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First World Series in Two Years

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Now that the first World Series in two years has ended it's time to reflect on the season, the playoffs and Series, as well as the current state of the game.

It may be that some have forgotten that this season didn't start on time, and that it would not have started at all, were it not for the ruling of Judge Sonia Sotomayor that once again the baseball owners were in violation of federal law. For that act alone both leagues should vote her the MVP of the 1995 season.

That baseball owners might be violating federal law still seems to be of no interest to most baseball fans or sportswriters who continue to insist that the only thing of any significance is whether games are played for their amusement. It's a game, not a business, the players are overpaid and spoiled, and the owners are just trying to get control of their costs. Everyone's greedy.

In the season that started late, there were individual and team performances of incredible dimensions, and many fans stayed away from it all. In Cleveland, where the Indians won 100 games in a shortened season, the team performance was almost as good as Albert Belle's as he hit 50 homers in only 144 games. In Atlanta where nothing but a World Series win could interest fans, the best pitching staff in recent memory was led by Greg Maddox who ran off a record 18 straight road wins, and finished the season 19-2, the highest winning percentage in history by a pitcher with 20 decisions. In September, Seattle suddenly experienced a winning baseball team, and just as suddenly was transformed from a football city to a baseball city with a new stadium.

The one game Seattle-California playoff, followed by the divisional playoffs and League Championships offered high drama, although the brilliant owners made sure that much of it was kept off national television. Despite that baseball fever seemed to be growing, and the playoff system seemed to be a big success.

The World Series offered some of the best pitching in its history. The Cleveland Indians who built their reputation as big hitters saw their season batting average of .290 drop to about .170, thirty points below the Mendoza line. This was not a slump, it was a tribute to the overwhelming depth and strength of the Atlanta pitching staff. In addition Orel Hershiser's postseason is a tribute to both modern medicine and his own tenacity. The bulldog was outstanding.

When you consider that Tom Glavine is the number two pitcher on the Atlanta staff, and Smoltz and Avery are three and four in the rotation, you can get a feel for just how strong Braves pitching really is. Maddox's performance in Game One with a two-hitter was hailed as a masterpiece, and it was topped by Glavine's performance in Game Six. Maddox will chalk up his fourth straight Cy Young Award, and of course it was Glavine who had won the last one, not won by Maddox.

Despite this baseball may be in trouble in Atlanta. Too much success has spoiled the fans, who now expect excellence. They have lost that enthusiasm that was there in '91. The first two games in Atlanta were marked by a subdued crowd, and scalpers at Fulton County stadium found they were operating in a buyers, rather than a sellers, market. Tickets at face value were everywhere. Dave Justice was right.

Also fans in Atlanta had been turned off by the strike. Tom Glavine, the Braves player representative who was high profile during the strike, was vilified on the talk shows and heavily booed when the season finally started. As Glavine was presented the MVP trophy how many fans remembered the strike? How many realize that nothing has been resolved?

Ownership is still leaderless and apparently without a plan or program for the weeks ahead. Negotiations are non-existent. Bud Light, acting commissioner, is too busy extorting the people of Wisconsin with his threats to move the Brewers, while simultaneously telling the Astros they can not do the same in Houston. Talk of the need for new stadiums seems to be everywhere. Maybe after the owners finish looting the great urban centers of America, they will have time to resume their attack on the players union, or even negotiate.

As for the MLBPA, it seems to be moribund. It would be surprising if the Players Association has the necessary strength in the rank and file to strike again, and of course without the will to strike they have little power. They may be just fading away.

Salary Caps, revenue sharing, free agency, all those familiar terms are still out there, and there seems to be no one interested in dealing with them. The excitement of the World Series will end soon enough, and the malaise of this industry seems likely to engulf everyone for a considerable time to come.

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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