

An Inside Look at How the Union Works in Major League Baseball



Doyle Pryor spent 20 years as the Assistant General Counsel for the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) from 1992-2012, and was heavily involved in negotiations during the 1994-1995 baseball strike.

Question: Do you believe that unions play an important role in sports?

Absolutely. A guy like Derek Jeter has a lot of bargaining power when negotiating his salary with a team. However, for every Derek Jeter there are a hundred players who don't have that star power and need a union to help negotiate salaries, benefits, working conditions. In a 6 month period baseball players have to travel 200,000 miles to play and work 7 days a week- what other job has that schedule? It's important under those intense conditions that players still have rights to a fair work environment, and unions help to negotiate that with the owners and the league.

Question: Can you comment on drug testing and what, if any, role the union plays a part of it?

The union was very instrumental in negotiating what the drug testing system would look like as it fundamentally protects most of our players from having to compete at a disadvantage against players who cheat. Many people see the union as an impediment to drug testing or feel we are trying to protect players who cheated, but the truth is that we strongly advocate for drug testing as it keeps the playing field level for the majority of the players. Both the union and the management agree on how important it is to keep the game "clean."

Question: Would you be able to comment on the specific case of Alex Rodriguez?

Yes, if evidence is found that he in fact was doping then he should receive a punishment. The issue is, does he deserve the punishment of a 211 game suspension that he was given- which was very different from other players found guilty for the first time. The rule is that the first time any player caught doping he is suspended for 50 games. So the question is, if this is Rodriguez's first time, then is it right for him to receive a more severe punishment than the other players? What could happen is that he and the management of the Yankees can meet with an arbitrator- a trained third party person who would not gain or lose by the decision- and allow them to make a final decision on what should be done.

Question: Is there anything else that we should know about the union's role in baseball?

Baseball was the first union to be set up in professional sports with a charity built into it. It is called the Players' Trust and most people don't know about it. Players earn royalties for things like baseball cards, video games, etc. and the Trust is set up to automatically receive a portion of those profits. The union runs the Trust for the players and contributes millions of dollars to charitable causes at home and around the world.