

■ AND IN THIS CORNER

The Show - \$1,000,000 and counting...

"What I did with my Notre Dame Fall Break, or, How to waste a full week without even trying."

This would have been the headline of this week's column, but it was a tad too long.

Needless to say, I spent most of last week engrossed in what is somewhat pompously known as the Fall Classic, that wonderfully misnamed championship series of baseball, pitting the American League's best team against the National League's. This year's World Series is being marketed as something special, the culmination of the "return of baseball" from a devastating strike which ended last season.

But perhaps I should first explain the baseball playoffs and its financial situation for those who tried to ignore the hoopla (as much as I tried to ignore O.J.).

The "big new thing" in baseball this year should

have been the new divisional alignment. From 1969 through 1993, each major league was divided into two divisions, East and West, whose leaders at the end of the year would play a best of five, later best of seven series, with the winners meeting in the World Series. This year, with three divisions in each league, a fourth team in each league would have a spot in the playoffs, the new "wildcard spot", borrowing the concept from the NFL. Whereas before four teams made it to the playoffs, this year there were eight. This is still nowhere near the number of yearly playoff-bound teams in the NFL (twelve), the NBA (sixteen, I think), and the NHL (some ungodly number).

Because of this new wildcard scenario, the baseball playoffs now last the entire month of October. A seventh game of the World Series, barring any rainouts or errant earthquakes, would be played on October 29th, a frigid date for any northern city. And despite an additional five-game series (dubbed the "two tier system" by sportscasters) the best teams in baseball, the Cleveland Indians and the Atlanta Braves, still

made it to the World Series with little difficulty. Some argue that the wildcard "races" generate more excitement and a more interesting post-season for more fans, but all the additional games really generate is additional ticket and television revenue for the owners.

Which brings me to the financial debate of baseball. The new playoff system should have been the big news this season, but the real big news is that he season was played at all.

Last year I was among the many baseball fans who were annoyed by the season-ending strike. Fans are still annoyed at baseball, as evidenced by a marked decrease in stadium attendance for

practically every team. The owners and players still do not have a new bargaining agreement, and the criticism of the "millionaires fighting billionnaires" has not subsided. What is surprising is how

few people have bothered to put this financial debate into proper perspective.

Baseball, like all other professional sports leagues, is part of the entertainment industry, just as are the film producers, the media, the book publishers, and the music producers. Baseball players, like movie actors and rock musicians, are essentially employees of the industry bosses. But unlike actors, writers, and musicians, sports players are not treated as if they are talented individuals who deserve to be compensated for the revenue they provide for their team owners.

Until the 1970's, baseball players were basically not allowed to play for another team, unless traded or sold like property. In fact, they were legally considered property, in part due to baseball's unique anti-trust exemption granted them by the U.S. Congress some time ago. Until St. Louis outfielder Curt Flood refused a trade to Philadelphia in 1970, declaring himself a "free agent" (the first time the phrase was used in connection with sports), no one had thought to seriously challenge the baseball owners since the turn of the century. Then,

after free-agency became established contractual fact, with the help of the ever-greedy George Steinbrenner and the advent of the decadent Eighties' media explosion, team owners had even more money to burn, and began to lure the best players with higher-paying contracts. In other words, the owners are to blame for the multi million dollar sports contracts today.

In 1994, the average baseball player salary was listed at over a million dollars. The base salary for a rookie was \$140,000, and not that many players make even \$500,000, so it stands to reason that this "average" figure is a very misleading one. However, when compared to other employees of the entertainment industry, baseball players make near to nothing. Movie stars annually bring in millions of dollars—Sylvester Stallone, for example, was given \$20 million last year before he even knew what the movie was and before the script had even been written. Jay Leno and David Letterman make millions for their nighttime TV talk shows, and they're not even funny. Oprah Winfrey made over \$100 million last year and is listed as the richest woman in America—yet on the list of the richest Americans, she barely cracked the top 50. Care to wager who is on that top 50 list? A Ted Turner or Adolph Coors, perhaps? Maybe even one George Bush, Jr., current owner of the Texas Rangers and Governor of Texas, responsible for bilking taxpayers of half a trillion S & L dollars and getting away scot-free thanks to his dear Daddy Warbucks?

Movie stars and the like are allowed to make millions in the public eye because they appear to be classy, because they are the royalty of America. Sports players, on the other hand, can be seen regularly on TV spitting, sweating, scratching themselves, and getting dirty and grimy just like anyone else. Yet they make just as much money, if not more, for their team owners as a Stallone or a Jagger and still do not receive the same industry consideration for physical talent that a Tom Hanks will for a flat, cardboard "filmic" still-life upper-class visage.

Even compared to other sports players, baseball players are far behind in

wage earnings. Basketball stars such as Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal opposed the recent NBA players' agreement because it would limit their product endorsements to \$40 million per year. The Dallas Cowboys recently signed a five-year contract with cornerback Deion Sanders for \$35 million, plus a \$12 million bonus. No wonder he doesn't want to play for the Cincinnati Reds anymore. And how many baseball players wind up on McDonald's Super-size cups with Looney Tunes characters?

The funny thing is, despite all the negative reactions they receive from sports fans, millionaire blue collar workers still work as hard as anyone in the "normal" work place and take pride in what they do. Cubs' second baseman Ryne Sandberg could have made seven million last year, but his legendary physical skills were deteriorating, and rather than disappoint his fans with sub-par performance, Sandberg retired to allow a younger, more physically active player to take his spot in the lineup. Some call it arrogance. I call it class. And I'm not even a Cubs' fan.

What's more, sports stars contribute a substantial percentage of their income to charities—not out of a sense of guilt or a "placate the poor" feeling that so many of the wealthy upper-class tweed-wearing union have, but because most if not all of these sports stars honestly care. They grew up in the Poor Americas, North and South, and they know what it's like, how hard it is to get ahead, how few opportunities there really are, how many young people in this hemisphere are taken advantage of by large, faceless, money corporations and left for dead, or worse. If someone is going to make millions of dollars every year, I would rather have hard-working employees receive the bull's share and help their relatives, friends and neighbors of the eternal lower class than have multi-billionaire owners hoard and subscribe to the elitist trickling down the drain theory.

So how's about those Braves?

Matthew Apple is a creative writing graduate student at Notre Dame. He can be reached at matthew.t.apple1@nd.edu for inane baseball trivia.

Matthew Apple

■ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lecture sponsors clarify Adams misconceptions

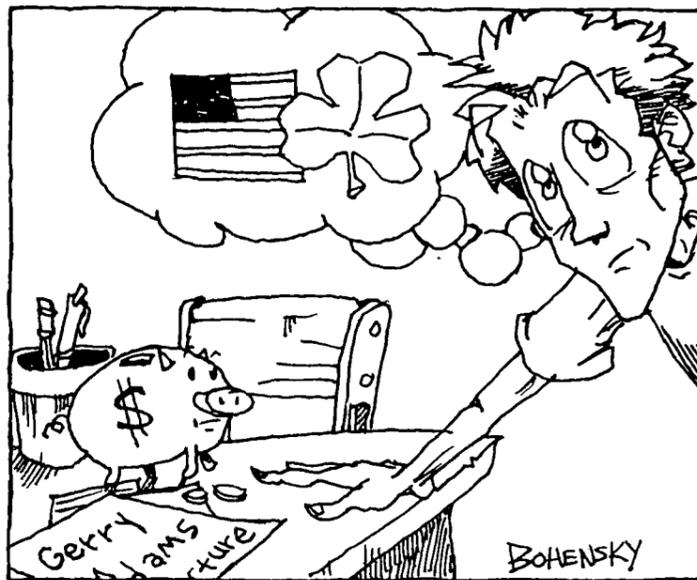
Dear Editor:

We are writing in response to some inaccuracies which appeared in the Oct. 12, 1995 issue of The Observer in an article regarding the Gerry Adams lecture.

Contrary to the statements in the article, Adams' lecture is co-sponsored by the Student Union Board, Student Activities Office and the Student Government. These three organizations commonly sponsor lectures and debates which facilitate discussion of societal and University issues on campus. We often host political speakers of both national and international prominence and do not shy away from controversial issues. When we were approached with the offer to bring Gerry Adams to speak, we felt the opportunity was too great to ignore. The conflict between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is one which affects many Notre Dame students and their families. Furthermore, we feel that even students and faculty not directly affected by the conflict should be aware of political, religious and ethical concerns which face the world outside of our campus. As with any political speaker, however, the presence of Gerry Adams at

Notre Dame in no way reflects an opinion of our organizations or the University. We encourage the Notre Dame community to become informed, to question, discuss and debate this issue and all issues which arise on campus. After all, that is exactly what true education entails.

We acknowledge and understand that many students and faculty members have unique concerns regarding this lecture. We have addressed these same questions ourselves and regret only that the information was misrepresented in *The Observer*. The speaking fees associated with Adams; visit are paid to the agency helping arrange the lecture and to Friends of Sinn Fein, a non-profit organization with offices in New York and Washington. Friends of Sinn Fein is registered with the U.S. Justice Department and is therefore subject to audits and inspections the same as any other non-profit organization. Contributions are used to offset the administrative costs of operating these two offices. The offices are responsible for promoting the establishment of peace in Ireland by providing a communication link between Irish-American organizations



and American media sources in the United States only. Additionally, Friends of Sinn Fein lobbies the U.S. Federal government for support of Irish efforts to protect human rights and rebuild the economically deprived and war ravaged regions of Ireland.

While there is an admission fee for this and all lectures on campus of similar magnitude, the proceeds from ticket sales are typically just enough to cover advertising and promo-

tion expenses.

Again, we invite and encourage the Notre Dame community to attend the lecture and to provide informed, intelligent discussion of Mr. Adams' visit and the issues surrounding his visit through all campus media.

JULIE WALLMAN

Student Union Board

KEVIN KLAU

Student Activities

JONATHAN PATRICK

Student Government

No money should go to Adams

Dear Editor:

I am writing regarding the Observer cover story of October 12, in protest, concerning the upcoming visit of Gerry Adams, head of Sinn Fein. For the record, I am neither Catholic nor Protestant, and I have no vested interest in who runs Northern Ireland. I have no objection to Mr Adams' visit. I would like very much to hear what he has to say. However, the Irish Republican Army has a twenty year history of killing people; and one year of not-killing-people is not enough to merit either my admiration or my money. I think that it is out of line for the Notre Dame Student Union Board or the University to ask anyone to help finance the IRA, or its lobbyists, in order to hear this man speak. I am willing to give Mr. Adams and his cause a hearing. I am absolutely not willing to pay him for the privilege.

CAROL ANN LIND

Graduate Student in Art History
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