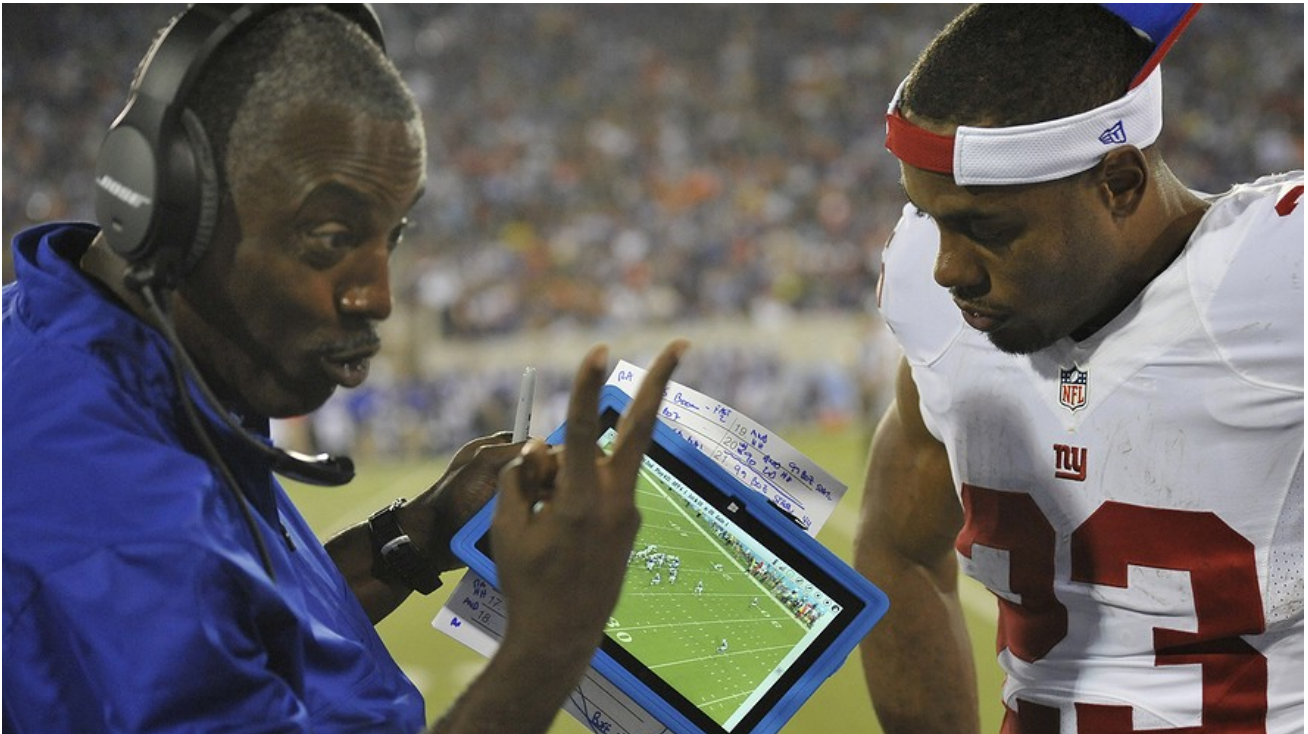


# This is how sports teams choose their tech gear

By Jacob Bogage, Washington Post on 09.07.16

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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, according to baseball historians, Major League Baseball clubs have kept phones in their dugouts and bullpens. Historians aren't really sure when the first one appeared, but the earliest mention of one came in a 1930 article in The Sheboygan Press about Yankee Stadium.

Managers use the phones to call the bullpen, the area where pitchers warm up, to tell relievers to get ready to enter the game. In the 1930s, it was an advanced technological solution. Today, not so much.

T-Mobile in 2013 spent millions of dollars to partner with Major League Baseball to replace stadium landlines with cellphones. The idea was that bullpen coaches could stand next to a reliever and watch him throw instead of being sequestered in the corner on the phone. But the idea didn't take.

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

That's how a lot of sports technology works, industry observers say. For a whole host of reasons - not the least of which is the sneaking mistrust we all have of all computers in high-stress situations - technology is slow to work its way into the hands of coaches and players, even when there seem to be obvious benefits.

"People are fearful that if I try something and it looks stupid, it could mean my career," said Nick Watanabe, 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."

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

Then in 2014, Microsoft partnered with the league to replace the binders with Surface Pro tablets. The roll-out was bumpy. Some teams didn't use the devices right away. Some used both the tablets and binders. Some called the tablets "iPads" or "knock-off iPads," which really got under the skin of Microsoft executives. They 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, something previously prohibited. And teams are responding this preseason by using the tablets all the time, said Galen Clavio, 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."

That's true with how a lot of people feel about new devices. What sets sports apart is the pressure heaped on those devices and the people who made the decision to use them, to perform.

The average tenure of an NFL coach is three years, according to Sports Illustrated. If you spend time and resources on an app that doesn't help you win games, you're likely to pay for it with your job, Clavio said.

That's the great divide between technology that makes it into the sports world and that which doesn't.

Cellphones don't help teams win games. Tablets with game film, or iPads with scouting reports, do.

And professional sports coaches are likely to be of a different generation than the technology they're handed, said Ann Pegoraro, 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 that criticism 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 got hold of that data, they could tell coaches to bench that player against left-handed pitching.

The sports-tech world is entering the phase advanced statistics just out-grew, Watanabe said. Not everybody trusts it, but the ones who do and have learned how to use it are starting to reap benefits. Teams are getting ever-more secretive over not just playbooks, but also data and the gadgets they use in practice.

Major League Baseball this year gave each club an iPad to keep with them in the dugout, the first time a mobile device has been allowed on the field in the league's 113-year history, to review scouting reports and game tape. Teams can annotate those notes mid-game with the Apple Pencil.

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

## Quiz

- 1 Which of the following selections from the article suggests that fear of new technology could have a negative impact on teams' chances of winning?
  - (A) Managers use the phones to call the bullpen, the area where pitchers warm up, to tell relievers to get ready to enter the game. In the 1930s, it was an advanced technological solution. Today, not so much.
  - (B) For a whole host of reasons - not the least of which is the sneaking mistrust we all have of all computers in high-stress situations - technology is slow to work its way into the hands of coaches and players, even when there seem to be obvious benefits.
  - (C) The roll-out was bumpy. Some teams didn't use the devices right away. Some used both the tablets and binders. Some called the tablets "iPads" or "knock-off iPads," which really got under the skin of Microsoft executives
  - (D) And professional sports coaches are likely to be of a different generation than the technology they're handed, said Ann Pegoraro, director of the Institute for Sport Marketing at Laurentian University in Ontario, Canada.
  
- 2 Which of the following aspects of the article is NOT thoroughly discussed?
  - (A) why cellphones were not adopted by baseball teams
  - (B) why some coaches are slow to adapt to new technology
  - (C) how teams were taught to use Surface Pro tablets
  - (D) how the players feel about using new technology
  
- 3 According to the article, each of the following has contributed to teams' resistance to use new technology on the field EXCEPT:
  - (A) fear that the technology will not function
  - (B) the general age of professional coaches
  - (C) lack of access to tablets and cellphones
  - (D) worry over losing jobs if it does not work
  
- 4 How does the article develop the idea that new technology will likely have a larger role in professional sports in the future?
  - (A) by citing statistics about winning records of teams already using technology
  - (B) by quoting players who are enthusiastic about the use of the technology
  - (C) by comparing professional coaches to people's uncles and grandfathers
  - (D) by explaining that teams will now be allowed to use devices and how they use them