

Does the Clemens Contract Set a Bad Precedent for MLB?

Written by Diane M. Grassi
Saturday, 12 May 2007 12:01



By now, the baseball nation has had time to try and wrap its head around the re-signing of **Roger Clemens**

to the

New York Yankees

, for the remainder of the 2007 Major League Baseball (MLB) season. Most likely, according to **Clemens and Yankees General Manager, Brian Cashman**

, it will be around June 1st, if not sooner, when Clemens makes his 2007 MLB debut.

Sports pundits, broadcasters, journalists as well as every MLB fan has an opinion about the big dollars involved and whether Clemens is essentially a hired gun. But there are perhaps a number of questions beneath the veneer which should be discussed, which are far bigger than one Roger Clemens. For baseball history and the supposed integrity of the game dictates, at least seemingly so, that no one player is greater than the game itself.

But if we expect an ex-owner and opportunist such as **Commissioner Bud Selig** to be the one to honor the game, we might as well give up now. Given his wretched record of ignoring performance enhancing drugs in his sport for almost 15 years, for example, until he was ultimately squeezed by the U.S. Congress to seriously address the issue, how can we expect anything but business as usual from such a flawed figure presiding over the integrity of the game?

Select [Read More](#) to see the rest of this article on [The Biz of Baseball](#)

And when speaking about the integrity of the game, we must address the very basic idea of baseball as being a team sport, which takes the efforts of every player to be in attendance for every game, whether or not they are actually participating on the field that day.

Does the Clemens Contract Set a Bad Precedent for MLB?

Written by Diane M. Grassi
Saturday, 12 May 2007 12:01

It can be argued that Roger Clemens is being paid entirely too much compensation for his truncated season in 2007, but more importantly, is the precedent setting structure of his deal. But in order to evaluate his current deal, it is helpful to revisit his contracts of the preceding 3 years.

Those who have followed Clemens' career, since his first retirement after the 2003 season with the NY Yankees, know that he spent three consecutive years with the Houston Astros, thereafter. Clemens returned to Houston, supposedly for the opportunity to close out his career with his hometown club.

With some prodding from good friend and starting pitcher, Andy Pettitte, who also left the Yankees to return to his home in Houston, after not reaching an agreement with NY after the 2003 season, Clemens came out of his brief 6-week retirement and signed a 1-year contract with Houston on January 12, 2004, for the entire 2004 season.

Clemens pitched in 33 games in 2004, 214.1 innings, had an 18-4 record with a 2.98 ERA. He followed that up by winning the 2004 National League Cy Young Award, the seventh of his career.

In December 2004, Clemens accepted salary arbitration from the Astros and re-signed for a 1-year deal in January 2005, for the entire 2005 season. The contract was for \$18,000,000.022; almost double that of his 2004 incentive-laden salary. During 2005, he pitched in 32 games, 211.1 innings, with a 13-8 record and finished with the lowest ERA in MLB at 1.87.

The Astros made it to the 2005 World Series but were unfortunately swept by the Chicago White Sox. Clemens also disappointingly was forced to leave Game 1 of the 2005 World Series due to a hamstring injury, a chronic problem for him during his years from 1999-2003 with the NY Yankees. Primarily due to those injuries, Clemens thought long and hard about whether or not to return to MLB for 2006, due to his conditioning program, stamina and longing for his family. He eventually, however, filed for free agency in November 2005. Then the Astros denied him arbitration in early December 2005, thus precluding him from re-signing with the club until after May 1, 2006.

Does the Clemens Contract Set a Bad Precedent for MLB?

Written by Diane M. Grassi
Saturday, 12 May 2007 12:01

Clemens then went on to participate in the World Baseball Classic in March 2006 and left the door open to return for the 2006 MLB season. And on May 31, 2006 he signed a contract with the Houston Astros worth \$22,000,000.022, pro-rated for the portion of the season which he completed. Clemens' first game of 2006, however, was not until June 22, 2006. He ended up pitching in 19 games, 113 innings, with a 7-6 record and a 2.30 ERA.

It can be speculated that since Clemens lived in the Houston vicinity, that he initially retired after the 2003 season to spend more time with his wife and four young sons, and that it was the main reason he was accommodated by the Astros allowing him to stay at home in Houston, when not scheduled to pitch, while the club was on the road.

Most baseball fans, at least those outside of Houston, were reportedly not even aware of such an arrangement. Those who did know, as well as the media, pretty much gave him a pass for such an allowance, given the future Hall of Famer's contribution to the game of baseball over the course of his career. Presently, Clemens has 348 lifetime wins and 4.604 strikeouts, second all-time. His advancing age also worked in his favor for such a request.

But Clemens' just executed contract with the NY Yankees ventures even more so into untested waters. For not only will Clemens be playing a shortened season, but for the first time, at least in Yankees history, the storied club with the most wins in history, will allow him to essentially be a part-time player. Yes, his contract is excessive even for a full-time player, which works out to around a pro-rated amount of \$4.5 million per month for the 2007 season. But he will be accorded the option in his shortened season to be away from the team on his four days between starts if he so wishes, to either tend to family, charity or other business obligations.

Ever since the DH was instituted in 1971, it has been scrutinized as it raises the question as to whether it is fair for a DH to be considered a full-time player, as he does not play the field. But it remains the obligation of the DH to cheer on his teammates, whether he is on the field or not. The same can be said for relief pitchers, pinch hitters, utility players, or pinch runners, whether or not they are used on a daily basis.

Clemens seemed rather disingenuous when he said at his news conference on May 6, 2007 that, "I didn't know the details of my contract sitting down yesterday." Rest assured that Roger Clemens knew exactly what he wanted and that his agent Randy Hendricks would not have deleted such a clause in the contract without checking with him first.

Does the Clemens Contract Set a Bad Precedent for MLB?

Written by Diane M. Grassi
Saturday, 12 May 2007 12:01

But, if it really does not matter to Clemens when asked specifically about such an arrangement, then he should honor his promise to work with the young pitchers on the Yankees staff when he is not pitching, and strike that traveling clause from his agreement. Otherwise, how he will have time to work with the other pitchers, given his out-of-town distractions, will remain questionable.

Where Bud Selig should make a ruling is to make it clear that such an arrangement should not be left up to any one franchise as it will ultimately lead to favoritism over other players and opens the door for other players demanding like contracts. It also leads to the probability for low team morale, and thereby a lack of team cohesiveness.

And the contributing parties to this whole scenario must be held accountable in addition to the Commissioner of MLB. They include the Houston Astros, its management and ownership, the NY Yankees, its management and ownership, the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA), and of course, Roger Clemens himself.

But the fate of MLB clearly rests on Bud Selig's shoulders. However, he is once again too shortsighted to foresee that MLB's future also is determined by his inactions and benign neglect of his obligations for the good of the game of baseball. And yes, sometimes it is *not* about the money but rather about the game itself and about preserving its integrity for generations to come.

You decide.

Diane M. Grassi is a contributing writer for The Biz of Baseball.

This column presents the opinions of the author. It does not necessarily reflect the views of The Biz of Baseball, or BizBall LLC.

[Grassi's complete profile and contact information can be viewed here](#) .

Does the Clemens Contract Set a Bad Precedent for MLB?

Written by Diane M. Grassi
Saturday, 12 May 2007 12:01

All Rights Reserved by the author. Please contact the author for any full republication rights.