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## Major League Madness - The Iditarod

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
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Have you Atlanta Braves fans noticed how well Krause is doing at shortstop? Did anyone see the box from the Mets-Yankees game last Sunday? What a line-up! They say that Newman may be the new DiMaggio, and that Jensen might be the new Seaver. And boy don't those San Francisco Giants look tough again this year with Ortman in center and Morrow in right? And of course the Blue Jays are still the defending World Champions, and they look like they are loaded with new talent. And even if they win it all, the World Championship will still come south of the border, as the Jays will be playing their home games in their new home away from home, Dunnedin, Florida.

It is spring training in the national pastime, that legendary idyllic time of renewal, new life, and optimism. The sounds of bat hitting ball, and the pop of leather as ball meets glove, which usually fill us with the nostalgia for springs past, now fill us with the nausea of the present spring. Fear and Loathing, Donald Fehr and Bud Selig, have given us a spring of confusion and pessimism, with replacement players who can't be identified even with a scorecard, and labor negotiations which seem to be going nowhere.

Is it really going to happen? Are major league owners going to allow this travesty of replacement players to continue? Do they really intend to begin a regular season this way? It will be an insult to the fans and clear attempt to bury the players union. Is there no one out there who has enough sense to say enough already? Baseball's attempted suicide is not a pretty sight.

And then, just in case you thought things couldn't get any worse, last week comes news that Little League teams will no longer be able to use the names of major league teams without paying a rights fee. Spokespersons for Major League Baseball say this is a simple copyright and licensing issue. These people really do not have a clue. All anyone understands is the short-term bottom line, and no one seems to understand the meaning of the phrase "long term irreversible damage."

If I were David Stern I would invite all Little Leaguers to rename their teams after NBA franchises, and further bury these baseball suits who remain clueless. Maybe the time is right for replacement owners, replacement executives, and replacement lawyers.

Here we are in what should be the optimism of spring, drowning in pessimism, stupidity, and greed. If this goes on much longer the numbers of people who will still care if and when it is over will be miniscule.

So where to turn for sport that still resembles sport rather than a labor-management power struggle worthy of the late nineteenth century? Try looking North beyond the Canadian border to Alaska, which this week and next, plays host to one of the great sporting events of our time, "The Last Great Race on Earth," better known as the Iditarod.

This 1,159 mile dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome has been contested in Alaska, where spring in early March is but a rumor, for over two decades now. The race commemorates the transportation of serum by dog sled to Nome to fight a diphtheria epidemic in 1925. Dog-Sled racing itself goes back into the late 19th century as a competitive sport, while the Iditarod was organized by Dorothy Page and Joe Reddington Sr. to save mushing from the growing trend toward snowmobiles.

The challenges are many. The elements often display their fury along the trails. Three years ago 150 miles into the race teams were bunching up because the trail ahead had been buried by blowing and drifting snow. A few days later strong winds and a rough trail had been compounded by overnight temperatures near minus 35 at Finger Lake.

In the 1990 race it was in turn too warm, too cold, the snow drifts were insurmountable, there were Buffalo on the trail, and two sleds were attacked by Moose, who tangled the lines and stomped the dogs. The mountains and the tundra offer challenges of epic proportion.

The place names along the trail are expressive and exotic. Finger Lake, Rainy Pass, Koyak, Shaktoolik, Skwentna, the Yukon River, Cripple checkpoint. This is a test of man and animal against the power of nature, with the severe cold, the high winds, and whiteout snowstorms.

The Last Great Race on Earth really does live up to its name. The Dogs and their best friends challenge the elements and one another in a test of skill, power, and endurance, over the course of 1,159 miles, almost any one of which can claim the life of a participant.

And there isn't a lawyer in sight.

On Sport and Society the is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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