Outside the Lines

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Chairman's Note

Partial archives now online. Although the official Business of Baseball Committee Web site remains under construction, I've posted my own writings on the subject, from the newsletter and elsewhere, at http://www.roadsidephotos.com/baseball/ . I'll be updating the site throughout the off-season with thoughts about contraction, labor relations and the like. The site also contains a number of downloadable data files, and links to other sites likely to be of interest to Committee members.

MLB News

MLB threatens to contract by two teams. See separate article.

Commissioner Selig announces $500 million losses in 2001. Details to be presented at a December 6 Congressional hearing. This should be fun; check my Web site for further commentary.

Selig receives three-year contract extension. When Bud Selig became acting Commissioner in 1992, MLB's own numbers show that the sport was modestly profitable. The owners now claim to be losing $500 million/year despite greater revenue sharing and a doubling of gross revenues, yet they're so happy with Bud's leadership that they extended his contract two years before it was due to expire.

Labor talks on hold pending contraction grievance. Although the CBA expired November 7, MLB has not imposed a signing free and has promised not to lock out the players "for now." Murray Chass of the *New York Times* reported that early this season, secret talks were going so well that the negotiators thought they might strike a deal by the All-Star break. However, the owners broke off talks in late June, reportedly because Selig and his allies favored a harder line than their negotiators were taking.

MLBPA accounts down to "only" $114 million. This fund, collected mostly from licensing fees, compares to $200 million before the 1994 strike. MLBPA membership remains one of the world's best investments: each member's $9,150 annual dues returns roughly three times this sum from MLBPA-administered licensing agreements.

Most TV ratings rise. Regular-season ratings for national network and cable telecasts held steady, while ratings at the various local Fox Sports Nets rose by an average of 10% in 2001. The Seattle Mariners led the way with an average 14.9 rating; the Minnesota Twins posted the largest increase, a whopping 161%. The World Series averaged a 15.6 rating and 25 share, up 26% from 2000's all-New York series; Game 7's 23.5/34 made it the most-watched baseball game since Game 7 of the 1991 Twins-Braves series.

Video Webcasting of games in 2002? After attracting a reported 120,000 paying subscribers for its $9.95 package of live game audiocasts, mlb.com may also offer live videocasts for 2002. The Webcasts would feature the team's local video feed, and would probably be blacked out in markets where the game telecasts are available through cable or free TV. The details must still be negotiated with local rights holders.

Around the Majors

Diamondbacks win Series, look for more money. The team's backers have invested $198 million to date; managing general partner Jerry Colangelo wants another $160 million over 10 years for working capital. Earlier this year the team persuaded its high-priced veterans to defer large chunks of their salaries, freeing up cash for now but creating huge deferred liabilities.

Braves claim "mammoth" operating losses. Without disclosing the numbers, Atlanta president Stan Kasten insisted that despite the team's uniquely lucrative national cable deal with its affiliate WTBS, the Braves have sustained "very, very serious" operating losses in 2000 and 2001.

Red Sox bids received. The Yawkey estate's 53 percent share of the Red Sox – an asset that includes 80% of the NESN regional sports cable network, as well as Fenway Park and its land – is expected to sell for $350 million or more. Former Padres owner Tom Werner heads a bidding syndicate that includes former Senator/Blue Ribbon Economic Panelist George Mitchell, baseball executive Larry Lucchino and The New York Times Company; other bidders include Charles Dolan of Cablevision, brother of Indians' owner Larry Dolan, and several local developers and concessionaires.

Reds ordered to pay $6.5 million back rent. Marge Schott had withheld the money in a dispute over alleged preferential treatment given the NFL Bengals. County officials offered to forgive the rent in return for the Reds' signing a lease for a new park, but local resident Steven Ritter sued to invalidate the concession. A local judge held that since the Reds were still playing in the same park under the terms of the same lease, the county couldn't waive its right to the money.

Marlins could soon be sold. Rumors suggest that Expos owner Jeffrey Loria could soon buy the Marlins from John Henry for $150 million. Henry would then buy the Anaheim Angels from Disney, while the Expos would be contracted, sold to the highest bidder or operated by MLB itself.

Expos outdrawn by 13 minor league teams. Montreal's average crowd of 7,648 fans per home game was less than, among others, the Class A Kane County Cougars. As of late September, the Expos were responsible for the majors' *32* smallest home crowds. The Expos have signed a lease for 2002, but it contains an escape clause in the event of contraction.

Yankees announce new cable network. YankeeNets, which owns the Yankees, Nets and New Jersey Devils, owns 52% of the new YES Network, with 40% held by investment bankers and the remainder by individuals. YES, which will begin airing the Yankees in March, the Nets in November 2002, and the Devils in 2007, is still negotiating with local cable companies over the cost of its programming.

Pirates revenues jump in new park. Owner Kevin McClatchy noted that PNC Bank paid $30 million over 20 years for naming rights, and that the Pirates sold all 65 luxury suites, for an average of $80,000, in just 1-1/2 months. Even though the price of an average ticket rose from $11.80 in 2000 to $21.48 in 2001, attendance jumped from 1.7 million to a franchise-record 2.4 million.

Padres receive $48 million stadium guarantee from MLB. The Padres are responsible for $146 million of the $450 million cost of a planned ballpark-and-redevelopment project in San Diego. The same week that Commissioner Selig explained that MLB would rather kill off low-revenue teams than loan them money for new parks, MLB agreed to guarantee $48 million of the Padres' contribution. Construction on the park was suspended in October 2000 in the wake of lawsuits challenging the city's share of the funding, but it's now expected to be ready for Opening Day 2004.

Rangers' stadium mortgage paid off 10 years early. The $135 million bond issue approved in early 1991 was financed by a half-cent sales tax increase, as well as $3.5 million year from the Rangers. The deal benefitted from a recession in the construction industry while the park was being built, followed by faster-than-expected economic growth that produced higher sales tax revenues.

Blue Jays claim huge losses, blame exchange rate. In early October Blue Jays officials said the club would lose $50 million (Canadian) in 2001, with roughly $40 million of this sum attributable to the exchange rate. The club claims losses of $10 million in 2000, $8.7 million in 1999, $42.8 million in 1998 and $36.3 million in 1997 (all figures in Canadian dollars).

Northern Virginians propose $325 million stadium. The Virginia Baseball Stadium Authority is already authorized to issue up to $200 million in state-backed bonds, and has identified four potential sites for a park, including two in Arlington County and two in Fairfax County. Even before MLB declared it would rather contract teams than move them, both of Virginia's Senators and three of its Congressmen were hinting they could challenge MLB's antitrust exemption if metropolitan Washington, D.C. didn't get a team soon.

Results of the First Annual Bud Selig Prediction Contest

In November 2000, Commissioner Bud Selig solemnly advised Congress, "At the start of spring training, there no longer exists hope and faith for the fans of more than half of our 30 clubs." Since neither Selig nor anyone else who makes these generalizations ever identifies the teams that "can't possibly win," the statement is all but meaningless.

Last January our annual survey put Selig's claim to the test. Respondents were asked to predict *which* 16 clubs ("more than half") were least likely to make the playoffs in 2001.

The line between contenders and pretenders proved easy to draw. In addition to the eight postseason qualifiers (Yankees, Indians, Mariners, Athletics, Braves, Astros, Cardinals and Diamondbacks), six more clubs – the Twins, Phillies, Mets, Cubs, Giants and Dodgers – finished six or fewer games out of the playoffs. The wildcard format made no difference, as both wild-card teams had better records than the other divisions' winners.

Here's who we picked as the likely losers, the 16 clubs whose fans should have "no hope and faith":

0 votes:	Atlanta, Chicago White Sox, New York Yankees, St. Louis, San Francisco
1 vote:	Boston, New York Mets, Oakland
2 votes:	Cleveland
8 votes:	Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Seattle, Texas
9 votes:	Arizona
11 votes:	Houston
14 votes:	Colorado
15 votes:	Toronto
19 votes:	Minnesota
20 votes:	Anaheim, Detroit, Florida, San Diego
21 votes:	Kansas City, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay
22 votes:	Baltimore, Chicago Cubs, Montreal, Philadelphia

Out of 30 teams, we made five gross errors and two other serious errors. Every single respondent was wrong about the White Sox, Cubs and Phillies. Only one correctly concluded that the Red Sox wouldn't contend; only three picked the Twins to contend. Nearly two-thirds of us wrongly expected the Reds and Rangers to contend. In addition, half were wrong about the Astros, and nine of the 22 respondents wrote off the eventual world champion Diamondbacks. Although the contest essentially asked us only to assign each team to the top or bottom *half* of the league, we still were wrong about 30% of the time.

If he had elaborated on his testimony, Commissioner Bud would probably have picked the highest-paid club in each division to win, with the highest-payroll non-winners taking the wild-cards. This formula would have missed five of the eight postseason qualifiers. Only two divisions, the AL East and AL Central, were won by the team with the highest payroll, and Atlanta, which won the NL East, would have been the wild-card under the Selig Prediction Formula. Overall, the postseason qualifiers ranked 1st (Yankees), 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th, 11th, 17th, and 29th (Athletics) on the payroll scale. Seattle won 116 games with the 11th highest payroll, while the Diamondbacks won the World Series with the eighth highest. The other six contenders identified above ranked 3rd, 4th, 14th, 15th, 24th and 30th, while the six last-place teams ranked 7th, 13th, 18th, 19th, 26th and 28th.

[Look for another contest like this in the next annual survey.]

Contraction Follies, by **Doug Pappas**

On November 4, fans thrilled to the ninth-inning, seventh-game conclusion of the most exciting World Series in years. Two days later, Major League Baseball's owners, led by Commissioner-for-Life Bud Selig, destroyed all the goodwill the Series had produced by declaring that two of MLB's thirty teams would be eliminated during the off-season.

When contraction was first proposed, a major obstacle was the shortage of owners willing to get out of baseball. Disney was looking to sell the Angels, but only to someone who would keep the club in Anaheim. Montreal was the most obvious target, but Jeffrey Loria was determined to operate a baseball team. So was John Henry in Florida. The Tampa Bay Devil Rays were locked into a long-term lease and played in a state whose Attorney General had vowed to stop any attempt to move or fold the team, and whose courts had already held MLB's antitrust exemption inapplicable to issues of franchise movement.

Then Carl Pohlad came to Selig's rescue. Pohlad, MLB's wealthiest non-corporate owner, was frustrated that Minnesotans wouldn't build him a nearly-free stadium after he had pocketed tens of millions of revenue-sharing dollars without reinvesting them in the club. If Selig needed another team to contract, he could have the Twins – for a sizable premium over their market value, of course.

Never mind that the Twins are an original American League franchise with 40 years of history in Minnesota. Never mind that the Twins had won two World Series since 1987, and almost won their division this year. Never mind that the Twins outdrew the Yankees from 1987 through 1994, or that attendance had risen 68% in 2001. Never mind that Minneapolis-St. Paul is larger than Cleveland, St. Louis or Denver, or that local investors (including Clark Griffith, son of the man who sold the Twins to Pohlad) are willing to buy the team.

team. The Twins were the missing piece in Commissioner Bud's master plan, so they had to go.

But Pohlad had forgotten two things. First, on September 26, Twins president Jerry Bell had notified the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission, owner of the Metrodome, that the team was exercising its option to play at the Metrodome in 2002. Second, the Twins' lease at the Metrodome provided: "If the Team ceases to play major league professional baseball games for any reason, the Team shall have breached this Agreement and will be liable for such remedies as may be available to the commission at law or in equity, including, but not limited to injunctive relief, and orders for specific performance requiring the Team to play its Home Games at the Stadium during the Term hereof."

Relying on this provision, a local judge enjoined MLB and the Twins from contracting the team or playing home games anywhere but the Metrodome in 2002. The Minnesota Supreme Court rejected MLB's emergency appeal, leaving the injunction in place and directing the intermediate appellate court to expedite consideration of the case. Even on an expedited basis, though, the appeal won't be decided until 2002 – too late for the Twins to be contracted over this off-season.

Another major roadblock is, not surprisingly, the MLBPA. While the owners recognized that they would have to negotiate the *effects* of contraction with the union, they took the position that the decision to eliminate teams did not have to be bargained. The MLBPA's grievance will not be heard until mid-December – and even if MLB wins, it is unlikely to be able to negotiate the details in time to contract for the 2002 season. MLB wants to allocate players from the affected organizations through a dispersal draft, while the MLBPA would insist on free agency for all affected players.

One man who thinks the players are likely to win their grievance is former Commissioner Fay Vincent, who told ESPN Radio, "I would put my money on Donald [Fehr]'s legal opinion over the owners because Donald is always right and the owners never are." Terming contraction "a public-relations fiasco delivered by the owners," Vincent asked pointedly, "If baseball is suffering financially as much as they say they are, then where are they going to get the money to buy these teams out?"

Contraction also met with swift legal opposition. Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone and Michigan Representative John Conyers introduced bills to strip MLB of its antitrust exemption with respect to franchise matters. Conyers explained, "Any time 30 of the wealthiest and most influential individuals get together behind closed doors and agree to reduce output, that cannot be a good thing for anyone but the monopolists." Conyers has asked MLB to produce a host of financial and other documents – notably including studies on contraction or relocation, and any studies on territorial rights to San Jose, New Jersey and Washington, DC. The attorney generals of Minnesota and Florida have vowed to sue if clubs in their states are contracted; as a pre-emptive move, Florida's Bob Butterworth has subpoenaed financial records and all contraction-related documents from MLB, the Marlins and Devil Rays.

Bud Selig will testify before Congress on December 6. At that time he promises to show that even though MLB's gross revenues have risen from $2.1 billion to $3.5 billion since 1997, this year 25 clubs lost money and MLB posted a collective loss of over $500 million. He can expect to be asked why clubs that are supposedly hemorrhaging money would (a) pay a nine-figure premium to buy and fold two teams, or (b) award a three-year contract extension to the man who led them into such desperate straits.

Whatever Selig tells Congress is unlikely to undo the damage to MLB's reputation, and his own, caused by the contraction announcement. If MLB was truly determined to eliminate two teams, it could have simply bought them, proclaimed their dissolution, and presented the MLBPA and local officials with a *fait accompli*. Selig's announcement that two *unnamed* teams would be contracted was widely viewed as a bluff to force the MLBPA into givebacks, and to pressure governments in Montreal, Minnesota, Miami and Oakland into subsidizing new stadia. Such tactics are resented in ordinary times; when used even as the aftermath of the September 11 bombing wreaked havoc on state and local government budgets across North America, they're despised. Selig compounded the public relations debacle by telling Minnesotans to "look in the mirror" when looking for someone to blame for the prospective loss of the Twins, suggesting that any city unwilling to subsidize its local team didn't deserve one.

And Selig's justifications for contraction ranged from the disingenuous to the ludicrous. In MLB's official press release announcing the contraction vote, Selig stated: "The problems facing the potentially affected teams will not be resolved by either changing ownership or changing location. Merely transferring existing problems to another ownership group or another city would only exacerbate the problem, not resolve it." In other words, MLB already had the best possible owners, located in the best possible cities: Washington, DC was a worse baseball market than Montreal, and no one could run the Twins better than Carl Pohlad.

When critics noted that Selig's own Brewers stood to gain from the elimination of the Twins, Selig called the suggestion of a conflict of interest "childish" and "inane." Selig's assertion to the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* that "St. Louis is closer to Minneapolis than Milwaukee is" should also surprise anyone with a map

In that same press release, Selig declared, "This action, though difficult, should not surprise anyone who is familiar with the economics of the game. Our industry has significant financial problems that we are trying to address in a myriad of ways. Contraction is one step toward addressing the industry's problems." Yet barely a year before, MLB's own hand-picked "Blue Ribbon Economic Panel" had unequivocally concluded, "If the recommendations outlined in this report are implemented, there should be no immediate need for contraction." MLB implemented *none* of these recommendations before voting to kill two clubs.

On November 7, Selig told mlb.com, "I honestly believe that we can get this done by the end of November." Not quite. At the end of November, MLB still had thirty teams. It also had a lawsuit in Minnesota; a grievance filed by the Players' Association; an investigation by the Florida Attorney General; and a Congressional effort to revoke its antitrust exemption...not to mention an expired labor agreement which could produce another work stoppage before or during the 2002 season. MLB had consistently misplayed its hand, alienating fans, angering commentators and infuriating elected officials while moving no closer to either its stated goal of contraction or its implicit goal of new stadia and concessions from the MLBPA. And Bud Selig had a raise and a new three-year contract extension...

<u>*The Secret of Bud Selig's Success*</u>, by **Doug Pappas**

As I often demonstrate, it's easy to bash Bud Selig. But he's doing *something* right: most people with his track record aren't guaranteed employment through 2006 at a reported $4 million/year. Unfortunately, the Commissioner's greatest skill is also the source of MLB's most serious problem.

That skill/problem is that Selig still thinks like an owner. From September 9, 1992, when he was named acting head of MLB after Fay Vincent's forced resignation, until his formal election as Commissioner on July 9, 1998, Selig was simultaneously running the Milwaukee Brewers. He still owns about 35% of the Brewers (held in a trust), while his daughter runs the team.

Many critics of Selig's tenure retain a romantic vision of the Commissioner as some sort of philosopher-king looking out for The Best Interests of Baseball even when those interests conflict with those of the owners who hire him. The experience of Happy Chandler, Bowie Kuhn and Fay Vincent shows the limits of this view. But the Commissioner is uniquely positioned to act in the collective interest of MLB as a whole, whatever that effect may be on individual teams – and Selig has abdicated this responsibility.

Selig came to power during a nasty dispute over revenue sharing that divided teams into large-market, middle-market and small-market camps. After reopening the collective bargaining agreement, the owners spent more than a year fighting one another before they could even formulate a proposal to the players. That proposal allowed large and small market owners to agree that revenue sharing was a great idea...so long as the money to be shared ultimately came out of the players' pockets. When the players objected, the final third of the 1994 season was doomed.

The revenue-sharing plan ultimately adopted contained a fatal flaw: it did not require recipients to reinvest the money in their teams. When the owners of the Expos and Twins realized that the revenue-sharing money allowed them to lock in a profit so long as they didn't try to compete, they ensured that revenue sharing would not fulfill its intended purpose. Rather than provoke a confrontation by forcing these clubs to use the money properly, Selig & Co. would rather pay them to go away. That won't solve anything; it doesn't even remove the incentive for Tampa Bay or Kansas City to adopt the same strategy.

Selig takes every opportunity to lament "competitive imbalance" as only the owner of a bad small-market team can. What other business would *allow,* let alone *encourage*, its chief executive and most visible spokesman to disparage its product with remarks like "At the start of spring training, there no longer exists hope and faith for the fans of more than half of our 30 clubs"? MLB has *more* competitive balance than any of the other major team sports, and as the results of our prediction contest show, handicapping a season before spring training is a wildly uncertain venture. Selig's remarks can only reduce interest in baseball and depress attendance in the very markets he's trying to help.

George Steinbrenner is the only owner quoted in the press release announcing Selig's extension. Steinbrenner declares, "it is absolutely imperative now more than ever that we have stability and leadership, both of which Bud Selig offers us more than anyone else I can think of."

What does it mean when the owner with the most to lose from any attempt to improve "competitive balance" praises Selig's "leadership"? Implementing the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations – greater revenue sharing, a tax on higher payrolls, enforceable minimum-payroll rules, unequal distribution of central fund revenues – would reduce the Yankees' financial advantage over smaller-market clubs. Contraction preserves that advantage. For Steinbrenner, a one-time check for $15 million to save himself years of subsidizing the Twins and Expos is a great deal. For Kansas City and Tampa Bay, who write that same check but reap no savings, it's a terrible deal – but they're so blinded by the prospect of more money from the central fund that they don't seem to care.

If MLB is serious about addressing Selig's cherished "competitive balance problem," it must realize that there is *no* solution that doesn't involve taking more money from the Yankees and Dodgers and giving it to the Royals and Pirates. At the same time, recipients *must* be compelled to spend that money to improve their teams. Unfortunately Selig, like his fellow owners, would much rather demand that other people solve their problems for them. It's much easier to tell local governments "subsidize your team or you'll lose it," or insist that the players work for less money than the owners are willing to pay them, than to make the tough choices necessary to resolve these issues.

But if Selig won't force the owners to address problems of their own creation, he least he can do is to stop whining and shut up. The *most* he can do is to resign in favor of a knowledgeable outsider, *and* insist that this outsider be given the necessary authority to solve anything the owners themselves describe as a problem. Don't hold your breath. Mortality tables suggest that the 67-year-old Selig is likely to live another 15 years, so look for a new Commissioner around 2016.

Origin of the Name "World Series"

One baseball myth that just won't die, particularly among fans who know about half as much as they think they do, is that the "World Series" was named for the New York *World* newspaper, which supposedly sponsored the earliest contests. It didn't, and it wasn't.

In fact, the postseason series between the AL and NL champs was originally known as the "Championship of the World" or "World's Championship Series." That was shortened through usage to "World's Series" and finally to "World Series." This usage can be traced through the annual baseball guides. Reporting on the first modern postseason series, the Red Sox-Pirates battle of 1903, the 1904 *Reach Guide* called it the "World's Championship Series." By 1912, Reach's headline spoke of the "World's Series," while Francis Richter's text still referred to the "World's Championship Series." The Sporting News Guide, first published in 1942, used "World's Series" through 1963, changing to "World Series" in the 1964 edition.

The New York *World* was a tabloid much given to flamboyant self-promotion. If it had been involved in any way with postseason baseball, the fact would have been emblazoned across its sports pages for months. While researching ejections, I reviewed every issue of the New York *World* for the months leading up to the 1903 and 1905 series -- there's not a word suggesting any link between the paper and the series.

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

The Central League Champion Yakult Swallows won the Japan Series on Oct. 25. The Swallows' opponent, the Pacific League champion Osaka Kintetsu Buffaloes, couldn't show the powerful batting skills they had exhibited during the league games. In game 2, Tuffy Rhodes, an Afro American player who had tied Sadaharu Oh's season record with 55 homers, hit a three-run homer in the bottom of the 8th inning to win the game. Alas, that was the only opportunity for Buffaloes' fans to cheer -- the Buffs lost the other 4 games of the best-of-seven series and baseball season was over.

The boring season for baseball fans has come -- but frankly, an earlier stretch of boredom came between the regular season and the Japan Series. The Buffaloes clinched their league championship on September 26, with more than two weeks of the regular season remaining. For Swallow fans, the situation was better, as their team won the league championship on October 6. But in both leagues, the close of the regular season on October 12 was followed by more than a week of idleness until the Japan Series began on October 20. In the past, this time was often used to replay games postponed by rain earlier in the season. But since more teams now play in domed stadiums, this downtime has become common.

At the same time, more Japanese -- and not only baseball fans -- paid attention to North American baseball. The Seattle Mariners progressed to the division series, where they defeated Cleveland and moved on to face the New York Yankees, world champion in four of the past five years. All of the Mariners' games were broadcast on Japanese TV in the morning. Some people watched from home before leaving for work; some watched from restaurants during their lunch hour.

I have written before that I would like to see the Japanese league champions included in Major League Baseball's Division Series. Although the time difference and long distance to be traveled pose obstacles, I have some ideas for overcoming them. One idea is to schedule these games on weekends only. Fortunately, the second Monday of October is a national holiday on both sides of the Pacific. That would allow three games of a best-of-five series to be played over this weekend, with the other two on the preceding or following weekend. The four- or five-day interval would allow players to travel the long distance and adjust to the time change.

The Seattle-Cleveland division series featured one game in Seattle, followed by a day off and another game there. The next day was a travel day. After two games in Cleveland, they had another travel day and played the last game back in Seattle. With three days off during a five-game series even now, a four- or five-day interval for international matches might be acceptable.

The time difference could be difficult for broadcasting purposes. If one of four Division Series games were played in Japan, a night game in Japan would be broadcast in the morning in North America. I can't estimate the likely audience, but I guess it has potential, especially on the weekend. The situation would be the same in Japan. To accommodate fans in both countries, games in one of the two series in which Japanese teams were involved would be could be played at night in Japan, the other at night in North America. That way fans in Japan and North America would each have one morning game and one night game.

I haven't found a solution for a Japanese team's participation in the League Championship Series or World Series. If I think of one, I'll write it here.

The Last Lame Duck Season

With Major League Baseball's promised two-team contraction in limbo, there's a real chance that the purportedly unwanted teams will be forced to play another season. If the past is any guide, the results won't be pretty.

Commissioner Selig should remember the last time a team was forced to play in a market it had abandoned: the lame-duck 1965 Milwaukee Braves. After leading the NL in attendance in each of their first six years in Milwaukee, the Braves saw attendance nose-dive in the early 1960s. Between 1957 and 1962 the Braves lost two-thirds of their patrons. The club, which in 1953 had become the first club in 50 years to move, sought to become the first club to move twice.

Although the Braves' lease at Milwaukee's County Stadium ran through 1965, the club didn't want to wait that long. In mid-July 1964, The Sporting News broke the story that the club was headed for Atlanta. Soon thereafter the Braves asked the NL for permission to move. The NL granted permission -- but for 1966, requiring the Braves to honor the final year of their stadium lease. (Those were the days.)

Undaunted, the Braves began transferring operations to Atlanta during the off-season. They made no effort to market in Milwaukee: after selling 4,477 season tickets for the 1964 season, the Braves had sold exactly 36 for 1965 as the year began. The Braves begged Milwaukee officials to let them out of their lease, offering $500,000 (roughly 2-1/2 years' rent), but the city refused to consider the offer unless the NL promised Milwaukee a new team in the next expansion. Fat chance.

Meanwhile, a group of Milwaukee businessmen formed "Teams, Inc." to lobby for a new team. The organization was chaired by Milwaukee businessman Edmund Fitzgerald, son of the man for whom the doomed freighter in the Gordon Lightfoot song was named...but before long a local car dealer named Allan H. ("Bud") Selig became its most prominent member.

By mid-February Braves ticket sales were so dismal that the club asked Teams, Inc. for help. The Braves offered the organization five cents/ticket on the first 766,927 tickets sold (a figure chosen to match the Braves' previous low attendance in Milwaukee), then 25 cents/ticket between this number and 1,000,000, and $1/ticket for each ticket over the million mark. If fans wouldn't pay to watch the lame-duck Braves, perhaps they'd pay to support the group lobbying for a new team.

They wouldn't. With Selig in charge of the Teams, Inc. ticket drive, the group bought out County Stadium for Opening Day and re-sold the tickets. Opening Day attracted over 33,000 fans...but the next three games combined drew fewer than 10,000 fans. Interest was so low that the Braves, who were already broadcasting and telecasting selected games to Atlanta, offered all their games for free to any Wisconsin radio station willing to air them. In mid-June local officials rejected another offer of $500,000 to let the Braves move to Atlanta over the All-Star break. The 1965 Braves drew only 555,584 fans to County Stadium, a decline of over 350,000.

In 2001 the Minnesota Twins outdrew the Chicago White Sox, a larger market team which had won its division the previous year, and the Philadelphia Phillies, who led the NL East for much of the season and contended into early October. If the 2002 Twins lose fans at a comparable rate, that would translate to a $7 million decline in local revenues directly attributable to the threat of contraction.

The Braves moved all of their offices to Atlanta after the 1965 season. A month later, Bud Selig made his first of several trips to the major league meetings, where he would beg repeatedly for an expansion franchise. His first of many unflattering photographs appeared in the December 18, 1965 Sporting News, accompanying an article that explained how the NL had blown him off. Despite Selig's pleas, Milwaukee wasn't even one of the four sites selected for expansion in 1969. Milwaukee finally received a team less than a week before Opening Day 1970, when a Seattle bankruptcy court awarded the Pilots to a group led by Fitzgerald and Selig.

All that remained in Milwaukee was the lawsuit. The Braves' threatened move prompted the State of Wisconsin to file an antitrust suit against the team and the National League, demanding that the Braves stay put unless and until Milwaukee received an expansion team. On January 28, 1966, a Wisconsin judge preliminarily enjoined the Braves from moving. To avoid the implications of the Supreme Court's Federal Baseball decision holding baseball exempt from federal antitrust laws, the state sued under Wisconsin's parallel statute.

On January 28, 1966, the judge preliminarily enjoined the Braves from moving. On January 29, the NL voted unanimously to ignore his ruling. In mid-April, after a 38-day trial which revealed that the Braves had used accounting tricks to turn six-figure profits into paper losses in both 1963 and 1964, the court held that the NL had illegally restrained trade. But this decision was reversed by a 4-3 vote of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which held that the state antitrust laws could not constitutionally be applied to the NL's actions.

The majority opinion dismissing the complaint ended with an unusual plea: *"There ought, we think, to be included in any law which Congress may pass upon this subject some provision which would protect communities, either those who have or hope to have home teams, from arbitrary and unfair dealing."*

Bud Selig surely agreed with that sentiment in 1966. Bet he doesn't now...

New Members

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