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Baseball Commissioner

Richard C. Crepeau
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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Acting Baseball Commissioner for Life Bud Selig is currently making noises suggesting that it's time to choose a permanent Commissioner and that he doesn't want the job. I do, and I offer the following manifesto as my application for the position.

First and foremost I will take this position only on the condition that the Players Association take part in the selection process on an equal footing with ownership. The Commissioner must be mutually acceptable to both parties, and must be given wide ranging powers for a definite term of office, say five years, with removal only by a three-fourths vote of those who elect the Commissioner. Also the Commissioner must have binding arbitration powers which would go into effect any time the collective bargaining process fails.

This would help to establish an atmosphere in which the players and owners are equal partners in determining the working conditions for major league baseball, and negotiations as equals will lead to trust and a workable collective bargaining process.

With the first measures of revenue sharing in place under the new agreement, owners will be instructed to begin working on additional revenue sharing measures, including all television revenues, as well as home and visiting attendance revenue. The objective is to achieve equitable sharing and balance along the NFL model. Franchises in the major leagues should rise and fall together.

If a franchise is unable to earn a profit, then sale of that franchise will be allowed on a free market basis. Under no circumstances will a franchise be allowed to threaten to move in order to gain concessions from state or local governments. Both threats and concessions undermine the relationship between a franchise and a community.

When franchises are put up for sale the local community will be given the right of first refusal. Moving toward community and/or public ownership of baseball franchises, in a manner similar to that existing in Green Bay, will be encouraged. This would have the advantage of removing the monstrous egos and nineteenth century capitalist mentalities of existing ownership from the game. A professional sports franchise should be regarded as a public utility rather than a piece of private property, and it

should also be regarded as a public trust. This would be a major step in creating a true stake in the game for the fans and the public.

In the matter of playing facilities, Major League Baseball as a function of the commissioner's office will seek to facilitate the financing of stadia, and teams will be encouraged to own and operate their own facilities.

As to the game itself this commissioner will establish the principle that there is only one form of major league baseball. The anomaly of having two sets of rules, one for the National League and one for the remainder of organized baseball must be ended. The two leagues and the players will negotiate the rules unification, and if they cannot reach an agreement, the commissioner will impose a settlement under his arbitration powers.

Along the same line all umpires will be integrated into one body. Umpires will work for Major League Baseball under the Commissioner's Office, not for the American or National League. Existing crews from the two leagues will be mixed, and the rules and procedures, including manuals and training, will be standardized. In addition the disciplining of players for violations of conduct, standards, and rules will be done by a single person within the commissioner's office.

In the future no franchise will be awarded to domed facilities unless they can demonstrate the ability to operate grass fields, and all artificial fields will be converted to grass as soon as possible. Bumper pool baseball will be no more.

As an economy measure all players will be declared free agents at the end of each year, unless they have been signed to multi-year contracts. This will flood the market with talent, drive down the price of mediocrity, and encourage roster stability especially among the star players.

The Commissioner's Office will encourage the restoration of a relaxed ambiance at the ballpark, where the art of conversation is not only possible, but also encouraged.

The Major Leagues continue to be the place where baseball is played at the highest possible level. The grace and geometry of the action, the relaxed atmosphere of the ballpark, punctuated by the dramatic moments of speed and confrontation, make it one of the great sporting events in the world. The fans of baseball

know that, and the Commissioner will do everything in his power to allow fans, players, and owners to concentrate on that reality.

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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