



The Game: Inside the Secret World of Major League Baseball's Power Brokers

Jon Pessah

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The incredible inside story of power, money, and baseball's last twenty years

In the fall of 1992, America's National Pastime is in crisis and already on the path to the unthinkable: cancelling a World Series for the first time in history. The owners are at war with each other, their decades-long battle with the players has turned America against both sides, and the players' growing addiction to steroids will threaten the game's very foundation.

It is a tipping point for baseball, a crucial moment in the game's history that catalyzes a struggle for power by three strong-willed men: Commissioner Bud Selig, Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, and union leader Don Fehr. It's their uneasy alliance at the end of decades of struggle that pulls the game back from the brink and turns it into a money-making powerhouse that enriches them all.

This is the real story of baseball, played out against a tableau of stunning athletic feats, high-stakes public battles, and backroom political deals--with a supporting cast that includes Barry Bonds and Mark McGwire, Joe Torre and Derek Jeter, George Bush and George Mitchell, and many more.

Drawing from hundreds of extensive, exclusive interviews throughout baseball, *The Game* is a stunning achievement: a rigorously reported book and the must-read, fly-on-the-wall, definitive account of how an enormous struggle for power turns disaster into baseball's Golden Age.

The Game: Inside the Secret World of Major League Baseball's Power Brokers Details

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From Reader Review The Game: Inside the Secret World of Major League Baseball's Power Brokers for online ebook

Steven Z. says

When I picked up a copy of THE GAME: INSIDE THE SECRET WORLD OF MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL'S POWER BROKERS by Jon Pessah I expected an exploration of the world of baseball between 1992 and 2010 from financial and labor perspectives. What I read encompasses those general themes, but the book also evolved into a prolonged discussion of Bud Selig and George Steinbrenner's roles in baseball during that time period, and bringing with it an excellent reporter's knowledge of baseball and the personalities involved. I soon developed an intense distaste for Selig, who was the owner of the Milwaukee Brewers and the "acting" commissioner of baseball at the same time, a direct conflict of interest; and a greater understanding of Steinbrenner, and a degree of empathy for his at times, outrageous behavior.

The year 1992 can be considered a "watershed" year in the history of major league baseball. The owners were at war with each other, the owners were also at war with the players through their labor union, and the steroid era was just emerging. Pessah raises the question; did Bud Selig save baseball, as the former Commissioner of Baseball would like everyone to believe. After reading Pessah's account I agree with his conclusions that Selig did more to hurt the game he supposedly loved, and his actions were driven by his own selfish agenda and led to some of the most hypocritical actions and statements that I have ever been exposed to. Bud Selig has one belief, what is best for Bud Selig. When it came to his role as owner of the Milwaukee Brewers, that belief centered on improving the value of his franchise no matter who he hurt or used by reorienting baseball's financial structure to meet his needs.

Unhappy with the settlement with the players union in 1990 because of what he perceived to be the actions of then Baseball Commissioner Faye Vincent, Selig worked assiduously to have him removed and have himself appointed as "acting" commissioner. Once this was achieved Selig would be in charge of negotiating a new contract with his adversary, Donald Fehr, the head of the players union. The Brewers team debt stood at \$35 million in 1990 and throughout the period it would quadruple, if not more. For Selig, a new stadium was needed to replace the antiquated Milwaukee County Stadium to help pay down his debt. The problem was who would finance the cost of this project. As Pessah's research will prove Selig would blackmail localities into having public funding for stadiums or they could lose their teams to franchise relocation or contraction (having the league fold their franchises). Selig was envious of large market teams with extensive resources because of cable television contracts and other marketing advantages, as a result he sought to pillage those teams through revenue sharing, a salary cap, and possibly, a luxury tax. His target was George Steinbrenner's New York Yankees and a few other franchises. What was most disingenuous, is that when revenue sharing was eventually implemented, many of the small market teams took the millions of dollars they received, supposedly designated for player development and procurement to make their teams more competitive, and devoted the money to their own profits. In Selig's case he paid down his debt, and at the same time reduced his payroll. In the case of billionaire owner, Carl Polhand of the Minnesota Twins, he just pocketed the money.

The first part of the book analyzes the steps that led to the cancelling of the last month of the 1994 baseball season and the World Series. In meticulous fashion Pessah describes the positions of the owners and the player's union. What seems abundantly clear is no matter how many times Selig downplayed the idea that the owners wanted a strike, the evidence reflects the opposite. After Selig arranged his coup against Vincent, he also engineered a change in baseball's voting structure to allow small market teams like the Brewers to veto any settlement with the players they did not like. Pessah places the onus of the strike and the possible

use of replacement players on Selig and his supporters, and less so on the player's union head, Donald Fehr. Along the way the author integrates the story of Don Mattingly, the Yankee first basement who had never been to the post season and whose body was slowly giving way to father time. When Selig ended the season, the Yankees were in first place and were on the road to a possible World Series appearance for the first time since 1981, and it seemed Mattingly's last chance may have been passed by. Pessah explores Steinbrenner and other owner's roles as well as Fehr and the union in intricate detail. What one concludes as a settlement is finally reached is that Selig is correct that financial changes needed to be implemented, but other issues facing baseball, like steroids were ignored because for Selig "the homeruns" that resulted from the use of steroids were good for baseball's bottom line. As a result he and the owners turned a blind eye to the problem.

Selig's methods are a major focus of the book. How he arranges for the Montreal Expos to be purchased by Major League Baseball for \$120 million and its sale for over \$400 million to a group that moves it to Washington, DC is priceless. Further, his manipulation of the Florida Marlins situation reflects his duplicitousness as he arranges for the former owner of the Expos, Jeffrey Loria to buy the Marlins when he cannot really afford to do so. Another example is how Selig arranges for John Henry to purchase the Boston Red Sox who he hopes will create a small market mentality more to his liking in Beantown. Selig did not overlook the needs of his own team, managed by his daughter Wendy while he was commissioner, a team that was \$148.7 million in debt. Amazingly, by the 2007 baseball season that debt has been reduced to \$30 million. Eventually Selig would sell the Brewers for \$200 million based on revenue sharing and Miller Park, the stadium that was publicly financed by the residents of Milwaukee. In addition, by 2009 Selig earned a salary of \$18 million a year, and by his retirement year he had a net worth of over \$200 million, not including the \$35-40 million he will collect from baseball as a Commissioner Emeritus, not bad for an owner of a small market team that at one time was hemorrhaging from debt.

Pessah's narrative includes a discussion of events taking place outside of baseball, and Congress is a major candidate for his sarcasm. Different Congressional committees and their politicians will use labor issues and the steroid epidemic throughout the period under discussion, grandstanding about the national pastime and making threats to take away baseball's anti-trust exemption. At the same time they avoid dealing with issues relating to Hurricane Katrina, the lack of proper body armor for US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, the crisis over Abu Ghraib, and numerous other issues. It seems reasonable to assume that the money that the owners are donating to Congressional campaigns bears fruit. The reader is provided transcripts of Congressional hearings, National Labor Relations Board decisions, intimate conversations among owners, as well as the inner workings of the union. These details are enlightening as we learn of Yankee General Manager, Brian Cashman's distaste for the arrogance he sees in Joe Torre, George W. Bush's hope to be Commissioner of Baseball, the inner workings of the Steinbrenner family, and many other interesting items. I assume that Pessah has worked his sources well and he is presenting an accurate account, however, a degree of footnoting might assuage my historian's sensitivities, though I compliment him on his excellent bibliography and the names of those interviewed.

The narrative makes for an excellent read for baseball fans and the public in general who lived through the events and relationships described. Pessah spares nothing in discussing the BALCO scandal and Barry Bonds, the Mitchell Commission and Report that Selig created to help clear his own guilt about how he handled, or better, did not handle the growing steroid scandal in baseball. The "bash brothers," Mark McGwire and Jose Canseco, Roger Clemens, Alex Rodriguez, Rafael Palmeiro, and many others make their appearances as authors or witnesses before Congressional committees. Perhaps the most important aspect of the book reflects the human frailties of all involved as the reader is taken from one contract negotiation to the next, in addition to each scandal or blight on baseball's reputation. Pessah's account is almost encyclopedic as his subject matter evolves over two decades. It seems to me as an avid baseball fan he does not miss much

and to his credit, his honesty in reporting is a highlight that readers should cherish. THE GAME is more than a baseball book, it is a story of greed, power, and manipulation that in many instances gives our nation's pastime a black eye. But as most baseball fans realize once spring training arrives after a long winter, they are willing to forgive and forget the actions of the likes of Bud Selig.

Matt Schirano says

Best baseball book I've read since "In the Glory of Their Time". Really well researched, pulls no punches.

Bill says

Three stars if your not a baseball fan!

Pamela Montano says

Between 1992 and 2010, baseball went through many changes. This book takes a look inside the men who created those changes, Bud Selig (Commissioner), Donald Fehr (head of the players union) and George Steinbrenner (owner of the NY Yankees). Bud Selig, one-time owner of the Milwaukee Brewers almost lost the job of Commissioner to George W. Bush. Luckily for baseball fans, that didn't happen. Donald Fehr, hero to the union and villain to the owners, clashes with Bud at every turn. Steinbrenner, once banned from baseball, returns with a vengeance and clashes with everyone, including those who work for him and play on his team. A very interesting look inside the greatest game ever played.

Tim Fischer says

Good book except too much about the NY Yankees!

Joe Frake says

If you're looking for a book that relives the great baseball moments of the past twenty years, this isn't the book for you. The book isn't about the playing of baseball, it's about the machinations of the organized sport and the people who pull the strings behind it.

The book is all about three men - Bud Selig, Don Fehr and George Steinbrenner. All were essential figures during baseball's growth in the 90s and 00s and saw the game through its biggest controversies (labor strikes and steroids). You have to be ready to ready a book much more about business and power dynamics than about the actual "game" of baseball.

The story is admittedly fascinating. This book will be very interesting to deep fans of baseball - you relive

the moments that shaped these years through a completely different lens. I love Pessah's present tense narrative style of writing that takes you back to those moments and makes you feel always "behind the scenes" in real time. I also appreciate that he is fair to these three characters - this is not a praise to the three figures, but an objective view of their accomplishments and shortcomings. He lets Selig's actions, for example, speak for themselves.

I give the book 4 stars, not 5, because the book was too long (nearly 600 pages felt entirely unnecessary) and its narrow focus on the 3 aforementioned characters felt repetitive. There was so much else going on in baseball, and so many players' achievements, that deserved some attention. I thought there were some missed opportunities to discuss in more detail the other things in American life (9/11 and other events) that he spent maybe a paragraph referring to.

I don't think this book would be very enjoyable for anyone who wasn't a pretty significantly invested fan over the late 90s and 00s. But if you were, you will largely love this book.

Tobias says

At first I thought this was a worthy sequel to John Helyar's classic *The Lords of the Realm*, about how the economics of baseball changed from the 1960s onward. The discussion of the conditions resulting in the 1994 strike certainly picked up where Helyar left off. However, as the book went on, it became clear that a) Pessah is better at simply recording events instead of analyzing and b) there's way too much about Steinbrenner and the Yankees at the expense of everything else. The summaries of gameplay are also, oddly for a book about baseball, distracting. I don't really need to know what happened on the field every season. For all the talk about the years of labor peace that followed the 1994 strike, Pessah doesn't actually make a strong argument for why this happened, just says that it did. Another omission is that he says almost nothing about the sabermetric revolution, which certainly helped narrow the gap between big market and small market franchises, a major factor in earlier labor disputes (I found only a single passing reference to Cashman's establishing an analysis shop in the mid-2000s - that's it). Also, for all the words devoted to the steroids issue, he never bothers to spell out what all the fuss was about, why it happened, etc. It's certainly connected to the economics of the game - bigger contracts mean bigger risks for falling behind - but he leaves this unsaid.

Informative, but disappointing.

Chad says

I thoroughly enjoyed the book. The structure of building the book around the relationship between Selig and Steinbrenner wasn't something I was sure about at the start, but it really showed the complicated nature of both men. Both succeeded in spite of themselves...

Selig being the ultimate backroom politician who is able to completely ignore all of his failures and shortcomings with a self-preserving myopia that allowed him to succeed.

Steinbrenner agreed to Selig's policies that cost him millions of dollars to support his competition (while complaining the whole time) that allows him to earn even more on the backend as the value of his franchise

soars.

I guess one might argue that it's actually a three-way dance with Fehr included. I grew to respect him even more in the reading of this book. He seems to be the one principled person in this whole mess. To him, it's about the players and their rights. After reading this book, I can better understand why he constantly looked like he was suffering--he had to deal with slippery men like Selig and the owners.

Harold Kasselman says

This is a fascinating and comprehensive look at the behind the scenes machinations of the major actors in the MLB from the calculated ouster of Vincent Faye up through the installation of Rob Manfred as the new commissioner. This is a must reference book for any baseball historian or fan of the game.

Mr. Pessah focuses on the major labor issues of those days including revenue sharing, a salary cap, building new stadiums, cable television revenue, lockouts, strikes, and PED usage. The story is largely centered around the major players of that era; namely Bud Selig, George Steinbrenner, and Don Fehr. The author appears to come down hardest on Selig who is depicted as a self-interested owner who cared more about his personal finances and his legacy as baseball commissioner than the integrity of the game(steroids/amphetamines) or his own ethics.(Owning the Brewers while still in the commissioner's chair). Steinbrenner is the power broker of the game who takes baseball and his team to revenue stardom as well as championships while reluctantly agreeing to the call from small market teams for revenue sharing and a luxury cap to foster competitive balance.

Don Fehr, it seems to me, largely gets a pass from the author for the strife in contracts and PED issues because he was just an agent of the players expressing their interests. Well, I'm not as tough on Selig nor as adoring of Fehr or Steinbrenner. But that's up to the reader to conclude. What is more important is the history of the crises in baseball during those years and the motivations and action of its actors in shaping the game to its biggest revenue for all involved in a relatively short period of time. The behind the scene machinations, especially of Selig and Jerry Reinsdorf are totally absorbing. The thinking of the actors are well depicted(some 150 people were interviewed)and makes for great reading. This is a long book but it is simply fascinating stuff and there is never a dull moment. Kudos to Mr. Pessah for his exhaustive efforts that are sure to place this book in the category of the best of the best.

Ceil says

One of the reviews I read said this book, while entertaining, had way too much detail about the machinations within baseball during the Bud Selig era (roughly 1990 to 2014). So it probably makes me a geek that I didn't find the blow-by-blow description of labor unrest (I mean, you can't say "strikes" in a review of a baseball book without being confusing) and drug use, home runs, and civic bullying the slightest bit overdone. Terrific book for the baseball geek who wants to relive a fascinating era in baseball.

Dorothy Fischer says

I love baseball! I love being at a ball park with hot dog in hand, and although some would say I can not be a true fan because I do not like beer, watching amazingly athletic players warm up. I love the statistics, the scoring, the strategy of pitcher and catcher, the signs, the squeeze plays, the walk offs...okay! I love

baseball! I wanted to read this book and get a true representation of the years I have lived through. I have lived in both New York and Milwaukee, born a Yankees fan, but because of many moves and a child who grew up a Royals fan, am now a Royals fan...when the Yankees are statistically eliminated from the playoffs! I diverge, there were times reading this book I decided to hate baseball(or the people forming it)....just how could these egocentric people be a part of what is righteous, true and holy?

Oh well, I grew up to reality by the end! An amazing research job, a well written and excellent read. Anyone who even likes baseball a little should read this. I will leave my personal opinions to myself so others reading this can learn for themselves all about Selig(a used car salesman, he will remain in my mind always) and Fehr and Steinbrenner and all the other players over the years of baseball that had so many changes and moments of awesomeness mixed with moments of despair.

Please read this and then pass it on!

Michael says

The history of Major League Baseball over the last two decades can be boiled down to three stories: the crippling strike of 1994 whose effects are still being felt today, the wide payroll disparity that led to revenue sharing and the luxury tax, and steroids. *The Game* is a painstakingly researched and riveting portrait of the three men who played the biggest roles in making that history: MLB Commissioner Bud Selig, Players Union leader Donald Fehr, and Yankees owner George Steinbrenner.

Pessah's sympathies lie mainly with Fehr (though nobody comes out of the steroid scandal looking good), but the book's main takeaway is his portrayal of Selig as a marginally effective negotiator, skilled at massaging the owners' massive egos, but somehow always one step behind the times, and possessing a desperate need for approval. I also did not realize just how close George W. Bush came to being named the commissioner in the mid-90s, which would have precluded his run for Texas governor and changed modern history.

This book's lengthy running time (nearly 600 pages of text) may be a turnoff for anyone looking for a quick primer on recent baseball events, nor does it break any news, but it is never less than engaging and touches on just about every issue facing the game today. Highly recommended.

Mike says

A behind the scenes and on the field look at baseball from 1992 through 2015, *The Game* threads a series of stories and narratives together: the rise of Bud Selig as Commissioner, George Steinbrenner and the Yankees, MLB's labor relations, and the rise of PEDs and steroids. Jon Pessah has written a masterpiece, all the more remarkable for the effortless way he keeps a series of stories moving smoothly and coherently, and for the way he is able to create a collage that allows the reader to better understand the motivation and misdirections of the many personalities he covers. To be sure, this book is most likely only for the passionate baseball fan, but a reader looking to understand more about big business in America would find much to enjoy in these pages.

Lance says

Fantastic book, well researched and pulls no punches. Full review is posted at my blog:

<http://sportsbookguy.blogspot.com/201...>

Kyle says

The access and information in this book is incredible, but the execution is somewhat lacking. The author certainly has a disdain for Bud Selig, which is at least understandable, and an obsession with George Steinbrenner. The book reads as much as a biography of Steinbrenner as it does as an examination of the inner machinations of baseball from 1992 - 2010. This book basically focuses on the Brewers and the Yankees while taking shots at George Bush and Jerry Reinsdorf. Steinbrenner is lauded as a genius, Selig as an evil buffoon, Don Fehr and the players union as victims, and the rest of baseball as irrelevant. A little bit more objectivity and inclusiveness would have drastically improved this book.
