

Spring Surprises in Sports & Entertainment: Ben Rice Lands a Brand Win, the Lion King Sparks a \$27 Million Lawsuit and OpenAI's Sora Loses its Disney Deal

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Welcome back to the Spotlight! Spring is in the air (depending on what day you check the weather), so this past Wednesday marked the official start of the Major League Baseball season, with just two teams (the New York Yankees and San Francisco Giants) leading off with a primetime game on Opening Night, as a prelude to the broader, more familiar Opening Day with twenty-two additional teams taking the field for the first time. The Opening Night game was notable for its featuring the ABS Challenge System, allowing catchers, pitchers and hitters the opportunity to elect to challenge an umpire's ball/strike calls by using automated technology. The broadcast of the Opening Night game was also notable for its being exclusively offered by a streaming service (Netflix), signaling a similar embrace of technology by the MLB, while also leaving baseball fans wanting an opportunity to challenge that call. Indeed, whatever the broadcast was, it was not for true baseball fans-evidenced in part by a lack of execution in a difficult-to-read, vanishing scorebug and missed in-game action. At times, it seemed like the broadcast was trying to bring a Savannah Bananas-type (bananified?) experience to viewers.

Perhaps that was the point, as Netflix's stated intention was to bring in a new audience for MLB action. I guess that was the explanation for the over-the-top (I will stipulate to the American flag effect created by drones that emitted red, white and blue smoke being extremely cool), at times head-scratching show for pregame introductions that featured, amongst other things, dancing on New York City-style taxicabs while the Yankees took the field and the Giants emerging from San Francisco-style trolley cars. Notably that show ended up delaying the start of the baseball game, upsetting an audience that was already up in arms about needing to have a subscription to watch what would have ordinarily been a nationally-televised game. So all in all, it seemed misguided to bananify, because Savannah Bananas games are about everything other than the game and Major League games are about the game (the end result of the game, by the way, (a 7-0 Yankees victory) was much appreciated by this writer, even if the background noise was not.

- New York Yankees First Baseman Ben Rice lands a tailor-made endorsement deal with Ben's Original Rice. Hopefully those carbs are put to good use.
- Composer Lebohang Morake sues comedian Learnmore Jonasi for over \$27 million over a now viral clip in which Jonasi mistranslated the opening chant to Morake's "The Circle of Life" from "The Lion King."

Jonasi has launched a GoFundMe campaign to finance his defense-presumably so he can hire the high-powered litigators at Timon & Pumba LLP.

- OpenAI pulls the plug on its AI video app Sora as Disney steps away from its \$1 billion deal with OpenAI that included the licensing of Disney characters in Sora. Not even true love's kiss seems to be enough to salvage the deal.
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