

MLB's New Paternity Leave Program Bucks Tradition

by Ramon E. Rivera on August 8, 2012

Many baseball players may be surprised to learn that Major League Baseball has a new groundbreaking paternity leave program that allows players to take up to three days off for the birth of a child.

The program, launched in 2011, makes it easier for players to take time off for the birth of a child by allowing their team to fill the roster spot by calling up another player. The issue was first raised by general managers at their annual off-season meetings and was quickly approved by the players' association and MLB.

"Players were torn between their family and leaving their team a man short," MLB spokesman Patrick Courtney said. "Baseball understands that players need to be with their families, but there was no rule to replace the player. Because of that, players were feeling pressure."

Prior to the new rule, players often missed the birth of their children. As detailed by Sports Illustrated, former San Francisco catcher Bob Brenly was told he could be at his child's birth, but only if he were able to fly back to New York in time for the game. Ex-outfielder Tom Grieve missed a birth because he couldn't leave a spring-training game with the New York Mets in 1978.

As recent as 2005, Freddy Sanchez, then a utility infielder with the Pittsburgh Pirates, was told that he could be at the hospital with his wife, but the team rule was that he had to be back in uniform by the seventh inning, regardless of whether the child had been born or not.

While three days may not seem like a lot to some new parents, it is certainly a step forward in changing a culture where any time off was forbidden under most MLB team policies.