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## Maris and the \* - Dream Team Disaster - Pennant Race

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE  
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Tuesday, October 1, was the 30th anniversary of Roger Maris' 61st home run, which broke Babe Ruth's record of 60 homers set in 1927. That Sunday in 1961 in Yankee Stadium should have been a wonderful occasion for Roger Maris, but instead it was the end of a long season of agony. Sportswriters and fans in New York and around the nation had done their best to make life miserable for Maris, for having the temerity to challenge the single season home run record of Babe Ruth.

During the course of the season Maris did not sleep well, did not eat well, and even suffered the loss of clumps of his hair as the pressure was escalated on him. Joining in this shameful spectacle was the Commissioner of Baseball Ford Frick, an ex-sportswriter who decided he needed to bow to the winds of public opinion. When it became apparent that Maris would make a serious run at the record, Frick announced that if Maris did not break the record within 154 games, the length of the 1927 season, an asterisk would be placed in the record books beside Maris' numbers and the home run record would still belong to Ruth. Maris hit home run 61 on the last day of the 162 game season.

A few weeks ago a special committee on records set up by Bart Giamatti "removed" the asterisk from the record books, thus undoing the actions of the spinless and witless Ford Frick. One curious facet of this story is that if you go to the record books, you can not find an asterisk anywhere. It simply is not in any of the major encyclopedias and record books of baseball. So the asterisk that never was, is no more. How nice that this came on the thirtieth anniversary of the achievement by the great Roger Maris. Now isn't it time to put Roger into the Hall of Fame?

The second item also goes back two weeks to the selection of the 1992 United States Olympic basketball team. What a disaster! What sham! What a joke this will make of the Olympics! To send this NBA all-star team to Barcelona proves nothing, except what we already know. These are the best basketball players in the world. They will destroy whoever gets in their way. And it will prove that Americans are among the poorest losers in the world, that as a sporting nation we do not know the meaning of sport or competition, and that indeed winning has become everything in the United States. Being Number One is a national obsession, and now that obsession has turned the Olympic basketball competition

into an international joke. Is this a measure of our greatness as a people? Let's hope not.

And now finally the pennant chase. First a note on the Minnesota Twins, my home team. They have become the first team to go from worst to first in a divisional race. Last season they played like a minor league team, but with some key additions via free agency, trades and the development of young players the Twins have moved to the top of their division. They will take on the Toronto Blue Jays before they can bring their homer hankies back to the World Series, but a combination of Twins talent and the fates may take care of that. You will note that the Blue Jays, and on one occasion the Expos, were close to a World Series trip before, but the gods of baseball have never allowed the showcase of the national pastime to leave the United States and go north of the border. I trust this will not change.

Then there is the National League West where the Dodgers and Braves are battling for the right to be hammered by the Pittsburgh Pirates. This is the one divisional pennant race remaining and what a wonderful race it is. The two teams enter the final weekend of the season with identical 92-67 records. The Dodgers will finish their season with three games in San Francisco where their dreaded rivals the Giants will try to guarantee a Brave pennant as they did in 1982 when Joe Morgan hit a homer to sink the Dodgers on the final day of the season. The Braves meanwhile will face the Houston Astros in Atlanta before three sellout crowds, as they try to equal the achievement of the Minnesota Twins by going from worst to first in their division.

This has been a marvelous chase down to the wire. Two games in the past week stand out. First, last Sunday's game between the Dodgers and Giants in Los Angeles where the Dodgers were losing 2-0 going to the eighth inning, and could have easily been behind 6-0. They scored once in the eighth, and twice in the ninth to pull out the game and maintain their one game lead on the Braves. The highlight was a broken bat hit towards third by Mike Sharperson. The barrel of the bat flew toward third-baseman Matt Williams accompanying the flight of the ball. The bat hit the ball a second time as Williams simultaneously tried to avoid the bat, and field the ball. Unable to do the impossible, Williams and Braves fans helplessly watched as the Dodgers tied the game, and then won it on a single by Darryl Strawberry.

Then on Tuesday night the Braves provided the miracle. The Reds scored six runs in the first inning and the Braves looked like

they were ready to fall two games behind the Dodgers. But no. They chipped away and going to the ninth inning had closed the gap to 6-5. After Dieon Sanders stole second base as a pinch runner, Dave Justice took Rob Dibble deep for a two-run homer and following Alejandro Pena's ninth save in nine tries in the ninth inning the Braves had won.

This is the way all baseball seasons should end.

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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