

## **Convergent Sport Culture: Mediating the Game**

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On June 2, Detroit Tigers pitcher Armando Galarraga was one out away from pitching a perfect game against the Cleveland Indians when umpire Jim Joyce declared the Indians' Jason Donald safe at first base. Slow-mo instant replay confirmed that Joyce had made the wrong call, and a mainstream and social media firestorm ensued.

Just a few weeks later, controversy erupted at the 2010 FIFA World Cup when England was robbed of an equalizing goal by the referee in their match against Germany. As the freeze frame on the broadcast clearly illustrated, the ball went past the goal line and the point should have scored. A Yahoo! soccer blogger noted that the "[e]ntire world sees England's equalizer (except the refs)."<sup>1</sup>

Both of these recent incidents have advanced the argument for more technology in refereeing, but more importantly for this roundtable, they are prime examples of how media convergence and technology have enhanced discourse among sports fans. Both the Galarraga "perfect game" and England's ghost goal lived on in Internet culture, as blogs like "Fire Jim Joyce"<sup>2</sup> and "The World's Game"<sup>3</sup> weighed in on the events, providing outlets for outraged fans' creativity and frustration.

One of the great joys any fan has is to debate and break down a play with other enthusiasts: "Was the runner safe?" "Did the receiver have control of the ball?" As technologies such as DVR, online video and screencapping become more accessible, these debates become more extensive, moving beyond a mere exuberant outcry in a bar or living room to a full-on amateur analysis of a play.

Creating one's own "instant replay" allows the viewer to endlessly debate every millisecond of every match with people around the globe. In the past, it might have only been possible to discuss the matter in person with friends or, possibly if one chooses and is lucky, on the air during a sports call-in show. Now, instead of just relying on memory or conjecture, goals, base tags and touchdowns can be accessed, slowed down or replayed over and over, analyzed as if they were the Zapruder film.

But what is the point of all this armchair analysis? One thing it does is build community among sports fans. To use another baseball example, look at the multitude of Red Sox blogs. There are sites for just about any kind of Boston fan, and they run the gamut from discussion of news and rumors to Red Sox-themed LOLspeak memes<sup>4</sup>. Through these sites, fans can interact, whether they're blocks from Fenway or halfway around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://sports.yahoo.com/soccer/blog/dirty-tackle/post/Entire-world-sees-England-equalizer-except-the-?urn=sow-251654>

<sup>2</sup> <http://firejimjoyce.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://theworldsgame.tumblr.com/post/742171460/spot-the-difference-hint-one-is-not-a-goal-the>

<sup>4</sup> <http://lolsox.blogspot.com/>

Diasporic fandom is no longer a lonely, isolating experience. In-jokes can be shared across oceans, and plays can be dissected by anyone with access to the Internet.

What media scholars should examine within the "armchair analysis" phenomenon are the messages presented. Do they simply mimic the sports narrative in mainstream media, or do they provide an effective counternarrative? Do armchair analysts provide a form of resistance to mainstream sport ideology, whatever that is? Do these amateurs influence professional sports coverage? If so, how?

As the worlds of media and sport continue to merge, the role of the fan and media gatekeepers will evolve, and the lines between professional and amateur may blur. These shifts in discourse are exciting, but not without consequences. One question we may want to ask is: if everyone's an analyst, what becomes of the audience? Does this potential to over-rely on technology kill the joy of sport, a joy that's partially based in its potential for human error? Then again, if one is fanatic enough, the endless ability to debate could be seen as exciting, a sports fan's paradise.