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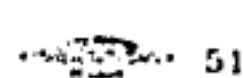
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FOOD FOR THE BARGAINING TABLE

The major league player with a problem knows he can turn to the club's top command for help. Major leaguers are surprisingly united in affirming the excellence of player-management relations at the club level. Rare is the general manager who rejects the open door policy in dealing with his players.

Verification comes from Tom Haller of the Giants, who is in position to know. As National League player representative, Haller hears testimony on a good many issues. One of his recent observations seems particularly cogent. Club employee relations, Haller says, are nearly trouble free. It's at the higher level, he adds, that the communications channel gets clogged. A specific case involves recent attempts to resolve the hassle over minimum pay for major league players.

Marvin Miller, executive director of the Major League Players' Association, has accused club owners of "interminable delay" in negotiations on this subject. Owner and player representatives are to meet on June 22 to seek a settlement.

Some top major league executives are concerned over Miller's charges. Joe Cronin, American League president, says so, and he offers some suggestions for clearing the communication lanes in a story on Page 15 of this issue. Cronin's comments are, we think, encouraging evidence that the static which Haller mentioned may soon be replaced by clear signals.

The players feel ownership has been patronizing, paternalistic and dilatory in approaching major points of contention. The executive camp snaps back by reminding Miller that he got what he wanted, and then some, in increased player pensions and a checkoff system to supply funds for his office.

We think the skirmishing may have served one good purpose. It probably has convinced both sides that it's time to "come, let us reason together." The owners must accept one fact of life: The players are determined to come to the table as bargainers, not supplicants. Nothing ignites player resentment faster than management statements or implications that "we have given" the players this or that. The players feel they have earned their gains, and that nothing was handed to them. We think their view is justified. We also feel that regardless of how the players have interpreted the owners' actions, over-all results show the players have been treated fairly.

As bargainers, the players would do well to remember Cronin's remark that "nothing is more important than the good will of the players." If the owners prize player good will, it behooves the players to cultivate the same from the owners.

AFTERMATH OF EPSTEIN CASE

Mike Epstein is a stubborn young man. Was it Mike's persistence or Baltimore pitching woes that put him in a Washington uniform? No matter what the factors were that set up the trade, Epstein's refusal to return to the minors may have lasting repercussions. Epstein is not the first promising player to reject demotion, but he is one of the few to stick to his guns long enough to convince others that he meant business.

The Orioles insist they'd have made the trade regardless of Epstein's sitdown strike because they were hard-put for pitching. That statement may be lost on many young players. They probably are much more impressed with the fact that Epstein defied his employer's order and got what he wanted—a chance to play in the majors.

Epstein was on option to Rochester (International) in 1966. Under baseball regulations, he could have been optioned this year and next—a total of three seasons—before the Orioles would have been forced to keep him or put him on waivers. That is a far cry from the free wheeling days when a major league club could bury a player in the minors for eight years without risk of losing him.

The three-season option rule appears fair enough for the boy who enters pro ball as a teen-ager. But what about the youngster who completes college before signing? He's 21 or even 22, as was Epstein, before he makes his pro debut. He could be 26 before his employer must keep him on his major league roster or offer him to rival clubs. A 26-year-old rookie is getting a late start. How good are his chances of staying in the majors five years to qualify for the pension plan? Probably not the best. A youngster arriving in the Big Time at 22 or 23 would seem to have the edge.

The hands-off agreement which pro baseball negotiated with the colleges in 1966 probably will result in more boys starting professionally at 21 or 22. We think the majors should consider a two-season option rule for any prospect who enters pro ball at age 21 or older. It should prove an incentive for young men who are in a hurry to get their chance in baseball.



Miller's Warnings to Sports

ST. LOUIS, Mo.

Two months ago, Marvin Miller, executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association, was a speaker on the annual Law Day program of the University of Texas Law School at Austin.

His talk largely went unnoticed, but we have come across the text and we believe some consideration should be given to a couple of his warnings.

First, he cautioned that if professional sports obtain federal antitrust exemption from Congress, they also may get federal regulation. And, second, he said if the club owners don't bargain in good faith with the present players' organizations, they may wind up being confronted with militant-type labor unions.

Speaking from his background of 16 years as an official in the Steel Workers Union, Miller asserted:

"There are indications that the owners of professional teams continue to look to Congress to bolster their somewhat fragile exemption from the antitrust laws. I question the wisdom of this course.

Neither Congress Nor Courts

"I think that baseball and the other sports could very well get specific exemption from Congress at some future time, but I think that we might get more than we are bargaining for, because it could very well bring with it specific government regulations with standards set by an appropriate federal agency as a safeguard.

"I don't think this is the wisest course for the owners . . . or the most effective course for the players to bring about a balanced, dignified relationship with their employers. I don't think that the course should lead through Congress or the courts either. I believe with respect to player problems, there already is ample legislation on the books to bring about large-scale improvement."

Taking up the matter of player organization, he said:

"This can take many different forms from the independent, unaffiliated type of association which now obtains in baseball, for example, to . . . super-militant unions not concerned with sports at all.

Much Remains to Be Done

"I think the evolution, if that's what it's going to be, depends in part on the owners, their attitudes and their practices. Because I believe in the long run, you reap what you sow in this area."

Individual relations between players and executives in baseball have never been better, but the atmosphere changes when owners or general managers sit down across the table from the player representatives to negotiate on general matters.

After mentioning the progress achieved through persistent efforts by the players' association, Miller continued:

"All this is to the good, but I think much more remains to be done. I'm not speaking at the moment of specific economic gains. What I'm talking about is the need for the major league baseball owners to rethink their position. What I'm referring to is the fact that as hard as some of the owners are

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YOUNG IDEAS



By DICK YOUNG

Wes' Mom Has Message for Mets

NEW YORK, N. Y.

The day after Jim Coates threw too close to Frank Robinson, the Angels sent Coates to the minors. Baseball, the message seems to say, has too few big stars to risk knocking them out of action. . . .



SAM MELE

... Delayed Firing



DAVE BRISTOL

... He'll Pay Price



TOMMY DAVIS

... Plenty of Speed

The other day, Wes Westrum phoned his mother in Minnesota to wish her a happy eighty-second birthday. "Wesley," she said, in the course of their talk, "I cannot hit for you."

On the Mets' last visit to San Francisco, Ken Strong, Jr., and Ken Strong, III, visited Gus Mauch in the Mets' clubhouse. Mauch recalled how Ken Strong, football Hall of Famer, could have made the majors as a hard-hitting outfielder, but crashed into a wall in Montreal, breaking his wrist. It wasn't the accident which ended Strong's career, Mauch remembers, but an incredible goof by the physician who, in attempting to remove a bone chip, removed the wrong bone. Ken Strong's right wrist was forever locked. He could not snap a bat at a pitch, and his football passing game suffered. He became the greatest kicker in the game.

Cal Griffith began firing Sam Mele in 1964. It was then, following a three-place drop to sixth, that Griff offered Mele a contract renewal calling for a \$6,000 salary slash.

Offering a manager a pay cut is, as far as I know, without precedent, and without much sense. Griffith, by some irrefutable logic, decided that inasmuch as the Twins had dropped three spots in the standings, the manager must have had a bad year. When a player has a bad year, you invariably cut him. Why not a manager?

Mele resisted. He wanted to quit. His wife talked him out of it. Wives are like that. They think a regular paycheck, even with smaller numbers on it, is more important than no paycheck at all. Mele felt his pride and reputation were more important, but his wife prevailed. Mele and Giff reached a compromise, and Sam took a \$3,000 cut.

The following season, the Twins won the pennant. Now, Mele was in control. He got back the cut and more. He got a two-year contract. With one-third of the second year gone, Sam Mele is gone. He finished second last year, and was 25-and-25, six off the pace, when he was fired. That's not exactly failure.

As soon as he was fired, Sam Mele heard from the Orioles and White Sox. Sam has 18 years in the pension and would like to make it a nice round 20 as a coach, perhaps, then into some front-office capacity. Whichever organization gets him gets an outstanding baseball man, a Walt Alston type, upstanding and forthright, and no baloney.

Reds to Wilt in July, Rivals Predict

Do you think managing a ball club is insecure? The Pittsburgh franchise in the National Soccer League is working on its fourth head coach this season. . . . While Dave Bristol is pulling away from the N. L., rival managers were saying, "Wait till July." The reason: Cincy was using its starters in relief. "He'll pay for it," say the competitors. "Suddenly, one or two of those arms will go." . . . At this writing, the Mets have 30 homers and look a good bet to top Maris' record.

In the free-agent draft the other day, the Yankees picked up Gerald Bosch, Don's brother. The Mets should have drafted him and traded him to Pittsburgh to get even. . . . Dick Dietz, Giants' catcher, is nicknamed "Mule," because of his protruding ears. Jim Ray Hart recently presented Dick with a mechanical mule which ejects cigarettes in the most amusing fashion.

Chuck Hiller on Rusty Staub: "He has improved faster than any player I have seen." . . . Any ball club which starts a fight with the Senators has to be out of its mind. How would like to have Frank Howard, Gil Hodges and Mike Epstein coming at you? . . . For a man with barking dogs, Tommy Davis gets down to first base in a hurry. His speed is underrated. In 60-yard sprints at Vero Beach, Tommy used to run a close third to Willie Davis and Maury Wills. The main reason for Lou Johnson's swift recovery from his broken ankle: When the doctor opened up the ankle to set the bone, torn ligaments were tied at the same time. Sweet Lou was back on the active list four weeks afterward. . . . There was a wonderfully warm ceremony, June 10, by the Oldtimers at Youngstown, O., the city sometimes known as Baseball Town, USA. It would have been the 102d birthday of Jimmy McAleer, so they threw a luncheon in memory of the man who was the first Cleveland manager, and at the head table sat Jimmy McAleer's widow.

The Pirates' players are holding clubhouse meetings again, without Manager Harry Walker and the coaches. Harry Walker approves. "The players," he says, "can get things off their chest, bring things out into the open, which they might not do with me and the coaches around." Roberto Clemente called the one the other day.