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## Jerry Reinsdorf's Smoking Gun and Baseball Labor Settlement

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They called him The Old Roman. In 1919 Charles Comiskey, owner of the Chicago White Sox so angered his players with low salaries and his cheapskate ways that they turned on him and fixed the World Series. In 1996 White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf so angered his fellow owners by his high salaries and wild spending that they turned on him, reversed their vote of the previous three weeks, and approved the new baseball collective bargaining agreement. Maybe they should call Reinsdorf, the New Roman, or Roman Nouveau.

Seventy-seven years after the Black Sox Scandal a White Sox owner once again precipitated a series of events that could lead to a new commissioner for the game and a new era in the sport and business of baseball. Acting-Commissioner for Life Bud Selig has said there would be a new commissioner after the collective bargaining agreement was approved and the situation in baseball stabilized. If all continues on course we will reach that point soon.

But before we leave this ugly episode in the history of baseball, a few things need to be clarified. Randy Levine certainly deserves a great deal of credit for his persistence and for his ability to bargain effectively and to conclusion with Donald Fehr and the Players Association. But Randy Levine did not do this alone. Donald Fehr was a key part of the process and the players were willing to make a number of significant concessions to the owners.

The Levine-Fehr negotiations worked because the two men trusted each other, wanted to reach a settlement, and were willing to compromise. The Levine-Fehr negotiations almost failed because too many owners still do not understand, or do not want to be a party to, the collective bargaining process. Those owners, led by Jerry Reinsdorf and Wayne Huizenga, repudiated the bargaining process and the work of Levine and Fehr. Some thought they could get further concessions from the players, not understanding that the bargaining process had ended and had an integrity of its own. Some owners, like Reinsdorf, still dreamed the dream of being able to destroy the Players Association.

To say that the process worked is misleading. It did not work, but Jerry Reinsdorf so angered his fellow owners by signing Albert Belle to a five year, fifty-five million dollar contract, that they finally realized that an agreement with flaws is much

better than no contract at all. To say the process worked is like claiming the process worked in Watergate. Jerry Reinsdorf became the "smoking gun" in this scenario, just like Nixon taping himself provided the "smoking gun" in Watergate. The process didn't work, but luckily the principal characters shot themselves in the foot.

Four years of labor-management turmoil have ended. And make no mistake about it, the owners were at fault. At least 95% of the blame for this turmoil can be laid directly at the feet of these 19th century robber baron wannabes who loot cities, fleece the public, and seek to dominate their employees. From the first step on December 7, 1992 when owners voted to reopen the contract, until the rejection of their own negotiator's efforts on November 6th of this year, the owners time after time did everything they could to destroy the Players Association and permanently cripple major league baseball.

It was the owners who in August of 1993 pledged not to lock out the players nor unilaterally change the terms of the agreement through the 1994 season. Then it was the owners who forced the strike, when it became clear that without a strike they would impose their own rules on the players. It was the owners who canceled the end of the season, the playoffs and the World Series, thus matching the arrogance of John J. McGraw who forced the only other World Series cancellation in history. It was the owners who then unilaterally imposed their own settlement on the players.

It was the owners who voted 26-2 to use replacement players and make a joke of the 1995 season, having just destroyed the 1994 season. It was the owners who were found to be repeatedly in violation of labor law by the National Labor Relations Board. It was the owners who consistently lost their appeals of these rulings in court. It was the owners who were found at fault in the courtroom of Judge Sotomayer and told to rescind their actions and get baseball back on the field with real players.

It was the owners who kept hiring and firing their chief negotiators, each of whom we were told was tougher than his predecessor and each of whom would bring the players to their knees and change the balance of power. And it was the owners who gave us Acting Commissioner for Life, Bud Selig, who may be remembered as the Civilian edition of Gen. William Eckert, baseball's unknown soldier, or as the Commissioner who made us long for Bowie Clown.

Oh those wonderful owners, they finally voted 26-4 on November 26 to accept reality. Why do I find it so difficult to be grateful to these noble sportsmen for such a courageous act?

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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