

Has MLB Licked the Parity Issue?

Written by Maury Brown

Tuesday, 10 October 2006 01:36

There have been several articles this week and last talking about MLB and parity, with yours truly guilty, as well. Every year, writers will go over payroll figures and look to see whether MLB is still a case of big spenders controlling the post season -- something that has been MLB's Achilles' heel for some time. In the case of parity, or more correctly, disparity in MLB, it has been the lack of a salary cap that has been the culprit.

This season, however, sees clubs with low to mid-level payrolls going deeper into the playoffs than in years prior, which Selig and Co. will surely point to when saying that revenue sharing is doing what it was meant to do: give all 30 clubs an even playing field in which to compete with the Yankees and the Red Sox of the world. But what is the press thinking? What have I found in researching?

Here's some samples...

Chris Isidore of CNN/Money seems to be the first one to have gone looking to see how this season's player payroll and the Win-Loss record of the clubs correlated. I provided him with the data for the article, out of which, Chris wrote in [Baseball's flatter playing field](#) :

The results of the full season show that the impact of big dollars is being mitigated by better baseball management and by the changes in the league structure that are spreading the dollars around much more evenly than before, giving teams more incentive to compete.

He then wrote:

The wild-card system has kept more teams competitive and spending on players for a shot at a playoff spot. Almost the entire National League was in contention for a playoff spot deep into September, thanks mostly to the wild card.

In fact the Philadelphia Phillies, a team that in July traded two of its stars to the deep-pocket Yankees in an effort to cut payroll, soon found themselves in the wild-card hunt and trading for well-paid veteran stars.

"It seems like everybody is spending money," said **Maury Brown, editor of BizofBaseball.com**

"People understood more revenues were coming in. And I think that the wild card, more than anything, has been the key to getting a lot of teams in the spending mode. They realize it creates at least the artificial sense of a pennant chase."

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Yesterday, in **my article for Baseball Prospectus**, I continued on the tangent that Isidore was on and broke down the payrolls for all 30 clubs based on the late Doug Pappas' Marginal Payroll/Marginal Wins formula. In [Breaking](#)

[Down the 2006 Season by Marginal Payroll/Marginal Wins](#)

, I write:

Of the eight clubs that made the playoffs, three of them had the highest player payrolls for their respective divisions (Yankees, Mets, and Dodgers), and Detroit (\$82,612,866) had the second-highest player payroll in the AL Central, over \$20 million behind the White Sox (\$102,750,667).

But along with the high payrolls, this season sees two clubs in the playoffs that had the lowest player payrolls in their divisions (the Twins and A's), while San Diego (\$69,896,141) sits in the middle of the NL West, between the Giants and the Diamondbacks. When compared to the other 30 clubs, Opening Day payrolls rank the Padres 17th, the Twins 19th, and the A's 21st.

After I presented the numbers for 2006, I concluded by writing:

On the whole, it's incorrect to say that revenue sharing is the cure with which Selig can erase MLB's disparity ills. The introduction of the Wild Card has been an important factor contributing to the ability of clubs that don't sit within the highest levels of player payroll to compete. What will be of keen interest will be the changes to the revenue sharing system within the next CBA. From those changes, we'll see whether 2006 was a trend, or an anomaly.

Today, **Thom Loverro of the Washington Times** covers the topic in [High Hopes and low budgets](#)

writes:

. As Loverro

Here it is again, another postseason series that contradicts the deep thinkers who believe baseball is out of whack, that teams cannot change their fortunes and that money buys championships.

The Detroit Tigers, who lost 119 games three years ago, tonight will meet the Oakland Athletics, that model of fiscal restraint, in Game 1 of the American League Championship Series.

The Yankees and their \$199 million payroll? Home.

The Red Sox and their \$120 million payroll? Home.

The Angels (\$104 million) and White Sox (\$103 million)? Both watching the series at home.

The Tigers ranked 14th in baseball this season with a payroll of \$82 million, just \$7 million ahead of the woeful Baltimore Orioles. The A's ranked 21st with a \$62 million payroll, \$1 million

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behind the losing Washington Nationals.

The Beatles were right: Money can't buy you love.

Thom mentions that from 1921 to 1965 the longest stretch without the Yankees winning the World Series was 3 years.

Loverro then continues to opine:

But it's not just the money. It's how the money is being spent. It is no coincidence that 2006 looks a lot like 1966, the year the Orioles broke the Yankees' stranglehold on the American League and started the parade of new teams (Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, Oakland) in the World Series.

Player development changed forever in 1965 when the first amateur draft took place, giving losing teams a chance to bring quality young players into their minor league systems.

More than 40 years later, player development is all the rage again. Free agency, which turned the game upside down in 1975, finally found its place as a complement to, not a substitute for, player development.

More articles will certainly surface between now and the beginning of next season. It's also a certainty that Commissioner Selig or Bob DuPuy will mention how revenue sharing has been working its magic when a new Collective Bargaining Agreement is reached (it's no longer an "if", but a "when").

Shortly, possibly as early as this coming Monday, Neil deMause and I team up for an article on the revenue sharing system and analyze what is good and what needs addressing. It's far from a perfect system in the sense that it's hardly equitable. The rest of our discussion that makes its way into the article will have to wait till publication. Until then, look for The Biz of Baseball to cover any articles that are published on these topics in the future.

Maury Brown is the editor of *The Biz of Baseball* and an author for *Baseball Prospectus*. He can be contacted [here](#).