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Baseball Negotiation - Movie Review: Tin Cup

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Oh those wonderful owners. It was just ten days ago that it seemed like baseball was ready for a settlement and a new collective bargaining agreement. Donald Fehr and Randy Levine seemed to have reached an agreement after the owners had given Levine a green light to bargain even on the issue of service time. Then the owners reverted to form and pulled the rug out from under their chief negotiator.

As you may recall, if you care anymore, the major stumbling block for the past three years has been revenue sharing and a payroll tax. An agreement was reached on these issues. Under the terms of the negotiated agreement about five teams will be hit by the tax, and an equal number of low revenue teams will benefit. With that mountain having been climbed, what has gone wrong?

It seems that Levine has been undercut by Jerry Reinsdorf and others over the issue of service time credit during the strike, a strike forced by the owners. Apparently Levine was instructed by owners that service time could be given only if the players backed off lawsuits and unfair labor practice charges against the owners. Levine was able to negotiate an exchange with Donald Fehr on these issues, but when he went back to ownership for final approval they balked.

What is this about really? You can talk about the technicalities of service time forever, but for the players it is a bottom line issue they will not give up. For the owners it could be compromised as long as they got something in return, which they did, and as long as they got the payroll tax, which they did.

So what is the problem? I would suggest two or three factors are at work here. Some owners just can't stand the idea of service time being granted, although it always has been in previous strikes. Some owners are so caught up in the need to punish the union or crush the union that they won't accept any agreement. Some owners are so determined that others not be allowed to tell them how to use their property, that they are willing to go down in flames on this marginal issue. They will settle for nothing less than Don Fehr's head on a platter and the players on their knees. Then there are perhaps a few owners who see that service time concessions will mean that they will lose some of their good players at the end of this season, or be forced to pay them

big bucks to keep them, and want to delay that eventuality for another season.

No doubt there are still owners who believe they can declare an impasse in negotiations, go back to the court of Judge Sotomayer, and get her to lift the injunction that prevents them from imposing their own settlement. With the negotiations having gone this far and with so many major issues settled, this is not a likely scenario. But some owners still dream the dream of unfettered power, a return to the good old days of owner dominance and player subservience.

So it seems that some owners haven't learned a thing and are willing to run the same route they ran before, forcing another strike by destroying the good faith bargaining of their chief negotiator who was on the verge of a major labor agreement. Oh, those wonderful owners!

Another disappointment this week came at the movies where I was sucked into paying my six bucks to watch Ron Shelton's attempt to do for golf what he did for baseball.

While "Bull Durham" had a feel of reality and showed a real love and affection for baseball, "Tin Cup" shows little real appreciation for golf and only succeeds in replicating the banality of a CBS Sports presentation. Annie's poem to baseball and Crash Davis' litany of beliefs were rich, even when corny, while Tin Cup McAvoy's attempt to do the same for golf is poorly written and devoid of any genuine feeling. Kevin Costner was great as Davis and grating as McAvoy. Unlike Crash Davis, Tin Cup McAvoy is a caricature with little human feeling who evokes little sympathy. Unlike Annie Savoy who was a marvelously rich and poetic woman with a passion for baseball, Molly Griswald is doll-like and displays little passion for anything. The supporting cast of "Tin Cup" shows some promise, but they have too little to work with. Don Johnson as David Simms is appropriately jerky, although a bit over the top. Only Cheech Marin as Romeo Posner gives a performance that is at all memorable.

This is a movie that was poorly conceived, badly written and directed, and not believable. It had its moments, but they were too few and far between. It was at least thirty minutes too long and laced with pauses that were awkward and boring, too often at one and the same time.

Believe me, "Tin Cup" is no "Bull Durham." The great golf film is yet to be made.

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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