

# MLB International Delivers Pure Baseball to World Audience

By: [Ken Kerschbaumer](#), Editorial Director | Published: July 13, 2011

MLB International once again tapped into the **resources of the Corplex Iridium production unit** to create the MLB All-Star Game world feed, which was distributed around the globe. Foreign broadcasters were on hand to lend a personal touch to the on-air-announcer side of things, but, for the most part, the look and feel of the telecast was handled by a U.S.-based team that understands the intricacies of the game.

“From a production standpoint, this game is more about entertainment than it is the actual play between the lines,” says Peter Toma, who produced the MLB International feed as a break from his regular duties producing Pittsburgh Pirates games. “So we obviously try to highlight the stars as much as we can, but the beautiful thing is, both teams are made up of stars.”

During the game, Toma relied primarily on **MLB International’s nine game cameras that are fed to the Corplex Iridium truck**. MLB International VP/EP Russell Gabay says that Fox specialty-camera feeds were also available as robo and down-the-line cameras and that shots from handheld cameras were shared between the two entities.

“It’s a function of space and also dollars, but the most important thing is, the two production teams have a strong relationship and share tape resources,” he explains. “It’s a very cohesive production between ourselves and Fox.”

Many would argue that producing a ball game is producing a ball game, but today’s domestic broadcasts, whether national or regional, feature a vast number of sponsor and promo elements that are of little interest on the world stage. Toma says the biggest difference is that the international feed is a throwback to an era when sponsored elements were not part and parcel of a

professional-sports broadcast.

“It’s like a baseball broadcast from the 1970s,” he says. “It’s about as pure a baseball production as you can get.”

Another difference from the U.S. style of broadcasting is that the scorebug appears on screen only when the centerfield camera shot looking toward home plate is on-air.

“That camera is on-air 70% of the time,” says Gabay, “but the camera guys love that they don’t have to frame [with the bug in mind].”

The biggest technical change this year was that EVS instant-replay servers operated in the ProRes format, a move that puts the international MLB operations inline with other MLB-related broadcast entities.

Gabay also decided to give the Newtek 3play instant-replay system a chance to be operated in a live, major-sports-production environment. The multichannel HD/SD slow-motion replay system provides synchronized, continuous recording and display of up to three video streams with up to eight inputs.

“It’s an interesting tool, and it definitely has its limitations, but we have a good relationship with Newtek, and we wanted to put it in a live environment and see how it can do,” says Gabay. The system wasn’t used with any live-action feeds but was used with some of the safer camera shots, such as beauty and crowd shots.

The feed itself was available in three flavors: HD (720p), SD, and SD upconverted to 1080i. Transmission was handled through the MLB Network multiplex and delivered out to Encompass, where graphics from two virtual-signage systems, one for Latin America and one for Asia, were inserted into the programming stream. The system drops ads behind home plate, allowing MLB International to attach more revenue to the broadcast.

“We’ve had success with that as we have become more aggressive with it as a sales tool,” says Gabay. All commercial spots that appeared in the world feed were sold on a global basis and appeared everywhere simultaneously.

One of the biggest challenges in broadcasting a baseball game for an international audience is that, between pitches and innings, there is a lot of time for an announcer to fill with discussion about the game, something that can test the skills of the best English-speaking announcer who has grown up with the game. That is one of the reasons many of the foreign announcers listen to the English commentary from Gary Thorne and Rick Sutcliffe. Nations represented on-site with broadcast teams included China, Japan, Canada, England, Curaçao, Mexico, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. ESPN International also took the feed.

“So much of the game is spoken and not graphically represented that it can be hard for the foreign broadcasters [to call the game],” says Gabay. “It’s like a Berlitz course, and the broadcasters appreciate.”

Prior to the first pitch, however, is a different story. In an approach similar to the mix zones found at an Olympics or Super Bowl, each foreign broadcaster builds a six-minute, native-language open for the game. Then, after the open, the international feed cuts to break and comes back live and from the stadium, and the foreign broadcasters do not appear on camera again.

Although the MLB International team, at only 23 people, may be small, Gabay says relationships with Fox Sports and front-bench talent like Pete Machesky, Bill Webb, John Moore, and others make the difference: “This is all built on relationships.”