

Major League Baseball Is Doomed

I've always liked watching baseball. I'm not exactly a student of the game, but I followed it enough when I was growing up that I always stop when I see a game. A trip to the ball park is always relaxing. I even like minor league ball. I have never seen a baseball movie I didn't like. In short, I'm a very hard man to alienate from baseball.

I haven't been closely following Major League Baseball for a while. I don't have a TV, because, well, I'd watch it, so I can't casually turn on a game, but after seeing this year's opening day fiasco,¹ I've come to realize that perhaps major league baseball has lost its way. So, I've been more aware than usual about MLB articles.

Today, I read one of those rare newspaper articles that held two revelations. Even more surprisingly, it was in the *L. A. Times*.

The first revelation is that all the ball parks are named for companies. This is not the sign of a sport that is free from outside influence.

Now, I realized that this ugly trend had started. I even realized that some company believed that it could rename Candlestick Park after itself. In this article, a stunning number of ball fields were named after companies. It's not like they were in this grey area between being named after prominent businessmen or community pillars, which I can live with. After all Busch Stadium has hosted its share of great moments, and it can be reasonably argued that it's named after the family, not the corporation. These parks are named after Pacific Bell and Qualcomm.

No one can go to Pacific Bell Park without thinking something like "you money-grubbing bastards couldn't name it after Willie Mays." I encourage baseball fans to actually refer to the field by that name: "You Money-Grubbing Bastards Couldn't Name It After Willie Mays Park." I plan to. Any argument about the field being part of the community are mooted by the simple fact that the corporation didn't have the humility keep its name off the title of the building.

The commercialization of stadium names, vile though it is, is old news. What I didn't realize was that some of the major well-known sources of MLB income these days are Las Vegas and Indian casinos. There are signs advertising Las Vegas in Dodger Stadium. A Native American tribe that just happens to run a major San Diego-area casino is sponsoring the Padres' 2000 season.

Now, if I were part of an organization that had just lost a large segment of its fan base because of a strike primarily over money, and that had recently prevented an obvious Hall of Fame caliber ballplayer from being inducted into that august body because of gambling offenses, I'd be doing my best to avoid any indication that my organization was grubbing money by getting into bed with gambling interests. But maybe I'm old fashioned.

Maybe I'm so old fashioned that I don't believe that today's sophisticated baseball fans can make the distinction that these companies and ball clubs want to make between Las Vegas the "destination" and Las Vegas the gambling den. More cosmopolitan fans can certainly tell that the Native American tribe sponsoring the Padres' 2000 season, whatever that means, is distinct from the casino that said tribe runs. See, to me, that sounds like the ball club is encouraging fans to vacation in a place with a sports betting operation, and that if the Padres get into a situation where their performance could cost the casino a lot of money, that casino would be able to exert influence on them.

I may as well be living in 1919.

¹ http://www.lunabase.org/~faber/Walking/aint_right.html