Outside the Lines

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Chairman's Note

New E-mail list up and running. At the Committee's annual meeting in West Palm Beach, members expressed interest in an electronic mailing list through which members could post research queries, alert others to articles of interest, and generally discuss the business of baseball. More than three dozen members have already joined the list, which is open to all recipients of this newsletter. To subscribe, send an E-mail to BaseballBiz-subscribe@egroups.com.

Committee compiling a roster of major league general managers. Shortly after the E-mail list opened, **John Matthew** proposed our first full-fledged Committee project: compiling a list of all major league general managers, or executives who performed the role of a GM. If you'd like to help, contact John directly at john.matthew@home.com.

Committee contribution to forthcoming SABR anthology. SABR Publications Director Mark Alvarez has asked all research committees, including us, to submit one article for inclusion in a forthcoming SABR anthology. Mark advises, "it should be related to your regional area or your research committee's purpose. It could be something an individual member has been working on, a joint project of several members, or even a 'point-counterpoint' approach to a particular issue." The finished article must be submitted to Mark by May 1, 2001. If you've got an article in mind, please contact me.

MLB News

"Blue Ribbon Economic Panel" issues report. See accompanying article.

Owners postpone realignment, adopt unbalanced schedule. After failing to reach consensus on how to realign, the owners shelved the issue for another year. They also approved an unbalanced schedule (clubs in the four five-team divisions will play 19 games against divisional rivals, while AL West clubs play 19 or 20 and NL Central clubs play 16 or 17) and voted not to rotate interleague opponents, except for a scheduling exception which will allow the Astros and Rangers to play one another for the first time.

MLBPA extends labor deal through 2001. Surprising no one, the Players Association exercised its option to extend the current labor agreement through the 2001 season. No word when negotiations for the next contract will begin – before they do, Bud Selig will have to bang some heads together to unite the owners behind a single proposal.

***Forbes* warns of rising franchise debt**. In the article accompanying *Forbes*' annual survey of franchise values, which ran in the June 12 issue, Michael Ozanian writes that from 1998 to 1999, major league owners' franchise debt rose from 30 cents per dollar of enterprise value (defined as the value of the team minus stadium debt) to 43 cents per dollar, largely due to the Yankees' restructuring and increased use of deferred money in long-term contracts. As a result, Ozanian believes that even if the next labor talks bog down, the owners' collective need for cash flow to service their debt will prevent them from locking out the players.

Richie Phillips' ex-umps reject partial reinstatement. Under the deal offered by MLB and tentatively accepted by the new union, the World Umpires Association, 10 of the 22 umps foolish enough to follow Phillips out the door would have been re-hired, with six more retiring and the remaining six bought out. Phillips' forces rejected the offer, preferring to take their chances in arbitration.

Scott Boras finds yet another draft loophole. Boras guided high school catcher Landon Powell, *Baseball America*'s #2 junior prospect, to free agency by advising him to take the exam for a General Equivalency Diploma and declare himself eligible for the draft by notifying the Commissioner's office. Powell did so – and when the Commissioner's Office failed to notify teams that he was eligible, he slid through the draft unselected and can now negotiate with any club.

Women like baseball, too! According to a report presented to owners at their mid-July meetings, women make up 46% of a typical major league crowd. The report suggests several marketing initiatives directed to women, including “Father of the Year” awards, Ladies’ Nights, Mother’s Day promotions, a “Women’s Corner” on the MLB Website, more player personality stories on daytime TV and in lifestyle sections of local newspapers, and (in the words of the official MLB press release), “in-park promotions designed to entertain – not patronize – female fans.”

Around the Majors

Orioles seek authority to sell naming rights. Although their current lease at the government-owned, 100%-publicly-funded Oriole Park at Camden Yards doesn’t allow the Orioles to auction the park’s name to the highest bidder, the club thinks it should be allowed to do so anyhow. A club lawyer whines, “we deserve the same lease rights the [NFL] Ravens were granted.” The Ravens paid the Maryland Stadium Authority $10 million for naming rights to their stadium, then resold them to PSINet for $105.5 million over 20 years.

Red Sox reach tentative, shaky stadium deal. In late July, the Red Sox, the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts agreed on a $665 million package to build a replacement for Fenway Park in the same neighborhood. The deal calls for the state to contribute $100 million for infrastructure; the city to provide $140 million for land acquisition and site preparation and $72.5 million for a new parking garage; and the club to finance the $352 million park. The team would be liable for all cost overruns on stadium construction, and $28 million in overruns for the city’s share of expenses. The city’s share would be financed by a 0.25% hotel tax; a $5 surcharge on 9,000 parking spaces around Fenway on game days; surcharges of 5% on tickets and 15% on luxury boxes; and a concessions surcharge.

The state legislature has approved the plan, which still faces spirited opposition within the Boston City Council. Even if the Council goes along, local interests have threatened to sue over the use of eminent domain to seize land for the park. And it’s far from clear how the Red Sox – which are still owned by the Yawkey Trust and have no capital of their own to contribute – can raise $352 million without crippling the team for years to come.

Reds’ managing partner buys naming rights to new park. Carl Lindner, who also owns the Great American Insurance Company, will pay a reported $75 million over 30 years to have the Reds’ new stadium called “The Great American Ballpark.”

Marlins abandon plan to build their own smaller stadium. Owner John Henry indicated he’d be willing to spend up to $80 million to build a 25,000-seat park which could later be expanded, but abandoned the idea when the club’s architects estimated the initial cost of such a park at $180 million.

Twins’ bid for outdoor ball rejected. MLB rejected the Twins’ proposal to shift a three-game series against the Texas Rangers from the Metrodome to a 25,000-seat temporary park to be constructed near the Mall of America. The Twins touted the stunt as a way of rousing support for outdoor ball in the Twin Cities.

Expos’ future remains cloudy. Jeffrey Loria, who last year bought operating control of the club, is buying out 13 local investors. Lending further credence to rumors that he may be planning to move the team, Loria surrendered the Expos’ option on the land in downtown Montreal which had been selected for the site of a proposed new ballpark.

Yankees, MSG Network litigate over new cable contract. With the Yankees’ landmark 12-year, $486 million cable deal about to expire, the club and MSG Network are battling over the meaning of a clause which gives MSG the right to match any other offer. The Yankees had structured an “offer” pursuant to which the club would sell its rights to a new entity controlled, and 95% owned. by the team. Under this deal, the Yankees would receive $838 million over 10 years, with rights fees starting at $65 million in 2001 and rising, at the rate of 7% per year, to $119.5 million in 2010.

MSG claimed this wasn’t a valid third-party offer. It further objected to provisions in the deal which would force it to assume unrelated obligations, such as buying rights to the NBA’s New Jersey Nets and giving the Yankees a 25% share of all net income which Cablevision, its parent company, earns from all sports channels in the United States. A state court judge sided with the network, preliminarily enjoining the Yankees from consummating the deal as structured. We haven’t heard the last of this battle.

Athletics’ interest in Santa Clara apparently blocked by the Giants. With the Coliseum renovated for football at the expense of baseball, and San Francisco's new park easily accessible from across the Bay, the Oakland Athletics are exploring a possible move to Santa Clara County in Silicon Valley. The Giants, who received territorial rights to Santa Clara County in the early 1990s when *they* were thinking of moving there, say they won't relinquish the territory.

Site of new Phillies park still uncertain. The mayor's office estimated that a stadium in downtown Philadelphia could cost $545 million, or almost twice as much as building in the north lot of the South Philadelphia sports complex. Although the Pennsylvania legislature approved funding for the Pirates and Phillies in the same bill, Pittsburgh's park will open before Philadelphia even breaks ground for its stadium.

Sale of Blue Jays near. Rogers Communications, Canada's largest cable company, is reportedly negotiating to buy 80% of the Blue Jays for roughly $120 million. Rogers also seeks to buy control of Canada's Sportsnet cable channel, in which it currently owns 29.9%.

Report on the Blue Ribbon Panel Report, by **Doug Pappas**

In July, amidst much fanfare, MLB published "The Report of the Independent Members of the Commissioner's Blue Ribbon Panel on Baseball Economics." A copy of the full report, in Adobe Acrobat .pdf format, is available online at http://www.majorleaguebaseball.com/u/baseball/mlbcom/blueribbon.pdf.

The first paragraph declares that the Panel "represent[s] the interests of baseball fans." Twelve of our 16 self-appointed protectors own or operate major league teams. The four "independent" members are Yale president Richard C. Levin, who drafted the owners' 1989 salary cap proposal; former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker, who represented the owners on the *last* blue-ribbon economic panel, in 1992; former Senator George Mitchell, often mentioned as a possible Commissioner; and columnist George Will, who in a remarkable conflict of interest serves on the boards of both the Orioles and the Padres.

The report supports its conclusions with three types of data from the 1995-99 seasons: revenues, player payrolls, and "competitiveness," measured by comparing payrolls to on-field performance. All of this data is taken directly from figures supplied by the clubs and MLB; the panel conducted no independent investigation of its own. As a result, we're treated to straight-faced assertions that over the past five years, the Braves lost $7 million despite their on-field success, new stadium and national cable exposure, and that Rupert Murdoch paid over $300 million for a Dodger club that lost $77 million over this same span.

. In fact, MLB claims that from 1995 through 1999, only three teams -- the Yankees, Indians and Rockies -- made money, while the industry as a whole lost over $1 billion, or $35 million per team. By contrast, *Financial World* and *Forbes* estimate that MLB collectively earned $400 million over this period.

Indeed, MLB's own figures show that from 1996 to 1999, gross revenues grew by more than $1 billion, while player salaries rose by only $550 million....yet MLB claims that losses *increased* over this period. Where did the other $450 million go?

The panel then presents payroll and "competitiveness" charts to illustrate its concerns about "chronic competitive imbalance." The charts show that as a group, teams with higher payrolls have better records than teams with lower payrolls. This is news? So long as superior players earn more than inferior players, high-payroll teams will collectively have better players than low-payroll teams.

The charts also err in using September 1 rosters for to calculate team payrolls. Since this method allocates a player's entire salary to the club he plays for on September 1, and since contending teams tend to acquire high-salaried veterans from rebuilding clubs in midseason, this method artificially inflates the difference in salaries. For example, the Yankees will be charged with all of Jose Canseco's salary despite paying only a third of it, while the Orioles will have paid well over $10 million in salaries to players traded before the arbitrary September 1 cutoff. A more accurate method -- in fact, the method used to measure payrolls for luxury tax purposes -- would compare teams' actual payrolls, pro-rated for players traded in midseason.

By focusing only on the seasons from 1995 to 1999, the panel has made the link between payroll and performance look stronger than it actually is. In 1994, one year before the selected period, the Montreal Expos had the majors' best record and second-lowest payroll. *This* season, at press time Toronto, Oakland and San Francisco are contending with the lowest payrolls in their respective divisions, while the Chicago White Sox have the AL's best record but third lowest payroll. Clearly, there's *some* link between payroll and performance, but it's not as strong as the panel suggests.

More importantly, the charts beg the real question, which is how easily a team can move from one category to the other. Let's look back to 1991. That year, the Minnesota Twins upset Oakland, the league's highest-paid team, to win their second World Series in five years. In the National League, Pittsburgh won its second of three consecutive divisional titles. The Pirates lost the LCS to the surprising Braves, who had posted the league's worst record in each of the three previous seasons.

That right: within the past decade the Twins won the World Series, Oakland had the majors' highest payroll, and the Pirates won three division titles in a row. As the doomsayers would have predicted, the three lowest-payroll clubs finished with the three worst records, a combined 189-297 -- but within a few years those hapless losers, the Orioles, Indians and Astros, were among the game's elite.

In fact, since 1991 24 of the 30 major league teams have made the playoffs. A 25th, Montreal, had the majors' best record in 1994. The other stragglers include Tampa Bay, a third-year expansion team; Anaheim and Detroit, mismanaged large-market clubs; Kansas City, which had earlier won seven division titles in 11 years -- and Commissioner Selig's Milwaukee Brewers.

The panel proposes a variety of solutions to remedy the perceived competitive imbalance. The most important of these recommendations call for greater sharing of local revenues, a luxury tax on high payrolls and incentives to pressure the low-payroll clubs to spend more on players.

Most importantly, the panel did *not* propose a salary cap. This omission effectively removes this controversial issue off the bargaining table even before the next labor negotiations begin. Fans looking forward to a 2002 season can breathe a little easier.

Not too much easier, though. Instead of a firm salary cap, the panel called for a "competitive balance tax" modeled on, but tougher than, the luxury tax which existed from 1997-99. Clubs would pay a 50% tax on the amount of their payroll over $84 million, a formula strikingly like the one the players rejected five years ago. They won't go for it now, either -- especially as the $84 million threshold would remain constant for several years, with no adjustment as MLB's revenues increase.

Unfortunately, the panel doesn't seem to realize that another of its recommendations would improve competitive balance without provoking another strike. This superior solution is greater revenue sharing.

To an owner, baseball players are investments. Teams which sign players to expensive contracts do so because they expect the signing to produce at least that much additional revenue, in the form of increased attendance, higher ticket prices, and more lucrative local media contracts. Revenue sharing and a luxury tax affect opposite sides of this analysis, but have the same effect.

Assume that Team X expects that signing Player Y to a $5 million contract will produce $6 million in additional revenue. Under the current system, it will make him an offer. With a luxury tax in place, if the team's payroll is high enough that signing Player Y would cost another $2 million in tax, it won't sign him. With greater revenue sharing, the cost of signing Player Y would remain at $5 million, but if $2 million of the expected extra revenue is diverted to the visiting teams, Team X is left in exactly the same position. If MLB implemented the panel's proposal to share as much as 50% of local revenues, large-market teams would have less incentive, and less money, to increase their payroll.

Neither revenue sharing nor the luxury tax solves the "Montreal problem": small-market owners who simply pocket the money they're given without reinvesting it in their teams. The blue ribbon panel would "encourage" them to spend more on players by reducing revenue-sharing payments to clubs with payrolls below $40 million. But this approach can only work if the amount of money to be withheld is larger than it's likely to be: offering the Twins or Expos $5 million to increase their payroll by $20 million will have no effect. Only a firm minimum payroll can do that.

But this minimum can't be simplistically based on annual payroll alone, because requiring clubs to maintain a $40 million payroll every season will actually hurt the better-managed clubs. Several years ago, Cleveland showed how a mediocre team can become a perennial contender by trading all of its high-salaried veterans for prospects, then locking up the young players with long-term contracts. A team following this strategy will have a very low payroll for a year or two before the young players mature, but will lose revenue sharing money during the rebuilding period. By contrast, clubs like the Phillies and Brewers, who regularly spend just enough to finish 78-84, would receive their full share. .

In *Fair Ball*, Bob Costas identified a way around this problem. Costas would tie revenue sharing to a club's five-year average payroll, thereby encouraging teams to adopt the Indians' model, and would penalize clubs which refuse to spend by fining them the full amount by which their payroll falls below the minimum.

The Blue Ribbon Panel also proposes to overhaul the amateur draft. Some of the changes -- allowing clubs to trade draft picks, depriving playoff clubs of their first-round pick -- seek to improve competitive balance, but the key changes would save all owners money by reducing amateurs' leverage. Foreign players would be would be subject to the draft, and draftees would no longer be allowed to re-enter the draft each year until a selecting club met their terms. The MLBPA is unlikely to fight hard against these proposals, since it doesn't represent draftees and most of the savings would probably be passed on to its membership.

Several minor proposals are either pointless or downright bad ideas. The worst suggestion is an annual "competitive balance draft," under which the eight clubs with the worst records could draft players not on the 40-man roster of the eight playoff teams. Apart from the silliness of rewarding a club for finishing 23rd rather than 22nd, the players not on a 40-man roster typically include a team's very best young prospects, the loss of whom would be far more severe than the loss of the 39th or 40th man on the major league roster. The panel's proposal to deprive all playoff clubs of their first-round pick in the following year's amateur draft also seems unnecessarily punitive. The panel also advocates eliminating the compensation pick awarded clubs who lose players to free agency, noting that many players on the verge of free agency are traded in midseason to clubs with better records, who then get the draft pick. But by lowering the trade value of such players, the plan would reduce the value the trading club receives in return, leaving it no better off.

Finally, the panel advocates "strategic franchise relocations" to better markets. It suggests that struggling teams might consider moving "to a very large market already occupied by one or more high-revenue clubs." This definition applies to Washington, D.C., which is lobbying for a team -- but also to northern New Jersey, an even better market which is currently considered part of the New York territory. If revenue sharing fails to slow George Steinbrenner, perhaps a new team in the Meadowlands could do the trick...

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

For Japanese people, August is the month to remember the tragedy of war. In 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on the 6th and 9th, and we surrendered on the 15th of that month. Baseball players of that era were not spared the horrors of war. Many talents disappeared in battle, including a Japanese legend named Eiji Sawamura. Sawamura is famous for the game he pitched against a team of American all-stars, including Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Jimmy Foxx, who toured Japan after the 1934 season. At a game in Shizuoka, Sawamura struck them out many times and pitched a complete game, allowing just a solo homer to Lou Gehrig.

After the tour, selected players from the Japan All Stars who had opposed the American visitors organized the original Yomiuri Giants. Sawamura joined them. Other clubs were soon organized, and the first professional baseball league in Japan began play. Sawamura became Japanese professional baseball's first star player. But unfortunately, he lived in a war era. He was drafted into the army and died on his way to the Philippines when his boat was sunk by an American submarine's torpedo.

Beside the Tokyo Dome, a symbol of the prosperity of baseball in today's Japan, stands a stone monument for baseball players who lost their lives in World War II. For as long as I have been in Tokyo, I have been laying flowers there every August 15, a day now regarded as a memorial day for war victims. For most of the past decade, I was the only person who did so. The situation seems to have changed: when I arrived last year, I found some flowers already there. I was glad to see more baseball fans showing their respect to the pioneers of Japanese professional baseball who were forced by war to stop playing their favorite sport. But I believe most fans don't know of this monument.

As I had mentioned when I wrote who threw out the first pitch of the season, Japanese baseball organizations don't honor their players' great achievements as often as their American counterparts. In America, former players or historic moments are often presented to the crowd as mid-game attractions. In Japan, the Nippon Ham Fighters, who are striking a deal with the New York Yankees, began introducing their former players and their achievements at home games last year. The fans at the game I attended welcomed the introduction, but other clubs have not followed suit. Introducing fans to the victims of war and their on-field achievements may not be popular in-game attractions, but if baseball organizations don't do it, fans will never learn of such players. I hope Japanese teams become more aggressive in making fans aware of the pioneers of Japanese professional baseball.

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

Triple-A

Tacoma Rainiers to be Sold. With the death of his brother, owner George Foster has decided to sell the Tacoma Rainiers (PCL-Mariners), and devote more time to the family poultry business, foster Farms.

Foster said he wants to see a local buyer for the Triple-A team, which plays in the 40 year old Cheney Stadium. A recent study has concluded that the 9,600-seat ballpark will need up to $16 million in renovations. The Rainiers are contracted with the Seattle Mariners through 2003, and with the city of Tacoma to play in Cheney Stadium until 2005. Though no sale price has been listed, Portland's AAA team recently sold for $12 million. Foster bought the club in 1991 for $5 million.

Grizzlies Close to New Ballpark. A vote of 6-1 by the Fresno City Council has granted a little daylight to the Fresno Grizzlies (PCL-Giants) and their effort to build a new ballpark. The planned 12,500-seat multi-purpose stadium is expected to run roughly $31 million. The financing logistics are yet to be settled, though the city would kick in $2.7 million for 30 years, and would get back $2.5 million annually from rent, parking and other revenue. The amount of the rent has not been determined, but an earlier proposal earmarked $1.5 million annually. Though two previous attempts to secure funding fell through, the third time may prove to be the charm. For the past two seasons, the Grizzlies have used the ballpark belonging to Fresno State University. If a deal is not finalized soon, the team will be forced to move, due to a stipulation in their agreement with the Giants stating that the Grizzlies would have a new stadium by 2001.

New Englander to Try to Save Baseball in Ottawa. Ray Pecor already owns the Vermont Expos (NYP-Expos), and wants to save baseball in Ottawa by purchasing the Lynx (IL-Expos). The Triple-A team has been on the market for quite some time as Howard Darwin, the current owner, hoped that a local interest would step forward and buy the team. Pecor has signed a deal with Darwin and negotiated a favorable stadium deal with the city. MLB approval is pending. Though attendance at Lynx games has been an issue, Pecor hope to turn that around.

Indians Sign with Brewers. The Indianapolis Indians of the International League signed an agreement with the Milwaukee Brewers to serve as the feeder team through the 2002 season. The Indians had been previously affiliated with Cincinnati Reds, who signed with the Louisville RiverBats.

Minor League City with Major League Dreams. Click onto MLBoregon.com and you will find Portland's latest attempt to lure a major league club to the Rose City. The Portland organization hopes to target teams such as the Oakland A's, who are unhappy with their current lease agreement. Portland Family Entertainment, however, recently purchased the Triple-A Albuquerque Dukes for $12 million to play at Civic Stadium next season.

Knights to Build Ballpark in Charlotte. The Charlotte Knights (IL-White Sox) don't actually play in the North Carolina city. The Triple-A team plays in the 10,000-seat Knights Castle in the nearby suburb city of Fort Mill, SC. The team, however, is looking to move to the south end of Charlotte Knight after more than a decade of absence. HOK Sports has been hired to design a ballpark with the assumption of play beginning in 2004. The Charlotte City Council believes the city can provide up to $20 million towards the $40 million stadium price tag. The project cost is based on the amount spent to build Slugger Field in Louisville, KY. Though major league teams have been courted to move to Charlotte, owners for the Knights are not considering revamping their stadium plans to suit a major league team.

RiverCats Break Sales Record. Ticket sales for the new Sacramento RiverCats (PCL-A's) have been going through the roof. The RiverCats set a season record with 713,225 tickets sold by June 15. The Triple-A team has averaged 12,245 fans at their home games at the 14,111-seat Raley Field. The previous record was set by the Salt Lake City Buzz in 1994.

Double-A

Mandalay Makes It Number Four. Mandalay Sports Entertainment has purchased its fourth minor league team. According to a report, the sports company will take over operations for the Shreveport Captains (TX-Giants) at the end of the year. Mandalay already owns the Las Vegas Stars, (PCL-Padres), Lake Elsinore Storm (CA-Angels) and are partial owners of the new Dayton Dragons (MWL-Reds). The company had previously made two attempts at buying major league teams, including the troubled Oakland A's.

Sports Company Buys Trio of Maryland Teams. Comcast-Spectacor, a Philadelphia-based major power in the sports and entertainment industry made their first foray into Minor League Baseball with the purchase of three Maryland teams from Maryland Baseball. The Bowie Baysox (EL-Orioles), Frederick Keys (CL-Orioles) and Delmarva Shorebirds (SAL-Orioles) were taken lock, stock and barrel. The purchase price was not disclosed. The affiliation with the parent Baltimore Orioles will continue through their current contractual agreements. Comcast-Spectacor holdings include teams in basketball and hockey as well as venues and a regional sports network.

New Sally Team to Affiliate with Dodgers. A company called Play Ball North Carolina has struck a deal with the Los Angels Dodgers to place a South Atlantic League team in Wilmington, NC. The team will begin play in 2001 at Brooks Field on the UNC campus.

Round Rock Express Breaks League Attendance Record. For a new team, the Round Rock Express (AA-Astros), care calling a lot of attention to themselves. The team has broken the Texas League attendance record at 415,834 at Dell Diamond in only 44 games through July 21. The previous record was held by the San Antonio Missions with 411,959 fans in 67 home games.

Single-A

California League Explores Options in Tijuana. California League president Joe Gagliardi recently met with Tijuana mayor Francisco Vega de la Madrid to explore opportunities that may exist for the league in the border city. Though the area may prove to be a great area for American baseball. The economic situation has not been fully worked through. Gagliardi thinks a team might be in place by 2002, when the Mudville Nine (CA-Brewers) may be ready to leave their current Stockton, CA home. The major league affiliation may come from the San Diego Padres, who are currently with the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes, are extensively marketing in the Tijuana market.

Volcanoes Erupt with Fans. More than 100,000 tickets have already been sold through mid-July to fans of the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes (NWL-Giants). The team has had four straight years of ticket sold reaching over 100,000 since its move from Bellingham in the mid-1990s.

Midwest League Breaks Attendance Mark for Single Day. On Saturday, July 29th 45,358 fans went to seven games in the Midwest League setting a new single day attendance record. The previous record was 43,575 set on June 29, 1996. 12,610 fans were in Lansing, 12,013 in Kane County, 8,872 in Fort Wayne, 2,547 in Cedar Rapids, 1,461 in Clinton and 1,022 in Beloit.

Boise Hawks Sold to Media Company. The Boise Hawks (NWL-Angels) became the latest team to be purchased by a media company. Horizon Broadcasting Company purchased the Hawks for an undisclosed amount from Diamond Sports Management. Horizon, a Seattle-based company, is owned by Bill Ackerley, whose family owns Full House Entertainment and the NBA Seattle Sonics. The Seattle company has also made recent radio station purchases in the southern Idaho market.

Massachusetts Legislature to Provide Funds for Ballparks. The Massachusetts legislature has proposed a bill that will create a huge bank of funds for the expressed purpose of building minor league ballparks in the state. Approximately $8 would be made available to Pittsfield, where the short-season Pittsfield Mets (NYP-Mets) play, though the team is set to move to Troy, NY before 2002. A stadium could be built to house another team. The Mets currently play in the 81-year old Wahconah Park. In Worcester, where there is not a team place, the city can apply for a $7 million grant to build a stadium. The city is expected to lure another New York-Penn League team or one from the independent Atlantic League.

Independent Leagues

Grizzlies of the Midwest Construct New Den. The Gateway Grizzlies of the Frontier League have begun construction of a $6 million ballpark in Collinsville, IL. The 4,500-seat stadium is set to open for the 2001 season. The Grizzlies said they already have sold 700 season tickets for their inaugural year.

Camden Gets a Team. The Atlantic League will welcome a new team to their brethren next season. The Camden (NJ) RiverSharks are set to play in a $17.5 million 6,425-seat stadium now under construction. Over 10,000 local kids participated in a naming contest.

MudCats in Deep Mud over Name. A rose by any other name is just a rose, a bard once wrote. A mudcat, however, belongs in Carolina and not in northern California. The Carolina Mudcats (SL-Rockies) have forced the Feather River MudCats of the Western League to change their name. The team had previously been known as the Reno Blackjacks before moving to the Sacramento region last year. Though the name had been selected in a community contest, the Carolina team threatened a lawsuit, which the Feather River team felt too costly to pursue.

Arsenal Stadium Project Delayed. The independent Aberdeen Arsenal have delayed construction of the $25.7 million 6,000-seat stadium because sales have slumped for skyboxes and luxury suites. The Ripken Stadium skyboxes are currently going for $50,000 each, and luxury suites, $15,000 each. The team has reported the only five skyboxes have been reserved and five suites sold. The groundbreaking ceremony has been postponed until August 15. Aberdeen, MD native Cal Ripken, Jr. has made major contributions to the stadium project that bears his name.

Roster Changes

New members:
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