

Selig Retires

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
January 21, 2015

On Sunday, with no real NFL Football to clutter the world of sport, the man who I once referred to as the "Acting Commissioner for Life," will retire. It turned out that the "Acting-Commissioner for Life" was very nearly Commissioner for Life. It is clear that over his long and rocky tenure as Commissioner of Baseball Bud Selig left a massive legacy. The business and sport of major league baseball was impacted for good and for ill by the man who began his professional life selling used cars in Milwaukee. He will end his tenure as Commissioner by becoming the "Six Million Dollar Man."

Bud Selig became "Acting Commissioner," technically the Chairman of the Executive Council, in 1992 after he and his fellow owners fired then Commissioner Fay Vincent for being, among other things, soft on the Major League Baseball Players Association. The owners wanted the Association crushed and Vincent seemed too even-handed as Commissioner. Subsequently Selig was elevated to the position of Commissioner in July of 1998.

By then the "Acting Commissioner for Life" had demonstrated his willingness to do anything, yes anything, including canceling the World Series, to crush the MLBPA. What greater demonstration of his commitment to himself and his fellow owners could there be than to wipe out the World Series, something that two world wars and the Great Depression had failed to achieve. In the process he could not stop telling the world how much he loved this game and how much it hurt him to zap the World Series.

Yes, it was a great achievement done outside the law and finally put to an end by the act of a Federal Judge who is now on the Supreme Court of the United States and who should be in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Judge Sonia Sotomayor affirmed the NLRB decision that the owners had violated the law, ordered them to return to the bargaining table, and to void the unilateral changes made in the labor agreement. Although this saved the 1995 season, it took a further act of greed by another owner several months after the 1995 baseball season ended before a new collective bargaining agreement was achieved.

Some have looked back on this act of attempted suicide by Selig and the owners and concluded that their collective madness brought labor peace. There has not been another interruption of a baseball season since. I am reminded of the American General in Vietnam who claimed he had to destroy the village in order to save it. Selig tried to emulate the general but luckily he failed. Baseball survived and over the long haul has prospered.

What else might be directly attributed to Commissioner Selig? Some have charged him with negligence over the steroid and PED issues in baseball. He has been called the "Great Enabler." It is said that Selig did not move on PED's because the home run boom, particularly the Sosa-McGwire chase of 1998, was helping baseball recover from the Selig led disaster of 1994-95. This may be unfair, as it might just be that the Commissioner was clueless, something well within the realm of possibility.

Then there was the unfortunate development at the 2002 All-Star game when the managers were running out of players in extra innings. There were many possible ways to fix this minor problem, but instead Selig treated it as if it were one of the greatest calamities in baseball history. He found a "solution" that had nothing much to do with the problem and created the strange situation in which an exhibition game now determines the home team for the World Series.

Next on the list was the Commissioner's brilliant decision that two teams would be contracted, eliminated, wiped out, sort of like the World Series was wiped out. In November of 2001 Selig announced that the owners had voted to eliminate two franchises, without naming them. It quickly became known that the Minnesota Twins and Montreal Expos were on the block. The elimination of the Twins would coincidentally enlarge the Milwaukee Brewers geographic fan base, while the elimination of the Expos would solve an attendance and financial headache for MLB.

The Twins survived and went on to build a new and beautiful outdoor stadium, while the Expos were less fortunate. They were sent off to play games in Puerto Rico and then landed in Washington, D.C. In the end this was all part of a shady deal in which the Boston Red Sox were sold to a syndicate headed by John Henry and a coterie of the friends of Bud Selig. They paid less than what was offered by other

potential buyers. The Expos owner Jeffery Loria sold his team to Major League Baseball and then bought the Marlins from the Marlin's owner, the aforementioned John Henry. No doubt the Henry and Loria families have fond memories of Bud Selig.

One other note on Bud Selig. He remained an owner while serving as Commissioner selling the team in early 2005. He demonstrated his credentials as an owner by getting the taxpayers of southeastern Wisconsin to build him a shiny new state of the art domed stadium using \$290M of public funds. A 0.1% sales tax was put in place on January 1, 1996 to pay off the debt on Miller Park. The debt is projected to be retired sometime in 2017. Miller Park has certainly been an upgrade for the Brewers and the Selig's, although not necessarily for the taxpayers of southeast Wisconsin.

Commissioner Selig did in fact have a major impact on baseball and it was not all negative. As mentioned above some consider the emergence of labor peace to be a part of his legacy. The growth of television revenues and the increase in regional and local media ratings are a positive. The World Baseball Classic is a part of Bud's legacy along with the international development of the game. The institution of replay is lauded by many, the development of a stronger drug policy, and the increase in franchise values is often attributed to Selig's leadership.

Not be overlooked is Selig's role in increasing the diversity in the major leagues both on and off the field and some consider this a very significant part of his legacy. The retirement of Jackie Robinson's number across the major leagues was certainly a plus.

Others in baseball count the expansion of the playoffs and the realignment of the teams a major achievement. The fact that he did not use the latter as a time to put everyone on the same rules is certainly a disappointment. The National League DH anomaly stands out like a sore thumb.

To many people the bottom line on Bud Selig is that the game seems to be in a healthy state and Selig deserves some credit for that fact.

For those who will miss Bud in his familiar role as uber-fan, not to worry. A shrine is being built at Miller Park and among other things it will feature a Bud Selig

hologram. In a sense he will leave, but will never be gone.
For many of his admirers this is a good thing.

As for me, enough already.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you
that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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