, telephones were an advanced technology solution, but today, not so much.

## **Baseball Teams Like Regular Phones**

In 2013, the cellphone company T-Mobile spent millions of dollars to replace stadium landlines with cellphones. The idea was that bullpen coaches could stand next to a pitcher and watch him throw. In prior years, coaches would stand in the bullpen corner where the phone was. But the idea didn't take.

All 30 Major League ballclubs still use landlines, MLB spokesman Matthew Gould said. Managers could not be persuaded to switch over.

That's how a lot of sports technology works, baseball experts say. There are many reasons why coaches and players are slow to adopt new technology even when there are obvious benefits. One of the big reasons is that we don't trust computers in high-stress situations. This seems to be the case even when technology really will help.

"People are fearful that if I try something and it looks stupid, it could mean my career," said Nick Watanabe. He is a professor of sports administration at the University of Mississippi. "But those who are doing it are the ones who are getting a competitive advantage."

## **Football Teams Check Plays On Tablets**

The NFL's players and coaches, for example, used to look at dozens of photographs of how the other team's offense or defense was lining up. Staff members carried around thick binders of papers as they ran to and from printers after every football play retrieving the latest images.

Then in 2014, Microsoft partnered with the National Football League and gave the teams Surface Pro tablets. The rollout was bumpy and some teams didn't use the devices right away. Some used both the tablets and binders, while others called the tablets "iPads" or "knock-off iPads," which really annoyed Microsoft executives. The tech company sent advisers to coach the coaches on how to use and talk about the devices.

Now this year, the NFL is allowing teams to use the Surface Pros to watch video on the bench. Previously, they didn't allow it. And teams are responding by using the tablets all the time, said Galen Clavio. He is the director of the National Sports Journalism Center and a professor of sports media at Indiana University.

"It can't just be a new gadget," he said. "It has to be a gadget that does something new."

## **New Devices Part Of The Game**

A lot of people feel that way about new devices. What makes sports different is that there is so much pressure on those devices, and the people who use them, to perform.

The average NFL coach lasts three years, according to the magazine Sports Illustrated. If you spend time and money on an app that doesn't help you win games, you are likely to pay for it with your job, Clavio said.

That's the difference between technology that makes it into the sports world and that which does not.

Cellphones do not help teams win games. Tablets with films of a game, or iPads with scouting reports, do.

## **Not Like The Old Days**

Professional sports coaches are also likely to be of a different generation than the technology they are handed, said Ann Pegoraro. She is the director of the Institute for Sport Marketing at Laurentian University in Ontario, Canada. Imagine your grandfather hollering at the TV when a batter strikes out. Now imagine him vigorously tapping an iPad to enter his complaints into a database. Sounds crazy, right?

It is, if your grandfather, like some coaches and team executives, doesn't know how to use that data. But if your tech-savvy niece or nephew did, he or she might tell coaches to bench that player.

## **MLB Now Using iPads**

The sports-tech world is entering a new phase, Watanabe said. Not everybody trusts it, but the ones who do and have learned how to use it are starting to see the benefits. Teams are getting more and more secretive over not just playbooks, but also data and the gadgets they use.

Major League Baseball this year gave each team an iPad to keep in the dugout. It is the first time a mobile device has been allowed on the field in the league's 113-year history. The teams use them to review scouting reports and game tape. Teams can make notes in the middle of a game with the Apple Pencil.

Unlike the cellphones, the league spokesman said, every team is using them.