There's probably no sport that loves data as much as Major League Baseball. So it's no surprise that electronic health records have been a big hit with the league.

This is a report for *iHealthBeat*, a daily news service of the California HealthCare Foundation. I'm Kenny Goldberg.

Orthopedic surgeon Heinz Hoenecke, Jr. is the head team physician for the San Diego Padres. He oversees the health of 40 men on the major league team's roster and 115 players on the Padres' minor league teams.

Hoenecke thinks the league's EHR system is terrific.

*(Hoenecke):* "*It really enhances trades and communication, and has created sort of a portability in the electronic medical record for baseball that we're still struggling for in clinical practice settings.*"

The EHRs contain not only a player's complete medical history, but also daily reports from athletic trainers and physical therapists. There's information on injuries and a section where the team doctor can add notes and input images from MRIs and other scans.

Hoenecke says having all of that information at his fingertips is a major advancement.

*(Hoenecke):* "*Anytime we have more accurate and up-to-date information, it makes it easier to make the best decision regarding their immediate and long-term care.*"

Major League Baseball began the transition to EHRs in 2010. Chris Marinak, who at that time was the league's director of labor relations, spearheaded the effort.

Marinak -- who had a background in IT -- felt that an EHR system would have a big advantage over paper records.

Marinak says it took two years to get EHRs fully functional for all 30 MLB teams.
(Marinak): "Along with just putting the information electronically, we also standardized a lot of the recordkeeping that was done 30 different ways. And so that was another piece of the value here, was that now you could look at an evaluation of a player, and you're using the same terminology from one team to the next."

For example in the old days, the Boston Red Sox may have called an injury one thing, while the New York Yankees called it something else.

Under the new protocol, medical terms are standardized. That makes it easier for teams to evaluate the health of players who may be involved in a trade.

What's more, Marinak says the league has created an injury-tracking system that sits behind the data.

(Marinak): "We now have six years' worth of injury information that we can track on a de-identified basis. And that's really the key ... you can't log into the system pull up information from an opposing team's player. It's at a league level, and we look at trends."

By analyzing concussion information stored in this injury database, the league discovered that the standard 14-day disabled list for players who had suffered a concussion was too long; most players didn't need to sit out that many games.

The solution? Major League Baseball established a 7-day disabled list that better fit players' needs.

No one spends more time with EHRs than the athletic trainers.

Ron Porterfield is in his 10th year as the head athletic trainer for the Tampa Bay Rays. In addition to his other duties, Porterfield spends two to three hours a day inputting data into the system.

(Porterfield): "Every player that comes through every day that receives any type of hands-on treatment from us is pretty well documented for whatever it is that we did with them."

Baseball teams are on the road half of the season. In the days of paper records, access to medical files was limited when teams were traveling. Porterfield says these days having the EHRs available on his iPad is invaluable.

He says the information is especially useful when he's helping an athlete rehab from an injury that they've suffered before.
(Porterfield): "It lets me go back and go, 'Okay, is there an MRI report with it? Can I compare this MRI to that MRI? How significant was it? How long did it take him to heal? What could I be doing at day four, at day five, at day ten?' It also gives us a good idea when we talk to the front office, because their big question is, 'When's he gonna be ready?''"

About everything you'd ever want to know medically about a ballplayer is in their EHR. Whenever a trade is under consideration, teams will give the other team's trainers and medical staff access to that player's record for a limited time.

(Porterfield): "We'll go through that player's medical records, we'll look at 'em, we'll see what we like, what we don't like. We'll get our doctors involved, if need be. We'll be in contact with the general manager. We'll call the athletic trainer back, ask specific questions about that player."

But Porterfield says there's one vital piece of information that isn't in their EHR: What kind of teammate they are.

MLB's Chris Marinak says maybe someday.

(Marinak): "The first person to figure that out is going to have a big benefit against all of the rest of the teams in baseball, because it will be a pretty important piece of information to know."

This has been a report for iHealthBeat, a daily news service from the California HealthCare Foundation. If you have feedback or other issues you’d like to have addressed, please email us at IHB@chcf.org. I'm Kenny Goldberg. Thanks for listening.