

# Baseball: Labor Peace and Great Play in the Post-Season

11-1-2002

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## Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Baseball: Labor Peace and Great Play in the Post-Season" (2002). *On Sport and Society*. 565.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/565>

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
November 1, 2002

It was a baseball season to remember for a multitude of reasons.

Just a year ago Luis Gonzalez denied the Yankees the hardware when his bloop single over a drawn-in infield sent the Diamondback fans partying into the night.

After what seemed like only a few hours Bud Selig poured cold water all over a great World Series and an exciting season refusing to allow baseball fans the opportunity to contemplate the greatness of the game. Contraction became the buzzword of baseball's off-season, and it became what every good fan wanted to do to the Commish.

Four unnamed teams, two of which were immediately named, Minnesota and Montreal, were earmarked for the scrap heap of Major League baseball. It was all so necessary for the survival of the game, said Bud, after a season of increased revenues, attendance, and excitement. Baseball once again was flogging itself in public lest it become too popular.

What has happened since has been almost as unbelievable as Selig's pronouncement of the need for radical surgery.

One must start off the field as the spring and summer was filled with gathering storm clouds of what seemed to many an inevitable strike. From Bud's November pronouncement, through the winter and into spring, the specter of labor strife hung over all discussions of the upcoming season. As the games began in April there were few who thought a full schedule would be played. It seemed to be the strike no one wanted, but a strike no one could avoid.

In the meantime a marvelous season of baseball was unfolding. The Minnesota Twins were heading toward a divisional championship rather than contraction. The Expos were playing well and seemed to at least have some shot at a wildcard slot through mid-summer. A number of teams were displaying a level of play that had not been seen in their ballparks in some years. Most notable in this category were the Los Angeles-California-Anaheim Angels who started the season by trying to take themselves out of contention before the end of April. Somehow the Angels righted the

ship and were playing some of the best baseball in the major leagues.

Then came the All-Star game and once again Bud Selig came forward to cast a pall over the national game. It has been a truism that there are no ties in baseball, the game without the clock. In addition "there is no crying in baseball" became a catch phrase since Tom Hanks first delivered the line in "A League of Their Own." The night of All-Star Game produced both. The fiasco of the tie brought at least a few tears across the land as Bud Selig whined through the night on national television trying to rationalize his amazing decision.

We now know that all of this was simply the darkness before the dawn. After the All-Star break the divisional and wild card races heated up, the Twins marched steadily toward the playoffs, and the Oakland A's went on a memorable and remarkable 20 game winning streak punctuated by several dramatic wins in their last at bat. New stars were born as new names appeared on the "league leader" lists.

Then the miracle occurred. Major League Baseball and the Players Association were able to come to a collective bargaining agreement without a work stoppage for the first time. The collective bargaining process worked as it is designed to work. For the first time in history it seems that the parties involved were able to treat each other with minimal respect and were committed to a settlement of the issues.

In fact no one wanted a strike. No one looked to humiliate the other side. Everyone recognized that there are problems with the economics of the game, and everyone recognized that a work stoppage would only make those problems worse, at least in the short run.

So what can be said about the much-maligned Commissioner of Baseball? It seems that Bud Selig played a key role in making this process work. It seems that Bud was able to steer his owners in one unified direction, a process that is similar to the herding of cats. And it seems that Bud Selig is the commissioner who finally has been able to convince the owners that it is a new world in which the Player's Association is not going away, and that it is wiser to bargain with the Association than to seek to destroy it.

As for the Player's Association and Donald Fehr there seemed to be a new awareness that the balance of power could not be pushed much further in their favor and that there is some limit to the production of golden eggs.

This assessment may be too optimistic but it seems to me a view worth holding and one that perhaps will hold.

As for the game itself, the post-season produced some interesting baseball and some healthy surprises. The elimination of last year's World Series opponents, as well as the Braves, in the first round was a blow against the dominance of big payrolls. The playoffs produced a raft of memorable moments while the World Series produced a seven game battle with great plays, big hits, unlikely heroes, and an unforgettable Angel comeback in Game Six.

It was all as it should be and now in the peace of the off-season we can contemplate the greatness of the game itself.

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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