
MARBURGER, DANIEL R. (ed.). *Stee-rike Four! What's Wrong with the Business of Baseball?* Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997. Pp. x., 218. Notes, tables, figures, appendix, selected bibliography, index. \$55.00 cb.

Come the millennium, when sport history enjoys the full academic respect its practitioners earnestly crave, these same practitioners may find the time for scholarly introspection. They will be able to investigate the birth of their own field and its development against the odds. If they cast their gaze a bit further, they will also study how the allure of sports has seduced other academics, including students of literature, sociology, statistics, and perhaps most prominently, economics.

On that great come-and-get-it day, this present collection of essays, assembled by an associate professor of economics at Arkansas State University, will stand as a primary document. This is so because Daniel Marburger strove to capture the state of economic thinking about baseball at one outrageous moment in time—immediately after the Major League Baseball Players Association went on strike in August 1994, and the MLB Executive Committee responded by canceling the balance of the season and the World Series.

Economists can be fans, too, and Marburger quickly rounded up a bunch of his colleagues to set this latest baseball work stoppage firmly in its economic context. Importantly, these essays were mostly finished before U.S. District Court Judge Sonia Sotomayor issued the injunction that effectively brought the strike to an end, and before the players and the owners approved a new collective bargaining argument incorporating a luxury tax on team salaries. Thus, this book records for historians what economists were thinking about baseball precisely at the sport's most recent crisis point.

Since both the Players Association and baseball owners regularly trot out economic data to make their cases, sport historians would be well served by some statement of where the economic truths lie. In other words, who, if anyone, is telling the truth? More so than any other essay herein, James D. Whitney's "Whither Baseball after the Strike of 1994?" meets this need. Whitney says it quite plainly: "There is a considerable amount of agreement among economists to the effect that in this dispute, baseball owners are right about the problem they face, but baseball players are right about the remedy" (p. 123). More specifically, the research summarized here tends to support the owners' complaint "that small-market franchises tend to face particular economic difficulties in the market for free agents," but that the owners' proposed answer, a salary cap or a luxury tax (such as is now in place), solves nothing. Consequently, says Whitney, "economists have been recommending revenue-sharing among the owners themselves as sufficient to address the big-market/small-market disparity" (p. 123).

In one way or another, almost all of the other thirteen essays in the book echo this basic point. In the main, too, reading them will bring a smile to the faces of those predisposed to side with the players against the owners. Marburger himself sets the stage for the discussion with two introductory papers. The first reviews the entire history of baseball's labor-management wars and exposes once again the repeated follies of the owners and their ineptitude in dealing with Marvin Miller, executive director of the union. The second demonstrates why the two sides cannot be expected to resolve their differences in the off-season without interrupting play.

Following this beginning, the next nine papers are grouped into three categories. Four look at salaries and at the arbitration system that owners seek to blame for most of their troubles. Three examine possible solutions, and two consider the sport's exemption from federal antitrust regulation. One of the three concluding essays covers the subject of publicly financed stadia; the other two try to sum things up.

Taken as a whole, these essays cast more doubt upon the positions usually asserted by the owners than those espoused by the players. Players salaries are not "too high," arbitration is not the root of all the game's evils, salary increases do not drive up ticket prices, and the game is not on the verge of economic collapse. But all of this, in a certain sense, is beside the point. Baseball's future remains precarious because the fans' perception is that today's players are greedier than the owners and that it is the players who have destroyed the hallowed concept of team loyalty. These economists' arguments may be airtight, but not nearly enough people will ever be persuaded to agree.

So important do these essayists value what they have to say that they made a real effort to strip their vocabulary of much professional terminology to try to reach a wider audience. Worthy though this idea might be, the price of this book, its academic publisher, and its dense typeface will still inhibit all but the hardest souls.

—STEVEN P. GIETSCHIER
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