Outside the Lines

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Around the Majors

Attendance down slightly, but games are shorter. MLB's final, unofficial attendance was 67,667,670 fans, an average of 28,055 per game. The Angels, Red Sox, Cubs and Yankees set all-time attendance records, and 15 of the 30 clubs posted increases, but overall the average was down 0.4% from 28,168. Those fans left an average of six minutes earlier, as the average length of a nine-inning game fell from 2:52 to 2:46.

TV ratings rebound. Fox's regular season ratings rose from a 2.5/8 share to a 2.7/8 share, the highest since 1999. ESPN's regular season ratings were essentially flat, falling from 1.06 to 1.04. Buoyed by the presence of, and early success of, the Cubs and Red Sox, postseason ratings jumped 28% overall, with World Series ratings rebounding by 9% and the LCS rating up a phenomenal 65%.

MLBPA considering collusion grievance. The union's suspicions, relating to the 2002-03 offseason as well as 2003-04, center around clubs' use of a central information bank to learn what other clubs are offering particular players; use of the "60/40" debt rule to deter some clubs from signing free agents; and the perceived effort to flood the market with players to reduce any one player's negotiating leverage.

MLB to sell $1.5 billion of debt notes. FleetBoston will lead the sale of $1 billion in one- year notes and co-manage the sale of $500 million of 10-year notes with Bank of America. This will be MLB's first publicly rated debt sale. The bonds are backed by revenue from television and radio broadcasts, licensing and sponsorship contracts. They will replace some of the $1.78 billion of bank loans and credit lines MLB (as opposed to the individual clubs) had in August 2002, on the eve of the labor showdown.

Failed drug tests mean mandatory steroid testing in 2004. The CBA signed in 2003 provided for random, "survey" testing of players for steroids in 2003, with mandatory testing to follow only if more than 5% of players tested positive. They did, even though the MLB drug testing program has been roundly condemned as ineffective by Olympic testing officials and pro-testing scientists.

Two lawsuits filed against MLB. In the first, Juri Morioka, a Japanese citizen who worked for 15 months as an administrative assistant for MLB, claims she was fired for complaining about anti-Japanese remarks from coworkers in MLB's International Department. The NLRB has already investigated, and rejected, her complaint, but Morioka hopes a federal court will be more sympathetic. I doubt it.

In the second three former players, Richard Moran, Ernie Fazio and Mike Colbern, have sued to force MLB to give them the same pension and medical benefits available to players who retired after 1980. They allege that they were discriminated against when the pension rules were amended to reduce the vesting period for pension benefits from five years to 43 days, and for medical benefits from five years to one day. Other groups of retired players have sued and lost on the same theory – but what makes this one special is that the plaintiffs further allege that by inviting ex-Negro Leaguers to participate in the pension plan on the same terms that they do, MLB unlawfully discriminated against white players.

MLB settles 11-year-old action. Tampa businessman Frank Morsani and his partners had purchased 42% of the Minnesota Twins in April 1984, hoping to buy the rest of the club from the Griffith family and move the Twins to Tampa. He alleged that Bowie Kuhn induced him to back away from the Twins by promising him first crack at an expansion franchise. Instead he was shut out of the expansion process, while also trying and failing to buy and move the Athletics and Rangers. Morsani sued in 1992, but procedural wrangling tied up the action for years. It settled, on undisclosed terms, shortly before the action would finally have come to trial.

Expos back in Montreal for most of 2004 season. At press time, MLB and the MLBPA were close to a deal which would allow the Expos to play 22 2004 home games in either San Juan, Puerto Rico or

Monterrey, Mexico. Expos players originally voted down the proposed split schedule, but were reportedly willing to reconsider in return for scheduling concessions and some assurances with respect to the club's payroll.

Their future for seasons beyond 2004 remains murky. Northern Virginia's chances to win the club took a hit on Election Day, when Arlington voters re-elected the officials who had withdrawn two desirable sites from consideration. Washington, DC seems to remain the frontrunner, but recently a group from the Norfolk area surfaced and asked for MLB to consider their market, too.

MLB News

Cubs win lawsuit over ticket brokerage. Judge Sophia H. Hall ruled that the club did not violate Illinois anti-scalping laws when it set up a related corporation whose sole business was selling Cubs tickets at scalpers' prices; sold this corporation tickets for premium seats at Wrigley Field that had never been offered for sale to the public; loaned the corporation the money to buy these tickets; and took them back for full credit if they weren't sold for multiples of face value.

Marlins' stadium plan advances. The Miami-Dade County Commission has offered to contribute $73 million from hotel and sports facility taxes toward the estimated $325 million cost of a 38,000-seat retractable-roofed stadium in Miami. The Marlins, who have offered to pay $137 million and to cover cost overruns, will also change their name to the Miami Marlins if the stadium is constructed. The city of Miami and State of Florida are also expected to write large checks toward the proposed new park.

The Marlins' dreadful stadium lease, negotiated by former owner Wayne Huizenga with himself, meant that Huizenga made as much from the Marlins' postseason success as the club did. Huizenga got 30% of the concession profits, 62.5% of the parking charge and all the suite revenue, while the Marlins had to pay for all game-day personnel. The Marlins say that they earned only $6 million from the postseason, less than half what a similarly situated club could expect to earn, and claim to have lost $20 million in 2003. On the bright side, the Marlins, who have never won a division title and have finished above .500 only twice, have now won more World Series in 11 seasons than the Philadelphia Phillies have in 121.

Dodgers sold to Frank McCourt for $430 million. News Corp., which paid $311 million in 1998 for the Dodgers, their Vero Beach spring training facility, and their complex in the Dominican Republic, has agreed to sell the club to Boston developer Frank McCourt and others for $430 million. Commissioner Selig predictably reacted by whining about how much money the Dodgers had lost under Fox, and how the increased revenue sharing under the new CBA would somehow help a club that will *pay* more.

Brewers slash payroll, fire CEO, alienate entire State of Wisconsin. The Milwaukee Brewers' board of directors forced club President and CEO Ulice Payne, Jr. to resign after Payne revealed that the board wanted to reduce the Brewers' payroll from $40.6 million to $30 million in 2004, and probably maintain it at that level through 2006. The board did, however, come up with the $2.5 million or so needed to buy out Payne's contract. Angry legislators, who narrowly approved the sales tax needed to construct Miller Park after Brewer officials assured them they needed the extra revenue from a new stadium to field a competitive team, now want to audit the Brewers' books, and several prominent voices in the Milwaukee media have called on Commissioner Selig to sell the club.

During the Payne controversy, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* discussed the Brewers' finances in considerable detail. They're expecting $15 million in revenue-sharing money in 2003 and more in 2004, which means that revenue sharing alone could fund more than half their major league payroll. Existing owners have contributed $44 million in new capital over the past 5-6 years, with Commissioner Selig personally responsible for $13.2 million of this sum. The club's debt would be even higher, except that in 2002 the stadium authority forgave $41.1 million of debt and accumulated interest in return for the Brewers' assuming responsibility for maintenance and repair on Miller Park. The Brewers are reportedly $110 million in debt; they have been trying for months to raise capital, but are unlikely to find much of it until Bud and Wendy Selig are stripped of all official and unofficial authority over the club.

Cardinals stadium construction to begin in early 2004. The Missouri Development Finance Board has approved the sale of $45 million in revenue bonds and the issuance of $29.45 million in tax subsidies. The St. Louis County Council is expected soon to approve a $45 million loan to be funded from the bond issue, with the proceeds repaid from the county's hotel and motel taxes.

The Cardinals must turn over to the state $58.9 million of land and/or marketable securities. The club will contribute $50 million of its own money toward stadium construction. In addition, the company that will own the stadium and lease it to the Cardinals for 29 years will borrow $183 million and obtain $47 million from equity investors. The Cardinals have also committed to spend $60 million developing two blocks of a proposed six-block "Ballpark Village" office and residential development, to be constructed on the site of the present Busch Stadium.

Baseball in Washington, by **Mark Pattison**

Early in the 2003 season, the Bob Davids Chapter conducted a public forum, "Bringing Baseball Back: Making the Case" inviting representatives from each of the prospective ownership groups in the Washington area wanting the Montreal Expos to move to the mid-Atlantic. The only positive response came from Bill Collins' Northern Virginia group. Jerry Burkot, executive director of the Collins group, talked for over an hour.

"Anybody can fill a ballpark Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. No matter where you are you're going to fill that park up. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday is whether you either make you money or you don't. And we feel very strongly that to fill the park on those days, you have to be out where the people are, where people live, where their families are," Burkot said. "We feel the market has shifted out to the suburbs."

Although Burkot's appearance took place before MLB's self-imposed -- and blown -- deadline of the All-Star break to decide on a site, Burkot may have anticipated a delay when he said, "I think MLB was quite surprised with the news ... of what the Anaheim Angles went for. You're talking about the world champions in the second-largest market in the country and a newly renovated ballpark, and that team went for $180 million. And that's eye-opening, to say the least. You look at Forbes, which is a fairly decent authority on evaluating properties, (which) valued the Anaheim Angels at about $225 million and they went for 180. They (also) valued the Expos at $112 million. The owners paid $120 million for the Expos. They've probably lost $30 million. We imagine it's going to be upwards of $150 million. We don't think it's going to be 200 (million)."

Burkot said MLB will dispose of the Expos sooner rather than later because "these guys have to write checks every year. It's costing them each over a million bucks.... They see a lot of clubs up for sale. There's a lot of clubs for sale out there, and they're not moving. I think they thought this would be a $200-$300 million franchise. Quite frankly, what do you do next year? Do you play 40 games in San Juan? Do you go back to Montreal?"

He took issue with the Orioles' survey claiming that 33 percent of its attendance comes from the Washington metropolitan area. "Five percent of the Orioles' attendance comes form Northern Virginia and D.C., 8 percent from the Maryland suburbs -- nowhere near the 33 percent the Orioles claim," adding, "I've never seen the Orioles' polls. We've released all our numbers to the public."

Burkot had a bone to pick with local media coverage of the relocation effort, even before Arlington County, Va., officials rejected a stadium in its jurisdiction: "What's more interesting to cover: 20 people with signs screaming outside saying `We don't want a ballpark' -- there were 40 or 50 that were pro. They never got a mention. They never got any airtime. 'Cause that's not what sells. The Washington Post's going to play it up, because it's the Washington Post, not the Virginia Post. They've made no bones about that. I think it's pretty obvious and blatant: Their biases are clear as far as how they're treating the effort in the District versus the effort in Virginia."

He predicted that a Northern Virginia team playing at RFK Stadium in D.C. for three years before a Virginia ballpark is built would have a payroll "in the middle of the pack, or lower part of the upper half. ... In a Virginia stadium, we'd probably be one of the top 6 or 7 revenue-producing teams, and we'd expect to have a payroll in that same range." He added the Collins group is committed to making some tickets available at $10 or less, and would welcome Fred Malek's D.C. group joining them, and would consider joining Malek's group if suggested by MLB and 'if it's a good business deal."

Burkot noted that one early partner in the Collins group was former Washington Senators second baseman Tim Cullen. "As an executive, he was a great infielder," Burkot said. He added the Houston Astros would have come to town had the NFL's Houston Oilers not announced they were heading to Tennessee. Even so, the Houston stadium referendum passed by one-third of 1 percent.

He dismissed San Juan, home of 22 Expos games in 2003: "You look at the income level over there ... and the heat: Fourteen thousand fans (per game) -- you can get that at RFK in your sleep."

Burkot was equally as dismissive over Baltimore indemnification claims, saying MLB's legal department told him "they don't think Baltimore has any claim to this area.... What goes on within Major League Baseball, who knows?" He added, "If there's any arrangement made, we're going to be asked to pay

X amount of dollars for the franchise. That amount is going to go to Major League Baseball: to distribute it their own way. “Our secondary market is Richmond, Tidewater, Norfolk -- out to West Virginia, Charlottesville, that area. Our market’s going that way.... The District’s secondary market in the other direction is Baltimore. We’ll get people from Maryland because it’s convenient for them. We’ve got secondary markets better than half the major leagues’ primary markets.”

Equal time, though, was ultimately given to the Malek bid, as Winston Lord dined informally with SABR members during a monthly chapter-sponsored “hot stove dinner” in Northern Virginia -- Burkot’s home turf. More turned out to chat with Lord than with Burkot. The chapter has no position on where a team should be located, although individual members have preferences. It’s safe to say chapter members want a team if only to force the Orioles to improve their product.

Burkot’s remarks were audiotaped for a SABR member writing a book on “the death of the Expos” for McFarland. If you want a copy of the tape, e-mail me at pattison_mark@hotmail.com.

Book Review: **Moneyball: The Science of Winning an Unfair Game**, by **Ron Kaplan**

One of the reasons baseball fans remain so steadfast in their devotion is a sense of tradition. During interminable rain delays and constant pitching changes, broadcasters often wax nostalgic about how little has changed over the years: there have always been nine men on the field; bases are still 90 feet apart; three strikes and you're out. It's this comfort level that makes change so difficult, why people are opposed to innovation such as Astroturf, the designated hitter and inter-league play. "This is the way things have been done and this is how we're going to keep on doing them," seems to be the general mindset of proponents of the old school.

Michael Lewis, in his thought-provoking *Moneyball*, makes one wonder if school will soon be out. As he puts it:

> *[A] baseball diamond was ... a field of ignorance. No one had established the most efficient way to use relief pitchers. No one had established to the satisfaction of baseball intellectuals exactly which part of defense was pitching and which fielding .... And no one had figured out how to make the amateur draft any more than the madness it had always been.*

Using the example of Billy Beane, the GM of the Oakland Athletics, the author shows how new concepts in scouting and developing players could revolutionize the baseball world, if only open minds prevailed.

Unable to spend as freely as their upscale brethren, small market teams like the Athletics must be content to scout the high school and college players other teams might find less desirable or to pick up the detritus of other clubs. In fact, while the A's own veteran scouts drooled over the "potential" (that damnable word) of talented schoolboy (i.e., high school) athletes, Beane preferred to go with the relatively more mature and established college prospects.

The difference between the A's and other fiscally-challenged clubs, however, is their stunning success. Beane and his associates have managed to build pennant contenders seemingly out of straw.

The new manner of assessing personnel could be considered almost a new age philosophy. Rather than looking for the hulking slugger who can bash balls out of sight, Beane and company seek a kinder, gentler athlete, one adept in the art of taking a pitch, making the opposition wear itself down. Why else would Beane aggressively pursue a nobody like Scott Hatteberg, a catcher left unsigned by his former team and whom no one else wanted, and convert him to a first baseman? Because Hatteberg is a master of how to "work the pitcher."

(Beane, himself a coveted high school star and the New York Mets' first round draft pick in 1980, could serve as an example of how the highly-touted can fail to live up to expectations despite the consensus of the crewcut, tobacco chewing bird dogs. He was considered too analytic, too thoughtful to make a go of it as a player. Instead he took that curiosity and developed into a keen administrator and student of talent.)

The author examines the influence of Bill James and his band of number-crunching "sabermetricians" on Beane's decision-making processes. Instead of batting average and runs batted in, James and his brethren advocated different statistical yardsticks such as on-base percentage and runs created. "The [traditional] statistics were not merely inadequate: they lied," writes Lewis, "And the lies they told led the people who ran major league baseball teams to misjudge their players, and mismanage their games."

Lewis offers several examples of the A's forward thinking. As a group of batters gather around a video monitor to study pitch-by-pitch sequences, the author notes how "[t]hey're no longer playing a game; they're playing game theory."

The in-depth coverage of the draft process, with its tactics, subterfuges and stomach-churning tension, is a wonderful insight into this annual event. With the help of his laptop-clutching assistant, Beane carefully analyzed players' tendencies rather than raw numbers. Lewis compares the GM and his crew of "computer geeks" to "card counters at a blackjack table" (some might say the draft is actually more of a crap shoot). To carry the non-baseball analogy further: when describing the machinations involved in making Nicholas Swisher their first pick in 2002, it seems as if the author is writing not so much about baseball as about chess.

Lewis, a business writer whose previous books include *Liar's Poker, The New New Thing* and *Next*, tells this revolutionary tale with a mixture of keen insight, thoughtful prose and -- at times -- too much detail, which sometimes detracts from the overall picture. Many of his references are financial in nature, as when he speaks of "derivatives" -- those fragments of the game such as how the next pitch after a 1-1 count can make a huge difference in how a batter performs. Perhaps because of this, however, Lewis comes at the reader with fresh eyes, remarking on issues the average fan fails to notice, on the field and behind the scenes.

The Farm Report: The Business of Minor League Baseball, by **Anthony Salazar**

Over 39 Million Go to the Minors. For the second time in its history, Minor League Baseball (the other MLB), reached the 39 million attendance mark, as parks around the country witnessed 39,069,707 fans coming through the turnstiles. Of the 15 leagues, five hit all-time attendance records. Within the total number of leagues, there are 176 teams. The all-time attendance record was marked in 1949 when 39,782,717 fans watched 449 teams in 59 leagues.

For the fourth consecutive year, the Sacramento RiverCats and the Memphis RedBirds of the Pacific Coast League led all minor league teams in attendance with 766,326 and 749,446 fans, respectively.
Other minor league attendance leaders include the Round Rock Express (685,973 fans) and the Frisco RoughRiders (669,977 fans) of the Texas League; and from the Midwest League, the Dayton Dragons hit the 590,382 mark, an all-time record for Single-A classification.

Attendance hit 38,639,142 fans in the 2002 season, while 38,808,339 fans went to minor league games in 2001. That's a 430,565 increase from the 2002 season, and a 261,368 increase since 2001. The following table presents Minor League Baseball's attendance figures by league. Attendance figures were released by the Office of Minor League Baseball this autumn.

2003 Overall Minor League Attendance

League			
International	6,368,799	932	6,833
Pacific Coast	6,998,344	1,107	6,322
Mexican	3,033,286	863	3,515
Eastern	3,677,309	779	4,721
Southern	2,283,659	654	3,492
Texas	2,767,854	545	5,079
California	1,564,199	678	2,307
Carolina	1,458,840	503	2,900
Florida State	842,303	747	1,128
Midwest	3,375,898	909	3,714
South Atlantic	3,129,212	1,015	3,083
NY-Penn	1,784,663	498	3,584
Northwest	891,091	303	2,941
Appalachian	265,985	293	908
Pioneer	628,265	293	2,144
TOTAL	**39,069,707**	**10,119**	

Evaluating the Free Agent Class of 2002 & the Effect of Contract Years, by **Don Leypoldt**

"Of course he is playing well. It's his contract year!" Sports fans often bandy about phrases with similar sentiments. Conventional thinking says that an impending free agent plays better in the last year of his contract, in the hopes of making himself more attractive to bidding teams. But is that really the case? If so, logic says that there should be a fall off in his production the first year he signs a new contract, since the player over-performed the previous year. As MLB free agent bidding starts this month, will the new teams overpay for talent based on inflated past performances? Or is the notion of a "contract year" a myth?

To test the validity of the hypothesis "Contract years inflate performance," I compared the 2002 and 2003 performances of the 153 major leaguers who were in the free agent class of 2002. I began by collecting the 2002 and 2003 performance, team and contract statistics of every player eligible for free agency at the end of 2002 (all figures from USA Today). I then divided these players into three categories: hitters, starting pitchers and relievers. I next reduced the collective performance of all players in each category into a single, full-season stat line to provide a fair basis for comparison.

I also analyzed two key subsets of the data:

1. Length of contract. Since stars tend to get long term contracts while average players tend to get one-year deals, I compared the performance change of players signing long term deals with those who signed one year contracts.
2. Type of contract: those who signed major league contracts vs. those who signed minor league deals.

I found that while players in all three categories exhibited significant drops in *appearances*, the *performance* of hitters and starting pitchers remained remarkably constant from 2002 to 2003. Only relievers experienced a performance drop off.

Specifically, free agent hitters had 10% fewer at-bats in 2003 compared to 2002. Starting pitchers threw 27% fewer innings; relievers pitched 29% fewer. But as the tables below show, when projected over a full season (500 AB for hitters, 180 IP for starters), their collective performance was strikingly similar:

Year	**AB**	**R**	**H**	**HR**	**RBI**	**BB**	**SO**	**BA**	**OBP**	**SLG**	**SB**	**OPS**
2002	500	67	134	16	68	50	87	.268	.336	.430	7	.766
2003	500	67	133	15	68	50	88	.266	.330	.423	5	.753

Year	ERA	W	L	PCT.	GS	IP	H	BB	K	WHIP
2002	4.32	10	11	.482	29	180	185	58	114	1.35
2003	4.43	12	10	.537	28	180	192	55	112	1.37

WHIP = **W**alks and **H**its per **I**nning **P**itched

While starters' winning percentage increased significantly, one reason could be that the free agents joined better teams. Nine of the 31 free agent starters pitched for playoff teams in 2003, and many other free agents pitched for Seattle, St. Louis and other contenders. Since their collective ERA actually increased from 2002 to 2003, the better winning percentage is unlikely to be a function of the pitchers' own performance. The ERA of free agent relievers jumped even more:

Year	**ERA**	**W**	**L**	**PCT.**	**SV**	**IP**	**H**	**BB**	**K**	**WHIP**
2002	4.06	4	5	.467	4	80	79	36	59	1.36
2003	4.42	4	5	.452	3	80	83	32	61	1.43

With the exception of games played, there is no evidence of a contract year for hitters. For pitchers, there is a slightly stronger case, although the performance changes are not statistically overwhelming.

Subsets:

As a whole, there is little evidence that players over-perform in their contract year. But not all free agents are created equal. Big stars sign rich, multi-year deals. Regular players and benchwarmers tend to sign smaller one-year or minor league deals. If the hypothesis is correct, a star player is more likely to over-perform in his contract year than a regular player, because the stakes are higher. More bidders will find him attractive if he performs, and that will drive up his price.

In fact, players who signed a one year or a minor league deal had a 3 point increase in their batting average and no change in their OPS (on base plus slugging) average from 2002 to 2003. Those who signed multi-year deals saw their batting average decrease by an average of 12 points and a decrease in their OPS of 26 points. Here's the data, with the bottom pair of columns representing players who signed multi-year contracts:

Year	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	SB	OPS
2002	500	64	132	15	68	48	88	.264	.324	.420	7	.685
2003	500	66	134	15	65	46	86	.267	.326	.418	6	.685

Year	**AB**	**R**	**H**	**HR**	**RBI**	**BB**	**SO**	**BA**	**OBP**	**SLG**	**SB**	**OPS**
2002	500	79	142	21	74	63	82	.285	.365	.478	7	.842
2003	500	70	136	19	78	63	86	.273	.356	.461	4	.816

The same holds true for pitchers. Pitchers who signed a minor league deal or a one year deal had a tiny drop in WHIP and lowered their ERA by .22 points from 2002 to 2003. Those who signed multi-year deals saw their ERA rise by nearly an entire run and had their WHIP increase by .16. The winning percentage of pitchers who signed minor league or one year deals increased 84 points from 2002 to 2003, while those who signed multi-year deals saw their winning percentages fall 72 points. Statistics for a projected 180-inning season are shown below. As similar effects were noted among both starters and relievers, the tables combine the two groups for the sake of space. Once again, pitchers who signed minor-league contracts or one-year contracts are listed first, those who signed multi-year contracts follow. Although the pitchers who signed long-term contracts had been significantly superior in 2002, the performance of the two groups converged in 2003 to the point that it becomes difficult to tell them apart:

Year	**ERA**	**W**	**L**	**PCT.**	**IP**	**H**	**BB**	**K**	**WHIP**
2002	4.65	9	12	.421	180	190	64	122	1.41
2003	4.43	10	10	.505	180	189	60	124	1.39

Year	**ERA**	**W**	**L**	**PCT.**	**IP**	**H**	**BB**	**K**	**WHIP**
2002	3.45	12	8	.588	180	170	54	117	1.24
2003	4.41	12	11	.516	180	190	62	117	1.40

Among both hitters and pitchers, those who signed multi-year contracts exhibited sharp drops in performance, those who signed one-year or minor-league contracts did not. This supports the hypothesis that a star player tends to over-perform in the last year of his contract. It will be interesting to see how Miguel Tejada, Bartolo Colon, Gary Sheffield and others play this out as they take the field with new contracts in 2004.

The View from Japan, by **Yoshihiro Koda**

The 2003 Japan Series matched the Pacific League's champion Fukuoka Daiei Hawks against the Central League champion Hanshin Tigers. The best-of-seven series went the full seven games before the Hawks won the championship. The series attracted a record total of 289,640 fans, and TV ratings were more than 20% for each game even in Tokyo, where no games are held.

The Hawks and the Tigers attracted huge crowds during the regular season, too. Each set a franchise seasonal attendance record, drawing more than 3,000,000 fans for their 70 home games. The 2003 season was a success for both clubs, both on the field and as a business.

But even after such a great season, Hawks fans are still concerned about the future of their team. The club is owned by Daiei, a nation wide retailer which has experienced serious financial problems in recent years. Its creditors are pushing Daiei to sell the Hawks and related facilities, including their home park, Fukuoka Dome, and a hotel next to the Dome.

60% of the Hawks' stock is held by Daiei, with the remainder owned by Tadashi Nakamichi, a son of the founder of Daiei who is generally considered the owner. Nakamichi has resisted selling the club and its facilities for a long time, but under pressure from creditors is about to sell the Dome and the hotel to an American investment company, Colony Capital. Even if Colony Capital is also interested in the Hawks, it can not buy them, because the Japanese professional leagues prohibit ownership by any 100% overseas company..

Hawk fans have supported Nakamichi's desire to remain as an owner. Baseball fans in Fukuoka lost their first team 25 years ago, when the Lions moved to the Tokyo metropolitan area. Ten years later, Daiei bought the Hawks and moved them to Fukuoka from Osaka. After struggling for a decade, the Hawks have won three pennants and two Japan Series in the last five years, causing Fukuoka fans to regard the Hawks as their treasure. The fans appreciate Nakamichi and his late father, the first owner of the Hawks, for bringing baseball back to Fukuoka.

After the final game of the Japan Series, some Fukuoka fans held up a banner declaring, "Tadashi Nakamichi should be an owner of the Hawks forever!" was shown at stadium by some fans after the game at which the Hawks won the Japan championship. The fans seemed to be encouraging club executives as they struggled with financial issues.

A few days later, though, the Hawk fans were angry and disappointed. They were not alone; the team's field manager and players also showed their distrust of team executives. In an unusual incident, the Hawks sent away one of their sluggers without any security. Rumors suggest that this was connected to the financial issue.

Some rumors are targeting one of the club's chief executives. After reviving the near-bankrupt hotel next to the Fukuoka Dome, he was asked to do the same for the team. So far he has been successful, leading the Hawks to both a championship and record home attendance.

However, some players have also resisted his handling. In 1999, another year in which the Hawks won the Japan Series, their ace pitcher left the club, complaining about management. At the press conference, the slugger who was leaving the Hawks said, "The thinking way of the executives and players may never cross." These words may often be heard in the winter – probably on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.