

A Thing Of The Past

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, June 16 2007 7:00 PM -

Great stuff here on this Father's Day from the passionate Paul Cousineau, who writes today about the death of Saturday afternoon major league baseball. As Paul explains in the column, the greedy exclusive contract that MLB has with FOX has essentially killed the notion of teams scheduling Saturday afternoon games, and Paul isn't happy about it. HAPPY FATHERS DAY dads!!!!



About five years ago, while planning my bachelor party, the group of us decided that that perfect way to spend the day was to buy a block of seats in the bleachers for a Saturday afternoon game, then have our way with the city after the game. Considering that the game ended about 4:00, the city was our oyster and spending the day under the sun in the LF bleachers at the Jake couldn't have been a better start to the day/night.

Going even further back, my grandfather took me to a Saturday afternoon baseball game at Municipal Stadium as the Erie Warriors faced off against the Bash Brothers version of the Oakland A's in the late 80's. The day was memorable in that we had seats behind the visiting dugout and we marveled at the size of the players under the glare of the Saturday sun. While our astonishment at the size of those particular players has since been affected by subsequent findings, it's not the only lost innocence that the day represented.

The glory that Saturday baseball represents, sitting under the sun with your

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friends or family, watching baseball the way it was intended to be viewed has been forever altered by (surprise, surprise) the shortsightedness of MLB and the greed associated with the exclusive contract with FOX for the Saturday Game of the Week.

The current set-up works like this:

FOX looks at the Saturday match-ups throughout the league and selects the two or three games to feature in a 4PM EST game to different parts of the country. For example, the Indians/Braves game yesterday was selected and was available to about 26% of the country. The decision-making process and the selection of where the games are viewed is not the problem though.

Because FOX has an exclusive contract to broadcast MLB games on Saturdays, most teams schedule their games for night games as if they schedule an afternoon game (say, 1PM EST), the game is blacked out locally and can only be broadcast later in the day on a tape delay so as not to conflict with the FOX broadcast. Again, using yesterday as an example, the Yankees/Mets game was played at 1PM, but (since it was not a FOX game) it was blacked out locally and was shown later in the day on a tape delay as it is not allowed to be shown live as it may conflict with (and take viewers away) from the FOX games.

Now, of course, FOX being what they are, the Saturday games that are chosen are invariably Yankees, Red Sox, Braves, Cardinals, Astros, and Cubs games. Do you think that the folks in Kansas City have seen Saturday afternoon baseball in a few years, or that it's going to happen anytime soon?

Essentially what this does is prevent teams from scheduling Saturday afternoon

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games as they are not allowed to broadcast them in real time. Even if they are chosen for the FOX game, the game does not occur until 4PM, ending sometime around 7PM in the Eastern Time zone. This eliminates the best part of the Saturday game, getting to the park about noon on a Saturday, having lunch at or near the park, enjoying a summer afternoon at the ballpark, and making it home (or going out somewhere) to catch dinner and still have Sunday in front of you for the completion of your weekend.

Saturday baseball (not Sunday baseball) was the time for parents to take their children down to the park and for friends to gather downtown for an afternoon out, all without the specter of a Monday morning coming up quickly.

What MLB and FOX have done, with the goal of lining their pockets with money, is eliminate the 1PM Saturday baseballs game for a generation of fans. And, unlike basketball, which is played indoors (although a 9PM NBA Finals start time is laughable), baseball was meant to be played outside, under the sun, in front of their young fans.

Unfortunately, it represents another poor decision in a long line of them made by MLB that are meant to be in “the best interests of the game”, but couldn’t be further from the truth.

While I’m on that topic of misguided, short-sighted decisions by MLB (and the view from this soapbox is so nice), let’s have a look at the debacle that is inter-league play.

This season, the Phillies play as many games at the Jake as old Tribe AL East

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divisional rivals the Yankees, the Red Sox, the Blue Jays, and the Orioles. Also, due to the games moved to Milwaukee for weather reasons, the AL West leading Angels won't make a trip to Cleveland. So, if the Indians and Angels meet in the playoffs, the Angels will be making their first 2007 trip to the Jake.

How, exactly, does that make an ounce of sense?

So, this week, instead of seeing another AL team come to Jacobs Field, I'll sit through two games against the Phillies, a team that the Indians have no history or interest in.

If MLB wants to create a rivalry with Cincinnati ... fine. Have a home and home with the Reds and limit it to that. This extension into the Indians playing the NL teams instead of seeing their OWN league rivals borders on the absurd.

Now, MLB says that inter-league play draws more fans than intra-league games, but have they ever considered that most inter-league games are played ON THE WEEKENDS when families are able to make it to the ballpark? The Indians played Cincinnati last weekend, have Atlanta this weekend and will face off with Washington next weekend. Do you think that those weekend games will draw more than a Tuesday night against Oakland? Sure, but it's not because of who the Indians are playing.

MLB is setting attendance records IN SPITE OF decisions made regarding the scheduling of inter-league games and the elimination of the Saturday afternoon game. It speaks more to the appeal of the game, that it is able to overcome shoddy decision-making from the MLB offices, than it does that they are making the right decisions.

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Which brings us to the crux of the issue – fans (and specifically families) WANT to attend weekend afternoon games, but the money grab by MLB and FOX have removed a full 1/2 of those games from the equation through their poor policies and seemingly endless ignorance of their fan base and the burgeoning fan base of youngsters that are continually shorted in the MLB decision-making process.

On this Fathers' Day, it's time for MLB to recognize the error of their ways and embrace their next generation of fans by revising their obviously ill-advised decisions regarding Saturday baseball.