

Blame Ambiguity for the Alex Rodriguez Suspension Circus

Written by Maury Brown
Tuesday, 06 August 2013 14:09



There he was in front of a microphone just prior to the Yankees game against the White Sox. Alex Rodriguez, who the league had just hours earlier said they would suspend him on Thursday for the remainder of the 2013 season and all of 2014, was talking of how he would use the grievance process afforded him by the league and MLBPA's drug agreement, yet never answered whether he ever used performance-enhancing substances. He'd let arbitrator Fredric Horowitz decide.

What the case really boils down to at this point isn't whether A-Rod used the PEDs (it would seem odd that the league would have so much evidence on him, yet 13 other players with less evidence said, "You got me," while A-Rod was the only one that didn't), but rather how long and how much money in salary he will lose. Alex Rodriguez said he's "fighting for his life" but what he's really fighting over is semantics.

Beyond his suspension, there is the circus-like atmosphere that has surrounded it all. The daily leaks of information that so infuriated MLBPA Executive Director Michael Weiner over confidentiality of the drug policy that he said, "The manner in which confidential information was so freely exchanged is not only a threat to the success and credibility of our jointly administered program; it calls into question the level of trust required to administer such a program."

The matter goes deeper, and MLB and the MLBPA have only themselves to blame.

When a player tests positive for PEDs, there are clear guidelines for the penalties within the drug agreement: 50 games for a first violation, 100 for a second, and possible banishment from the game for a third. Apparently no one at the ML:BPA thought that formalizing such a penalty structure for non-analytical suspensions. Either they thought that would not occur or would not be this messy. Either that or the league got the ambiguity as part of collective bargaining.

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None of this chaos would be occurring if suspension lengths for those found to be in violation of the drug policy through investigation had clear penalties. Instead the league is playing hardball by twisting the drug policy around to the point of absurdity in the name of doing what's right for the game. Alex Rodriguez basically goes from never testing positive or serving a day under suspension to the most harshly suspended player ever in the game behind only the Black Sox players, Steve Howe, and Pete Rose. Go figure.

How do such bright minds create a loophole so big as to drive a Mack truck through it? Couldn't suspension lengths—good or bad—have at least been reached? Instead, Rodriguez—a man that is likely guilty—is exercising the grievance process, not to determine guilt or innocence, but to knock the number of games under suspension down, and therefore, allow him to collect more of his salary due to him by the Yankees.

Baseball is always keen to say that they would rather talk about the game on the field than the scandals that rock them off the diamond. They never want to say that they're often culpable in that regard. If the league wants harsher penalties and the MLBPA wants to penalize those who leak information, maybe the two sides should quit looking to gain traction on self-interest issues and get to the heart of how this chaos kicked off in the first place. If the players and league had the exact guidelines, there'd be no recourse over suspension lengths (Rodriguez reportedly has been arguing that he should see a 50 game suspension due to being a first time offender). Baseball, you shot yourself in the foot on this one.



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

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