Part One

As I was growing up, I loved playing baseball. From the first grade to the eighth grade, I always played for the same league. I would be put on different teams every year, but I would always recognize everyone on my team and the opposing team because I saw them year after year. When I finished playing for that league in the eighth grade and moved on to high school baseball, one of my coaches asked me if I would like to come back and umpire games. In baseball, an umpire is someone who officiates the game. In professional baseball, there are typically four umpires on the field at a given time, and sometimes there are more if it is a very important game. However, in little league there are typically only one or two on the field at a time. I was hesitant about it, but my coach told me that I would get paid for doing it, and now umpiring is a hobby of mine that I have been enjoying for about five years. Being an umpire has made me watch MLB umpires more closely, because I know how tough their job can be.

Umpires have many factors to oversee while officiating a game, and a lot of them could be happening at the same time on different parts of the field. One of the responsibilities umpires have is calling balls and strikes. In baseball, when a batter is up he is given four balls and three strikes. A strike is called when a batter either swings, or takes a pitch in the strike zone, which is typically when the ball is in between the chest and the knees of the batter, and it crosses home plate. A ball is called when a pitch is thrown and does not meet the criteria to be called a strike. If a batter gets three strikes, he is out, and if a batter gets four balls, he gets to go to first base. However, calling balls and strikes can cause quite a bit of conflict. Close calls, like if a pitch is just below the knees, can go either way. A player on one team can think that it was a strike while a player on the other team can think it was a ball. The umpire has to call it one way or another based on his judgement, so there will inevitably be some disagreement based on what he decides. This is where robot umpires come in.
In recent years, broadcasts covering baseball games have become much more technologically advanced. Features like Statcast can show statistics like the maximum speed a fielder reaches while chasing down a ball, or the launch angle and exit velocity of homeruns. These have no effect on the game itself, and are solely used for entertainment and getting fans more engaged in the game. However, recent technology has also allowed for pitches to be tracked in real time, as well as placing a precise strike zone on the broadcast that can track whether a pitch is a ball or a strike without human error. This is done by placing three cameras in a triangle shape that can cover the strike zone and track whether or not a pitch is in it (Shafer). The main conflict that comes with this is that there are still human umpires determining whether a pitch is actually a ball or a strike. This causes quite a bit of quarreling between spectators and between teams, because there are many instances where a pitch is clearly a ball or a strike based on the robotic strike zone, but the umpire calls it the other way, and sometimes these situations can directly impact the outcome of the game.

As of right now, this technology has not impacted baseball directly. However, it is coming pretty close to implementation. Major League Baseball has been making quite a bit of progress with it and wants to try it out soon in order to compete with the growing popularity of the NBA and NFL (Mansfield). The spectators are aware that this technology is coming soon, and this knowledge has impacted how they view the game. Close calls that are butchered means that umpires now come into even more heat because the viewers know for a fact that the call was supposed to go the other way.

In the future, this technology will be implemented into baseball without a doubt. The rules of the game have been altered quite a bit in the last couple of years in order to make the game faster, more enjoyable to watch, and to make conflict less frequent. An example is replays. In the past, calls on whether runners were safe or out were decided only by umpires, and their ruling stood even if video evidence showed the opposite to be true. Now however, players and coaches can challenge calls, and they get reviewed. If the call was wrong, it can be overturned. If Major League Baseball was willing to change that, they must be willing to try out other changes as well. In fact, they are much closer to trying it now than they were last year (Mansfield). If it were implemented, the game would become a lot smoother with
less room for disagreement. Spectators would know that a call was judged accurately, and they would be able to enjoy the game more. It would also make the game faster because once again, there would be less time put into disputes. This might even cause the MLB to bring in more money and increase the popularity of the sport as a whole. That might be a little bit of a stretch, but the positive impact caused by using robot umpires would certainly be noticeable.

Baseball is a wonderful sport that is somewhat plagued by inaccuracy. Bad umpires can ruin games, and it seems like good ones are far and few in between. This is not at all their fault though, as humans are never 100% perfect all of the time. This is where technology can come in and save the sport. If robot umpires are used in the future, baseball will drastically change for the better. Time will tell whether or not it will be used, but it seems like the technology is available. It is now up to the MLB, hopefully they will realize how much technology can impact them for the better.
Part Two

The TV show I chose is The Office. The episode is called “Launch Party.” It is the third episode of season four. The Office is a TV show that follows the lives of people that work for a paper company in Pennsylvania called Dunder Mifflin. It is a mockumentary, which means that the show plays out like a documentary, but it is fictitious. The characters break the fourth wall often, and they are interviewed about what is going on in the show. This specific episode takes place in 2007, when online shopping is just starting to take shape. In the fourth season, Dunder Mifflin has a new vice president, and he wants the company to become younger and faster. One of the ways he does this is by creating an online marketplace for Dunder Mifflin’s products, which he calls “Dunder Mifflin Infinity.” This challenges the traditional methods of selling paper used by Dunder Mifflin such as selling over the phone and having face to face meetings with potential clients. Customers that buy paper from Dunder Mifflin find it much easier to order online, and the website is expected to quickly become the company’s top salesman. This does not sit well with the company’s current top salesman, Dwight Schrute. He decides to compete with the website for a day to see who can sell the most reams of paper. His coworker, Andy Bernard, keeps a tally of reams of paper sold. Throughout the day, Dwight and the website are neck and neck. As soon as Dwight gets on top, Andy refreshes the website and Dwight loses the lead. Eventually, the clock hits five, and Dwight barely beats the website.

Online marketplaces are the technology being focused on in the show. This episode came out when they were just starting out, but eleven years later they are bigger than ever. In the show it was Dunder Mifflin Infinity. A great real life example is Amazon. Anyone with a computer and a connection to the internet can access it and purchase products at competitive prices. It is able to provide relatively cheap two day shipping through Amazon Prime because of how many people use it. If consumers don’t want to purchase Amazon prime, Amazon also provides free shipping for orders above $25. It is very clearly the most dominant online marketplace today. In a survey asking where consumers would do their holiday shopping online for the 2017 holiday season, 76% responded with Amazon. Second place belonged to Walmart, which was only 8%. (Reagan & Gralnick).
Online marketplaces are solving many problems. One of them is accessibility to products for people that live in rural areas. People that may not have the ability to go to big box stores such as Walmart and Target because they live in small towns can have items that they would buy there shipped to them. Another problem that online marketplaces solve is the ability to check prices. When going to stores, consumers have to travel back and forth to compare prices on items. When shopping online, all of the sellers have their price listed, and the cheapest option is displayed first. This makes looking around for the best deal much more quick and convenient. Online marketplaces are also creating some problems, but they are mainly for other business. For example, the salesmen of Dunder Mifflin complain that they don’t get commission when customers call asking about how to use the website. In real life, online marketplaces are causing less people to get out of their homes and visit businesses.

This technology is ethical when you look at it from a business standpoint. Online shopping is a big part of the world becoming more convenient. It has put many retail stores and shopping malls out of business. The owners of these retail stores and shopping malls may argue that online shopping is unethical, but this is just normal competition. If these stores can’t become more convenient in a way that challenges online shopping, they inevitably won’t be able to keep up. When you look at online marketplaces from other viewpoints, however, there are parts of it that can be considered unethical. For example, Amazon has shifted jobs away from traditional retail and big box stores to warehouses, which excludes people with disabilities and people that are not physically fit enough to work there. Amazon is also known to not provide full benefits for the people working at these warehouses, compared to other warehouses that are unionized. Finally, Amazon has even been known to get employees at these warehouses to wear wristbands that track their efficiency. Not completing enough orders in a certain time frame could cause a worker to lose his or her job (Kolitz). While there is no problem with getting rid of workers that are not meeting their job requirements, making them wear wristbands to track it is a little much.

In five to ten years, online marketplaces will only continue to become bigger, faster, and more innovative. We are already seeing this with Amazon. There are now services available that send groceries
to your door within a couple of hours. There are also drones that are able to ship packages in the same or the next business day. Innovative ideas like these will continue to make Amazon grow unless another company comes along and stops it, and that company will need to have something even better than the service Amazon is able to provide now. Overall, it looks like online marketplaces are not going anywhere anytime soon.

Online marketplaces are here to stay for the time being, and it is very easy to see why. They provide a level of convenience that other stores are not able to match. As more stores are forced to close their doors because of online marketplaces, it will be interesting to see how many of them are left in ten to fifteen years. It will also be interesting to see if something else that tops online marketplaces or makes them better comes around soon. Time will tell, but for now online marketplaces reign supreme.
Works Cited


