

## All Star Indifference

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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What if they played an All Star game and nobody showed up? In large measure, that's pretty much the theme of Major League Baseball's version of the All Star game this year and for once I'm not talking about fan indifference, although I could be.

With seemingly half of the selected baseball All Stars begging off or otherwise ineligible because they pitched on the Sunday before a Tuesday game, Major League Baseball now has on its hand an All Star game in name only that will end up being played mostly by second and third tier players that have had a decent half season, no offense to Asdrubal Cabrera intended.

The union is of course defending the defections, despite their ever swelling numbers, as a matter of a number of individual circumstances combining at the same time to make the situation look worse than it really is. There's no reason to doubt that explanation unless you take into account that when it comes to what's best for the sport, the union has always led from the rear anyway.

The fact is, while there undoubtedly are some players that care about actually playing the All Star game, for many of them it's an unneeded distraction, like Sunday dinner at the in-laws, that they'd would rather just avoid.

If there is a marker for this All Star game and the joke that it's become, thy name is Derek Jeter. Citing the mental and physical exhaustion of chasing his 3,000th hit, Jeter begged off even attending any aspect of the festivities in Phoenix.

This is the sainted Derek Jeter, by the way, the one player we're all reminded has always done the right thing when it comes to baseball, who has blown off the whole damn thing because the pressure of achieving a goal he was going to achieve sooner or later has left him positively

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exhausted. This is also the same Derek Jeter that was voted on the team and who otherwise stands completely healthy at the moment.

Jeter's "decision" with a small "d" has created a little bit of controversy but not enough to get anyone too excited. And even if it got any one other than the goofs running Fox Sports who are broadcasting the game terribly overheated, it wouldn't be enough to change his mind anyway. With his usual flair for the uncontroversial, Jeter just shrugs his shoulders at the dust up, as he undergoes a personal calculus that probably concluded that Phoenix in July sounds about as exciting as Ann Arbor in the fall. True that.

If baseball had a real commissioner with real power who really cared about this mid-summer exhibition, he'd come out forcefully against Jeter's actions and levy a heavy fine, assuming that real commissioner thought the All Star game carried some sort of transcendent importance.

But baseball has Boob Selig, a man who can wax philosophic about the enduring goodness of all that his sport represents but cannot actually do anything meaningful for the sport, just kind of shrug his shoulders as well and rationalizes it away like a parent whose kid just came home with a bad grade in Algebra. Never mind the message that Jeter is sending to the other so-called All Stars or the few fans that give a flying fig about the game. It's not like baseball is imbued with symbolism anyway.

I don't really want to pick on Jeter, the least hateful Yankee of the last 25 years. But I think it's perfect that it's a healthy Jeter, having just created a quaint feel-good story on the eve of the game by going 5-5 on Sunday and getting his 3000th hit on a home run, who is telling the rest of the world that there are much better ways to spend a Tuesday night in July than engaging in a meaningless exhibition game. Indeed there is. Tuesday night is the premier of the final season of *Rescue Me*, for instance.

And before anyone from Major League Baseball bothers to drop me an email to remind me that "this one counts" because the winner of the All Star gets home field advantage in the World Series, let me remind them that this fact is of only tangential relevance to fans in two cities that haven't yet been identified anyway. Besides, since baseball went to awarding the home field advantage prize to the winner, there's been absolutely no correlation between that prize and World Series success.

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So back to Jeter and his 3,000 better ways to spend three days then in the 194 degree heat of Phoenix sweating out a potential haboob.

If Jeter giving baseball the middle finger serves as the flashpoint for reconsidering the actual playing of this annual snorefest, then it will have served a greater purpose and he may be elevated to the least hateful Yankee of the last 50 years.

But baseball is full of traditions that don't make any sense so there's no chance that Jeter's inaction will have any lingering effect on a game that has long since lost whatever lingering effect it was supposed to have.

There may still be a few fans somewhere, anywhere, who still watch more than an inning or two of the thing, but let me know the next time there's any water cooler talk about the game in your office and I'll remind you that it was the first time, too.

The last time something interesting happened at an All Star game was 2002 when Boob Selig proved my point by ending a 7-7 game in the 11th inning and declaring the game a tie and sending everyone home. Outside of ESPN's Buster Olney, I'm not sure anyone else even noticed or at least complained since it was, like 3 a.m. on the east coast when this "decision", again with a small "d", was made.

The truth is that the only people that really benefit from this All Star game are those among the 174 players selected who get some sort of bonus for achieving that half-honor. That's fine. I'm not against baseball naming its All Stars, for whatever that means. It's just that the game is less meaningful than an episode of The Bachelor.

But why pick on just baseball. If there's anything worse than baseball's all star game, it's basketball's. And even then, both of those games are positively riveting when compared to the low wattage output of the NFL's Pro Bowl. But hey at least the Pro Bowl is not the Minor League All Star game, an oxymoron of such major proportions that they ought to just retire the term oxymoron here and now in honor of the minor leagues even naming All Stars or, as I like to call them, the best of all the players not good enough to play at the major league level.

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It's all harmless, I know and there are much bigger issues in the world of sports. But if baseball is going to interrupt its season year in and year out in this way and then tell me it's for the fans, it's worth letting them know that we're on to their schtick.

Celebrate if you must, baseball, but I have the public on my side. The television ratings for the game have been trending down since 1988, with 2010 being the lowest rated All Star game ever. There's no reason to think this year will be any different, what with Jeter decompressing in his penthouse. And worry not, fans, if Fox pulls the plug in the future. Somewhere in the can has to be a lost episode of The Search of the Next Elvira to replace it.