

VIEW From The Cheap Seats

By Mark Savoie

As much as I hate to continue writing about the labour problems infesting North American sports, I find that I must comment on the atrocity that will be major league baseball should the owner's bluff of using replacement players prove not to be a bluff. The truth is that the possibility/probability that it is not a bluff quite frankly scares the living bejeezus out of me. I have been a baseball fan since as early as I can remember, and the idea of watching major league baseball played by minor league players is revolting to me.

The whole attraction of major league baseball – as well as the NBA, NFL, and NHL – is that when you are watching it you are watching the best. If the owners elect to dress the Pawtucket Red Sox in a Boston Red Sox uniform or the Ottawa Lynx in a Montreal Expos uniform, then major league baseball will cease being the best, but will be a poor second to the Japanese leagues. At present, with the real players – major league baseball is by far the best brand of baseball to be found in terms of talent, but only the most chauvinistic of fans could believe that the Japanese are so far behind that they do not have a superior brand of ball than is found in Triple A. Once the owners advertise their Triple A players as the best baseball to be found in the world they will have reduced major league baseball to a freakshow league suited to be found next to the fat lady and the dog faced boy. Once this happens, once the public have lost their belief that they are watching the best possible players afield, it will become very difficult to gain this belief back. Baseball is in danger of losing its status as a major sport, a status which it has enjoyed for longer than any other North American sport.

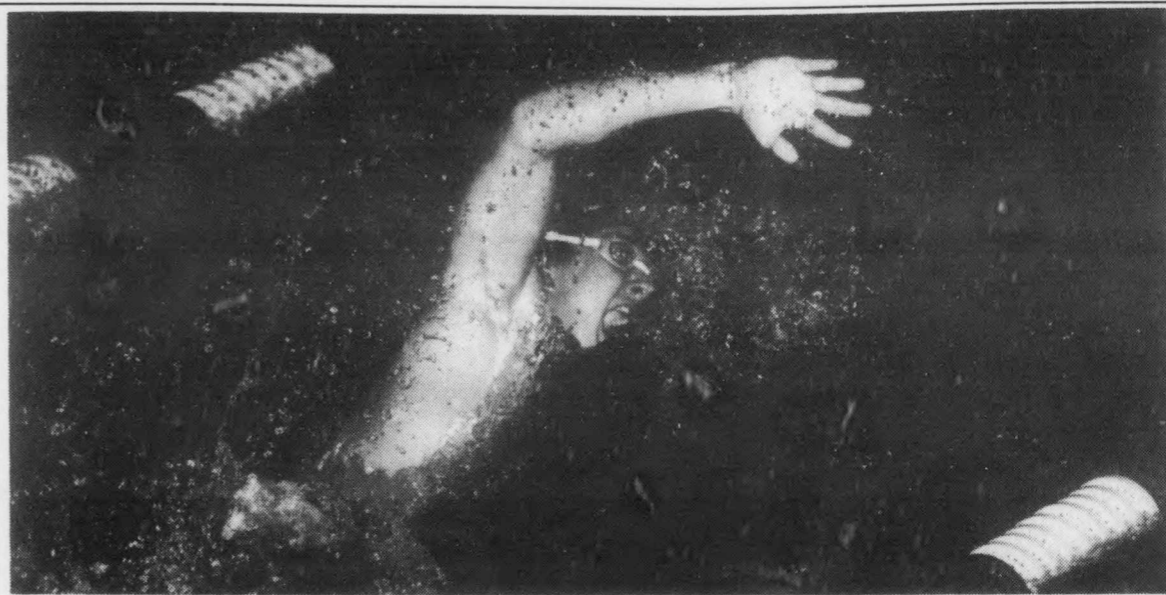
Should the bluff prove not to be a bluff, there is only one salvation for the sport of baseball. Unfortunately, I have heard no rumours that the players are seriously planning to establish their own league separate from the jurisdiction of the owners. This is the only chance to maintain baseball's credibility in lieu of scab ball.

Over one hundred years ago, in 1890, the players tried to establish a league of their own separate from the owners. Artistically, the league succeeded admirably. The Player's League presented a quality of baseball far superior to that offered by either the National League or the American Association. Regrettably, the inadequateness of the financial backing proved to be too great to overcome, despite far better attendances than were achieved by the established leagues. The problem was that the owners were able to frighten several of the Player's League investors into jumping ship. They were able to do this because the players' solidarity was not nearly so complete as it was today. As such, the hegemony of the Player's League of 1890 was not nearly so complete as would be the hegemony of a Player's League of 1995.

Fan loyalty to Major League Baseball would diminish quite rapidly, for the same reason that fans have always abandoned minor league teams for major league teams when given the chance. They quite simply want to watch the best baseball available. It will not be out of any loyalty to the players, it will merely be the pursuit of the best entertainment value that they can find.

Sadly, all of this appears to be a red herring, since if the players were to attempt a project like this they would have had to have started organising the league long before now. Hopefully, the fact that they have not begun such planning is an indication that a settlement to the strike remains possible within the foreseeable future. This, however, is doubtful. In fact, despite my fears of what will happen to baseball should

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Reds Dave Pelkey swims to victory.

Photo Kevin G. Porter

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