



Original Article

[The Biz of Baseball](#) is pleased to offer up this guest article from **John Brattain** on the A-Rod saga, with Scott Boras and the Yankees as key players. John is a regular columnist with [The Hardball Times](#)

and

[MSN Canada](#)

. We hope you enjoy. -

Maury Brown

- President & Founder, Business of Sports Network

Eventually it befalls everyone in a position of power. They overestimate their strength, their leverage, their intelligence or the other side's resolve/leverage/strength or smarts. They overreach, try for a little too much or don't yield enough and it ends up in a humiliating, costly and painful defeat complete with lasting ignominy.

Baseball is not immune to this phenomenon--not by a longshot.

Back in the 1960-1970's baseball ownership's hubris got the better of them and they all but discounted Marvin Miller and ended up getting totally thrashed. In the 1990-2000's the MLBPA underestimated an certain used car salesman named Bud and have seen salaries drop from over 50% of total revenues to less than 40% this year and have to cope with a drug testing regimen with penalties containing real teeth.

Is Scott Boras going to be the next to go down in flames?

Brattain: Waterloo

Written by John Brattain
Monday, 29 October 2007 10:51

Boras is the most powerful, best known, most loathed and highly clever and resourceful man in the agent business. He brokered baseball's first \$100 million and \$200 million contract and is looking to crack the \$300 million (and possibly more) level this off-season. He's hoping that the man who was the recipient of the biggest contract in MLB seven years ago can top the existing ceiling.

Back in 2000 there was a certain logic to overpaying for A-Rod. He was the rarest of birds; a good fielding shortstop with a batting title, a 40/40 season, three straight 40 HR seasons (two of them in a pitchers' park) and all of this was before his 25th birthday. As a capstone, in 2000 he reached the triple-triple (100 runs/RBI/BB) level and batted .409/.480/.773 in the ALCS against the soon to be crowned World Series champions. Hey, if you ever needed to justify blowing the bank on one free agent, Alex Rodriguez was the living, breathing justification.

Tom Hicks gave A-Rod over a quarter-billion dollars in guaranteed money. Seven years since, no player has matched that salary on either an annual basis or a total package. Sadly, 252 is now the defining legacy for both men. It's a feather in Boras' cap to be sure but a distraction in appreciating one of baseball's all-time greats in the eyes of many.

After the dust settled it became clear that nobody was even close to Hicks' offer and that Boras had managed, as he did once before, in breaking the \$100 million barrier with Kevin Brown, to get his mark to bid against himself.

While Boras is confident he can obtain yet another record contract, he does have a few obstacles now that he didn't have seven years ago.

(Select [Read More](#) to read the rest of John Brattain's "Waterloo";)

To begin with, clubs will be more wary of dealing with the duo this time through. They saw what could happen when you take Boras's claims at face value. It can cost tens of millions of dollars in excess of what is needed to have the highest bid.

I'm guessing that some teams have put the word in Boras's ear that they may be willing to pay a premium-plus but at the moment all they are the words of an owner--folks who are renowned for saying things they will later take back. They can only have a shot at A-Rod if he opts out and may think they can get him for a lot less if the Yankees do go in another direction.

Brian Cashman is likely aware that Boras is of the opinion that if Rodriguez opts out the Yankees will still bid. Since a brand new deal will cost the Yankees the remainder of the Rangers subsidy plus a 40% luxury tax hit they will likely sit back and observe how the market plays out. They will probably reiterate their stance that they are not bidding for two unstated reasons: (1) the bidding will not be as generous if clubs believe the Yankees aren't involved in the auction and (2) Boras will not likely recommend his client sign any deal until the Yankees weigh in.

Further, Cashman will likely pull the pre-opt out offer off the table if A-Rod does declare free agency to prevent Boras from shopping it around. Boras needs the Yankees involved to get the money he is seeking; by playing it cool he suppresses the market for his client. Cashman will not play Boras's game by being the stalking horse that drives the bidding process upward. The Yankees have the luxury to sit back and let it play out knowing they have the resources to top any other club's offer. They know Boras knows this too and the agent will go back to see if they want to top the highest bid.

George Steinbrenner stated recently that "I don't think there's any secret that we want A-Rod to stay, but it's also not a secret that Brian made it clear a long time ago, and I've made it clear after him: If they opt out, goodbye." Boras cannot do what he did in 2000, do an end around the G.M. and take it straight to the owner. Boras will be dealing with Cashman. While Steinbrenner hates to lose, he also hates even more when somebody turns their back on the Yankees. The Boss views it as a privilege to wear the pinstripes and to screw around the Yankees to get more money does not sit well with him.

If it's Cashman's show to run, then Boras has his work cut out for him.

Another consideration is that clubs involved in the bidding are aware that Boras uses "phantom offers." A few years back he claimed that somebody had offered 5 years/\$75 million for Kevin Millwood's services. When nobody bit, Millwood had to accept arbitration. If Boras tried this tactic tossing around an insane offer, Cashman will probably state long, loud and repeatedly that if such a bid exists; it didn't originate from the Yankees.

Probably the biggest X factor in this is Bud Selig. The commissioner most assuredly doesn't want a new salary benchmark to be set and will let the owners know how he feels. The Cubs

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are on the market and signing A-Rod to a mega-deal is a good way to get Selig to make the process more onerous. The John Henry of the Red Sox are indebted to Selig for accepting their lower offer for the franchise and making it easier to them to divest themselves of the Marlins.

It's difficult to imagine the Red Sox being the team to give Boras the contract he is seeking for his client. The Mets would either have to shuffle their entire infield or have Rodriguez play first base or the outfield. Boras has to hope one of the west coast teams (Angels, Dodgers, Giants) are eager or that Detroit's (who generally gives Boras clients what they want) 'we don't want A-Rod' remarks are more of a bargaining position than an expression of disinterest.

Equally true is that back in 2000 clubs knew that Rodriguez was only going to get better, now (despite Boras's cheery projections) teams are aware that the chance of decline is more likely than improvement. A-Rod may have another 2-3 years at this level but what is going to happen in years 4-12 is the \$300 million question. In 2000 you were getting the complete package. Soon, Rodriguez will be making his money solely with his bat. An excellent bat to be sure, but no better than Albert Pujols, Manny Ramirez, or a young Frank Thomas.

While it was all upside in 2000, there is baggage now that didn't exist seven years ago.

Now A-Rod has a reputation as somebody who can be problematic in the clubhouse when things don't go his way. He has his share of derisive nicknames. Some ex-teammates refer to him as 'the cooler'; he is the enduring image of the biggest October choke-job in history and has a reputation of vanishing in the playoffs. He played four seasons on a team who view anything short of winning it all to be a failed season and that very team never made it out of the LCS and didn't even emerge from the LDS over the last three seasons.

Boras is arrogant and confident about his own baseball omniscience so much so that he's devoting a section of A-Rod's new testament (the old testament being the one he wrote in 2000) to the October failures of some of baseball's all time greats. He thinks that being the team holding the player who will break Barry Bonds' home run record or Pete Rose's all time hits record will sway teams to drop a bundle on him. However, there will probably be opt outs in the next contract in case he ages extremely well and you can bet there will be one the year before where Boras has calculated that Rodriguez is due to overtake Bonds. A team may pay for these milestones but there will be no guarantee that A-Rod will still be there when the time comes.

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I'm guessing Boras has a three-step plan regarding Rodriguez:

- 1) Secure the desired contract, the team is irrelevant--just get the money.

- 2) Sell A-Rod on what happened last time: Try the new city, if they compete fine, if not demand a trade to a contender.

- 3) Count on the signing team within three years to have a case of buyer's remorse and would be willing to eat part of the deal a la Tom Hicks and be rid of the rest of the obligation.

Finally: Bud Selig will be working the phones if he isn't already. Alex Rodriguez cost Texas, at this point in time, \$111 million for three years service (salary plus money sent to the Yankees). Selig will use Hicks (who will undoubtedly stand up like an alcoholic at an AA meeting) to say in effect: "I bought what Scott Boras was selling me. It cost me \$37 million a year and those years we never got out of last place. Don't make the mistake I did. No player is worth that much."

Boras is counting on the tactics he used in 2000 to work again and he's counting on the Yankees to be involved even if A-Rod opts out. If he is wrong on either of these counts it could be Scott Boras's personal Waterloo.

□ **John Brattain** is a regular columnist with [The Hardball Times](#) and [MSN Canada](#) .□