



Chronological History of the Major League Baseball Players Association

The 1980's

1980

Mid-February 1980. While Ray Grebey insists that negotiations can continue through the season, Marvin Miller is adamant that the players cannot risk playing without a basic agreement.

February 1980. There are 26 arbitration hearings, with the players winning 15. Most significantly, Chicago Cubs' pitcher Bruce Sutter won the biggest-ever award of \$700,000 as compared with the Cubs offer of \$350,000.

March 4, 1980. The MLBPA Executive Board meeting in Tampa results in a 27-0 strike authorization vote.

March, 1980. Marvin Miller tours each of the 26 team camps and receives a voice vote of 967-1 for strike authorization.

March 18, 1980. The owners withdraw the salary scale proposal, but retain their demand for professional player compensation for free agent signings.

April 1, 1980. At an executive board meeting in Dallas, the players vote 27-0 to cancel the remainder of spring training games (including several lucrative exhibitions, like the Dodgers-Angels Freeway Series) and set a strike date of May 22.

May 15, 1980. Miller suggests isolating the free agent compensation issue from the negotiations, in effect putting it on hold. Ray Grebey rejects this proposal.

May 23, 1980. (CBA-5) After an all-night session at the Doral Inn in New York, the two sides announce a new four year agreement (1980-83) at 5:00 a.m. The breakthrough comes when management agrees to Miller's proposal to form a one-year Joint Study Committee (consisting of two players and two management representatives) on the free agent compensation issue.

June 30, 1980. In *Fleer Corporation vs. Topps Chewing Gum, Inc., and MLBPA*, Judge Clarence Newcomer of the US District Court in Philadelphia rules for plaintiff, and requires that the MLBPA issue at least one additional group license for baseball cards by January 1, 1981. Late in the year the union negotiates a license with both Fleer and Donruss, ending a 25-year Topps monopoly.

August 7, 1980. The Joint Study Committee holds its first meeting. The four main members are Frank Cashen (Mets general manager), Harry Dalton (Brewers general manager), Sal Bando (Brewers), and Bob Boone (Phillies). Barry Rona and Don Fehr attend and take notes. Ray Grebey and Marvin Miller attend occasionally.

November 9, 1980. The re-entry draft is held at New York's Plaza Hotel for 48 players. Dave Winfield later signs a ten-year, \$13 million deal with the Yankees.

1981

February 19, 1981. Ray Grebey announces (per the terms of the CBA) that the Joint Study Committee had not been able to reach an agreement and that the owners are unilaterally putting their compensation proposal into effect.

February 25, 1981. The Association's Executive Board meets in Tampa, and votes 29-0 to set a May 29 strike date.

April 20, 1981. Federal mediator Ken Moffett is once again engaged to help negotiations.

May 7, 1981. Claiming that the PRC is no longer bargaining, Marvin Miller files an unfair labor practice charge with the NLRB. The players petition asks that the owners turn over financial data to prove their claims of huge losses.

May 27, 1981. The NLRB issues a complaint in support of the Association, asking that the owners supply the data requested by Miller and asking for an order to delay implementation of owners' plan for up to one year.

May 28, 1981. Representatives for both the players and owners meet with NLRB officials. The players postpone a strike decision until the US District Court rules on the NLRB's complaint.

June 3, 1981. The NLRB's injunction request is heard in US District Court in New York by Judge Henry Werker.

June 6, 1981. The MLBPA offers a new compensation proposal. The clubs would create a pool of MLB players from which teams losing free agents could choose.

June 10, 1981. Judge Werker rejects the NLRB's petition for an injunction, further ruling that the players must go on strike within the next 24 to 48 hours or forfeit their right to do so. Marvin Miller, acting for the players, issues a directive announcing the strike will take effect on June 12.

June 11, 1981. With the deadline a day away, Moffett holds an all-day negotiating session. At 12:30 a.m. Miller announces that the strike is on, and removes himself from further negotiations (since owners consider him a roadblock). The elected player reps plus attorneys Don Fehr and Peter Rose will negotiate.

July 1, 1981. After missing seven sessions, Marvin Miller rejoins the negotiations.

July, 1981. During the first 48 days of the strike, 17 negotiating sessions are held. Chief union negotiators are Bob Boone (Phillies), Steve Rogers (Expos), and Mark Belanger (Orioles).

July 6-10, 1981. After several postponements, the NLRB hearing over the players claim of unfair labor practices against the owners takes place in New York. A decision is postponed until August 3.

July 8, 1981. Moffett submits a compromise plan to the players and owners. The players accept the proposal on the July 10, but the owners reject it the next day.

July 15, 1981. US Labor Secretary Raymond Donovan met with both sides to tell them of President Reagan's concern.

July 20, 1981. Negotiations move to Washington at Secretary Donovan's request.

July 22, 1981. After talks between player negotiators and owner's executive board break down, Miller: "I don't think there is going to be any baseball for a long while, possibly into next season."

July 25-27, 1981. The MLBPA holds player meetings in Chicago then Los Angeles to brief players.

July 31, 1981. Settlement announced at 6 am following all-night session at the Doral Inn. A "Type A" free agent is defined as being in the Top 20 pct. at his position based on statistical formula and requires team losing free agent to receive a major league player. Players vote 627-37 to ratify agreement; the owners vote 21-2-1.

1982

February 2, 1982. Of the three 1981 Type A free agents, two re-sign with their original clubs. The exception is Ed Farmer whom the White Sox lose to the Phillies. As compensation, on this date the White Sox select Joel Skinner from the Pirates as the first ever compensation pick.

November 10, 1982. The re-entry draft is held at the New York Sheraton for 41 players. The biggest salary went to Steve Garvey who receives a five-year, \$6.6 million contract from the Padres.

December 6, 1982. After Miller had earlier announced his retirement, the MLBPA names Kenneth Moffett as his successor, effective January 1, 1983. Miller will remain active for four months to ensure an orderly transition.

1983

January 1, 1983. Ken Moffett, the former director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, takes over as executive director of the MLBPA, replacing the retiring Marvin Miller.

February 1983. Fernando Valenzuela, represented by agent Dick Moss, wins the first ever \$1 million arbitration award.

November 7, 1983. The re-entry draft is held at the New York Sheraton. Of the 45 free agents, five are Type A: Kent Tekulve, Milt Wilcox, Doug Bair, Dennis Lamp, and Tom Underwood.

November 22, 1983. The MLBPA Executive Board fires Ken Moffett and names Marvin Miller interim chief.

December 8, 1983. The MLBPA names Donald Fehr acting director; Miller remains as a consultant and member of the negotiating team.

1984

1984. Gene Orza joins MLBPA as associate general counsel.

January 20, 1984. The White Sox select Tom Seaver from the Mets as free agent compensation for the loss of pitcher Dennis Lamp to the Blue Jays. Mets fans and the team's owners are stunned by loss of Seaver, an aging team legend, whom they did not protect from the compensation pool as they assumed no one would not take him.

June 21, 1984. After months of work and negotiation, the owners approve the Joint Drug Committee's drug treatment program, which the players had accepted on May 23. In general outline, if a club suspects a problem, but the player declines treatment, a three-person board of professionals will review the case. If the board recommends treatment and player declines, the commissioner can impose penalties.

October 1, 1984. Peter Ueberroth becomes commissioner, replacing Bowie Kuhn.

November 14, 1984. Negotiations kick off for a new collective bargaining agreement with Don Fehr leading the talks for the players and Lee MacPhail for the owners. Other player representatives: Mark Belanger (union official), Don Baylor (Yankees), Steve Rogers (Expos), Jim Beattie (Mariners), Kent Tekulve (Pirates). Others for the owners: Bud Selig (Brewers), Edward Bennett Williams (Orioles), John McMullen (Astros).

December 31, 1984. CBA-5 expires. The two major issues to be negotiated for the next agreement are the players share of the new television deal for their pension/benefit plan, and the owners desire to slow the rise in salaries.

1985

February, 1985. Ninety-eight players file for salary arbitration, all but thirteen settle. The players win six and lose seven.

February 27, 1985. In the CBA negotiations Lee MacPhail claims that clubs are struggling financially. Under collective bargaining rules, this requires the owners to make financial data available to the union.

March 12, 1985. MacPhail provides the union negotiators with financial data for the previous 13 years, which shows an industry profit only once, in 1978. According to the data, the clubs lost

\$92 million in 1982 and \$66 million in 1983 and project large losses into the future. Fehr subsequently asks for more details. The owners later trim back their projected losses.

Spring 1985. After examining the books, Stanford economics professor Roger Noll contends baseball actually made \$24 million in 1984, and that the so-called losses were caused by bookkeeping artifices such as charging sister companies below market rates for television, radio, concession, and parking revenue; mixing in real estate properties; and large executive salaries.

May 20, 1985. The owners offer up a comprehensive proposal:

- Teams with higher-than-average payrolls could not sign free agents unless they were for less-than-average salaries
- Trades for players who would put team above the average payroll would be prohibited
- All clubs must be under the 1985 payroll level by 1988
- Salary arbitration awards would be capped at double the player's previous salary.

May 22, 1985. Unhappy with the owners offer, the MLBPA Executive Board votes to authorize a strike.

July 15, 1985. The players' Executive Board meets in Chicago and sets a strike date of August 6.

August 1, 1985. Commissioner Ueberroth enters the negotiations; he terms the owners' offer "frivolous" and says they should "stop asking for the players to solve their financial problems."ⁱ He recommends that the owners drop their salary cap proposals, and the players agree to three years of service time for salary arbitration (up from two). He suggests the strike deadline be extended while talks continue on the pension contribution.

August 4, 1985. In renewed negotiations Don Fehr offers to accept less than one-third of the television revenue for the pension plan if the owners agree to use the difference to help poorer clubs.

August 6, 1985. The strike begins. Negotiators meet four times during the day.

August 7, 1985. Talks continue in the morning at Lee MacPhail's Manhattan apartment. Don Fehr, Marvin Miller, Mark Belanger, Buck Martinez (Blue Jays), and Kent Tekulve (Phillies) represent the players. The parties reach an agreement on CBA-6 shortly after noon.

November 1, 1985. Ueberroth speaks at a general managers meeting, advising attendees that long-term deals are not smart business. He further instructs that if they want to sign a free agent, he wants them to first justify the deal economically to him.

November 1985. Sixty-two players file for free agency, a new record; Detroit outfielder Kirk Gibson is generally considered best player available. In the event, only four sign with a new team, all marginal players unwanted by their old team.

1986

January 7, 1986. After receiving no free agent offers, Kirk Gibson (Tigers), Carlton Fisk (White Sox), Donnie Moore (Angels) and others reluctantly return to their old teams at much less money than they had hoped for. This is the last day that they can sign with their old clubs before waiting until May 1.

January 11, 1986. The MLBPA files a grievance against the drug testing clauses that some clubs are inserting into player contracts. The union contends that the clause needs to be collectively bargained.

February 3, 1986. Don Fehr files a grievance charging that the owners had colluded in not signing free agents this offseason. Clubs had also stopped offering any contracts longer than one year, and eliminated bonus clauses, interest on deferred payments, no-trade clauses, and no-trade provisions.

Early April, 1986. Commissioner Ueberroth sends a letter to players announcing his drug testing plan: four tests per year for two years for all players with drug testing clauses in their contracts.

June 30, 1986. Arbitrator Thomas Roberts rules the for union in the drug clause grievances. Reportedly, 459 players had such a clause in their contract. Players who had been disciplined by Ueberroth are also still subject to such a clause. Fehr suggests the union might be willing to make a deal for random testing if it was done through proper channels.

August 5, 1986. The PRC fires arbitrator Thomas Roberts after his ruling in the drug grievance. Don Fehr files a grievance on the firing because the collusion grievance was in process and in front of Roberts. The CBA prohibits firing an arbitrator mid-case.

September 11, 1986. Arbitrator Richard Bloch rules that PRC could not fire Thomas Roberts in the midst of the collusion proceedings.

November 1986. Seventy-nine players file for free agency, notably Jack Morris, Andre Dawson, Tim Lincecum, Lance Parrish, and Bob Horner. Once again, the players find a non-existent market for their services.

1987

January 8, 1987. If they do not re-sign by this date, they are prohibited from re-signing with their previous club until May 1.

March 9, 1987. Having received no free agent offers, Andre Dawson (with agent Dick Moss) shows up at the Chicago Cubs training camp and gives GM Dallas Green a blank contract to fill in. Green writes in \$500,000 and a few bonuses. Dawson signs, and wins the MVP award that season.

May 1, 1987. Four players--Rich Gedman (Red Sox), Ron Guidry (Yankees), Tim Lincecum (Expos), Bob Boone (Angels) -- who came through free agency empty-handed, sign with their former teams on the first day that re-signing is permitted.

September 21, 1987. Arbitrator Roberts finds for the players in the collusion grievance for the free agent class of 1985 (Collusion I).

November 1987. Seventy-six players become free agents, including Jack Morris, Dave Righetti, Gary Gaetti, Mike Witt, and Paul Molitor. Once again, there is no apparent market for any of them.

1988

January 5, 1988. The biggest name among the 1987 free agents, Cardinals first baseman Jack Clark, signs a two-year deal with Yankees for \$3 million. The market appears improved over the previous offseason, but, nevertheless, very few multi-year contracts are offered. A few players who switched teams include Mike Davis (Oakland to Los Angeles) and Brett Butler (Cleveland to San Francisco).

January 19, 1988. The union files grievance on behalf of the 1987 free agents (Collusion III).

January 22, 1988. Arbitrator Roberts rules that seven players from the 1985 free agent class are free agents again, giving them until March 1 to land a new deal without risking their current contract (Collusion I). The “new look” class includes Kirk Gibson, Carlton Fisk, and Joe Niekro.

August 31, 1988. Arbitrator George Nicolau rules for players in the collusion grievance for the 1986 class (Collusion II), noting that the evidence “convincingly establishes that everyone knew there was to be no bidding” for free agents who their previous team wanted to retain. Nicolau delays announcing a remedy until after the season.ⁱⁱ

September 8, 1988. The owners select Bart Giamatti (currently the NL president) as baseball’s next commissioner, effective April 1, 1989. Peter Ueberroth had earlier declined a second term.

September 1988. The owners establish a voluntary “information bank,” whereby teams can share information on which free agents they want to keep or pursue and what salaries they are offering. The union asks Nicolau to prohibit this practice, and the arbitrator said he would issue a ruling in tandem with Collusion III.

October 24, 1988. Arbitrator George Nicolau, ruling in Collusion II, grants new-look free agency to 12 players, including Rich Gedman, Bob Boone, Brian Downing, and Willie Randolph. Three of twelve switch teams: Boone (Angels to Royals), Randolph (Yankees to Dodgers), and Jim Clancy (Blue Jays to Astros).

November 1988. Seventy-four players become free agents, notably Bruce Hurst, Steve Sax, and Mike Moore. The three soon sign with new teams: the Padres, Yankees, and A's respectively.

1989

April 1, 1989. Peter Ueberroth is succeeded by A. Bartlett Giamatti.

August 31, 1989. Judge Roberts, in Collusion I, awards \$10.5 million to 139 players.

November 13, 1989. Ninety-one players file for free agency by today's deadline. Subsequently, Montreal pitcher Mark Langston signs a five-year \$16 million pact with the Angels. Mark Davis receives four years, \$13 million from the Royals.

November 28, 1989. Negotiations begin on a new CBA; the current agreement expires December 31. Barry Rona is replaced as PRC lead by Chuck O'Connor, while the MLBPA lead negotiators are Don Fehr, Gene Orza, and Mark Belanger.

December 14, 1989. Owners propose dedicating 48% of network TV/radio and gate receipts for player salaries in conjunction with a team payroll cap and floor. According to their scheme, if a team reaches payroll cap it could not sign any free agents other than their own. In addition, the owners want a pay-for-performance system for pre-free agency players to replace the current arbitration system. Fehr responds that this system would affect the mobility of free agents. Moreover, the pay-for-performance plan would eliminate multi-year contracts, guaranteed salaries, and the maximum 20% cut rule. At one point when Fehr asks O'Connor if the players would receive more or less money than under the existing system, O'Connor tells him, "I don't know."ⁱⁱⁱ

Phil Bradley (Orioles): "I felt kind of sorry for Chuck [O'Connor]. They sent him into a fight without any ammunition."^{iv}

Don Fehr: "For the players to accept revenue sharing, they're going to have to be satisfied it presents a situation for players at least as good in all respects as some variant of the current system would."^v The union head further contends there is no known economic problem in baseball.

December 31, 1989. CBA-6 expires.

ⁱ *The Sporting News Official Baseball Guide*, 1986.

ⁱⁱ *New York Times*, September 1, 1988

ⁱⁱⁱ *Sports Illustrated*, March 5, 1990.

^{iv} *Sports Illustrated*, March 5, 1990.

^v *The Sporting News Official Baseball Guide*, 1990.