

633 Victoria Terrace
Paramus, New Jersey 07652

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Rob Manfred
Commissioner
Major League Baseball
6th Ave Stes A & E
New York, NY 10020

Re: America's Naptime back to being America's Pastime?!

Dear Mr. Manfred,

At one point in time baseball was known as America's pastime. It was the number one sport in America in the way that it was the most popular and made the most money. However, in recent times sports such as American football (NFL), and basketball (NBA) have seemingly surpassed baseball in both profits and popularity. As stated in an article by the Denver Post, "average viewership for the World Series has declined dramatically since the 1970s, from 44.2 million in 1978 to a record low 9.8 million viewers in 2020" (Saunders). While looking at it closely these other sports have seemed to adapt to the times and made their games more exciting and more marketable to the casual viewer. I believe that a strategy can be applied to marketing the sport better through TV deals, social media, and merchandise, etc. that can really elevate the sport back to its prime. In this day and age technology dominates the media, and as a result the average person's attention span has dropped. This means that to get the attention of casual viewers you need something that will catch their eye. That's where marketing comes in. I am coming to you Mr. Manfred because as the commissioner of baseball I believe you can implement these changes to the league and really help the sport.

A Problem in Marketing

Baseball's biggest problem is its lack of marketing. What I mean by that is that not enough content and "hype" is put out about the league or players compared to other major sports leagues in the United States. To put this in perspective on Instagram for example (a very popular social media app) The MLB (Major League Baseball) has about 8 million followers compared to the NFL's 22 million, and the NBA's 60 million. To be fair these followers also consist of users outside of the United States, but still the picture is pretty clear. For a sport that dubs itself America's Pastime, it doesn't really seem like that is the case anymore. A reason that this is happening is because the MLB has not optimized its marketing capabilities.

First off “As of 2018, Major League Baseball did not allow fans to post any video highlights on social media accounts. Even worse, they only allow MLB teams to post two video highlights on team social media pages during a game” (P. Johnson). On top of that, the MLB also has poor TV deals where the new stations that they stream their games on are not able to stream on all types of platforms, which causes viewers to miss out on the games. The problem that baseball has does not pertain to the die hard fans, because no matter what those fans will stay dedicated to the sport. The problem is for the casual fans or swing fans who would tune in if games were more accessible or if they maybe were marketed better and thus enticed to tune in one day. The MLB is a billion dollar corporation so they definitely have the money to make these changes, it really comes down to executioning a proper plan.

Study #1 Star Power Diminishing

Popularity of sports are defined by the players. Fans love to relate to players that they can root for and relate to. Being able to wear your favorite players jersey, or see them make the winning play is something that most sports fans love. Having guys that are the face of the league very much contributes to the sports popularity because the more people that look up to those players, the more fans are brought into the sport. A study was done by The Q Scores Company comparing familiarity scores of the top athletes in each major sports league. In baseball the face of the league is often nodded to Mike Trout, the center fielder of the Los Angeles Angels. He is widely considered one of the greatest players of his generation and plays in a big market being in Los Angeles. According to the study, Trout only had a familiarity score of 22 (22% of Americans know who he is); “meanwhile, Tampa Bay quarterback Tom Brady[NFL] has an awareness rating of 79, and the Los Angeles Lakers’ LeBron James[NBA] has a score of 74” (Saunders). To put this in perspective again to Instagram, LeBron James has 100 million followers, Tom Brady has 10 million, and Mike Trout has 1 million. This is very concerning and just shows how poor marketing contributes to this fact. Mike Trout is just as talented in his sport as LeBron James and Tom Brady are, and on top of that makes more money in his contract than both of them as well. But still he is not as popular.

Study #1 Why is Star Power Diminishing for Baseball?

When looking at the overall statistics pertaining to popularity it becomes evident that baseball has not made themselves as widespread as other sports. I feel that everyday I see NFL players Aaron Rodgers and Patrick Mahomes in their State Farm commercials yet I do not see the same for MLB players. Even when it isn’t football season or isn’t basketball season I still see promotions for those sports. However, the MLB does not do a good job promoting outside the sport and outside the season. There are very few commercials that have MLB athletes in them. Even during the season sports channels such as ESPN cover the other sports more due to the MLB not having as much of a draw. If someone or something is seen more, more people are going to relate to that thing. More people know who LeBron James and Tom Brady are because

they are presented in the media more. If Mike Trout started showing up in State Farm commercials maybe he would be more recognized, but as of now the MLB has not taken advantage of that.

Study #2 - Team Equity and Forbes

Another study presented by Adam C. Merkle compared team equity in the MLB. Meaning that it compared how a teams overall popularity is determined by its TV viewership, social media followers, ticket sales, etc. It was determined by this study “that MLB teams should invest in and grow the effectiveness of both non-seasonal and in-season marketing assets” (Merkle). This conclusion was made because on average MLB teams are overshadowed by their NBA or NFL team that shares a city with them. The study showed that on average MLB teams have a lower team equity than other sports league teams because overall their attendance, merchandise and social media followers are not on par with the other teams that share their city. The only exception was the New York Yankees, which had a better team equity than the New York Giants (NFL), New York Jets (NFL) and New York Knicks (NBA). The idea of this study can also be shown through Forbes. Forbes has a yearly list of their top 50 most valuable sports franchises. Although this is not the same formula used to determine team equity by Merkle, it is similar and produces very similar results. According to the 2021 rankings, only 6 MLB teams made the top 50, while 9 NBA teams and 26 NFL made the cut. Both sets of data ultimately show that MLB teams have a much lower presence than other teams.

Study #2 How Bally Sports Plays into Team Equity

As I alluded to in the last study, team equity as calculated by Merkle has to do with many factors which include attendance, social media presence, Television, team performance, and marketing assets. Factors such as attendance and social media presence are problems that are definitely able to be fixed but are complicated problems that need to be approached with better marketing. When it comes to Television and or streaming games though there appears to be a clear problem. In recent years the MLB has failed to have their games accessible to everyone. In most major sports leagues there are a certain amount of games that are nationally televised, and then there are other games that are locally televised. However, the MLB has been known to enforce “blackout restrictions” in certain areas. This essentially means that “...fans either have to purchase expensive cable television packages, forgo watching games, or turn to illegal means” (Malmed). The MLB is able to do this because they were granted to do so due to a supreme court ruling in 1972. Networks are allowed to exclusively air team games through one platform that may not be available on every platform. An example of these blackout restrictions comes from March 2021. In March many regional MLB broadcasts switched from FOX Network to a new one called Bally Network (Due to Disney acquiring FOX). This became a problem because “as detailed by Forbes’, the change has had a direct impact on MLB ratings. Because Bally Sports doesn’t have agreements with YouTube TV, Sling TV and Dish, it loses out on a significant

percentage of a potential audience. The results have led to regional ratings dropping in several markets” (M. Johnson). As you can see this a prime and current example of the black restrictions because one network (Bally) has control of the game and just because they are not accessible on many of the platforms that people use to watch the game listed in the quote above, now all these fans that were used to watching on these platforms are left high and dry. Now a die hard fan of the sport will probably find a way around this either using illegal ways to watch the game or something else, but casual fan probably won’t put in effort to watch the game as it isn’t that important to them and they can probably find an NFL or NBA game that is that is much easier to access. This all connects back to team equity because when a MLB team in your area is not accessible for you to watch then that team has poor equity, even though it's not even their fault.

The Plan for Major League Baseball

Now it's time to lay out a plan for all of this. Let's first focus on the smaller things and work our way up to fix the whole problem. The main problem has to do with better marketing and increasing overall team equity. I think a good first step to approach would be social media. Social media in today's culture is huge that every corporation needs to take advantage of to be successful. In the past it may have been a nice add on but it is essential now with how digitized everything has become. As I stated earlier in the paper, the MLB did not allow fans to post any MLB licensed videos, and even limited teams to a certain number of posts as well. In their minds the MLB may be thinking that this is good for them since no one can steal their content, but when they are struggling in viewership I think it's something they need to let go. Having fans repost highlight videos on social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) or on sites like YouTube would be very beneficial as it would lead to many new eyes and interest in the sport. There is a huge market for people on social media to make sports accounts where they repost game highlights, post the scores, photos, edited videos, etc. The MLB blocks this market and the huge potential of it with these restrictions. Baseball has always been a sport that tried to stick to its old ways but it has “seemingly chosen to view social media as something that could harm its business. And now, they are living the consequential aftermath of such decisions” (P. Johnson). To piggyback on this point MLB players also need to optimize their popularity. The reason that guys like Tom Brady and LeBron James are so much more well known than popular MLB players is because of their presence outside of the sport. Whether it be endorsements, commercials, clothing deals, etc. MLB players are not doing enough to promote themselves and the sport. Most casual fans know for example Green Bay Packers Quarterback Aaron Rodgers from his State Farm commercials and Jeopardy game show host appearances than from his football games. The key here is to attract the casual fans. There is not much to do to attract sports fans as they are already invested in the product no matter how bad the MLB’s marketing is. Mike Trout is making more money (in his contract, not in general) than both LeBron James and Tom Brady, so a guy like him should take advantage of that to be seen more which will in turn help baseball as a whole. I’m sure many companies would love to use an athlete as decorated and as rich as Trout or other popular baseball players to promote their company. At the end of the day

Trout still has over a million followers so it's not like he is a nobody, there is just a potential for many more followers and fans to come his way.

Next the biggest problem revolving around team equity has to do with fixing the whole problem with how to view the game, and maybe even brainstorming ideas of things to add in to make the whole experience of baseball better. The biggest problem has to do with these blackout restrictions. They need to be abolished and MLB games need to be accessible on virtually every platform. In the NFL games are streamed on channels such as FOX, NBC, ESPN, CBS, ABC, etc. These are all channels that are accessible without just cable. On top of that games can be streamed on apps and through many other devices such as smartphones, computers, smart TVs, fire sticks. The MLB currently does not have these same features and it severely limits the fan outreach that they can have. To fix this the easy solution would be to follow a very similar structure to the NFL. If Bally Sports cannot be streamed on certain platforms then MLB needs to find a service that will. Not everyone is fortunate enough to pay for cable, which is why less expensive options need to be present because those options contain a lot of potential viewers. I think a potential solution could be to follow the way that the NBA and NHL stream their games. The NFL only has a 17 game season compared to the MLB's 162 game season so it would make more sense to follow the NBA and NHL which have 82 game seasons. Both the NHL and NBA stream their games between ESPN, ABC, TBS, TNT, and now potentially FOX (since Disney just acquired FOX and Disney already owns ABC and ESPN). These channels are accessible from many different platforms unlike Bally.

Lastly, a big thing that needs to be addressed in this plan is how to just overall improve team equity. As I stated earlier, according to Merkle and Forbes, MLB teams rank the lowest in overall equity and value between teams from the NFL, NBA, and MLB. We discussed television, and social media, but the last thing to touch on is how to increase excitement for the game. The MLB has proposed rule changes to increase the pace of play, however, to propose that would not be fair because we are looking for immediate changes and not ones that will take a while. So it is important to focus on what can be changed now that will be ready for next season. So what other ways are there to generate excitement rather than social media, TV deals, or optimizing player popularity? The answer lies within sports rivalries and special games. It has been found that, "fans exhibit nuanced behaviour related to the absolute quality and relative quality" (Mills) of teams in their area. This means that fans quality of games entice fans more according to research. This could mean games of importance (rivalry games or playoff implication games), and or special themed games. Both the NBA and NFL do a great job of presenting special themed games. The NFL does a game in London and in Mexico every year, and the NBA does special Christmas and Thanksgiving Day games just to name a few. The MLB has done a few of those kinds of games but nothing really special until they did the Field of Dreams game this past year. For those who don't know, Field of Dreams is a classic baseball movie that even non baseball fans don't know. This past year the MLB did a game at the sight of the movie and it "was the most-watched regular season MLB game in 16-years. Over 5.9 million viewers tuned into Fox to

watch...” (Lee). If the MLB can grow off of this they can really make a push against the NFL and NBA. Doing more Movie themed games, or special games will sell tickets in an instant, especially if it's something that a lot of people can relate to. Going back again to the Aaron Rodgers example, he has become a mainstream person to a lot of people for his work outside of football. So using mainstream things to promote the game will lead to many more eyes on it.

The Budget

This budget is going to be based primarily on new staff in the social media department since there needs to be a drastic change with how that is run. Next with the streaming services the way they work is that they pay the MLB to stream their games and in return get a piece of the revenue from the games that are aired. For that part the MLB will just need to reach out to other mainstream platforms who I am sure would love to pick up the MLB. Although I have seemed to talk down a lot about the MLB's viewership, let it be known that Major League Baseball still has millions of fans and is still more popular than other major American sports leagues such as the NHL and MLS (Major League Soccer). The last part of this budget will go towards making cool themed event games such as ones like the Field of Dreams game. This will also require an increase in staff due to all the new workload. According to Indeed.com MLB social media workers are paid around \$60,000 a year. Increasing staff by at least 100-300 people (assuming that with the 30 teams in the league that there will be 5-10 new employees assigned to each team. This will cost an extra \$18 million roughly. According to Gary M. Bloom the Field of Dreams field cost roughly around \$6 million to build. Doing more events similar to this each season will cost around that mark each time. The MLB should aim for around 3 different special games a season. This will bring the new cost around \$36 million, while also taking into account that streaming services pay the MLB to stream their games. The MLB averages around 9 billion dollars in revenue every year so this extra cost of around \$36 million should not hurt as in the long run it will help the league make a bigger profit.

Let's Get Back On Top

Baseball has for sure tanked from what it once was, but without a doubt if the current model of the league is changed for modern times, viewership will increase. The NBA and NFL aren't more popular because they are better sports, they are just better managed in the way they promote their league and players. It all depends on correct marketing at the end of the day. It all depends on people seeing the product and promotion from the product. Whether it comes from the players, social media, television, ads, etc. all press is good press for the league. I hope you can reach out and give your opinion on my proposal. I will be presenting my research at the College Ave Student Center, at room 1258 on May 1st, 2022 at 1:00 pm on College Ave Campus, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Please feel free to reach out to me at amm860@scarletmail.rutgers.edu if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for time Mr. Manfred, I look forward to speaking with you!

Sincerely,



Anthony Mania

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