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Bud Lite's Bloodless Coup - No NFL in LA

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Two sparsely reported and remarkable events from Sportsworld in the past week caught my eye and have gotten me thinking that we may be witnessing some fundamental shifts in the two sports that claim to be our national game. As one would expect these developments did not take place on the playing fields, but rather in the boardrooms. In baseball the positions of League President have been abolished, and in football it seems likely that the NFL will remain shut out of the Los Angeles market.

The abolition of the positions of American League and National League president may come to be known as Bud Lite's Bloodless Coup. Under the leadership of the Commissioner of Baseball, Bud Selig, major-league owners decided that the positions of league president, which are as old as the leagues themselves, are no longer needed. In some ways this is a highly defensible action, especially after the two major responsibilities of the presidents were taken over by the Office of the Commissioner. Supervision of umpires and disciplining of players for various infractions had been the only significant responsibilities of these presidents.

On the other hand these positions predate the commissioner's office and their removal is no small event.

The Commissioner of Baseball is a creation of the Black Sox Scandal and the turmoil of baseball leadership that preceded the scandal. No commissioner has ever been as powerful as the first one, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis. When the Judge agreed to become commissioner he insisted that the owners acknowledge him as the ultimate authority in baseball. He then proceeded to reduce the power and influence of the American League President, Ban Johnson. The National League President, a lesser power at the time, would be reduced to a powerless position later. By the late 1920's Ban Johnson had lost most of his power and resigned his position.

While Landis reigned supreme the League Presidents were reduced to making the schedule, running the umpires, approving contracts, and imposing discipline and fines but only on minor matters. Since the Landis years there have been occasions when some league presidents exercised minor influence, but certainly not any major power. During the commissionerships of such weak figures as "Happy" Chandler or William D. Eckert, baseball's

Unknown Soldier, some league presidents may have had minor influence. In the days of stronger commissioners like Kuhn and Ueberroth the league presidents became shadow figures once again.

Now with the elimination of the league presidents even the most ineffectual commissioner vis-a-vis the team owners will exercise at least some significant administrative power.

It is being suggested that Bud Lite's Bloodless Coup may be the first step toward the creation of a strong commissioner wielding centralized power in a way never before seen or at least not seen since Landis. In the past most commissioners existed at the whim and will of the collective ownership, with Kuhn and Ueberroth again being partial exceptions. As Bud Lite centralizes power he may be able to develop enough leverage over against the power of the owners to become a major player or even an all-powerful figure. Some have even suggested that a commissioner with this kind of power might be strong enough to force both leagues to play by the same rules.

What is clear is that we are looking at a new administrative structure for baseball that could, and I emphasize could, have far reaching consequences for the conduct of the game, or least the conduct of the business of the game. It is not likely that the commissioner will ever exercise Landis type powers, but it could well be that without the league presidents and offices, the new centralized commissioner's office will develop enough bureaucratic power to allow the commissioner to leverage the owners.

The other startling report of the last week came out of the expansion discussions for the National Football League. Apparently Los Angeles is not putting forth an ownership group and enough money to satisfy the expansion committee. It is in fact likely that Los Angeles will not get a NFL franchise.

This means that the second largest city in the United States will be without NFL football for the foreseeable future. Not only is L.A. the second largest city, but it is also the second largest television market in the United States, a much more significant fact in the wonderful world of contemporary sport. That there is no National Football League team in Los Angeles seems more than remarkable.

If the NFL is such a magnificent sports machine, and if professional football is so much more popular than the former national pastime, why is there no team in this city? The Los Angeles metropolitan area has two major league baseball teams and two National Hockey League franchises. Does this not raise the possibility that the hype surrounding the NFL may not be as substantive as people think? Perhaps the NFL is not the new national pastime after all. It is certainly no small matter that the NFL is not represented in the second largest city in the nation.

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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