

A Quality Start.

“In baseball, a starting pitcher records a quality start when he pitches at least six innings and allows three earned runs or fewer. A starting pitcher has two jobs: to prevent runs and get outs. The quality start statistic helps to quantify which pitchers did a "quality" job in those two departments.”

- Major League Baseball

We all know that the level of service has dropped dramatically in this country. Systems that used to work, like the airport and the post office, are woefully inept. We can't get election results on election night. Try to buy a concert ticket, schedule a doctor appointment, hire a plumber; it's not easy.

Here's just a few examples of incompetency I've experienced in the last few months.

- Popeye's chicken was out of chicken. “the manager forgot to order it.”
- The Chase ATM was out of money. “we forgot to load the machine going into the weekend.”
- Dunkin' Donuts was out of regular coffee. “I knew we were running close.”
- The mailbox, yes the actual mailbox, has been broken, yes broken, at our Post Office for four months. “Yeah, we know” says the clerk.

I could go on. We all have stories like this. Some blame Covid. Some blame “supply line issues,” some “staffing problems.”

I blame the “quality start” in baseball.

The “quality start” is a baseball statistic that didn't exist until 1985, when John Lowe, a sportswriter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, coined the phrase.

In my opinion, this was the beginning of the downfall of the American work ethic.

Prior to 1985, baseball had no such statistic as a “quality start.” A starting pitcher was expected to go the distance. That is, pitch all 9 innings of a game and try not to allow any runs. Successful starting pitchers prided themselves on complete games. For example, in 1969, Bob Gibson, by himself, had 28 complete games. For comparison sake, in 2020, all of Major League Baseball had 14 complete games.

Baseball analytics people will tell you that this dearth of complete games is a good thing. Expecting pitchers to throw complete games shortened careers and caused injuries. Fewer complete games resulted in major league baseball teams populating almost half of their 25 man roster with pitchers. This is why we see 4-7 pitching changes a game, helping result in 3-4 hour baseball games.

Owners like the longer games. They can sell more concessions at the games, and more commercials on the broadcasts. So, if you ask the analytics folks and the team owners, the quality start is a good thing.

However, is baseball better now? Most fans would say no. We're not happy with the interminable games, the number of pitching changes, and 100 MPH relief pitchers who only strike people out or allow a home run. We miss pitchers like Bob Gibson, Juan Marichal, Sandy Koufax, Greg Maddux and a host of others who knew how to pitch and not just throw. And finished what they started.

This "quality start" mentality has permeated everyday life. Today, working 11-4 from home in your underwear is the standard. Showing up to the office once in while makes you a "go-getter." Less than three mistakes a day could get you promoted.

Forward thinking business experts will tell you that this is a good thing. This way companies can pay less, reduce office space, and most importantly, improve corporate profits. Furthermore, they explain, having employees work long hours under pressure produces inferior results and unhappy people. Some even say feedback, especially negative feedback, does not improve performance; in fact it inhibits personal growth.

However, is life better now? My millennial and Gen-X friends tell me that, yes, the "quality start" mentality in the workplace is a good thing. This "quality start" mentality reduces stress, provides work/life balance, and allows for more collaboration and team work.

All I know is that back in the day, baseball's starting pitchers could finish a game. I could get chicken at Popeye's, money from the ATM and a cup of coffee at Dunkin' Donuts. And mailboxes worked.

Damn you John Lowe.

That's all I'm sayin'

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