

THE OBSERVER

NOTRE DAME OFFICE: P.O. Box Q, Notre Dame, IN 46556 (219) 631-7471
 SAINT MARY'S OFFICE: 309 Haggart, Notre Dame, IN 46556 (219) 284-5365

1995-96 General Board
 Editor-in-Chief
 John Lucas

Managing Editor
 Suzanne Fry

Business Manager
 Joseph Riley

News EditorDavid Tyler
 Viewpoint EditorMichael O'Hara
 Sports EditorMike Norbur
 Accent EditorKrista Nannery
 Saint Mary's EditorPatti Carson

Advertising ManagerJohn Potter
 Ad Design ManagerJen Mackowiak
 Production ManagerJacqueline Moser
 Systems ManagerSean Gallavan
 Observer Marketing DirectorPete Coleman
 ControllerEric Lorge

The Observer is the independent newspaper published by the students of the University of Notre Dame du Lac and Saint Mary's College. It does not necessarily reflect the policies of the administration of either institution. The news is reported as accurately and objectively as possible. Unsigned editorials represent the opinion of the majority of the Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, News Editor, Viewpoint Editor, Accent Editor, Photo Editor, Sports Editor, and Saint Mary's Editor. Commentaries, letters and Inside Columns present the views of the authors, and not necessarily those of The Observer. Viewpoint space is available to all members of the Notre Dame/Saint Mary's community and to all readers. The free expression of varying opinions through letters is encouraged.

Observer Phone Lines

Editor-in-Chief	631-4542	Business Office	631-5313
Managing Editor/Viewpoint	631-4541	Advertising	631-6900/8840
Sports	631-4543	Systems/Marketing Dept.	631-8839
News/Photo	631-5323	Office Manager	631-7471
Accent/Saint Mary's	631-4540	Fax	631-6927
Day Editor/Production	631-5303	Viewpoint	E-Mail Viewpoint.1@nd.edu
General Information	631-7471	Ad E-Mail	observer@darwin.cc.nd.edu



AND IN THIS CORNER...

Baseball's owners grasping at straws

Hey there, and welcome back to the column. It still feels sort of weird to be in class again, as if last week didn't really happen. Maybe it's got something to do with all this crazy weather. I'm still annoyed that Minnesota got a foot of snow and we got zip.

Originally I had the grand idea to create a "New Year's Resolution List," at the top of which would have been "I resolve not to expect the Bills to get into the playoffs again until my kids are my age," but it didn't feel right. I've never actually made New Year's resolutions, partly because they seem silly, partly because I know I'd never keep them.

Instead, I've decided to write about the greatest sport of all time, baseball. A bit cold out there to be talking about a spring-weather sport, I know. Call it wishful thinking, if you like. The topic, naturally, is the owners' recent approval of interleague play.

For some reason, baseball alone of all the big-time sports has struggled through a series of labor problems in the past three decades. This past one, which hasn't really ended, canceled the World Series for the second time (the first time occurred way back in 1904 when Connie Mack refused to let his Philadelphia A's play the New York Giants out of fear of losing.) History lesson notwithstanding, the fans took it out on baseball in 1995, with most ballparks showing a decrease in attendance of almost 25 percent from the previous year.

The owners have now decided upon a new strategy to get their fans back. The idea is to create more fan interest by pitting AL teams against NL teams, teams that normally would never play each other in the regular season. In order to accommodate the additional

interleague games into the demanding 162 game schedule, teams would play teams in their own league and own division fewer times. While this may look good on paper, there are still a number of problems the owners have conveniently overlooked.

First of all, these interleague games are worthless. Consider college sports or high school sports: each team plays a certain number of games each season against teams within its own conference and a certain number of games against teams that are not in that conference. In the final tally, conference wins determine who goes to the playoffs (or championship rounds, or what have you). Games that are played

against teams who are not conference opponents may count in the final team record, but not in the final team standings. The games are meaningless.

When major league baseball teams play divisional opponents, they try to win them all, at practically any cost. A win for a team versus a divisional rival means a definite gain in the standings, because at least one team in that division has lost that day. Games against divisional opponents are usually very intense. This has in the past led to many great baseball rivalries (most of which were made meaningless by the shift of teams into the new three-division alignment.)

So although interleague games would technically count in the standings, teams are going to treat them as non-divisional games, or even as exhibition games. I wouldn't be surprised if most teams would use all their secondary players in interleague games to rest the starters for the games that count. Boy, fans would really rush to see a Florida versus

Detroit game, wouldn't they?

Second, there are still differences between how the two leagues play. The big one is the Designated Hitter, which the American League adopted in 1973. The union likes it because teams shell out millions of dollars for extra home run hitters and because hitters get a chance to play two or three more years without actually playing. As you can tell, I don't like the rule. It lessens the role of the pitcher, decreases the strategy involved, deprives teams of money that could be used for better players, and takes away a spot on the roster that would be better filled by a younger, more exciting player.

Obviously, the DH was only invented by owners to supposedly make them money by attracting home run fans. The DH adds nothing to the game and reduces the aspects of baseball that give it the hum of intensive potential energy. It has also affected the manner in which pitchers perform in the American League. One of the reasons hard-throwing pitchers like Roger Clemens and Randy Johnson have been so effective is that for years AL pitchers threw nothing but junk. They thought that by learning curves and slurves and forkballs and other soft stuff, they could work their way around the extra hitter.

As a result of all these pitches that came in at the plate around the batter's ankles, the umpires began looking for them and thereby lowered the strike-zone. And as a result of more low strikes, batters adopted a diving style of swing to try to golf the ball out of the park, which in turn resulted in people believing a good hitter was someone with 30 homers and 100+ strikeouts to go with a sub-par batting average of below .250. If you've ever watched the World Series, you can see many instances of umpires confusing batters in both leagues by calling pitches strikes over different parts of the plate. This strike-zone confusion and lack of strategy in general in the American League

will continue to be a problem until the DH is eliminated.

Last, there remains the small matter of a labor agreement. The owners went right ahead and approved two expansion teams in Tampa Bay and Arizona, and now have approved interleague play, all assuming that baseball survives until 1998. I think that the fans were fed up with this sort of nonsense long ago, and that all of them want the labor problems to be settled before they believe a word of anything either side says regarding the future of the sport. Frankly, I don't blame them. It's hard to be loyal to a hometown team when you don't know if they're going to bother respecting your loyalty. I have to wonder how it must feel to those who have been loyal to a particular for a long time, only to see a pastime that has become a part of their lives turn around and treat their fans as nothing but sentient dollar bills.

In short, interleague play is the owners grasping at straws. They don't have a clue how to make more people interested in baseball, so they throw history and common sense out the window and turn to the bank. It's very amusing that these same money-grubbing owners come crawling on hands and knees to city hall begging for more tax revenue for more stadiums. I'm not one for traditions, but it seems to me, purist that I am, that interleague play at this point in baseball's history is being considered not as a potentially good thing for baseball, but as an escape for the owners from their own responsibility to the game.

Matthew Apple is a creative writing graduate student at Notre Dame.

He can be reached at matthew.t.apple.1@nd.edu. Also, check out his new homepage at <http://www.nd.edu:80/~mapple>. Regularly scheduled ranting will resume next week. "Do not adjust your television set. We control the vertical..."

Matthew Apple

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Writers are always selling somebody out."

—Joan Didion