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## Fight Breaks Out at Fight - Salary Jumps - Kirby Puckett Retires

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
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It was a week that featured the ridiculous and the sublime, and as usual the former exceeded the latter. I had planned to have an Olympic topic this week but events intervened and forced themselves upon us.

The ridiculous came in two major forms. The first was the fiasco at Madison Square Garden where people went to a fight and a fight broke out. The scheduled fight was between Riddick Bowe and some guy named Golota, a fighter from Poland, who is apparently under indictment in Poland on assault charges. Well at least he wasn't the heavyweight champion of New Jersey. Golota surprised everyone by outpointing Bowe, but in the end, by hook or by crook, Bowe took four low blows and Golota was disqualified.

This is when the fight broke out. Bowe's corner people rushed Golota and one of them pounded Golota with a cell- phone to the head. Others joined the fray in the ring and then fights spread to and through the stands. Before it was over it was a bloody mess and a tribute to Garden security and to the cesspool that is the heavyweight division.

It is not entirely clear why the Garden crowd went berserk but in may have been that word of the upcoming spending spree by the NBA owners had spread through the crowd--a wild theory but after the last few days all things seem possible.

That the Miami Heat would sign two players for \$212M over the next seven years seems ridiculous. That Atlanta could pop for \$50M for five years, or Seattle for \$88M for seven years, or that the Magic would find that \$115M for seven years was not enough to sign Shaq, all would have been regarded as ridiculous just a week ago. The only thing that seemed within the realm of reality was the \$30M for one year for Michael, even though that is greater than the total payroll of 24 teams last season. Now "Michael Money" seems almost like chump change, even though if the Bulls play 100 games next season, Michael will take home \$300,000 per game.

One wonders where all the money is coming from to fuel this spending frenzy. I have two possible explanations. Either the owners were making massive profits before last weekend and no one knew it, or David Stern is the drug lord of the universe and the NBA is fronting for him.

We know of course where the money originates. It comes from luxury box sales, season ticket holders, television sponsors, paraphernalia buyers, and the fleecing of taxpayers at the local, state and national level. All have contributed in various ways to this massive money machine.

Two interesting comments were made over the last few days about all this. Former player and coach Fred Carter recalled that when salaries went over \$100,000 less than two decades ago, people warned the players that they would kill the goose that laid the golden egg. The other observation, which may be the most insightful of any, came from one of the beneficiaries of this madness, Gary Peyton. He was talking about his contract and said, "\$75M or \$85M, what's the difference. You can never spend all that money anyway."

These sordid developments that raise serious questions about the Decline and Fall of Roman Empire were thankfully offset by the sublime.

When Kirby Puckett announced his retirement this week a great career came to a premature end. The eye problems that developed suddenly in spring training and robbed Kirby of depth perception, finally proved untreatable, and one of the great people to ever put on a baseball uniform was forced from the game.

The numbers are his Hall of Fame ticket, the leadership qualities are not measurable, the sight of this squat body made him look like an improbable athlete, and in the end he is one of the greatest players to ever wear a Minnesota Twins uniform. Number 34 jumping high over the glass in centerfield to rob opposing players of home runs was a marvelous sight. Watching Kirby run the bases was worth the price of admission, while Bob Casey's introductions became both a trademark and a call to watch greatness in action.

He played every minute of every game with an enthusiasm that was contagious, and his smile could light up the darkest corners of the Metrodome. His teammates and many other players in the American League are now wearing number 34 on their hats and uniforms as a tribute to his greatness.

As Kirby left he reminded his teammates how proud he was to have worn one uniform throughout his career, and could have told them he was able to do this because he took less money to stay in

Minnesota. He told them not to worry because Kirby Puckett would be all right. He asked them to play with pride and integrity. And then added: "Don't take anything for granted, because tomorrow is not promised to any of us."

And you can take that to the bank, Magic fans.

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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