

MLB finally lets you challenge the man behind the mask

By **ANTHONY ANGELILLO**
Copy Editor

Every baseball fan knows the feeling of yelling at their TV after an umpire makes a terrible call behind the plate. For generations, players would see the pitch coming in, see it wasn't the right call and either walk back to the dugout and shake their head or blow up and argue with the umpire.

Of course, you would get the manager of that team storming out and getting ejected, being held back by the bench coach while saying every swear word in the English language at that ump.

Well, that era of baseball is no more, as on March 25, the automated Ball-Strike Challenge System (ABS) debuted on Opening Night of the 2026 Major League Baseball season.

For the first time in MLB history, hitters, catchers and pitchers can challenge a ball or a strike and either get it right on the spot or realize that the umpires can be good sometimes.

The ABS System uses 12 Hawk Eye cameras set up around each ballpark to track a pitch. The batter, pitcher or catcher taps his head within two seconds of the call and the entire stadium watches the video board to see if the ball was in the strike zone or not.

Each team gets two challenges. If the team gets it right, they keep their challenges, but getting it wrong makes them lose that challenge, going down to only one until they have no more.

The early results have been wild. Kansas City Royals catcher Salvador Perez went 4-4 on challenges behind the plate March 30. Los Angeles Angels outfielder Mike Trout led all

players with four challenges through the first three days. He won three of them.

However, one person who has become the center of attention for why this system is now in place is umpire C.B. Bucknor.

In a game between the Cincinnati Reds and Boston Red Sox date, Bucknor would call back-back pitches strikes on a 1-2 count against Reds third baseman Eugenio Suárez, which were both successfully challenged by Suárez.

Bucknor would have eight calls challenged, with six of them being overturned, three pitches he missed by more than two inches.

Overall, Bucknor has been rated the least accurate umpire in MLB over the past five seasons, having a grade of 253.74 calls below the expected accuracy. He has been an umpire since 1996 and the fact that he still has a job and has been ranked the worst umpire in the league multiple times proves that ABS was designed not just for better accuracy, but also so shitty umpires like Bucknor can be held accountable.

I can go on and on about even more examples of Bucknor's calls this year, but there is a silver lining: umpires are becoming better at their jobs.

Through early April, MLB umpires have a 93.5% accuracy rate on pitches, up from 92.7% from the same stretch last

year. Considering that 2025 was already a record high, the improvement is even more noticeable, with nearly half of all challenged pitches being correct.

This means that the miscalls are often borderline pitches, rather than crazy errors.

The accountability element will now force umpires to change their ways behind the plate, as they now focus on avoiding overturned calls.

For all the drama, however, there are still concerns. Pitch framing has been a skill that catchers have spent years perfecting, but now it becomes less meaningful if borderline pitches that fool the umpire are then overturned.

Then we have cases where Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher/designated hitter Shohei Ohtani adjusts his cap after delivering the

first pitch of the game, and catcher Will Smith thinks it's a challenge signal and taps his own helmet.

It's the kind of moment where you wonder if MLB might rethink the head-tap signal, since players touch their helmets and caps so many times a game.

Full ABS testing in the minor league showed that walks increased game time, which goes against the improvements made by the pitch clock.

On top of that, during spring training, challenges averaged 13.8 seconds each and occurred 4.1 times per game. If you're doing the math, it comes out to 57 seconds per contested call, and when you have umpires like Bucknor missing eight calls a game, the added time becomes more noticeable.

So, where this system goes from here is the biggest question. The main goal is to give players a way to correct missed calls in high-leverage situations that fans can enjoy, and it has so far done so.

However, will MLB eventually feel pressure to expand the amount of challenges, reduce umpires' involvement by replacing them with robotic umps or go full automation on all pitches?

For now, the answer is no, and we will continue to see how the ABS system tries to preserve what makes baseball feel like baseball by adding a layer of accountability that has been missing for decades.

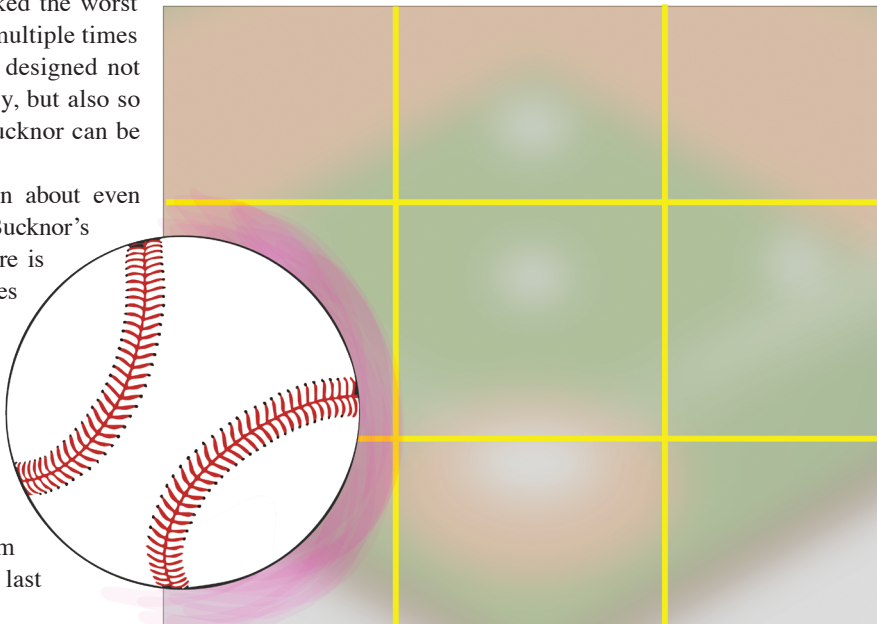


ILLUSTRATION BY KATERINA PARIZKOVA

The Egyptian King says goodbye

By **REX NAYLOR**
Staff Writer

Soccer player Mohamed Salah announced he will leave Liverpool at the end of the season with only eight games left in the season. Since he joined the Reds nearly 10 years ago, the Egyptian King has said goodbye.

Mohamed Salah is one of, if not the best players to ever play for Liverpool. From starting his career in his homeland of Egypt, to moving around Europe repeatedly and achieving immortal status for club and country, Salah is one of the best stories in the sport.

When he was only a teenager, he had to miss school to make a three-hour journey to training for his youth team. Only a year later, he was put into the first team at only 15 years old, and made his debut a few years later.

Salah got a move to Europe in 2012, playing for Basel in the Swiss Super League, replacing the big boots of Xherdan Shaqiri, who had just left for Bavarian giant Bayern Munich.

During his two seasons in Switzerland, Salah scored 20 goals in 79 games. On the surface, not eye-scratching numbers, but still impressive considering his impact in the Europa League against Premier League clubs.

Those two seasons earned him another move to Chelsea, where Salah couldn't adjust to the pace and technical level of

the Premier League. From there, he was loaned out to Italian clubs Fiorentina and Roma, where he impressed. Salah scored 15 goals in his loan season, then 19 the next season in 83 games, playing alongside his childhood idol, Francesco Totti.

This is when Liverpool came calling. Since Salah had spent time in Italy, English clubs and fans labeled Salah as a flop, unable to keep up with the English game.

Liverpool didn't seem to particularly care as they paid \$48 million for Salah, making him the club's most expensive transfer. No one seemed to understand the transfer until the season ended, when Salah scored 44

goals for Liverpool in 52 games.

This awarded him the Premier League Golden Boot for most goals with 32 in 38 matches, the PFA Players' Player of the Year, FWA Footballer of the Year, Premier League Player of the Season and sixth in the Ballon D'or ranking.

Salah and Liverpool also saw huge success in the UEFA Champions League, where Salah scored 10 goals in the campaign behind only Cristiano Ronaldo with 15. Liverpool made it to the final but were defeated by Real Madrid.

Salah was forced to leave the game early with a shoulder injury, which most definitely changed the course of the match.

His achievement that may stand above all that season was punching Egypt's ticket to the 2018 World Cup for only the third time ever. Salah and Egypt qualified for this summer's edition, which will likely be Salah's last time with the Pharaohs.

The following season, Liverpool made it back to the Champions League final, beating Tottenham, making Salah a European champion.

Still, there was an elusive trophy for Liverpool, the Premier League Title. The last time the Reds won the league was in 1990, when it was called the first division.

In the 2019-20 season, Salah netted 19 goals

as Liverpool won the Premier League for the first time, losing only three games, clinching the title with seven games remaining.

For years to come, Liverpool was a dominant force in English and European Football, consistently challenging for the title and making deep runs in the Champions League.

Salah won another golden boot in the 2021-22 season, scoring 23 goals and finishing runner up to Manchester City, even though their point total would've won the league in almost any other season.

In the 2024-25 season, Salah scored 29 goals, his most successful and impactful season with Liverpool since joining. Despite a new manager, Arne Slot, Liverpool won the Premier League convincingly, adding to Salah's accolades.

By the end of his career, Salah will be third on Liverpool's all time scoring list. Considering he has played for the club for less than a decade, Mo Salah is one of, if not the greatest, Liverpool player of all time.

What Salah did on the field is one thing, but his effect off it is another. Salah is a devout Muslim, and a UCLA study found that Muslim hate crimes dropped 16% in the Liverpool area after Salah arrived.

Very few athletes have been able to replicate what Salah has done, and with murals of him all around Anfield, even when Salah leaves this summer, his kingdom will still remain.



ILLUSTRATION BY TILIANA MIRABELLA