

Jan. 30, 2009

Baseball
An Institution Gone Awry

I have been a Major League Baseball fan all my life (Red Sox, especially), and until the advent of astronomical salaries, things were relatively fine with the sport. Now, to use a play on words, the game is “base” ball, in the sense of dishonorable and contemptible, as characterized by its insatiable financial gluttony. So too, with most other pro sports.

The source of its ill-gotten prosperity? Excessive advertising charges, and gate receipts, etc. The TV networks, players, team owners and organizations, all share in this scheme of robbing the poor to pay the rich! For what? So they can live a higher class life, at the expense of the exploited fans. It all sounds like socialism’s redistribution of wealth; albeit in the market sector.

What is right about an industry maximizing its profits, in a way that takes unfair advantage of its customers, and millions of other consumers who are not sports fans?

I tried to inquire of a company what the advertising component of a particular product price is.

I was told that they couldn’t divulge that figure, because it is proprietary information. How justified that reason is, I don’t know, but I suspect it would be indicative of how much consumers are being forced to contribute to the big rip-off in question.

I don’t know the astronomical total amount of money that is generated by the whole media/sports complex, but if one were to spread the estimated 80%+ (?) excess portion over the consumer base, the amount per person or family would probably be surprisingly material, if not shocking!

No matter what the figure would be, it would a lot more deserved by them than the super-rich sports people. An approximate computation of that personal budget effect could probably be made. But we know enough in principle to justify our objection.

To me, the system is an unconscionable abuse of the laissez-faire, or fair free market capitalism, that is supposed to be a hallmark of the American way of life. Unfortunately, “only in America” has more than one connotation.

If you would indulge me in some wishful thinking, consider the following scenario of an it’ll-never-happen, but fair solution. Excise the ad revenue fat (reducing inflated consumer prices), and thereby slashing the obscene salaries, by, let’s say, 80-90%. A \$1,000,000 player would still make \$100-200,000, which for the true value of his occupation would exceed the average income of most other skilled professions.

I, for one of millions, resent what the opportunists behind this have done to hijack our national pastime, along with other sports enterprises. Also, being captive clientele is not a good feeling.

Yes, I will still watch games; probably hypocritically. Yet, why should I let them rob me of the enjoyment of this grand sport? I can respect their performances, but not their exorbitant incomes.

There was a time when there was comparative financial equality among players and fans. Now its elitists and commoners. Makes for great camaraderie, doesn't it?

Its like a rigged poker game, where the consumers are forced to fatten the pot (through over-priced products), with the sports industry being the only big winner.

It is highly unlikely that there will ever be enough collective conscience to reform it voluntarily, but don't be surprised if President Obama and his cronies kill the golden goose, before the greedy monolithic sports empire may by some other means be forced to come back to its place in the real world. It would obviously be a lucrative source for the "redistribution of wealth." Poetic justice?

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