
JENNINGS, KENNETH M. *Swings and Misses: Moribund Labor Relations in Professional Baseball*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997. Pp. xii, 259. Appendix, bibliographic note, selected bibliography, index. \$55.00 cb.

This narrowly conceived, traditional industrial relations monograph focuses on labor conflict and negotiations between the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) and the major league club owners from 1992 to 1996, concentrating primarily on the 1994 player's strike. It consists largely of a highly detailed, but underconceptualized, recitation of bargaining developments, month by month, and often day to day. Chapters carry titles like "Nonproductive Collective Bargaining After the World Series Cancellation Until the 1995 Spring Training Season Until Judge Sotomayer's Decision," "Vanishing Labor-Management Relations Through the Remainder of 1995," etc. While the author provides considerable information on bargaining issues, and on how each side's position evolved during negotiations, he too often becomes bogged down in minutiae. The book at times reads as though the author is reproducing his note cards.

The author offers only a top-down perspective; he is largely concerned with analyzing and describing the actions of the top negotiators for the MLBPA and the owners, along with federal mediators and members of Congress. Although the events studied occurred only a few years ago, the author did not interview club owners, player representatives, sportswriters, or especially rank-and-file players, which would have provided a broader understanding of the dynamics of the negotiations and the strike. The study could also have benefited from some comparison of player and owner bargaining objectives and tactics, strike solidarity, and union achievement in baseball and football, which has also suffered serious labor conflict.

Clinton administration officials who unsuccessfully attempted mediation in the 1994 strike “were stunned by the depth of the hostility between the owners and the players” (p. 114), who were deeply divided over the principal issues. The owners sought to impose a salary cap as a means of containing escalating player salaries, achieving better cost predictability, and financing revenue sharing among the clubs, which they claimed was necessary to preserve competitive balance. They also hoped to eliminate salary arbitration, which they believed had consistently favored the players, in exchange for a reduction in the number of years required for free agency eligibility. The MLBPA strongly opposed salary cap, by increasing the ticket revenue percentage for visiting teams, using expansion fees, and sharing local as well as national broadcasting income. The 232-day strike, which resulted in the first World Series cancellation in ninety years, ended in a compromise that satisfied neither side.

The author is at his best in outlining the factors that weakened the owner’s position in the strike. Small market and big market clubs tended to disagree over how much revenue sharing was needed. The former, more concerned about containing costs, generally favored a more “hard line” bargaining approach. Owners who had purchased clubs more recently, for much larger amounts, were “leveraged to the hilt” (p. 83) and more vulnerable to financial damage from a long strike. They therefore might be expected to favor a more conciliatory bargaining approach. The owners were also divided on how to recruit “replacement players” during the strike, and over what, if any, discipline to apply against managers or minor leaguers who refused to participate in games with strikebreakers. Baltimore Orioles owner Peter Angelos even refused to use “replacement players,” and baseball officials had to cancel his club’s spring training schedule. Owners also disagreed over whether to grant players “service credit” for games lost because of the strike, allowing them to become eligible for free agency sooner.

By contrast, the player’s strike solidarity was impressive, stimulated by their perception that they were waging a defensive battle against management’s attempt to roll back previous gains, and by the owner’s recruitment of strikebreakers. In the interest of union solidarity, several players were even willing to sacrifice their chance to set major records, or achieve milestones like 3,000 career hits. Cal Ripkin, Jr., for example, risked his bid to break Lou Gehrig’s consecutive games played record because of the possibility that the leagues would consider games played by strikebreakers official.

While the author believes that public opinion had little impact, the study would have benefited from an analysis of each side’s public relations efforts to counteract the widespread view of the strike as a conflict between “cheap billionaires” [owners] and “whiny millionaires” [players] (p. 63). The study might also have given some attention to how sports columnists and television commentators depicted the issues and each side’s bargaining tactics.

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