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Baseball's Status in American Sport and Television

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Sometimes the worst laid plans of mice and men cannot do their damage. In the case of the major league baseball owners again they tried. But try as they might, they haven't been able to destroy the post-season.

It all stated in the divisional playoffs when all four games were played at exactly the same time, so that the audience could be regionalized. In the League Championship Series or LCS (which has the ominous sound of a religious cult) the Baseball Network again repeated their minimalist pattern starting both games simultaneously. There was one improvement. When one game ended they switched to the other, and some late inning tension was enjoyed nationally.

I must tell you that the rumors that the World Series will be offered on a regional basis are not true. We will not be restricted to watching every other half-inning.

One other note of brilliance by Bill Giles and the Baseball Network: Remember all those complaints about how the little kiddies couldn't stay up and watch those late starting games that go until after midnight? Well these guys moved to correct that problem. Saturday night games are starting earlier so that when the kiddies have to get up for school on Sunday morning they won't be too tired.

Is it any wonder that the players are a little hesitant to leave their fate in the hands of the owners?

And was it really necessary to hold up the start of Game Five in Cleveland Sunday night until the end of the Carolina-Jets game? Thanks to Bob Costas for wondering aloud about the status of baseball as the national pastime.

Despite all these efforts even the Baseball Network geniuses couldn't destroy some really great baseball, and fortunately some of it went out on national TV. First came the playoff game for the Western Division title between Seattle and California, a gem by Randy Johnson. And then came the climax of the Seattle-Yankees series with Randy Johnson once again playing superman in front of a screaming hysterical crowd in the King Dome.

The Braves-Rockies series offered some late inning drama, as did the Indians and Red Sox series, while the Reds-Dodgers match-up remains but a rumor in this part of the country.

When the NLCS began there was considerable disappointment that at least for the first four games we would not be able to follow the Mariner saga. But the Reds and Braves did not disappoint. Starting pitching on both sides was superb and the Braves bullpen finally looks like it is ready to do its part. Glavine, Schourek, Smoltz, Smiley, Maddox, Wells, Avery and Schourek again were masterful in the starting rotations. In relief, McMichael, Pena, and Wholers gave Atlanta the winning edge. Wholers seems finally be the closer the Braves always thought he would be.

The National League rookie of the year Chipper Jones played offensively and defensively like a veteran, McGriff just keeps on hitting(are the Braves really not going to re-sign him?) and such unlikely heroes as Javier Lopez, Charlie O'Brien, and Mike Devereaux made Bobby Cox look like a genius, which he ain't!

It appears to me that what makes this Braves team different from the previous National League champions are defense up the middle and the bullpen, with the biggest addition being Marquis Grissom in centerfield. To steal a line once said about Joe Jackson, his glove is where triples go to die, not to mention doubles and singles.

As for the Reds they were the Little Dead Machine. Reggie Sanders was so bad at the plate you had to feel sorry for him, and most everyone else failed in the clutch. This was largely a function of Braves pitching, although Sanders was suffering a special torture.

Meanwhile in the Indians-M's series which we picked up in the late innings, and for Game Five and Six, Orel Hershiser was his usual dominant self. Cleveland bats were booming although Belle's was not a ringer, and Seattle still looked like the early fall version of the miracle on 34th Street-- at least until Game Five when Hershiser again dominated.

When the ALCS returned to Seattle for Game Six Randy Johnson was back and everyone waited for him to dominate the Indian bats and for the Mariner bats to start booming around the King Dome. However Dennis Martinez, the other pitcher in this game, totally controlled the M's through the seven innings he pitched and the Cleveland bullpen finished up.

Don't look now, but the high-powered bats of the Cleveland Indians are accompanied by some high-powered pitching which silenced the big bats in both Boston and Seattle.

The Fall Classic returns and this may turn out to be one.

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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