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Hockey Strike Ends - Arthur Ashe HIV - Magic Ticket Price Increase

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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The last words of last week's commentary were, "This could be a long a one." It wasn't. The Hockey Strike is over, and it was a short one, ten days. Did the Sure-Footed Northern Rink Rat succumb to the call of the Stanley Cup? Or did the owners cave in under the economic pressures of the moment? Who blinked first, the players or the owners?

Looking at the major issues of the strike it is difficult to see any clear winner or loser. On the surface, looking at the basics of the settlement, it would appear that the players got what they wanted: Independent arbitrators, improvements in the compensation formula for free agents, improvements in pension and insurance, more money in the playoff fund, and licensing arrangements remain the same. But in almost all cases it was less than what the players wanted.

The two areas where the players gave up anything were on the schedule, which will be expanded by two games for the regular season, and on the length of the agreement. The players wanted a three year agreement, and basically got a one year agreement which will end in September of 1993.

This strike did not demonstrate that the players association can sustain a major work stoppage. The players were not tested, largely I think because they were at a point of maximum strength economically. But if there were a lockout in September of 1993 it would be the players who would stand to lose the most money, not the owners, and this might be a good time for the owners to test the resolve of the players or even break the union.

For now it's on to the quest for Lord Stanley's Cup.

Another item much in the news last week was the revelation that Arthur Ashe has tested HIV positive, making him the second major sports figure to have this become public knowledge. In the case of Magic Johnson the announcement came voluntarily. In the case of Ashe the announcement came as a result of the fact that USA Today was about to make the story public by virtue of a tip it had received. The paper contacted Ashe, asked him about the story they had, and as a result Ashe was forced to go public.

Ashe complained that he had been a victim of an invasion of privacy, that he had a right to live his life in his own way, and that he should not have been forced to deal with the disease in public.

Certainly there must be a great deal of sympathy for Arthur Ashe's position on this matter. He is no longer a major tennis star in the public eye, but in fact he is still a very well-known figure on the tennis scene, and he is still a celebrity. If Arthur Ashe had a heart attack, or if he had cancer, these facts would have been reported about him. If he had been arrested for cocaine possession or drunken driving, it would certainly have been on the evening news. He still is a public figure, and as a public figure he is subject to public scrutiny, whether he likes it or not.

What received less comment than Ashe's right to privacy, is the obsession that the American public has developed over the specter of AIDS. There is a voyeurism here that borders on the bizarre. Is it because this disease deals with two extremely significant human concerns, sex and death, that AIDS has become such an all-consuming concern of the public? Whatever the answer to that question, Arthur Ashe has become not only a victim of the disease, but the latest victim of our obsession with this disease and with the athlete as celebrity.

Meanwhile in Orlando, the Orlando Magic Money Machine announced an increase in the price of tickets. It is interesting how this was done. First, just after the purchase of the Magic by Rich DeVoss, the public was informed that they could look for a price increase for next season. Then occasionally during the following weeks the subject found its way to print. Finally two days before the announcement, the Magic orchestrated a major discussion of the price rise in the media.

What was interesting through all of this was that no one ever even slightly suggested how large the increase would be. A few hours before the announcement I was discussing all of this with a season ticket holder, and suggested that this was going to be a big jump. All of the preparation of the public mind had been done to cushion the blow. When asked how big, I suggested that as much as four dollars might be expected on the \$23 seats. I was wrong. It was seven dollars. The price rise was greater on the more expensive seats, and less on the less expensive seats. No doubt this progressive pricing policy represents the Amway social conscience in action. The average increase on the average ticket price was a cool 26.4%, slightly more than the inflation

rate over the past three years. Just think how much it would have been had the City of Orlando renegotiated the sweetheart arena contract before the sale.

If all this seems excessive Magic fans need to remember that Rich De Voss paid a high price for this team, and he has to make those monthly payments. My suggestion to those who think they might not be able to afford season tickets at the new prices: try an Amway party. If you do well, you too might someday have your own NBA franchise, heavily subsidized by the taxpayers that will make you even richer.

In the words of that great sports philosopher W.C. Fields, "Never give a sucker, an even break."

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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