

## Baseball's new CBA

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Richard C. Crepeau

*University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu*

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
Baseball's new CBA  
OCTOBER 30, 2006

As the World Series came to an end on Friday with Tony LaRussa receiving his latest anointing from the fans of Cardinal Nation (prepare yourselves for another book), others were left to wonder at the fantastic turnaround by the Tigers, who went from juggernaut to gift-givers in less than a week. The baseball story that was of greater significance was the announcement that a new contract agreement had been reached between the Players Association and the baseball owners. Collective bargaining, it seems, has worked once again, establishing a two time winning streak for the players, the owners, and the fans.

In August of 2003, when the current agreement was negotiated and agreed upon, it was the first time, after eight failures, that an agreement had been reached without a lockout or a strike. This was an historic achievement. At the time, the question was: could this be replicated when contract negotiation time came around again? Was the 2003 agreement an aberration, or did it mark a significant change in labor relations for baseball? Had the owners finally given up on the notion of breaking the union? Did both sides now have a lasting commitment to the collective bargaining process?

We may now have answers to all these questions. To see Donald Fehr and Bud Selig standing together on the field in front of a national television audience lauding the new agreement was intriguing and encouraging. They almost looked like self-satisfied elder statesmen, both men having aged and both having dropped the strident tones of the past. As Rick said to Captain Renault at the end of Casablanca, "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

The average baseball fan remains disinterested in arguments between the millionaires and the billionaires, and as a result last week's announcement of labor peace quickly receded into the background. Kenny Rogers's uncontrolled substance had much more appeal to fans and pundits alike.

The new agreement will run for five years and guarantees that baseball will have experienced sixteen years of labor peace before it ends. The interest in breaking that peace will fade with time, especially if prosperity continues.

Commissioner Selig was obviously pleased, terming this "a golden era in every way," adding that the "last agreement produced stunning growth and revenue. I believe that five years from now people will be stunned how well we grew the sport." There was no talk of suffering franchises or contraction, the prohibition of which continues in the new contract.

In point of fact, there is little change in this new agreement. There will be minor changes in the luxury tax and in revenue sharing, the minimum salary will increase slightly by steps over the years, at both the major and minor league levels. There is some tinkering with free agency rules and signing dates as well as compensation, and there is one potentially significant change in the signing date for players drafted before they finish college.

The drug testing agreement will remain in place as is, and there is no plan for HGH testing unless a reliable urine test is developed. There is some willingness to discuss a blood test for HGH under certain circumstances, but again a reliable test is a prerequisite to any such discussion.

Donald Fehr was pleased with the agreement. A twenty year veteran of the negotiating process, Fehr said he never really believed that an agreement could be reached before the expiration of an existing agreement. Fehr also believes that the owners and the Players Association came out of their experience working together on the World Baseball Classic with a new understanding that they could in fact do things together, an understanding that facilitated the recent negotiations.

Selig was reflective as he pointed out that there were no leaks during this negotiation and no dueling press conferences. "In other words, these negotiations were conducted professionally, with dignity and with results. These negotiations were emblematic of the new spirit of cooperation and trust that now exists between the clubs and the players."

The key words here are "professional," "cooperation," and "trust," words that many would have doubted could ever be used in describing the baseball labor scene.

And so it is now time for me to say that after all these years of attacking "Bud" Selig, I am ready to admit that in the past five years Selig has played a leadership role in two major developments for baseball. The first was his push for the World

Baseball Classic, which for all its problems turned into a terrific event.

The second, and by far the most significant development, perhaps since the desegregation of the game, has been Selig's ability to bring the owners kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century without the need to make a stop in the twentieth century. This will be his greatest legacy, and in the end may mark him as the greatest Commissioner in the history of baseball. (If you can't believe I wrote that last sentence, neither can I. And I did it without any foreign substance on my keyboard.)

Looking ahead, one can only wonder where all this may go. The history of many labor relationships indicates that once peace and a working relationship have been established, the two parties often become more than a bit cozy. In the language of the Sixties, the labor leaders can be co-opted by management and then succumb to the perks of power. The results are continued labor peace, a union leadership that grows away from its membership, and a regime of comfortable neglect toward the membership who remain quiet because the rewards have become so bountiful.

Whether Donald Fehr or his successors follow this route taken by Samuel Gompers and others, remains to be seen, but stranger things have happened. Indeed they just did.

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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