Outside the Lines

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Editor: Doug Pappas, 100 E. Hartsdale Ave., #6EE, Hartsdale, NY 10530-3244, 914-472-7954.
E-mail: SABRBaseballBiz@aol.com

Chairman's Note

Hope to see many of you at SABR's 33rd annual convention, to be held at the Denver Marriott from May 10-13. The Business of Baseball Committee's annual meeting is scheduled for 1:00 PM Friday, May 11. In addition to the usual discussion, and hopefully a special guest or two, this year's meeting will focus on building a Committee infrastructure.

Towards this end, whether or not you're coming to Denver, before the convention I'd appreciate hearing from as many of you as possible about (a) what business of baseball topics you're currently researching; (b) whether you have time to work on a Committee project; and (c) what you think would make a good Committee project. We'll discuss these at the convention and in the next newsletter. Drop me a note or an E-mail with your suggestions when you get the chance.

For example, new Committee member **Brett McGinness** asks: "I'm compiling a database of Major and Minor League Baseball attendance. I'm ultimately hoping to find a reasonably successful attendance predictor, factoring in everything from median income and average ticket prices to stadium age and population density. If there are other members doing any similar work, I'd love to pool resources and effort." Brett can be contacted at brettmcg@hotmail.com.

On another note, I've started a Weblog of links, news and commentary about the business of baseball. The URL is http://www.roadsidephotos.com/baseball/bbblog.htm.

MLB News

Opening day average salary up, median down. 2003's average salary of $2,555,476 is 7.2% higher than the 2002 Opening Day average, but the median continues to drop: $800,000 this year, down from $900,000 in 2002 and $975,000 in 2000.

Ticket prices up 2.8%. According to *Team Marketing Report*, the average MLB ticket now costs $18.69. The Boston Red Sox charge the most: their average of $42.34 is fully *70%* higher than the second-place Yankees. Montreal remains MLB's best bargain, at $9.00 (U.S.). Anaheim and Minnesota posted the largest percentage increase, while Texas slashed prices 11.4% and Tampa Bay's declined by 8.5%.

Surprise! Yankees remain MLB's most valuable franchise. *Forbes* values the Yankees at $849 million, up 13% in 2002. That's over $350 million more than the #2 club, the crosstown Mets, who are worth $498 million. The Cubs and Twins posted the largest gains in percentage terms, while Bud's Brewers lost 14% of their value. *Forbes* estimated an average 2002 operating loss of $1.3 million/team, or about $40 million for MLB as a whole. At one extreme, the Mariners earned $23.3 million net of revenue sharing; at the other, the Rangers lost $24.5 million.

More non-US players than ever. 230 of the 827 players on Opening Day 25-man rosters or disabled lists -- 27.8% -- were born outside the United States. This percentage is up from 26.1% in 2001 and 19.0% in 1997. The Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Venezuela contributed the most major leaguers, but 14 other countries were represented.

Early season attendance down 4.6%. Meanwhile, minor league attendance has increased by about the same percentage.

Selig says he'll step down in 2006. In late April, Commissioner Selig told a group of sports editors that he will retire when his current contract expires on December 31, 2006. I'll believe it when I see it -- particularly since the Major League Constitution expires the same day, and the new CBA expires on December 19, 2006. MLB won't, and shouldn't, install a new Commissioner just as labor talks are resuming.

Expos' 2004 home still undecided. Major League Baseball still hopes to find a new home, and a new

new owner, for the Montreal Expos before the 2004 season. These hopes are dimming, however, as local governments aren't opening their wallets as fast, or as far, as MLB had hoped. MLB's attitude was summarized by Jerry Reinsdorf, chairman of the relocation committee. When informed that Washington, D.C.'s stadium financing plan called for a mix of 2/3 public money to 1/3 private money, Reinsdorf responded, "Two-thirds/one-third is fine, but three thirds/no thirds is more of what we had in mind."

Here are the offers being discussed at press time. None has actually been approved by the relevant legislature. In addition, the judge hearing the RICO action against Jeffrey Loria, Bud Selig and others has ordered that while the case is pending (an arbitration against Loria must be heard first), MLB must give at least 90 days' notice of any attempt to move or sell the Expos.

- Washington, D.C.: $338 million, including $75 million toward construction of a new park; $15 million to renovate RFK Stadium for interim use; and $48 million for interest and financing costs. The club owner would be expected to contribute another $125 to $150 million. The anticipated $24 million/year in financing costs would come from a 10% tax on concessions, parking and admissions ($10.1 million); a graduated tax on D.C. businesses with more than $3 million/year in gross revenue ($9 million); and a special income tax imposed only on major league baseball players ($4.5 million). MLB and the MLBPA have both voiced strong opposition to the tax.
- Northern Virginia: $285 million toward the $400 million cost of a new park, with the bonds to be financed through sales and income taxes at the stadium, including a special levy on the salaries of players and club officials ($8.3 million); an admissions tax ($8.3 million); rental of retail space at the stadium ($1.5 million); a hotel tax in Alexandria and Arlington and Fairfax Counties ($1.5 million); and rental of the stadium for other events ($0.5 million).
- Portland, Oregon: Roughly $250 million in state and local support toward a $350 million ballpark. The state's share of $150 million would not be an official obligation of the state; if a new tax on MLB player and executive salaries didn't cover the debt service, either the legislature or a yet-to-be-named guarantor would have to come up with the difference. Local support would come from increases in the hotel/motel and car rental taxes, plus tax increment financing.

All-Star Game winner to get home field advantage in World Series. The MLBPA accepted the owners' proposal on a two-year trial basis. As part of the deal, All-Star rosters will expand from 30 to 32 players.

Original list of contraction candidates revealed. MLB documents which became public in March reveal that in July 2001, MLB officials identified the Anaheim Angels, along with the Devil Rays, Twins and Expos, as possible contraction targets. The plan called for contracting the Angels and moving the Oakland Athletics to Anaheim. This can be called the semifinal list of contraction candidates. The quarterfinal list, prepared in December 2000, contained eight names: the four clubs above plus Arizona, Florida, Kansas City and San Diego. With the Diamondbacks and Angels both winning the World Series one year after being targeted for possible elimination, the Twins and Expos are hoping the pattern repeats itself.

Around the Majors

Angels sold for $184 million. The purchaser, Arturo Moreno, is a fourth-generation Mexican-American whose fortune, estimated at $940 million by *Forbes*, comes from Outdoor Systems, Inc., a billboard company sold to Infinity Broadcasting Co. in 1999. The purchase price seems surprisingly low: *Forbes* had valued the Angels at $225 million, and Disney had demanded $250 million for them in 2001. The other clubs owned by giant media corporations, AOL Time Warner's Atlanta Braves and News Corp.'s Los Angeles Dodgers, are also reportedly for sale.

Cubs' ticket scalping plan leads to legal, public relations trouble. Last summer the Chicago Cubs invented a new way to hide revenue from their fellow clubs: scalping their own tickets. The Cubs set up Wrigley Field Premium Ticket Services, a nominally separate entity, and sold WFPTS thousands of prime seats at face value without ever offering them to the public. WPFTS then offered the tickets to the public at scalpers' prices – for the series against the Yankees, $155 for a $30 bleacher seat or $1,500 for a $45 front-row box seat. Several ticketholders sued under an Illinois law which forbids the presenter of a sporting event from selling tickets above face value, and a local judge recently certified the case as a class action. Disclosure of the scheme by Greg Couch in the *Chicago Sun-Times* (the *Tribune* seems strangely uninterested...) has infuriated many of the Cubs' most loyal fans, especially those who tried and failed to buy these tickets at the box office. MLB may also be interested, since the tactic seems to be a way for the Cubs to report the face to report the face value of the tickets for revenue sharing purposes while actually receiving much more.

White Sox sell naming rights for $68 million. After playing in Comiskey Park for 92 years, the White Sox will call U.S. Cellular Field home through the 2025 season. The deal was announced simultaneously with a 15-year extension of their lease.

Brewers' roof still acting up. Miller Park's pivoting stadium roof has been plagued with problems since the park opened. The pivot system was repaired during the offseason at a cost of $5 million, but now four of the 10 motors that power the system have failed prematurely. According to the contractor, the retractable roof, which was originally budgeted at $46 million, wound up costing $133 million.

Twins win right to keep finances private. The last remaining piece of the lawsuit over contraction was an attempt to local media to gain access to 9,000 pages of financial documents produced by the Twins. A Minnesota appellate court has affirmed a lower court ruling that the state's open records law doesn't apply to these documents, which were obtained by subpoena and subject to a protective order of confidentiality.

Expos' first "home" games in Puerto Rico draw well. Hoping to reduce its losses on the Expos, MLB moved 22 of their home games to 19,000-seat Hiram Bithorn Park in San Juan, Puerto Rico after a promoter guaranteed $350,000 per game. Expanded to an 81-game home season, that guarantee would total $28,350,000, which is more than seven clubs' 2001 home gate receipts. Puerto Rico welcomed MLB by imposing a 20% income tax on player salaries for games played in the commonwealth, though for most players this will simply offset taxes they would have paid elsewhere.

NYC audit claims the Mets owe $3.4 million in back rent. The city claims that the Mets, whose rent payments are tied to revenues, deducted too much of their revenue-sharing payments from the gross reported to the city. Another part of the dispute involves the small, rotating ads located behind home plate. The city's lease entitles it to 10% of scoreboard advertising, but the Mets claim that these small signs, visible primarily from the center field camera, should be treated as TV ads.

Padres prepare to play in Petco Park. The pet supply company paid $60 million for 22 years of naming rights to the Padres' new stadium, which is scheduled to open next April.

*Book Review: Andrew Zimbalist, **May the Best Team Win**,* by **Doug Pappas**

Eleven years ago, Andrew Zimbalist's *Baseball and Billions* heralded a new era in the coverage of the business side of Major League Baseball: serious, skeptical commentary written for the non-economist. *May the Best Team Win: Baseball Economics and Public Policy*, Zimbalist updates his analysis, with a special focus on the issues of profitability, new stadia and "competitive balance," and offers his own proposals for fixing what's *really* wrong with MLB, as opposed to what the owners claim is wrong. While not as groundbreaking as *Baseball and Billions*, Zimbalist has again produced a fine addition to the literature.

Notwithstanding a few minor factual errors (e.g., Minnesota was the fourth, not the first, team to draw over 3 million fans (p. 8) and ESPN had no postseason telecasts in 2001 (p. 63)), Zimbalist is strongest when marshaling evidence in support of his analysis. For example, he shows how the Padres, Yankees, Indians and Red Sox all reported higher revenues in their own financial statements or offering documents than MLB had reported for them in the December 2001 financial disclosures Commissioner Selig hailed as definitive. Zimbalist explains how the Yankees have an incentive to increase their stadium expenses: because their lease allows them to deduct the cost of maintenance and stadium improvements from their rent, and MLB allows them to deduct these expenses from their gross revenue before paying into the revenue-sharing pot, any improvements wind up costing them less than nothing. *May the Best Team Win* also includes a handy summary of recent franchise sales, as well as tables showing how each club would have been affected under different assumptions for MLB's revenue sharing formula.

The book's final chapter, "What Is to Be Done?", presents a series of quite reasonable public policy recommendations. Unfortunately, none stand any chance of adoption in the short term. MLB's unique antitrust exemption, and the provisions of the tax laws which subsidize the construction of new stadia and allow owners to create phantom losses by depreciating the value of player contracts, are ripe for repeal. Greater cooperation between owners and players could build the trust necessary to stabilize labor relations. But such trust must await the departure of Bud Selig from MLB's seat of power, and legislative change must almost certainly await the departure of a former owner from the White House and the election of a Congress less committed to the welfare of, and welfare for, the businesses and individuals who own sports franchises.

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

The baseball season in Japan for the year of 2003 opened with bad news. Following the war in Iraq, the two-game series between the Seattle Mariners and Oakland A's in Tokyo was canceled. Despite this regrettable event, the Japanese are continuing to embrace American baseball. Hideki Matsui, regarded as the best slugger in Japan until last year, has started his career in America, and he is being followed by a lot of Japanese media and fans who are going to American stadiums.

This situation has caused many in Japan to worry that Japanese baseball fans are losing their interest in domestic leagues. I am more optimistic. Even though Japanese fans feel closer to American baseball, the geographic distance between the two countries is a major obstacle. The fans in Japan can't go to American stadiums after work, and because of the time difference, American games are played in the morning in Japan, when most fans have to work. Under the circumstances, I do not believe that American baseball can't take place of Japanese baseball as a national pastime.

Turning to the domestic situation in Japan, the future of the Pacific League, one of two professional major leagues in Japan, is becoming cloudy. Many star players have been leaving PL clubs as free agents. Some signed with clubs in the rival Central League, while others have gone to America. For a long time, most PL clubs have had lower attendance and smaller broadcasting contracts than CL clubs, and free agency seems to have worsened this situation.

In an attempt to improve this situation, PL clubs have long sought interleague play against Central League clubs. A lot of fans and the Players Association supporting this idea, but the executive officers of CL clubs have never agreed. Their primary concern is losing some of their games against the Tokyo Giants, the nation's most popular club, whose visits always attract large crowds.

Having failed to win approval for interleague play, the PL has adopted a new playoff system for 2004. The league's second and third place teams will play a best-of-three series, with the winner progressing to a best-of-five series against the first-place club for the right to progress to the Japan Series against the winner of the Central League. PL officials expect that with three of the league's six clubs advancing to the postseason, the new system will produce more exciting games and keep more fans interested in the pennant race. I believe that they have studied the Wild Card system in America.

I don't like this idea. I believe the winners of each league's pennant race should play in the Japan Series as league champions. But unexpectedly, some field managers of PL teams are supporting the idea. These supporters include Sadaharu Oh, the former home run king who now manages the Fukuoka Daiei Hawks. I suspect the real economic pressures on the PL may be more serious than I thought, and that these club officials are feeling it

If the PL needs a better business climate, I would prefer to see interleague games introduced first, but as noted above, this is not likely to happen within the next few years. My next hope for the PL involves the Nippon-Ham Fighters. As I have written here before, next year they are moving their home from Tokyo to Sapporo. Sapporo has never hosted a professional baseball club, but has a new, good indoor stadium ready for the team.

This will mark the second PL club to move out of the urban areas of Tokyo or Osaka. Now three PL clubs and three CL clubs are based in metropolitan Tokyo, and two PL clubs and one CL clubs play in or near Osaka. Although much of the Japanese population lives in these areas, too many ballclubs are concentrated in these markets.

My hope is based on the success of the Hawks, the only PL club currently located outside of these two areas. The Hawks, who play in Fukuoka, have attracted more than 40,000 fans to each of their home games to date. I hope the people in Sapporo welcome the club and support them as well as Fukuoka has.

A friend of mine in Sapporo isn't so optimistic, though. He says that the recession in Hokkaido, the northern area of Japan whose capital is Sapporo, is more serious than in Tokyo or Osaka, and he doubts that the people of Sapporo will be able or willing to spend enough money attending baseball games. But the Fighters are eager to develop their new market. They have hired new staffers, including some who have worked for American baseball clubs. I hope their efforts prove fruitful and that they are able to create another baseball-crazy town in the north.

A Tale of Two Cities: How Pittsburgh and Philadelphia's ballparks were funded the same day and opened three years apart, by **Don Leypoldt**

On February 9, 1999, then-Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge signed a law that gave $325 million in state funds to the Pittsburgh Pirates, Pittsburgh Steelers, Philadelphia Phillies and Philadelphia Eagles franchises. The money would fund new stadiums for these four teams. Less than 26 months later, the Pirates opened their new stadium. As the Pirates start their third season in PNC Park, the Phillies' new ballpark is currently under construction, and will not open until April 2004. This article explores the financing and political issues that caused the three-year difference between the two stadium openings.

Despite sharing a governor, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia are two very different cities and markets. The Pirates play in the sixth smallest market in the major leagues, and their attendance was 2/3 of the major league average during the mid 1990s. The Phillies play in Major League Baseball's fifth largest market, and their attendance in the mid-1990s was 50% higher than the Pirates' attendance. The Phillies' media revenue is twice that of the Pirates' revenue. The combination of higher media revenues and higher attendance put the Phillies in a much stronger financial position than the Pirates.

The discrepancy in the two teams' financial strengths translated into different urgencies for a new ballpark. New ballparks usually mean a big increase in revenue, and the Pirates needed the revenue from a new stadium in order to survive in Pittsburgh. The Phillies, on the other hand, could view a new ballpark as a "nice to have", instead of as a necessity for survival in Philadelphia. Their 1993 National League pennant proved that they could not just survive, but thrive in the Philadelphia market and in Veterans Stadium. Additionally, teams in the past have used the threat of moving in order to extract stadium concessions from municipalities. The Pirates' lease with Three Rivers Stadium expired in 2001, whereas the Phillies' lease with Veterans Stadium expired in 2011. This meant that there was a legitimate possibility during the late 1990s that the Pirates could, and would move. Awareness of this possibility helped to expedite the new stadium process for the Pirates. The Phillies never resorted to this threat during their new ballpark's course of action.

It is important to evaluate the two cities' pathways to getting new stadiums with this background information in mind. The progressions of events in the cities of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia also help to explain the gap in the two ballpark openings.

Leading off: Pittsburgh's story

In 1995, Kevin McClatchy emerged as a potential buyer of the Bucs. McClatchy's bid was significant because of his promise to fight to keep the team in Pittsburgh. Despite the civic support that he received, McClatchy bought himself a fiscal mess. The year before, the Pirates publicly announced that they were in dire financial straits, and that they needed a new ballpark to survive in Pittsburgh. As part of the approval for McClatchy's purchase, the National League insisted that a new ballpark be built. The League ordered the city of Pittsburgh to have a stadium-financing plan in place by February of 1998, and a new ballpark built by 2001. Failure to do so would give McClatchy the right to move the team from Pittsburgh.

Fearful of losing a 110 year old Pittsburgh institution, Mayor Tom Murphy and the supporting Allegheny County Commissioners (Pittsburgh is the county seat of Allegheny County) mobilized a new ballpark campaign. Because no one source had the money to pay for a quarter-billion dollar ballpark, the funding would have to come from three different sources: the state, the county and the Pirates themselves. Ballpark proponents knew that obtaining financing through the state and county would be a significant challenge, because of strong taxpayer opposition to funding a stadium with public monies. Their initial referendum to fund the ballpark by increasing the sales tax in Allegheny and the ten surrounding counties an additional 1%, got clobbered nearly 2 to 1 by taxpayers in November 1997.

Murphy and the commissioners had to eventually rely on the RAD, or Regional Asset District tax, to get county funding. This is a special 1% Allegheny County sales tax that funds public works projects. More importantly, the allocation of the RAD funds did not involve taxpayer approval. In a very controversial vote in July 1998, the RAD board approved using their revenue to finance new stadiums for the Steelers and Pirates. The Board passed the funding with the bare minimum majority, which prompted a significant outcry from Pittsburgh citizens. But when the state legislature approved the last piece of the financing puzzle, by voting their allocation in February 1999, the mechanisms were all in place to fund the ballpark.

Pittsburgh was now almost finished with their plan. The site selection for the new ballpark was easy. A site on the North Shore of the Allegheny River was a ten-minute walk to downtown, underdeveloped, easy to acquire, and had access to major highways. The Pirates benefited from both PNC's relatively small size and extraordinary cooperation from the construction unions to build the ballpark in an unprecedented twenty-four months. The park was ready for Opening Day 2001, and it has received rave reviews.

Phorming a Phillies' Park

The February 1999 state-funding measure was the last item that the Pirates needed to get their ballpark. Conversely for Philadelphia, the state funding was merely their first step in getting a new park. Bill Giles, the Phillies' owner, was well aware of the tremendous success that his southern neighbors, the Orioles, were having with their downtown ballpark. (Baltimore is only 90 minutes from Philadelphia). Giles was also aware that Veterans Stadium was not a first rate baseball facility (although it is nowhere near as bad as the national media has made it out to be.) When McClatchy was required to have a new ballpark as a condition for buying the team, Giles starting lobbying for a downtown stadium in Philadelphia. The joint lobbying and clout from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia interests led to the state funding bill being passed. Neither city would have been influential enough to obtain funding for its own stadiums without help from the other.

Whereas Pittsburgh's primary challenge to getting a new ballpark was financing, Philadelphia's biggest reason for delay was site selection. Some wanted to keep the new stadium in the sports complex in South Philadelphia, which had highway accessibility, but no attractions within walking distance. Some wanted a downtown site. Some wanted to put the ballpark in Port Richmond, a working class neighborhood away from downtown, in an effort to revive that area. Indecision on choosing a location delayed sending a stadium-financing bill to City Council.

The Phillies finally decided to put the ballpark downtown. There were problems from the get-go. Residents were worried about traffic issues. There was great concern over the high number of properties that the city would have to buy and condemn. The delays, and the issues, meant that no stadium bill was brought to City Council in 1999. By November 1999, the Phillies and then Philadelphia mayor Ed Rendell had given up on a downtown site and were willing to accept a South Philadelphia location.

But Rendell wasn't mayor in 2000. Newly elected John Street was, and Street was a strong champion of a downtown site. Street's insistence on putting a ballpark downtown, despite the impracticalities and costs, took up almost all of the 2000 City Council legislative year and delayed a stadium bill for months. Mayor Street's mind changed as the opposition of downtown residents became more organized and forceful. Additionally, City Council heard an engineering report that announced that the City would need to spend close to $100 million in repairs and maintenance, in order to maintain the Vet and honor the Phillies and Eagles' leases there. This report brought some urgency to resolving the stadium issue, and the logistics problems of a South Philadelphia site were much faster to correct than those of a downtown site. In November 2000, after frantic scrambling, the City Council approved a bill to give the Eagles and Phillies $304 million to build new stadiums in the South Philadelphia sports complex. At that time, the Phillies announced an Opening Day of 2004 for the new ballpark. Construction is right on schedule, and the countdown is in progress. Phillies phans are eagerly awaiting the opening of what promises to be a gorgeous new ball field.

The 3 year wait between the opening of Pennsylvania's new ballparks can be explained by the different financial needs of the clubs, the different lease conditions of the clubs and by the different challenges the cities faced in financing and locating the parks. In the end, the Pirates got a beautiful new home. The Phillies will soon get theirs. The politics and financing behind them were not so beautiful, but the fights should soon be forgotten as Jim Thome launches home run balls against the Center City skyline, and Brian Giles pulls his homers into the Allegheny River.

About the author: Though now living in exile in Connecticut, Don Leypoldt is a suburban Philadelphia native and has a Master's degree from Penn State.

Looking Back

125 years ago: Warning that the National League is operating at a collective loss, league officials counsel salary restraint. NL adopts a uniform player contract and advises teams not to advance salaries to players during the winter.

100 years ago: On January 10, 1903, representatives of the AL and NL sign a Peace Agreement ending the war between the leagues -- but not before the AL rejects a consolidation plan proposed by several NL clubs. The proposal would have created a single 12-club league, similar to the 1893-99 NL, with teams in Boston, New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit and St. Louis. To consolidate, the AL team in Philadelphia would buy out the Phillies; Boston of the AL would move to Baltimore; Chicago NL and St. Louis AL would control the other formerly two-club cities; and the AL would abandon plans to place a team in New York. The AL refuses, and refuses to vacate New York, but agrees not to place a team in Pittsburgh if the player disputes can be settled. They are: a joint committee awards the AL nine of the 16 players claimed by both leagues, including future Hall of Famers Sam Crawford, George Davis, Ed Delahanty, Willie Keeler and Nap Lajoie.

The final piece of Organized Baseball's governance falls into place in September, with the adoption of a National Agreement by the majors and minors. The National Agreement establishes a three-member National Commission to govern Organized Baseball and formalizes the system which allows major league clubs to draft players from minor league rosters for a fixed, relatively low sum. The document solemnly declares: "The practice of farming is prohibited. All right or claim of a major league club to a player shall cease when such player becomes a member of a minor league club, and no arrangement between clubs for the loan or return of a player shall be binding between the parties to it or recognized by other clubs."

75 years ago: At the December 1928 NL meetings, league president John Heydler proposes allowing teams to designate a player to hit for the pitcher. The proposal is tabled in the face of unanimous AL opposition.

The December 20, 1928 *Sporting News* condemns a proposal by Braves owner Emil Fuchs:

“Judge Fuchs of the Boston Club wished to have suspended players granted a hearing. For some reason this seemed to escape the attention of the New York baseball men. It is one of the most extraordinary requests made by a major league official in a long time because almost all requests have been of a nature to make the rulings of suspension more binding. There is no other way in which players are to be kept in order. Once given a little leeway they will venture farther and farther upon forbidden ground until they are a law unto themselves as they have been in the past.

“It was finally decided that the president of the league would furnish a copy of the umpire’s report to the club from which a player is suspended but it is safe to say that the average player who is removed for a ball game has been given cause before he is set down, and there should not be any loosening of the bonds of discipline. Any return to the conditions of former days would be disastrous.”

50 years ago: The Supreme Court reaffirms Organized Baseball's antitrust exemption. Before the decision, Cubs owner Phil Wrigley predicted that the exemption would be overturned -- and that baseball would be better for the ruling. "The result will be chaos for a while, but I believe good will come of it in the end and that we will be better off eventually." Wrigley favors replacing farm systems with independent minor leagues, with major league clubs allowed to option a limited number of players to the minors.

25 years ago: Commissioner Bowie Kuhn appoints a 10-member commission to study the possibility of switching to a three-divisions-plus-wildcard format, and the possibility of interleague play. The AL generally favors both, with the NL opposed. Kuhn also testifies before Congress, apparently with a straight face, that a proposal to limit the deductibility of sports tickets and other entertainment could force baseball clubs to raise their ticket prices by as much as 50%.

In his December 1978 “State of the Game” message, Kuhn declares, “I am not very happy when I see stars like Luis Tiant and Tommy John signed by the world champion New York Yankees. The Yankees are fully within their legal rights, but this trend fulfills a prophecy some of us made that the star free agents would tend to sign with the best teams. It’s inevitable that this process will lead to a group of elite teams controlling the sport. Already, five teams have signed 53 percent of the free agents during the first three years of the new system.” Kuhn says he’s “watching [the situation] to see if I should take any action,” but Marvin Miller reminds him that because the issue has been collectively bargained, he's powerless to act. The Yankees obligingly moot the issue by finishing fourth in 1979, and don't win another Series for 18 years.

New Members

Samantha Bunten, 2420 16th St. NW, #302, Washington, DC 20009, sbunten@musearchitects.com
Mark McClusky, 2742 Golden Gate Ave., San Francisco, CA 94116, mark@mcclusky.com
Pearse McDade, 1006A Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002, Pearse.McDade@verizon.net
Ian McDonald, *The Wall Street Journal*, ian.mcdonald@wsj.com
Brett McGinness, 2473-A 20th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94116, brettmcg@hotmail.com

Stephen Miller, 4949 Lyle Road, Columbus, OH 43229, swmiller@wideopenwest.com
Eric Schuster, 3363 N. Deerfield Ave., Yorktown Heights, NY 10598, Schuster@USTA.com

New Addresses

Frank Cunliffe, 225 Penn Boulevard, Landsdowne, PA 19050-2628, fhc2@hotmail.com