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Grant's Contract in Jeopardy- NFL loses in Court- Hockey and Baseball Lockouts

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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It was just a few short months ago that Pat Williams glibly assured the Orlando public that the signing of Horace Grant to a contract that clearly circumvented the NBA salary cap was not a problem. "We have very clever lawyers," said Williams, "at one glance they can tell the difference between an oral and a written contract." But could they tell the difference between a cap and a strap?

The news out of a New Jersey courtroom this week sent shock waves through O-town, and the clever prestidigitators in the Magic front office scurried back to the drawing board. What looked like a sure thing to many, turned out to be one of those wonderful inexplicable courtroom turnarounds. While ruling affirmatively on the contracts of Kukoc, Dudley and Green, the Judge from Exit 59 said he didn't have enough information to make an immediate ruling on the Grant contract. But for now he would not approve it.

Once again the Magic are saying that everything is just fine, not to worry, Horace will be with us. If he is not it will a major setback for the team. They will still be looking for the elusive power forward, and they will be short one of the players from last year's team. We will now find out if Horace Grant loves Orlando enough to postpone his major financial gratification for one more year, or if he will take the money and run, or if the Magic lawyers are still able to distinguish written from oral contracts.

It has been a major week off the field of play, in the courts and at the bargaining table. In Tallahassee the Seminoles received news concerning the NCAA's lawsuit against the State of Florida which should clear the way for them to play their footlocker fullpacks.

In Washington the National Labor Relations Board ruled in favor of the NFL Players Association against the NFL Management Council. As a result 130 players will share \$30M from a settlement arising out of the 1987 strike. It is the largest settlement in NLRB history and involved back pay, incentive bonuses, and interest. In yet another case sports' ownership was found in violation of the law while dealing with labor.

This is a familiar pattern, and should help to explain why players are wise not to trust ownership. They are all too often arrogant men operating as a force unto themselves, who simply

can not believe that the ordinary rules of law and common practice apply to them.

And if all of this isn't enough the National Hockey League seems ready to follow the lead of Major League Baseball, with owners now saying they will lockout the players shortly after the beginning of the season. Apparently hockey ownership will join baseball owners in trying to force a salary cap on the players. Whether hockey guys have the same unity and resolve that baseball players have is doubtful, but it is certainly remarkable that two of the four major professional sports could be on strike at the same time over essentially the same issue.

So here we sit on the eve of the Ken Burn's documentary history of baseball on the precipice of sport history. For only the second time in the history of the World Series it will not be played. The first was in 1904, only the second year of the Series and therefore not much of tradition shattering event. John J. McGraw in his pique and arrogance announced that the New York Giants would not participate in a post-season series against the American League champs.

For McGraw the main motive was personal animosity towards the American League president Ban Johnson, who had offended McGraw by insisting that he act like a human being and sportsman while managing in the American League. This was simply too much to expect. McGraw jumped to the National League, and in 1904 was able to take his revenge on Johnson.

This time the owners are seeking revenge on the players who have, in the owners eyes, grown too powerful, have too much to say about the conduct of the game, and are taking away too large a share of the profits and not leaving enough in the pockets of the owners.

The World Series was not cancelled by World War I nor World War II, the Great Depression, wars in Korea or Vietnam, hurricanes, torrential rains, cold blustery weather, snow, or even an earthquake. Baseball is at its height of popularity, is generating more revenue than ever before, and is as interesting and entertaining than at any time in its history. And now it has been done in by a group of owners who seem determined to break the union.

There are those who say that owner stupidity has been threatening to kill baseball for over century. This could be their first success. Bud Selig meet Jack Kevorkian.

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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