

Ode to the Crazy Maverick, Finley

Written by Maury Brown
Saturday, 02 September 2006 06:12

By **Maury Brown**

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I miss Charlie Finley.

There, I said it.

He was vile. He was vulgar. He was a loose cannon. He was reckless.
He was brilliant. He was a great evaluator of talent. And, he could throw that talent away if he wanted to make a buck. He was, as Marvin Miller said, "One part P.T. Barnum and one part George Steinbrenner."

May the baseball gods have mercy on my soul. May Bowie Kuhn put a pox upon my house. May the Lords of Baseball shout, "Bow ye down, as we show you no mercy!"

Yes, I have sinned. Yes, I miss Charles Oscar Finley.

I grew up in the Bay Area taking in the Giants at Candlestick with Mays, and Marichal, and McCovey, and Spahn, and both the Alous – Matty and Jesus. Pardon me as I rub my hands together as I try to warm my still cold hands from those trips.

Then Finley arrived with the A's and that changed everything.

The drive was shorter, the tickets cheaper, and the ballpark warmer. These things, of course, meant nothing to a kid. What mattered to me were the names on the roster. Names with the likes of "Blue Moon", "Catfish", "Monday", "Blue", "Rudi", "Tenace" and "Fingers". The real and the fabricated names blurred in my mind. Those were all their God given names, as far as I knew. I saw the bright white, yellow and green uniforms as something

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that matched the times. The white shoes were something that made my team stand out from the drabness that permeated the other clubs. They all looked like cold damp mildew by comparison. Ostentatiousness be damned, I loved them.

I also loved the promotions. The yellow and orange balls that were given away. Why not use them for night games? The possibilities were not yet stomped down in a kid's mind due to my limited understanding of how the Lords of baseball worked.

Most of all, I loved Harvey. Harvey was the mechanical rabbit that popped up out of the ground behind home plate to deliver the umpire fresh balls for the games. It was a magical time to be a kid at the Oakland Coliseum.

Is it any wonder I chose to follow the business end of baseball as I grew up? Is it any wonder I have that solid dose of pretzel logic required to keep any man from going insane when tackling the "upside-down is right-side up" world of the MLB front office? I can blame it all on Charlie. That crazy maverick, Finley.

A salesman, a maverick, and "disreputable character" is born

Charles Oscar Finley was born to sell. As a child growing up in Birmingham Alabama, a young Charlie once won a medal and a bicycle for selling 12,500 subscriptions to the *Saturday Evening Post*. He played and loved baseball. He had been a batboy for the Birmingham Barons, and played semi-pro ball in his youth. After his dad had been transferred to Gary, Indiana, he followed in his father's footsteps and went to work at US Steel after his graduation from High School. Not content with this life, he sold life insurance on the side. He set the company sales record for policy sales in his first year.

He was also unstable physically. He worked himself to the bone, contracted tuberculosis, and spent time in a sanitarium. In classic Finley form, he had broken sales records for life insurance, but he had neglected to take out a

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policy on himself.

While recovering from his illness in the hospital, Finley had an epiphany: Doctors. Sell insurance to doctors.

He developed an insurance plan for those in the medical industry. He sold group policies based on the plan to the likes of the American Medical Association, as well as, the American College of Surgeons. By the time the '40s had waxed into the '50s, Finley was a multimillionaire and set his eyes back on baseball, and big-league baseball, to be more specific.

He made a run at purchasing the Philadelphia Athletics in 1954, but got beat out by Arnold Johnson. Then he went after the White Sox unsuccessfully. Undaunted, he went after the expansion Angels, even to the point of trying to lure Roy Rogers into the ownership group to offset Gene Autry's bid. But, he lost on that deal, as well.

Then the unexpected happened. Arnold Johnson dropped dead. Finley leapt at the chance by offering up \$2 million to Johnson's widow for the 52% stake in the Athletics. And while Finley had stalked the Lords in his attempts to purchase a Club, they hadn't spent the time to really get to know him. The owners sent Orioles chairman, Joe Iglehart to check Finley out. His report to the Lords was, "Under no conditions should this person be allowed into our league."

There was a slight problem. The team stunk, and Johnson's moving of the club from Philadelphia to Kansas City hadn't helped matters. No one – no one but Finley, it seemed – wanted to own the Athletics. Reluctantly, the owners approved the sale on December 19, 1960. Charlie 'O had prevailed. The starched shirts in the Lodge were in for a rude awakening.

Finley turns the Athletics upside down in Kansas City

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Finley set right off into turning the baseball establishment on its preverbal ear. He immediately went to work painting sections of Kansas City Municipal Stadium in colors that would have made the rainbow blush. Box seats were painted citrus yellow. The reserved and bleacher seats became turquoise. The foul poles an eye-shattering florescent pink. Not content with this, he went polar opposite from the rest of the baseball establishment with the uniform colors, as well. Finley came up with a color scheme that required sunglasses to watch. Kelly green, "Fort Knox gold", "Wedding Gown White" and shoes that were white "kangaroo albino" graced the players.

Charlie then decided to become the P.T. Barnum of the baseball establishment. He opened a zoo beyond the right-field fence with livestock ranging from sheep, to monkeys, to rabbits. The prized livestock addition was the new team mascot, a donkey he named, Charlie O.

On top of this, he did theme days to try and drum up attendance. Everything from Farmers Day, in which an embarrassed Deigo Segui was delivered to the mound by hay wagon, to Shriner nights, and "Bald-headed men" night.

All of this did absolutely nothing to bring up attendance. In fact, it slipped to from 683,817 to 635,675, last in the American League, during the first two years that Finley owned the club. Finley decided that maybe greener pastures would be available elsewhere. He started not so quietly shopping the idea of moving the A's. He tried moving the team to Dallas-Ft. Worth (voted down by he owners 9-1). He actually signed a contract with the state of Kentucky to move the club to Louisville for the '64 and '65 seasons.

The writing was on the wall for that attempt, however, when Arthur C. Allyn, the owner of the White Sox was quoted as saying, "Finley is a fool and his action is inexcusable. He has no right whatsoever to attempt such a move. He has an obligation to the to the people of Kansas City and he had better make it good. I don't have to tell you how the White Sox will be voting on the matter." The vote to approve that move failed 9-1

Finley remained undaunted. He attempted six-weeks later to move the club to Oakland. That move failed by a 9-1 vote, as well. He seemed driven to relocate to anywhere to get out of, as he privately said, "this horseshit town" of Kansas City.

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Finley wasn't opposed to promoting the A's, and more importantly, himself, outside of Kansas City. He shocked the Lords, and created his own private traveling circus when he announced that it was his intention to do a tour in 1965 of every American League city with his mascot, Charlie O. They traveled in a special trailer that was, as the AP reported it a, "plush, air-conditioned, radio equipped trailer" complete with an itinerary of stops. April 21: Detroit. April 25: Cleveland. April 28: Chicago. New York, Baltimore, Boston, Washington and Los Angeles rounded out the tour.

The Lords proceeded to then ignore Finley when he got in the trenches and did actual business with his fellow owners. This reaction infuriated Finley who thought that his fellow owners failed to see his genius.

And he was a genius -- if not in reality, at least it was so in Charlie's mind. He had hired one of the better baseball minds in Frank Lane as GM of the Athletics when he purchased the Club, and had Joe Gordon as manager. Gordon and Finley clashed. Gordon was shown the door in June of '61. Finley moved further and further into the decision-making process as far as the players were concerned. Lane was getting shoved out of the way. In August of '61, Finley canned Lane. Lane's replacement was F.P. Friday, one who had never worked in baseball, but rather in another area Finley was familiar with: Insurance. The Kansas City press creamed Finley over his front office moves. As Ernie Mehl, the sports editor for the Kansas City Star wrote, "Never has there been a baseball operation so bizarre, so impossible, so incredulous. If an ownership had made a deliberate attempt to sabotage a baseball operation, it could not have succeeded as well."

While other clubs had moved forward with full-time General Managers, Finley continued to work relentlessly scouting, signing and trading players. This, of course, went against the tenet of the old-guard which was to sit back and let others work for you. Getting in the trenches was for the common man, not the Lords. When John Fetzer of the Tigers approached Finley about hiring a GM, he replied, "When the day comes that I find a GM that can do a better job than Charlie O, I'll hire the son-of-a-gun."

Finley moves the A's to Oakland

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Finally, on October 18, 1967 the American League gave in and granted Finley the right to move the Athletics to Oakland for the 1968 season. Senator William Stuart Symington said from the floor of the Missouri Senate, that Finley was "one of the most disreputable characters ever to enter the American sports scene," and said Oakland was "the luckiest city since Hiroshima."

Once the team moved to Oakland, Finley continued to work his magic in terms of PR by hiring, of all people, Joe DiMaggio as executive VP of the A's in March of 1968. The Yankee Clipper, looking odder than odd in the bright yellow and green of the A's understood how things would be with Charlie. "I'm not exactly the executive type," DiMaggio said. "Only one man makes decisions for this firm, Charlie Finley." The position was, of course, nothing more than window dressing. The easy commute and easier paycheck appealed to Joe D. Finley would be allowed to reap the benefits of the name recognition without the worry of anyone meddling with direction of the club.

The change of scenery, Lane and Finley's signings, and those that were coming up through the system started to pay dividends. The franchise went from 62-99 in 1967 in KC, to 82-80 for the '68 season in Oakland. And while the attendance didn't look much different than it had in Kansas City, the winning became contagious.

In 1971 they won the AL West, but got swept by the Orioles in 3 games during the AL Championship. In '72, they didn't falter beating the Tigers 3-2 in the AL Championship and then beating the Reds 4-3 in the World Series.

Dick Williams, the manager of the A's at the time, was recently interviewed by Jeff Angus about that World Series, and a particularly interesting tale involving a suitcase.

The team was in Cincinnati and there's this suitcase that came with the team but they can't figure out who it belongs to. No one claims it, and it's

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really locked up. So a couple of clubhouse guys take it out on the field to try to open it to see what the contents are. No luck. Finally they decide to use a gun to open it. With the suitcase now open, the contents were revealed.

It's a whole suitcase filled with Charlie's shoes. One suitcase for nothing but shoes. No need to see a tag; the contents told the story. It was pure Finley.

1973 rolls around and the team repeats as World Series Champions... and again in '74. The players became stars, and the stars wanted more money. Finley being Finley danced around the details of following through with some of those contract agreements. In 1974, however, Finley would meet the enemy, and the enemy was him.

Finley screws Catfish and Catfish shows the world what kind of salaries players could make in free agency

Finley had continued to sign great players that had made the run possible. Not content with just signing them, they had to have colorful nicknames. Johnny Lee Odom had become "Blue Moon" Odom. When it came time to sign another pitcher, who hailed from Hertford, NC, Finley came up with another one.

"Do you have a nickname?" he asked.

"No sir," replied the pitcher.

"Well, to play baseball you have to have a nickname. What do you like to do?"

"Hunt and fish," was the reply.

"Fine," Finley said. "When you were six years old you ran away from home and went fishing. Your mom and dad have been looking for you all day. When they finally found you about, ah, four o'clock in the afternoon, you'd caught two big fish.... Ahh... catfish... and were reeling in a third. And that's how you got your nickname."

So was christened, "Catfish" Hunter.

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James Augustus Hunter may have grown up on a farm in North Carolina, but he was far from dumb hick. As he grew into one of the best pitchers in the game, he also began to understand how Charlie Finley worked. This was partially due to a massive shift in the landscape of the players when Marvin Miller arrived as Executive Director of the Players Association in 1965, and ensuing education of the players on how the business of baseball was supposed to work.

In 1974 Hunter signed a two-year contract with Finley. Finley, being Charlie O' Finley, had acted as his own attorney in many cases, regardless of his lack of education in law, even to the extent that he suggested parts of the language within the contracts. In the case of Jim Hunter's contract, there was a provision that required one-half of his salary was to be paid to an insurance company, named by Hunter, for the purchase of an annuity; the money was to be paid during the season. That is, it was to be paid in installments each payday during the season.

Shortly after the '74 season began, Hunter supplied Finley with the name of the insurance company that the installments were to be sent to. There was a problem, however. Finley never made a single payment to the insurance company in the name of Hunter during all of 1974. The reason was simple: Finley discovered that the \$50,000 wasn't tax-deductible, like current salaries. He wouldn't be able to take the deduction until years later. Hunter's lawyer pressed Finley for the \$50,000. Finley started making up a variety of excuses as to why the money wasn't being deposited. First it was that he couldn't meet up with his tax consultant. Then it was that he couldn't get his estranged wife, who was also the club's corporate secretary to sign off on the deal. With Finley and the A's now in default, Dick Moss and the Players Association sent written notice to the club to remedy the default within 10 days.

It should be noted that the timeframe to remedy the default was not arbitrary. A clause in the Uniform Players Contract that had been placed there by the owners, long before the union came into existence, read as follows in regards to being in default and not remedying the default within 10 days: "[T]he player may terminate this contract upon written notice to the Club, if the Club shall default in the payments to the Player provided for ."

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Finley called Hunter to his office at the Coliseum. When Hunter arrived, not only was Finley in the office, but American League President, Lee McPhail, as well.

Charlie, at this point, must have underestimated Hunter's intelligence. He held up a check for \$50,000 and said he would pay the sum now, but refused to sign the application to the insurance company. Hunter replied that he didn't want the money paid to him, but rather as had been agreed to: Deferred payments to the insurance company he had selected. Hunter then turned around and walked out the door.

The Lords knew they were in a pickle with Finley. The case would go to arbitration. Finley, being Finley couldn't get the story straight when he and the labor-relations members of management prepared to make the case. When it got to arbitration, arbitrator Peter Seitz was dealing with the same problem. Finley was now denying to Seitz that he ever received notification from Hunter's lawyer that Finley was in danger of going into default. The case was weighing heavily in Hunter's favor.

On December 13th, the decision was rendered by Seitz. "Mr. Hunter's contract for service to be performed during the 1975 season no longer binds him and he is a free agent," read part of the ruling. Charlie O had screwed over Hunter, and now Hunter was going to benefit from it. He was going to benefit from it in numbers that seemed cartoonish by the days' standards.

After Bowie Kuhn tried to get the owners to not bid on Hunter, and Miller threatening they'd sue if they did collude to not allow bidding, the derby for Hunter began on December 19th. The derby was unlike anything that had ever happened before, and it set the stage for the kind of contracts would become available to the players if the Reserve Clause were revoked. The frenzy for Hunter by the owners from December 19th

to New Years Eve Day showed just how much money the owners had, and more correctly, how much they were willing to spend on talent when the constraints of the Reserve Clause were removed.

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The two-year contract that Hunter had signed with Finley had been for \$100,000 a year with the deferments. By the time twenty-four clubs had jockeyed for the rights to Hunter and Gabe Paul of the New York Yankees had finished negotiations, Hunter had agreed to a deal worth \$3.5 million.

Finley hadn't just screwed himself over, but the Lords, as well. The seed that had been growing slowly in the back of Marvin Miller's mind about breaking the Reserve Clause now sprouted like Jack's beanstalk.

The Seitz Ruling and Finley's ability to see through it

At the beginning of the 1975 season, Miller decided to test the Reserve Clause by seeing if he could get Andy Messersmith of the Dodgers to hold out for the season without agreeing to a contract. Messersmith had been at loggerheads with the Dodgers on his contract, and had shown up to Spring Training without one. To play it safe, Miller looked to Dave McNally of the Expos as back-up in case Messersmith buckled over the course of the season, when the ever increasing dollars being offered to him would surely arrive from the Dodgers.

That was the test. Miller had read the Reserve Clause and latched onto Paragraph 10(a) of the Uniform Players Contract which said, "*The Club shall have the right to renew this contract for the period of one year on the same team*." Miller's interpretation was clear: If a player were not re-signed within one year of his contract not being renewed, he would be eligible for free agency.

Andy Messersmith never buckled. In October of 1975, the Players Association filed the Messersmith and McNally grievances. The arbitration case weaved through the off-season and set baseball on edge. Finally, on December 23, 1975, arbitrator, Peter Seitz ruled, "*The grievances of Messersmith and McNally are sustained. There is no contractual bond between these players and the Los Angeles and Montreal clubs, respectively*." The Reserve Clause had been revoked.

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The Lords were incensed. First thing they did was fire Seitz as an arbitrator. Secondly, they all tried to take stock of how the new landscape would alter business. Clark Griffith could only muster, "Oh, shit" when the news came on the radio.

Free agency would be available, but how would Miller negotiate the terms? As Miller wrote in his book, *A Whole Different Ballgame*, "In the wake of the Messersmith decision it dawned on me as a terrifying possibility, that the owners might suddenly wake up one day and realize that yearly free agency was the best possible thing for them; that is, if all players became free agents at the end of each year, the market would be flooded, and salaries would be held down."

Charlie Finley saw this advantage while the others failed to grasp the significance. "Hey what's the problem?" Finley said. "Make 'em *all* free agents!" Miller waited to see if anyone would actually listen to the maverick. "My main worry was that someone would actually listen to him," Miller said. "It would have been an impossible box. You could not have said you were opposed to freedom."

The result? No one listened. It was, after all, Finley. The Players Relations Committee proposed a ten-year free agency threshold, which Miller got to six years. Once Kuhn and the Lords had exhausted all the appeal processes in the courts, a new basic agreement was negotiated in 1976.

Finley had said how the owners could actually *benefit* from the ruling. The owners, through their own collective stupidity, balked at Finley's suggestion and have been paying for it since.

Finley sees his fate. Vida Blue, and Bowie too

Finley had always worked on the edge. When free agency became part

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of the new landscape of Major League Baseball, he knew his days as an owner were numbered. The star players on the A's staff started to negotiate for higher numbers. If it wasn't Joe Rudi looking to jump from \$84,000 to a three-year, \$375,000 deal, it was Rollie Fingers who had been making \$93,000 and wanted to leap to \$435,000 for three years. In both cases, the players were also looking for no-trade guarantees.

In early '76, Finley decided that he was going to get something out of this new deal.

Just before Opening Day, Finley traded Reggie Jackson, Ken Holtzman, and a minor-leaguer for Don Baylor, Mike Torrez, and Paul Mitchell of the Orioles.

Then, Finley *really* went to work.

He started by calling up the Red Sox. The blockbuster trade proposed by Joe Rudi, Rollie Fingers, Vida Blue, Gene Tenace, and Sal Bando for Fred Lynn, Carlton Fisk and a couple of minor leaguers.

Not content with just the Red Sox, he got the Yankees on the horn and offered up Blue for Thurman Munson and one of the Yankee starting outfielders – either Roy White or Elliot Maddox. Finley tinkered with offers and counter-offers, and not just with the Red Sox and the Yankees. He tossed out a deal for Rudi for Munson straight across. He got a hold of Milwaukee and floated a possible deal for Rudi for Darrell Porter. By the time he was through, Finley had negotiated with every American League franchise, with Kansas City the exception.

With one day left before the June 15th trading deadline, Finley still hadn't signed his star players. Then Charlie made the shift: If owners were willing to pay through the nose for star players, Finley would offer them up and do some profit making. "Trade" was shelved for "cash."

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He also started playing the Red Sox against the Yankees. When Dick O'Connell of the Red Sox got a hold of Finley on the phone, Finley said, "I'm with Gabe." Gabe, of course, was Yankees president, Gabe Paul. Finley threw out players and attached numbers. "I'm offering Rudi, Blue, Baylor, or Tenace for a million apiece and Bando for a half a million. Are you interested?" O'Connell would have to get back to Finley.

The Red Sox mulled options and scenarios. Finally they opted for Rudi and Fingers.

O'Connell phoned Finley and asked, "Are Rudi and Fingers still available at a million dollars apiece?"

"Yes, they are," replied Finley.

"How do you want your money?" O'Connell asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Send you the cash immediately, or paid to you over a period of time?"

"Do you mind giving me a few hours to think it over?" was Finley's reply.

"No problem," said O'Connell, and hung up.

The Red Sox now had Rudi and Fingers.

The problem was Finley was still working with Gabe Paul on a deal for Vida Blue. As O'Connell got off the phone, he realized that if Blue were to land in New York, the Red Sox deal would be a wash; that is, the Red Sox wouldn't get significantly better than their chief rivals.

O'Connell also worried about how Commissioner Kuhn might react to a deal for such large sums involving Steinbrenner. Kuhn had already suspended him once before. Would Kuhn nix both the Yankees and Red Sox deals involving Finley, who didn't exactly rub Kuhn right to begin with?

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To get around this problem, O'Connell got the Tigers in the mix. By getting Jim Campbell of the Tigers in on the negotiations for Blue, maybe the Red Sox could at least get Blue out of the Yankees hands and into Tigers where, more importantly, Blue wouldn't be in the AL East.

Campbell made the same offer to Finley of a million dollars for Blue.

Finley relayed the news to Paul. "The meat has aged today. It's better meat." Paul countered Campbell's offer with a deal for \$1.5 million and landed Blue.

There was that small problem that Finley had started with, however.

Blue was still not signed with the A's. Paul had swung the deal, but on the conditions that Blue was signed.

Finley called up Chris Daniels, Blue's agent and said he wanted to work a contract up. Daniel's said he would have to get a hold of Blue, but would get back to him. When Daniel's called back they had a proposal of \$200,000 for three years. Finley's response? "Astronomical."

Finley and Daniels negotiated back and forth over the terms for the three years, never mind the fact that Finley was not really using his money, but rather Steinbrenner's. The deal finally brokered by Daniels and Finley came to \$135,000 for 1976, \$145,000 for 1977, and \$205,000 for 1978.

It wasn't until later in the day that Blue and Daniels got the news about the Yankees. Finley would make more on the deal to New York than Blue.

Finley then lied through his teeth. When he called up Blue to give him the news, the one side of the conversation went like this, "Vida? This is Charlie Finley. I know how you feel. The damn Yanks jumped the time on me. They promised they wouldn't make an announcement and then we all heard it on the news... What do you mean, what announcement? I traded you to the Yankees... just you. For money."

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The fire sale news was spreading quickly, and finally made its way to Commissioner Kuhn. Kuhn told AL president, Lee McPhail that he'd better talk Charlie out of it. McPhail told Kuhn that he had tried, but the Finley had hung up on him. Now, Kuhn was in the mix.

Kuhn and Finley had been at odds since Day One. They were polar opposites in nearly every manner. When it came to their relationship over baseball business, Kuhn had reprimanded Finley on more than one occasion. If it wasn't over Finley for punishing Jackson by sending him to the minors, it was Kuhn slapping Finley with fines for handing out illegal bonuses to the his players after winning the '72 World Series. Finley disliked Kuhn so much, that when he was up for re-election in 1975, he headed up a group of owners called the "Dump Bowie Club." It was more of a challenge with the new owners in the AL against the establishment, which had their champion in Kuhn. Such had been their relationship.

When Finley and Kuhn met face-to-face over the fire sale, Finley started off on Kuhn. "Don't butt into this," Finley said.

Finley then went into a long diatribe about how free agency and poor attendance was killing any chances for Finley and the A's to be competitive. He projected that he'd have \$700,000 in losses for the year. With the sale of Blue alone, he could start to rebuild and be competitive.

By the end of the conversation, nothing had swayed Kuhn on the matter. This was in, "the best interests of the game." Kuhn was protecting competitive balance and the fans of Oakland.

The next day, Kuhn forbid the Yankees and the Red Sox not to play their newly acquired players. Kuhn called a meeting of the executive council to get their advice. All were in agreement; it was a bad deal for baseball. It would send a signal that pennants could be bought outright, and that was something that would create a travesty of the game. Kuhn ruled that the sales be voided.

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Finley went off the handle. He called Kuhn, “the village idiot.” He then ramped that up to “the nation’s idiot“, and finally, “his honor, the idiot in charge.” He then tried to sue Kuhn for \$10 million, which he promptly lost. Marvin Miller never filed a grievance for the players. Wisely, he understood that if the players came up for free agency they stood to make more than they would have in Finley’s fire sale. Charlie had done a bit of a revisit of the Hunter case. He had shown the other owners just how valuable the star players had been worth, and they garnered more in salary when they did come up for free agency.

Finley bows out

Charlie never got the memo. He continued to unload players, but was at least wise enough to not do wholesale transactions. He got his front office staff down to six. One of whom was a fourteen-year-old teenager, who was listed on the A’s organizational chart as vice-president. The teen, by the name of Stanley Burrell would grow up, change his name, and break into entertainment with the name of “M.C. Hammer.”

Total team payroll numbers dropped, as did attendance. The A’s looked and acted more like a AAA team than a big-league club. The Lords desperately pushed to get Finley out of the Lodge. At one point a scheme was proposed that would have each club kick in \$50,000 a piece, with Bob Lurie of the Giants providing \$1 million, Finley would kick in \$1 million to get out from underneath the \$4 million lease agreement he had with the Oakland Coliseum Authority, and Denver oil magnate, Marvin Davis would kick in \$1 million and move the beleaguered club to Denver. That deal fell through when Finley started to waffle on his end of the deal.

Finally, Walter Hass, Jr. arrived on the scene and offered to purchase the club. He and his son-in-law, Roy Eisenhart, as well as Hass’s son, Wally would like to purchase the team. The deal was more than acceptable to Charlie O. After all, it was in cash, to the tune of \$12.75 million.

At Finley’s farewell press conference he said, “[It] is no longer a battle of wits but how much you can have on the hip. I can no longer compete.”

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My Ode to Charlie

As I said, I miss Charlie. I can see him with his Kelly green jacket and matching cowboy hat. He's just the thing the starched shirts need today. David Stern has Mark Cuban; baseball could use a good dose of Finley-like entertainment like in the Lodge today.

Finley wasn't just some kook. On top of owning the Athletics, he owned the NHL Oakland Seals for a bit, another team I grew up loving while watching the likes of Carol Vadnais and Gary Smith.

In 1972 Finley purchased the Memphis Pros, of the American Basketball Association. In '74, the ABA took over the club.

The idea of using orange balls for night games was actually tried in several exhibition games, but hitters complained that they couldn't pick up the spin on the ball.

He toyed with the "designated runner" in 1974. He hired a sprinter exclusively for the purpose of pinch running and stealing bases.

Yes, this is my ode to Charlie O. May the baseball gods, once again have mercy on my soul.

SOURCES

Lords of the Realm – John Helyar
A *Whole Different Game* – Marvin Miller

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*Numerous
Wikipedia
Baseball-Reference*

newspaper articles culled from ProQuest