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## Money and Baseball: The Salaries Keep Rising

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
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It was the late Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen of Illinois who once said, "a billion here, a billion there, pretty soon were talking about real money." This quaint observation came to mind over the past few days in baseball as it was "a few million here, a few million there." One wonders if we are now talking about real money.

It is being reported that the current free agent crop has already amassed over a billion dollars and there are still a few more left to sign. On Monday \$412M went on two players-\$252M to Alex Rodriguez and \$160M to Manny Ramirez. Both of these salaries broke the all-time record set by Mike Hampton who collected \$121M only a week ago.

Records are made to be broken!

Certainly the price of mediocrity is going up with Kevin Appier pocketing \$42M, while the price of failure has risen as well with Steve Trachsel signing for \$7M after amassing a record of 16 wins and 33 losses over the past two years.

What does it all mean?

It means what it always means. There is too much money out there being spent for no useful social purpose other than to drug the masses. There is too much money out there chasing too few players. There are too many millionaire maniac owners who think that winning baseball games is the road to nirvana. Baseball, television, commercial sponsors, and marketing wizards, and the players and agents all conspire to corral as much of that loose money as possible.

It also means that in many cities you will read stories about selfish and ungrateful superstars who are egomaniacal twits who think only about themselves and have no loyalty to any higher values. In those same cities and across the country where sports is spoken you will hear and read the cries that baseball is killing itself, that baseball is being killed by the greedy players, that baseball is being killed by stupid owners, or that we are approaching the apocalypse. In the cities receiving these new millionaires-of-the-playing-fields you will read of the improvement of the team, the commitment of the owner to winning, the pluses for the community, the quality of character the new millionaire brings to the new team and the new city.

It means that baseball players are getting right up there in the money game with actors, lesser dot-com entrepreneurs, and lottery winners. It means that from this time on the price of free agents will be higher and higher and higher. It means that Derek Jeter will get a lot more money and a longer-term contract than the Yankees had in mind just a week ago. It means that Pedro Martinez, Nomar Garciaparra, Ivan Rodriguez, and other teammates of the new salary kings will begin to wonder what they might be worth, and if they can afford to wait for their next free agent opportunity or if they need to renegotiate now.

It means that ticket prices will be going up in any number of baseball parks across the land, as well as parking prices, concession prices, and team merchandise prices. It means that there will be a need for more TV and radio commercials between innings and during the game: "And don't forget fans, Billy Bob's two-run double is brought to you by the Twin Towers Bar and Grill, where you can double your pleasure, double your fun, any time of the day or night."

It means that the arguments about revenue sharing, competitive balance, and small-markets v. large markets will be heard again. It means that Bud Selig will tell us that he understands the concerns being expressed, and that something must and will be done. Bud will tell us, as he always has, that things can not go on like this, and that baseball has already made great strides, and that under his farsighted and inspired leadership everything will be just fine. In fact he told us this just a matter of a few days ago.

There will be great concern expressed about the fans. Oh yes, the fans. Will they become disillusioned by these developments? Will the gap between them and the millionaire players grow further apart? Will they continue to come to the ballparks? And what of the fans in those cities that don't have a chance to compete for a pennant? Are there really enough Americans with the capacity of Cub fans for self-flagellation to sustain Major League Baseball in this new era?

These are some of the questions and issues that will be raised over the next weeks and months ahead as baseball opens another season and the threat of more labor strife waits on the horizon.

In the end we can only wonder if we have been here before? Hasn't all of this been said over and over as the new contract ceilings are shattered by new free spending owners caught up in

the madness? Haven't we heard the cries about the declension in baseball and the declension in sport for over a century and half now? Are we truly looking into the abyss?

Yes, Yes, Yes and Maybe.

Stay tuned. And remember, in the words of the late John Mitchell, former spiritual adviser to Richard Nixon, "watch what we do, not what we say."

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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