Written by Maury Brown
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Who will replace this man?

Since Bud Selig stepped into the ownership ranks of Major League Baseball, he seemed to be everywhere, all the time. Early in his Brewers ownership tenure there didn't seem to be a committee that he wasn't on, learning every aspect of the ownership and league structure. But, if there was a defining moment for Selig—one in which he positioned himself to become the "every owner" commissioner that he is today— it has to be 1993, just a year after taking on the role of acting commissioner.

That year, real concerns began to surface over revenue-sharing. Remember, at the time, there was little if any. The AL had a system where sharing was 20 percent and the NL was 5 percent. Just prior, the Yankees inked their deal with MSG in 1989 worth nearly $500 million, and the Orioles were ushering in big revenues after the success of Camden Yards opening. To address the issue, a meeting was called in Kohler, WI where large revenue club owners formed one caucus while small and mid-markets formed another. The meetings were so acrimonious (Paul Beeston, then the president of the Blue Jays said that *acrimony* wasn't a strong enough word; *h atred*
was more appropriate) that Selig had to shuttle notes back and forth to try and keep communications going. In the end, Selig was able to calm the waters by building consensus (although the issue on revenue-sharing was not fully resolved until January of 1994), something that has become the current commissioner's strongest strength.

Flash-forward to today, and Selig is about as beloved as one commissioner can get with his employers, the club owners. I have joked that he is so beloved by them that if they could, they would make Selig the eternal commissioner of the game going so far that upon his passing, they would stuff him, prop him up in a chair, hold a séance and let Selig run the league from the afterlife.

Of course, that's not going to happen. But, there will come a day when he actually retires from the position (something that has become bit of a running joke as he has said he was going to retire more than once only to be lured back by the owners), or, he'll remain in the position until his passing.

When that happens, a new era will be ushered in. In the past, I have leaned back on the things that made Selig work so well… an owner… one that could relate to both small and large revenue makers… a consensus builder…. In the end, I have begun to believe that times have changed, and that at the very least, the next commissioner may not have to be an owner. At the same time, I don't see an outsider—your Fay Vincents, or Peter Ueberroths—being a good fit. I'm shifting more internally.

It may be that his relationship in the labor trenches might preclude him from eventually landing the position, but I'm finding it harder and harder to not envision Rob Manfred, the current Executive Vice President, Economics & League Affairs of the league as the next commissioner of Major League Baseball. If there's a #2 in baseball, it seems to be Manfred. The one matter that could make the transition interesting is that Manfred and MLBPA Executive Director Michael Weiner have become a well-oiled machine on labor issues. Selig has become more of a "big picture" figure with the league while Manfred has worked to implement the desires of Selig and the owners. This matter of having the commissioner out of direct talks has served itself well, and one wonders if that dynamic would be a key aspect that the owners would wish to retain.

At the same time, Manfred has become a key figure. If there's one that understands the mindset of the league, it's likely him, and based upon the long-standing relationship with Mike Weiner, it could work.

The bigger question—the one that looms out there—is how Manfred would be working the phones and being the master consensus builder that Selig is. Fans bemoan Selig, but in speaking with owners across the spectrum, they all say that Bud can be on the phone speaking with a low-revenue owner at one moment, and with a larger revenue-maker the next, and he seems to always be able to come across as understanding the needs of each. It's a rare quality that whoever takes over the helm will be measured by. Whether that's Manfred, a current owner, or an outsider, "communication" and "consensus builder" both have become cornerstones of *Lords of Baseball*.

Selig's contract expires at the end of the 2014 season, but it's likely that he'll renew then, as well. One can't imagine that at some point, somewhere, a conversation about his replacement hasn't happened. But, if there were real seriousness in the effort, there would have been a search committee prepping for the transition. To date, none has. Maybe I was right to begin with. Maybe Selig will be the eternal commissioner of baseball. If the owners could make it happen, I think that would suit them just fine.

Reference: Details on revenue-sharing prior to Kohler via "In the Best Interest of the Game" by Andrew Zimbalist

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Maury Brown is the Founder and President of the Business of Sports Network , which includes The Biz of Baseball, The Biz of Football, The Biz of Basketball and The Biz of Hockey. He writes for Baseball Prospectus
and is a
contributor to Forbes
.
He
is available as a freelance writer
.
Brown's full bio is here.
He looks forward to your comments via email and can be
contacted through the Business of Sports Network (select his name in the dropdown provided)
.

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