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The Inequities of the DH and Impact on World Series

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The team that won the National League Championship has not faced the team that won the American League Championship in the World Series since 1972. It was in 1973 that the American League started using the Designated Hitter. It has changed many things, some for good, some for ill. And you can argue for or against the DH until you turn blue. But one thing is certain, the World Series has been tarnished since 1972.

All the World Series prior to 1973 saw the AL and NL champions go head to head. Since then this has not been the case. It is time for this to end, either by getting rid of the DH, or by making the National League come into conformity with all of the rest of organized baseball. It is time to return the World Series to what it is supposed to be, a contest between the champions of each league.

Before the start of the 1991 World Series, Atlanta manager Bobby Cox was asked about the Designated Hitter rule and how it might affect the Braves. He said he did not see this as a problem for the Braves, because when used it would make the Braves lineup stronger, and when not used it would weaken the Twins. In other words, it works to the advantage of the National League team in both cases. This may help to explain why the Twins have been so much stronger at home, than in a National League park.

What this means is that the teams that won in each league never face each other. When the teams are in the American League park and using the DH, the National League team will be stronger offensively than the team that won the National League pennant, because they will add a bat to their lineup, and in some cases also strengthen themselves defensively. Such was the case this year when the DH rule allowed the Braves to remove Lonnie Smith from left field. It also replaced the bat of a pitcher with the bat of Brian Hunter. A nice trade. This isn't just a trade of one bat for another, it is a move that effects the entire nature of the lineup, and the rotation of that lineup over the course of the game.

On the other hand when the games are played in the National League park the DH is not used. This means that the team that won the American League pennant will not take the field. The team that won the American League pennant had a DH in the lineup everyday. In most cases he was a key to their success. Suddenly that player is gone, and is replaced by someone who may not have

had a bat in their hands in several years. Again it is not just a straight swap of bats, strong to weak, it has an impact up and down the lineup, and affects the rotation of that lineup over the course of the game. This year the replacement of Chili Davis with Scott Erickson, Jack Morris, or Kevin Tapani offers a stark example.

When is the last time an American League pitcher got a hit in a World Series? Does anyone remember? It has happened only twice since 1973. In 1989 Mike Moore of the A's doubled against the Giants in the earthquake Series, and Tim Stoddard of the Orioles singled in the 1979 World Series against the Pirates. Two hits in nearly 150 at bats. In addition most of these pitchers can not execute a sacrifice bunt.

It is time for the Commissioner of Baseball to take action and either end the use of the DH, or force the National League to get in line with the rest of the world. If Fay Vincent was to rule that in the World Series you had to play with the lineup that got you there, how long would it take for the National League to adopt the DH? My guess is, not more than a decade.

As for the World Series that ended last Sunday night there may never have been a more exciting Series in the history of the Fall Classic. Two teams that no one thought would be there, battled fiercely for seven games, to decide the World Championship in the tenth inning of the last game, 1-0. Jack Morris, pitching for the third time in the short series worked the entire ten innings, and in the process turned in one of the greatest pitching performances in World Series history. He certainly deserved the MVP award.

Three games went to extra innings and four games were decided on the last pitch. The heroes were numerous, and there were plenty of candidates for goat as well. Kirby Puckett is one of the most exciting players on the field today. His round wide-body look, the intensity with which he plays, and the obvious delight he takes in the game, all make him a pleasure to watch. His performance in Game Six with a single, triple, game saving catch, and game winning home run in the 11th inning made him a leading candidate for MVP. As Peter Gammons pointed out the other day Puckett is the only current superstar who has not been booed in his own ballpark.

The eighth inning of the seventh game was one of the most amazing innings in World Series history. With no score in the game the Braves loaded the bases in the top half of the inning,

and then with one out Sid Bream hit into a double play. Then in the bottom half of the inning the Twins loaded the bases with one out as the Braves pitched around Kirby Puckett. Kent Hrbek then hit into a double play. By that time in the game every pitch was critical, and the pressure was unbelievable.

As a longtime Twins fan and a longtime Braves fan I couldn't have asked for a better outcome. I have a feeling we'll be seeing many of these players in the national spotlight again.

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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