Sports

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UConn men's soccer plays against Siena at Morrone Stadium on Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2026. The Huskies took a 3-1 win.

PHOTO BY MORGAN BLANCHARD, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER / THE DAILY CAMPUS

SPORTS SPECTRUM: WHAT'S UP WITH THE MLB?

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At the MLB trade deadline, the Detroit Tigers agreed to trade two-time Cy Young Award winner Tarik Skubal to the Los Angeles Dodgers. The reaction from many baseball fans reinforced the view that the Dodgers are ruining baseball through their talent acquisition and the $180 million they pay in luxury taxes.

While it is easy to view Los Angeles as an unchecked monolith buying the sport, pointing solely at their luxury tax bill obscures a quieter reality: superteams don't exist in a vacuum, but in the vacuum left by league-wide risk aversion.

Boston decided after the 2018 World Series not to pay Mookie Betts. Atlanta decided after the 2021 World Series not to pay Freddie Freeman. The Yankees decided in the 2023 offseason not to pay Yoshinobu Yamamoto more than Gerrit Cole. The Rays chose to trade Tyler Glasnow, just as the Tigers traded Skubal.

Still, fans across the league are frustrated with where the sport stands, especially with fears of a lockout ahead. Yet the real diagnosis runs much deeper: Major League Baseball's structural stagnation is driven not by the financial dominance of a single superteam, but by a self-defeating combination of archaic media distribution models and a rigid, tradition-bound culture that actively polices player expression, alienating a younger generation of fans accustomed to the accessible, player-driven landscapes of the NFL and NBA.

While Major League Baseball has historically resonated with an older audience, particularly through radio broadcasts, the league remains notorious for clinging to a traditional consumption model that is steadily losing relevance among younger demographics.

As touched on previously, many believe the TV model is quickly costing more trouble than it is worth through the blackout systems. The NFL has mostly done away with it as every game is available on national broadcast.

While blackouts were meant to protect ticket sales and regional TV deals, situations like Iowa's often happen. The entire state is blocked from six teams. Similarly, the entire country of Canada is blocked from Blue Jays games.

Famously, in 2023, Bally Sports's parent company, Diamond Sports, went bankrupt. With broadcast uncertainties, the league took immediate action on the San Diego Padres and the Arizona Diamondbacks, and on contracts expiring for the Texas Rangers, Minnesota Twins and Cleveland Guardians. After a mass exodus in 2026, MLB local media had to step in and offer the league direct-to-consumer solutions.

Unless a team outright owns its network (Yankees own YES, Boston Red Sox own NESN) or co-owns it with a major network (NBC Sports Boston, Rogers Sportsnet, SNY), this is likely to happen again. Most teams in the league have shifted to direct-to-consumer options for in-market customers who have cut the cord. Still, a disconnect remains between younger fans and a sport that treats modern, athlete-driven marketing as an afterthought.

In modern times, Commissioner Robert Manfred has hoped that MLB will "be out of the business of blackouts" — but is that enough to address the problem?

In a media landscape dominated by multi-screening and short video clips, baseball's more historical architecture tends to get in its own way. While the NFL and NBA are more focused on player individuality and brand, baseball culture still quietly encourages a brand of self-expression in which players keep their heads down.

Baseball culture historically enforces strict uniformity, with postgame press conferences filled with the same humble attitudes not seen in the NBA or NFL. The rules, generally dubbed unwritten, are applied, with rookies often facing more scrutiny than established players. Standout moments include disparaging remarks on broadcast and a critique of how players wear hats, both of which the league and fans universally condemned.

Ultimately, baseball's problem lies more in preservation than product. When October arrives, moments like Bryce Harper staring down opponents after launching home runs, MLB packages those raw, electric moments for marketing reels because it knows: pure, unfiltered emotion sells.

However, the question lies with the sport's culture: even in the midst of a 162-game grind, is the emotion displayed allowed to be marketed?



MLB Commissioner Robert Manfred sits at a meeting. He hopes the MLB will not deal with regional blackouts in the future.

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