**Weekend 405 Baseball Transcript**

Dave Iverson: This is my most vivid baseball memory. It's 1963, the city junior high championships. I play second base. It's the bottom of the last inning. My team is up by a run. There's one out. The other team, Ensenal junior high, has runners on first and second. One out. The batter hits a bounding ball to the third baseman who fields it cleanly and fires towards me at second base. I can still see that ball coming at me. Still see it go right by me out into right field. Two runs score, we lose the game.

I can still remember walking off the field that day and having two thoughts. One, I'd somehow managed to single-handedly blow the city junior high championships. And two, it'd be the last competitive game I'd play. I wasn't good enough to play at the high school level. Still, none of this kept me from having a ready response when my coach hollered at me as I came off the field, "Iverson, what the hell went wrong?" I said, "Coach, swear to God, the ball curved." That's baseball.

The following is a special presentation of *Weekend*, brought to you by Wisconsin Public Television. There's something terrifically common in these shared emotions. The baseball game is this great metaphor, but finally you learn it's about time, it's about memory, it's about family, and it's about home. And those four things get you up in the morning. Play ball! It's his favorite pastime. I grew up with it, I love to play it, love to watch it. Great game. I think baseball is the best sport there is. It's a lot of fun to watch. This is our son's eighth birthday today and he wanted to come to a Hatters game. He connects, a long ball going out of the left field, Medwich under it, but it's a home run, a home run.

As a little kid I can remember my parents taking me to my first game, and I think it carries on from generation to generation. My dad played in the big leagues for 14 years and I more or less grew up around it. So ever since I've known, I've been around baseball. My last game was last night. And the fans scream, it's a home run, it's in the net! [music] Good evening, I'm Dave Iverson. Welcome to our special baseball edition. The front page of the sports section this morning had two baseball headlines. Players set strike deadline and Texas pitcher throws a perfect game. That's the way baseball is. Good news, bad news. Perpetually bittersweet.

Here's how we'll spend our baseball hour. Coming up, a preview of the new Ken Burns baseball documentary and an interview with the award-winning filmmaker. Later, Steve Jandesek looks at the issues that threaten to shut down Major League Baseball. We'll have comments from Bud Selig, Sal Bando, and a notable collection of sports reporters. Also tonight, a look at a Wisconsin connection to the most famous of all baseball scandals. The story of when two of the Black Sox came to Baraboo. And you can't do a show about baseball in our state without remembering the Braves of '57. Baseball is a game of remembrance. The pull of the past is part of what makes it special.

But baseball also reflects modern-day America. The good and the not-so-good. That's the point of a new PBS mega series, *Baseball*. It's a series filled with celebration, sadness, sacrifice, and greed. We begin our hour tonight, which after all is only as long as it takes to play three innings, with a preview of *Baseball* and an extended interview with its creator, Ken Burns. Let us go forth awhile and get better air in our lungs. Let us leave our close rooms. The game of ball is glorious. — Walt Whitman.

*Baseball*, the simply titled, much-anticipated, long-awaited 18-hour documentary series, is coming to PBS this fall. Creator Ken Burns thinks of baseball as the American Odyssey. Part myth, part metaphor, completely American. The film's narrator is John Chancellor. It is played everywhere. In parks and playgrounds and prison yards. In back alleys and farmer's fields. By small boys and old men. Raw amateurs and millionaire professionals. It is a leisurely game that demands blinding speed. The only game in which the defense has the ball. It follows the seasons, beginning each year with the fond expectancy of springtime and ending with the hard facts of autumn.

Americans have played baseball for more than 200 years. While they conquered a continent, warred with one another and with enemies abroad, struggled over labor and civil rights, and the meaning of freedom. The object of this game is to come home. What a wonderful object for a game amidst touchdowns and slam dunks and other things. This is about coming home. And that has allegorical and metaphorical and spiritual meaning. And it just means what it is. You travel around the bases. It's pretty scary territory out there. You have lots of life lessons and you finally get home.

Ken Burns is best known for creating the documentary series *The Civil War*. We talked about what he thinks of as the other great American story in a lengthy interview at Milwaukee's County Stadium. One of the interviewees in your film makes the statement that America will be known for three things: the Constitution, jazz, and baseball. Why is baseball a great American contribution? I think like jazz music and like the Constitution, it's about improvisation and the art and the glory of improvisation. All of these things are rigid structures into which we allow life to flow through.

And the beauty of our Constitution is its flexibility over 200 years to adjudicate all of our problems. And jazz has that great moment when the musician has departed from the theme and then returns triumphantly back to it as if lawfully impelled to restate the theme. And baseball, too, it's a game filled with absolute rules, and yet every park is unique. And within those rules is this glorious, never-before-seen drama. And because it's played every day and because of a thousand reasons, it's not only the greatest game but something that can stand as a metaphor for the country and do so without pushing it too much.

How do you see it as a metaphor today? I understand, I think, how it can be a metaphor for how time—time and the way in which this country has progressed. It's less clear to me how it's a metaphor for the '90s. Well, I think you could look at the game of baseball and quite reasonably come to the conclusion that it was suffering from an identity crisis. You could see that the game was beset by many of the same things that beset our larger national narrative.

You know, when Pete Rose goes to jail, his crimes are just on a smaller scale than Mike Milken's. They're the same crime, in essence—a sense of being above the law, of feeling oneself free of what the rest of us mere mortals are required to do. And I think that it still is. As a historian, as an amateur historian, I'm loathed to really try to label categorically the present. I don't think we have enough time, distance from this moment to do that. But I think it will always be a reflection of who we are.

At its heart lie mythic contradictions—a pastoral game born in crowded cities, an exhilarating democratic sport that tolerates cheating and has excluded as many as it has included. A profoundly conservative game that often manages to be years ahead of its time. It is an American odyssey that links sons and daughters to fathers and grandfathers. And it reflects a host of age-old American tensions—between workers and owners, scandal and reform, the individual and the collective.

Is there a danger, though, in—or maybe you would say you don't—but in romanticizing baseball too much and investing it with too many metaphorical qualities, especially when there may be a strike? I think this is a terrific danger. It's terrific in all of history. To be nostalgic is to yearn for the past, to make the past into something it never was. To say that the '30s and '40s were somehow a simpler time is forgetting the greatest economic crisis and the greatest war in the history of humankind. We live in simpler times compared to the '30s and '40s.

We don't want to do that, and we haven't done it in this series. We say that if you're going to lift up the rug of history and sweep out the dirt, you won't diminish that rug—that baseball can survive knowing its dark side. Burns believes baseball teaches lessons about the value of team, the value of the whole—lessons, he says, about democracy. There are many rhythms and forms to our democratic nation, and baseball seems to contain and encompass many of them.

There's this wonderful fault line between the community and the individual that baseball points up all the time. In other sports, you can go to your best player every single time if you want. If that's what you want to do, Michael Jordan can get that ball every single time. He's now playing a game called baseball in which he comes up only once every nine times at bat. That's just glorious. That's wonderful. It means that you are involved in a community activity and pulling it together.

I wonder why kids in the inner city don't play games. We've lost a sense of community. Baseball teaches community. Baseball is a kind of secular American religion. In a society that doesn't have a national religion, baseball provides, I think, a very legitimate alternative. We sit in the great cathedrals of this religion... and the Babe swings. It's a long run. It's in there. A little home run for the Bambinos. Colabay hits his second home run of the day... starts that windup.

Here's the pitch for the second strike. Here's the pitch. Swings on a low fastball for strike three. Now comes up Joe DiMaggio. He connects. A long ball going out in the left field. Medwich under it, but it's a home run. A home run. We'll get this ovation for Joe DiMaggio... with a good lead. There he goes. He hits the dirt and he's safe... Pitches. William swings. There's a high drive. It is a home run against the right field. The two-two of May. The swing ground ball, third base side. Brooks Robinson's got it. Throwing from foul ground toward first base. It is in time.

What's your worst baseball memory? My absolute worst baseball memory was in October of 1986, ten days, fifteen days before my second daughter was born. I was in Kansas City working on a film. I was in a hotel room with three other passionate Boston Red Sox fans. We're in the sixth game of the World Series. We had it won. For twelve separate pitches, we were one strike away from a world championship that had eluded us since 1918.

Do I say a ground ball in this story?

Actually, there was a wild pitch or a pass ball, depending on how close you want to argue this thing, which tied the game up. And then a ground ball that should have been fielded by the first baseman, Bill Buckner, and wasn't, as baseball will always deliver you these crushing blows. The Red Sox lost the game, and it was clear from that very moment that they would also lose the series, even though they had another chance at it.

And that was my worst baseball moment. I still hear about it. I still can kind of shake with the pain of that memory. Being a Red Sox fan means you have to sort of accept pain.

What's appealing about a loser? Well, loss is what life is all about. You know, we're going to die. The ultimate loss. All the other sports suggest a kind of immortality, which is impossible. Baseball doesn't. It's played every day. The greatest players fail seven times out of ten and still go to the Hall of Fame.

This game will always break your heart. It's designed to break your heart. That's what Jamadi said. There is this sense that you can watch this game and be humbled, that you can sit here and love your team, whether it wins or loses, because you're loving yourself. There's something about identity involved in the attraction to a team. It isn't just about winning.

I wanted to ask you about language in baseball. As many people have observed, including Bob Costas in your film, baseball allows for conversation. Is that part of the appeal to you, that words are a part of this game? To me, baseball is like breath. It's about inhalation and exhalation. And there are moments and pauses in this game that allow you to reflect. And it's wonderful. We talk about the games, and language becomes part of it.

Anecdotes. We keep finding the same anecdotes turning up in every generation of the games. Something that was told about Walter Johnson gets told about Lefty Gomez, Bob Feller, the next pitcher, Whitey Ford, Sandy Koufax, Roger Clemens. We want to hand down the oral lessons of our culture, which involves a lot of myth, too.

So, when Walter Johnson supposedly got two strikes on a batter who finally just walked away, and the umpire said, "Hey, wait a second, you've got a third strike coming," the batter said, "You can have it. It won't do me any good." I've heard that variously about dozens of players. Or the player who takes three quick strikes from a fastball pitcher and then turns to the umpire and says, "That last one sounded a little low."

And what's the story that I read about, that I think is in the film as well, about the dying manager? Oh yeah, he says, "What's killing you?" The coach of the Miracle Braves, Stallings, I think it was. The joke goes, "What's killing you?" and the guy says, "Bases on balls. Bases on balls." Or the guy who said, "How can you be such a fanatical Red Sox fan? Surely, you've got to have some balance in your life. If this rowboat we were in started to sink, and there was only one life jacket, who would you save? Your father or Ted Williams?" And the guy says, "Are you kidding? My father can't even bat 200."

Tell me finally your all-time favorite baseball story. Without a doubt, my all-time favorite baseball story is the moment on April 15, 1947, when a proud grandson of a slave, a man named Jack Roosevelt Robinson, put on a Brooklyn Dodgers uniform and walked out of the dugout to begin playing first base for the first integrated team in professional baseball in the 20th century. That moment was a glorious moment for the Brooklyn Dodgers, a triumph for Branch Rickey, and the beginning of one of the most heroic stories and men I've ever met—Jackie Robinson—and one of the great moments in American history and world history, I think. It's a beacon of real heroism.

We're in such an age where we have forgotten to select for heroes. We're so interested in building people up artificially and then tearing them down sort of maliciously and sanctimoniously, and we forget that heroism is always complicated. It's always tainted by a dark and complicated side. To survive as a people, we need individuals we can collectively agree, "Yes, this is someone whose life I respect." I can think of no one in the 20th century more deserving of our respect than Jackie Robinson.

And is that, in the end, what baseball provides—the opportunity for those moments? It's not so much that. It seems to me the opportunity to tell a story is an opportunity to replace the ordinary with something extraordinary. To just place in front of us a pantheon of heroes that could be legitimate heroes, to place before us the continuing, ongoing dialogue of what it means to be an American, to have stories. It's like a family album that you can open up and say, "Geez, there's Ty Cobb. Boy, he was a mean son of a bitch. And over here, Babe Ruth. Boy, what a lust for life he had. And here's Jackie Robinson. Do you know, my son, what this man did?" This is a great family album, and it's an opportunity to find out more about ourselves.

That's it. It's basically that simple. And to enjoy a great game. If you don't know the game, come on in the tent. There's plenty of room. More seats are available. If you do know it, I don't need to say anything more. It's just the greatest game that's ever been invented.

We'll show you some additional clips from Ken Burns' series, *Baseball*, over the course of our hour. We also want to let you know when the show's going to be on. There will be a sneak preview of *Baseball* on August 16th at 8 o'clock, and then the full 18-hour odyssey begins Sunday, September 18th at 8 p.m.

[music] Famous wordsmith and baseball legend Yogi Berra said, "It ain't over till it's over." Well, coming up next on *Weekend*, a report on this week's strike developments, like déjà vu all over again, and the outlook for the future of the Brewers in Milwaukee.

[music] Baseball is a beautiful thing. It's more beautiful in an old park that's asymmetrical and quirky. But even—and I hate to say this because it might encourage them—even in a dome with artificial turf, it's beautiful. The way the field fans out, the choreography of the sport, the pace and rhythm of it, the fact that that pace and rhythm allows for conversation, reflection, opinion, and comparison.

But will Bob Costas, the NBC broadcaster, get a chance to broadcast the division playoffs? Yesterday, the Baseball Players Union set a strike deadline of August 12th. Unless the huge gap between the owners and players is resolved by that date, the players will walk. The issues include salary caps, revenue sharing, free agency, and salary arbitration. In other words, money, money, money, and money.

What does it mean for Milwaukee, the Brewers, and their fans? *Weekend* producer Steve Jandesek talked with Brewer GM Sal Bando and has this report. This strike date comes in the midst of negotiations between Major League Baseball players and owners for a new labor agreement. The 28 Major League owners have presented a plan to the players that calls for a team salary cap. The players, who earn an average salary of $1 million, want a free market with no limit on what they can earn.

With no agreement in sight, the players voted to strike on August 12th.

And from that standpoint, I would like to see the Players Association have an open mind to see that it could be a win-win situation for both groups. Even if the players agree to a salary cap, the Brewers need to raise additional revenue if they are to stay in Wisconsin. Here's what Bud Selig told *Weekend* last summer:

"We need to sell more season tickets here. We've said that now for years. We need a cable deal. We need to sell all of our boxes. We need a new stadium. In today's economic environment, whether you like it or not, these are necessary—they're not options anymore. They're necessary things that we need to make this a sustaining, economically viable franchise."

The Brewers have four different sources of revenue. One is broadcast rights. The large market teams have local broadcast rights that are between three and ten times more than the Brewers. We have no cable contract. In fact, I think there are only two teams in baseball that do not have a cable deal—it's ourselves and Kansas City. So, we do need some type of cable network to be able to show our product. We need to move in that direction.

The second revenue source is attendance. When I first got the team and we came here, we thought if we drew a million people in those days, that was terrific baseball. Today, if you're not drawing 2.3 to 2.5 million, you are in some serious trouble. The last time the Brewers reached 2 million in attendance was 1983, the year after they went to the World Series. Attendance figures for this year show the Brewers are fourth from the bottom in home attendance in the American League.

Other sources of revenue for the Brewers include the sales of souvenirs and advertising on the outfield wall, scoreboard, and behind home plate. But these are a small part of the Brewers' revenue. When you put together a budget, you say if we draw X amount of people and if we receive this type of revenue from all different sources, we can spend X amount on players. Then what usually happens is you never meet those expectations, and you end up losing money because your revenue streams weren't as good as you thought they were going to be, or you go ahead and you spend it and maybe you spend a little more trying to win, and you don't win, or you have bad weather, or people just don't show up for some reason, and you can't conduct business that way.

You need a foundation of so many tickets, and that being incorporated into group sales and season tickets, that you know whatever happens, you've got X amount of dollars to work with, and you can survive. But Selig thinks some of these financial problems will be solved. But first, he needs the owners to share revenue and the players to agree to a salary cap.

You would hope that both parties would look at the best interest of the game and try to work it out. And my biggest problem is I find it very difficult to understand why we can't say, "Look, management, we have these problems. Players, we have these needs. Now how can we work together and give you what you need and you help us with what we need, and yet keep baseball where it should be—and that's the good, pure game that it's always been?" And I think you need people with pure hearts to do that and not their own agendas.

We'll have more on the strike situation later in the hour, but for now, let's just assume there won't be a strike and it's October, and we're all getting ready for the playoffs. Now, these will be the first held since we've gone to the three-divisional structure. Do you understand that structure? Do you care if you understand that structure? Well, Art Hackett has been trying to figure it out these last few days, and he's not too happy about it. Art?

**Art Hackett:** Thanks, Dave. I'm old enough to remember when the system didn't need an explanation. When there were only two leagues and no playoffs, you either had the best record, or you were given five months off to work on your golf game. But new expansion teams beget divisional playoffs, and divisional playoffs made TV networks happy, so they asked for more divisional playoffs. We got three divisions per league, which meant there had to be wildcard teams, and therein lies the problem we'll discuss this evening.

If the playoffs were held today, here's how it would work using the American League as an example. The three division leaders all make the playoffs. Today they are the New York Yankees, the Cleveland Indians, and the Texas Rangers. The Rangers' presence is laughable since, at two games under .500, they have the worst record of any division-leading team. In the AL Central, they'd be struggling to stay out of the cellar.

The wildcard team is Chicago, the White Sox. They are only one game behind Cleveland in the Central Division. Normally, the best team, the Yankees, would play the worst team, the Rangers, and Cleveland would play Chicago. But—and you knew there'd be a "but" in here, didn't you? There's a playoff rule few people know about. It says a wildcard team can't play the leader of its own division. So if the playoffs were held today, the Yankees would play Chicago and Cleveland would play the Rangers.

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Now, here's where it gets pretty scary. During the regular season, Texas leads their series with Chicago, seven games to five. And the Rangers, mediocre though they might be, might survive. A club--a sub-.500 club playing in a divisional championship series, which brings us to the meaning in all this. Since the teams in the National League West--take your pick, Dodgers, Giants, or Rockies--they're all losers too--we can all hope that the TV networks, who I hold responsible for all of this, will get what they truly deserve--the opportunity to broadcast a Colorado-Texas World Series.

Dave: Thank you, Art. We'll have more on whether or not there'll be playoffs later in our hour when three Wisconsin sportswriters join us to talk about those prospects. That's coming up later tonight.

[theme music]

And still to come on Weekend, the Baraboo-Black Sox connection and remembering the Braves of '57.

[theme music]

[crowd cheering]

There's a long drive way back in center field, way back, back it is.

[crowd cheering]

Willie May just brought this crowd to its feet with a catch which must have been an optical illusion to a lot of people. Willie May is the best. The sad saga of Shoeless Joe Jackson and the Chicago Black Sox will be featured, of course, in Ken Burns' baseball series, but here's a story that won't be told. It's about the summer two members of the Black Sox came to Sauk County. Art Hackett narrates producer Andy Soth's report.

[crowd chatter]

Now batting the center fielder, Royce Hazel. A summer night at the ballpark in Baraboo. They've played ball in this park since 1924. [bat cracks] Seven decades of runs, hits, and errors. Seventy years of stories played out in nine acts. But the most interesting story of all may be one from that very first year when two greats from that era's most infamous team met once again.

That's the story being uncovered and retold by this fan, UW-Baraboo physical education professor Steve Rundio.

"Well, it all began one day I went to get a haircut. The barber, he asked me if I had known that the Black Sox had played in Baraboo."

[piano music]

The Black Sox, the nickname given these eight members of the 1919 Chicago White Sox, responsible for baseball's worst scandal. In 1919, the Chicago White Sox had what was then a powerhouse. I mean, just a terrific ball team. They had won the world championship in 1917, had a good year in 1918. In 1919, again, they won something like 100 games, led the league in hitting, runs scored. They just overpowered everyone.

[piano music] And they were expected to overpower the Cincinnati Reds in the 1919 World Series. They went into the World Series heavily favored. Right before the series begins, the odds fall. Some smart money was bet on Cincinnati. That smart money was New York gambler Arnold Rothstein. He actually bribed these guys to throw the World Series.

The Chicago players were bitter about owner Charles Comiskey's stingy ways and became easy marks for gamblers. But the story was too big not to get out. During the next season, the eight players were banned from Major League Baseball. Interestingly enough, the White Sox again were leading the league, going to win another pennant. And then the confessions occurred in September, and they went into a tailspin.

The eight men out, including the legendary Shoeless Joe Jackson, all but disappeared. But had any Black Sox reappeared in Baraboo, Wisconsin? That question sent Rundio to the library. [typewriter ding] Reeling back in time through old newspapers, a story came to light.

"All of a sudden, one day, articles in the paper about Happy Felsch going to be playing in Sauk City for the Twin City Red Sox."

Happy Felsch, Milwaukee-born home run hitter from the 1919 White Sox, banned from the majors, was coming to Sauk City.

"We're not talking about a man who, you know, it's the end of his career, he's washed up, and now he's going to play for some little local team. I mean, he was at his height when the scandal broke and he was banned. So we're talking about a big event."

And across Sauk County in Reedsburg, another big event was underway. Buck Weaver, outstanding third baseman for the Sox, would play and manage the new team promoting the local dairy, Sorge's Ice Creams.

"Buck, he was an idol. You read the paper in there talking about the ball he played with, the kids valued it as if it were worth its weight in gold. They did a cartoon of a man standing there with his little boy, introducing him to the great Buck Weaver."

[camera shutter clicks] One little boy who met Buck Weaver was Bob Harper. This 82-year-old fly-fishing instructor still remembers his first job, bat boy for the 1924 Sorge's Ice Creams.

"But you never, ever let bats cross on a--because that is bad luck. That puts a double whammy on you if the bats get crossed. And a bat boy lets a bat get crossed. He isn't a bat boy very long. He's gone. Is that right?"

That's right. So how'd you learn that lesson? Buck told me. Harper was a bat boy for the Ice Creams that whole season of 1924 when Buck Weaver lived in this hotel in downtown Reedsburg. Happy Felsch lived on Dallas Street in nearby Sauk City. The two would meet many times that season. Buck Weaver, Happy Felsch, see him in action. And that's at Baraboo's new athletic field. That's pretty neat, isn't it? The new field in Baraboo was just one place that Buck's Ice Creams played Happy's Red Sox.

5,000 showed up in Edgerton to see a game. 2,000 at Sauk. 2,000 at Reedsburg to see a game. They're some big numbers. And they were seeing some great baseball. [cheers and applause] Some of the games had magnificent endings. They would go through the box scores from game to game, late in the inning, one or the other would be making a hit to save the game. Tied, bottom of the ninth inning, Buck's up, hits a screamer, makes a running circus catch to end the game.

It was a fierce competition fueled by Buck and Happy's shared past. Felsch and Weaver, they hated him. Weaver hated him. See, Felsch was one of the ringleaders of that. He was a crook. He admitted he was a crook. He took money to throw the series, and Weaver ended up losing, getting thrown out of baseball. A lot of people never realized that he had nothing, absolutely nothing to do with throwing the series.

The only thing he knew, inadvertently, was that he found out about the fact that some of them were planning to throw the series. And he didn't tell the authorities.

As the 1924 season wound down, no one suspected it would be Buck and Happy's last and only in Sauk County. The two greats would disappear once again, but not without a dramatic farewell from Buck Weaver. It's 1925. The teams are starting again, but without Buck, without Happy. The first game that Reedsburg plays, here's Buck in the stands. Now, I'm not making this up, you know, but it sounds like it. He's in the stands in street clothes watching. About the bottom of the 7th or 8th inning, he takes off his jacket and goes out, and he plays shortstop in street clothes. Doesn't he come up the next inning, gets a hit, steals second, scores the tying run, and they go on to win 3-2.

And then he was gone, and all that remains are the stories and this ballpark, where you can try to imagine a time when hundreds came to see two baseball greats. This used to be the only game in town 70 years ago. [laughing] But look, when you hear the crack of the bat. [piano music] You can't help but look when you know each crack of the bat is a new story being told. [cheering]

Remember what Yogi Berra said about playing the game? Yogi said baseball is 90% mental. The other half is physical. And there's more just ahead on our baseball hour. The Braves of '57 and our sports reporters talk about the future of the game. But first, another excerpt from the series "Baseball."

[piano music]

It's the game my father taught me how to play. It's, uh, time I saw things on a level playing. Something was rolling towards me, and it said "Spaulding" on it. I picked it up, instinctually would push it back. And those days, those summer days became fall days, became our Sundays together with my brothers and I and my dad whipping off his wicked curve. And, uh, I just remember how my hands hurt. And first, as I was afraid of the ball, and his, his coaching, you know, "Keep your shoulder in there, don't bail out, it's not gonna hurt you," you know. And, uh, that's what I remember.

Baseball writer Roger Angell once wrote an essay about the appeal of the original New York Mets, that unlikely collection of cast-offs and baseball misfits. In the end, Angell wrote, "There's more Met than Yankee in most of us."

The '57 Braves were derided by some as the team from Bushville when they went up against the Yankees in the World Series. You know what happened.

Here's another look at the Braves of '57 as produced by Gerilyn Goodman. ... to all in the 11th. One on, one out, Aaron the hitter. Hank swings. It's back, back, back. Home run for Henry. Here comes Johnny Logan heading for home. What a greeting he gets. Our Braves have clinched the pennant. The year was 1957, and the scene was bedlam in Bravesland as the National League champion Milwaukee Braves prepared to face the New York Yankees in the World Series.

Since their arrival in Beertown in 1953, the Braves had earned not only an impressive record but legions of devoted fans, who 30 years later still recount players' names with respect and great affection. Eddie Mathews. Fred Shanings at second. Johnny Logan at short. Del Crandall was a catcher. Joe Edcock. Warren Spahn was on the pitchers. Lou Burdette. Hank Aaron.

One fan who took his devotion to the Braves and turned it into a book is Milwaukee Bob Buege. Just 11 years old when the Braves won the series, Buege can still recall every double play, every foul ball, every RBI of the critical fourth game. The Braves had a lead of 4-1 going to the ninth inning. Warren Spahn was pitching, and it looked like a sure victory, which would even the series at two games.

And in the ninth inning, Elston Howard hit a three-run homer for the Yankees and tied it. Two on, two out. Howard at bat. He connects solidly, and the ball is going, going, gone. A three-run homer that ties the score. In the tenth, the Yankees scored to take a 5-4 lead, and things weren't looking good for the Braves. But then Nippy Jones came up to bat. Nippy Jones takes first after being nipped on the foot. He came up to bat and he was hit on the foot by a pitch.

The umpire at first said he hadn't been hit, but they examined the ball and found shoe polish and awarded Jones first base. A pinch runner scored on a double by Johnny Logan. And then Eddie Mathews came to the plate. Eddie Mathews hadn't gotten a hit in the first three games of the series. But in that game, he had gotten one hit.

And there was still an air of expectation when he came to bat. And there it goes. What a spot for a homer. There was just an upswelling of emotion, and the stands erupted. People stood and cheered for 15 minutes, as I recall, hugging each other and going crazy as if the series were over. But it wasn't over. Even at two games apiece, the Braves won the next one but lost the sixth game.

The climactic seventh game of the series was played in Yankee Stadium. I was at home watching it. Our school released us at noon so everyone could go home and watch it. They had a 5-0 lead in the ninth inning, and the Yankees managed to put some runners on base in the ninth. It looked threatening, but there was a hard-hit ball, I'm pretty sure Moose Skowron hit it, down the third baseline, and Mathews speared it with one hand. The Braves had won the series, and the city of Milwaukee erupted with joy.

There was a big celebration in downtown Milwaukee. Probably 100,000 people jammed the area, and unlike a celebration that would take place today, this one was completely orderly. Impresario Ben Barkin organized the official civic celebration. I will never forget when the networks were in my office, and they were saying, "Well, do you think people will turn out?" And I said, "Of course they'll turn out." "Well, will there be excitement?" I said, "Of course there'll be excitement." The crowds were unbelievable, and they came from all over, not only from Wisconsin but from the Midwest as well, because it was an exciting series. Everyone thought this was the team that belonged to the Midwest.

One of the celebrants was former Governor Martin Schreiber, who was a senior in high school at the time. Also, my dad was president of the city council in Milwaukee, and my dad, generally a straight kind of person, although somewhat fun-loving, put on one of those doodads where there's a piece of wire showing an arrow coming out of both sides of your head. He and former Mayor Frank Zeidler were pictured together in the middle of Wisconsin Avenue, with my dad having this arrow go through his head.

What exactly was the appeal of the Braves? What drives men like Bob Beege to devote two years of his life to chronicling their exploits, or his fellow Milwaukeean Tim Urban to spend 15 years and countless dollars amassing an impressive collection of Braves memorabilia? The Braves were an incredible team. So far, they produced three Hall of Famers. You had the greatest left-hander of all time, the greatest home run hitter of all time, and the greatest home run-hitting duo of all time. It was an amazing story.

The Braves were drawing barely 300,000 their last year in Boston. They moved to Milwaukee and instantly began drawing 2 million per year for the first 4 or 5 years. The city really took to Major League Baseball. It was exciting baseball, but more than that, it was the pride in the team that gave us such a lift and spirit.

During the series, the exuberance of Milwaukee fans was ridiculed by the sophisticated Yankees. When the Braves came back from a road trip, there was always a crowd waiting for them at the train depot, the airport, or anywhere else. The Yankees had never seen anything like it. They were completely shocked. Someone getting off the bus—some say it was Casey Stengel, though he denied it—made the comment, "This is really Bush," which is the ultimate put-down in baseball, referring to the minor leagues. The reporters picked it up immediately, and it spread around the city, becoming a catchword for the series. It almost became a source of pride that Milwaukee was "Bush."

The Braves, of course, moved to Atlanta, and the boys of summer of 1957 scattered across the country. A few remained connected to the game, most took up second careers, and some have passed away. All that remains of that magical team is their enduring record and a collector's memorabilia, which, for Tim Urban, evokes memories reaching far beyond baseball. People think, "Gee, that reminds me of something that happened when I was younger." It throws you back into that time period, and I think that's the neat thing about it.

In the land of the Chiefs and the home of the Braves
The world fell away
The Yankees proclaimed it a Bush League town
The Braves took up their tomahawks and mowed 'em down
Where they'd make the tops and the beer was the tops
The world fell away
It floats in the breeze on the land of the Chiefs
The home sweet home of the Braves

All right, enough of this. Enough of this nostalgia.

Baseball, as we all know, has a dark side as well. Money, greed, strikes, lockouts. It's time we consider a contrarian point of view, a reading from a book called *Field of Screams* by Richard Scheinen. Public Radio's Michael Hansen, a lifelong Cub fan, has soured a bit on the business side of baseball, much like Scheinen. Here’s an excerpt from *Field of Screams*, read by Michael Hansen:

Aren't you tired of it? It's been foisted on us for years now, decades even—all this literary bilge about how baseball is some sort of gentle art form, the game for poets. You know the titles—*The Boys of Summer*, *The Glory of Their Times*, *Baseball and the American Dream*. On and on it goes, the perpetuation of the big baseball myth. Worst of all is *Take Time for Paradise*, written by Bart Giamatti, the late commissioner of baseball. I mean, come on, you want to learn something real about baseball? Just talk to one of the hundreds of sportswriters who have been crushed to learn that their heroes are, by and large, a bunch of wealthy, arrogant men whose interests are limited to golf, women, and stereo equipment.

The big baseball myth casts the game and its heroes in a golden haze, as if it were some sort of ballet they've been performing all these years. Well, it's time for a reality check. I appreciate the well-executed squeeze play as much as the next guy, but everything that happens between the foul lines is not pretty. It's time to put some perspective on the myth.

That's no ballet, and that's no field of dreams. Thank you, Michael. So, finally tonight, we'll talk about the true nature of baseball. Joining us to do that are three baseball buffs who make their living by talking, writing, and reporting on the sport. We'll find out whether their heroes indeed only care about golf, women, and stereo equipment.

Joining us now are Andrew Cohen, who writes for *Isthmus Weekly* in Madison; Vic Feuerherd of the *Wisconsin State Journal*; and Jack Swanson of WTSO Radio. Let's talk briefly, if we can, about what we like about baseball, and then move on to today's news.

What do you like best about the sport, Vic? In terms of my profession, I like the daily aspect. It's a continuing story. It's not something like in football or basketball, where you have a 3-day or 4-day or week-long period of dead time. Baseball is every day. Listening to the segment on the Milwaukee Braves earlier, one of the fans mentioned that the Braves had the greatest left-hander of all time, obviously meaning Warren Spahn. My first reaction, as I said to Andy, was, "I think the guy forgot Sandy Koufax." And that's the beauty of baseball. I can sit there and say, "I think Sandy Koufax is the greatest left-hander of all time." There's always something to argue about in baseball, more so than in other sports. There's also time to argue about it—you don't miss a play while debating who's the best left-hander of all time.

I was going to say Lefty Gomez. You didn't see Lefty Gomez.

Jack, you make your living usually doing hockey play-by-play, but does the language and conversation, and the argument part of baseball—there's not time for that in hockey. Is that part of what appeals to you?

- The pace is entirely different, you're right. And I like the fact that in the summertime, when you're not going at 40 miles an hour, as you do in hockey, you can go at 3 miles an hour and talk about what's happening and hear the sounds: the crack of the bat, the ball hitting a glove. The pacing is different, and I like that, yes.

Are we in danger now, though, of losing that sense about the game? I mean, we were all chuckling at that last piece, you know, the land of the cheese, but there's also in that story this enormous pride that people felt about their team, our team. With the prospect of a strike, do we risk losing that quality?

- I think the myth of baseball will always exist, the romanticism that surrounds it, but I think our perspective, as we look at the corporate entity of Major League Baseball, if it hasn’t changed, it is changing—and for the worse. But as an individual, you always think back—I can think back to Swoboda making the diving catch in the '69 series. That’s an image I will always have, and it’s part of the romance of the game. But as we sit here and watch a bunch of rich people fight it out over something that we have a hard time comprehending, I think it's going to be tough.

Well, let’s talk about that. I mean, the revenue last year in baseball, as I recall, was $1.8 billion. The average salary is a little better than a million bucks a year. How did we get into this mess, Andy Cohen?

We paid them lots to watch them perform. We willingly part with $15 for a ticket when 10 years ago it was $5. There are more people watching than ever before, more people excited than ever before by baseball, and paying them isn’t hurting the game. I have no problem with the players making their fair share of what their labor produces.

So you don’t find it a bit souring to realize that a pretty mediocre ballplayer can make a half a million dollars a year? Well, I think that a pretty mediocre owner decided to pay the pretty mediocre player. If the owners just take care of their own house and decide, "We’re not going to overpay these guys." The salary bonds will get their $40 million because they’re worth it. But if they just declare everybody a free agent tomorrow, they’ll have more control of the salary structure.

Vic, you were making that observation earlier about how we ought to just open it all up—go all the way with sort of a free market system. Back in the mid-'70s, they used to laugh at Charlie Finley, he of the orange ball, the elephants and donkeys on the field, and the mustaches in the locker room. But Marvin Miller's greatest fear back in the mid-'70s when the free agency situation developed was that the owners would come around to Charlie’s thinking, which was to make everybody a free agent and let the market control the salaries. Right now, the owners want a salary cap and revenue sharing, but the revenue sharing is based on a salary cap. It’s not going to happen with the players just saying, “Yes, sure, we’ll do it.” But if you force the players' hands by saying, “Okay, we’ll give everybody free agency,” then you’ll see a cap in action on its own by natural economic forces.

Even though it’s hard to be sympathetic with the players, are the owners also, Jack, in a sense saying, “Save us from ourselves. We can’t figure this out, so we need to put all these rules into place because we’re afraid of the free market, in essence?” Well, it seems to me that’s true, but anytime there’s an issue of whether they’ve spent too much, they spend more. They give Ryan Sandberg $25 million or whatever, likewise Barry Bonds. I think, given their own head, the owners are going to spend whatever it takes to buy themselves what they need, except for certain small market owners who simply don’t have the money.

What’s going to happen? We’ve got a couple of weeks until the strike deadline. If there is a strike, and that seems a safe assumption, what’s the long-term impact on the game? I’m terrified for a franchise like Milwaukee. Despite Bud Selig crying wolf about how if he doesn’t get certain things in his contract, the franchise is going to have problems, I think if there’s a long strike—if this strike goes through September, October, and possibly into next year—it will have a longer-term effect on the Milwaukee franchise than if they didn’t have a strike and came to some kind of settlement.

What about the fans in all of this, Andy Cohen? You said that they keep coming and paying those increased ticket prices, but will they come back? There was a 50-day strike 13 years ago, and they came back. The funny thing about setting the strike date for August 12th instead of August 19th is that it preempts the fan strike day, which was called for August 13th. Of course, we know that back in '81 the fans tried this as well, and 95% of the people who showed up to the park said, "Hey, I’m going to the game."

Let’s pass on some advice, if we can, to fans. If you’re a fan—and we all are, the four of us certainly and most people watching—what do you do? If there’s a strike? Yeah, what do you do? Or in general terms? What do you do to hold on to this game that we all invest so much emotion and memory into? I think in the short term, you go and watch minor league baseball or town team baseball or Little League. You go to that little park in Baraboo and watch—that’s right. In the long term, if Milwaukee’s not there anymore, I’ll go to Chicago and watch Major League Baseball. I think fans will find baseball someplace when they start playing again.

How about watching endless showings of *Field of Dreams*? That’s right. Advice? I don’t know. What I will do is go back to coaching Little League next year. I had sworn it off, but if there’s no baseball for me in Milwaukee, Chicago, or Minneapolis, then I’ll go back and coach the little kids because it’s fun. It’s fun to watch them because they argue and fight with the managers and owners who control their actions on the field, but it isn’t over dollars.

I think one of the frightening things for the future of baseball, though, is that as you go by ballparks now, you don’t see kids just playing pickup baseball. Town team baseball isn’t as prevalent as it once was, and that frightens me for the future.

One sentence, prognostication if you would, please, about what’s going to happen. Want to destroy the game, but I think they will in the next couple of weeks. Strike? Yes, and I think when the owners realize how much revenue they’ll lose in the playoffs, they’ll bring them back. There will be a settlement.

- Don't forget, they don't have strike insurance this time. Last time they settled the day after the insurance was up. I don't think the owners intentionally want to destroy the game, but I think they will go right to the border of doing it this time, and I can see this one going through October. All right. Vic, Andy, Jack, thank you all. Thanks for joining us for our special baseball edition of our program. We'll get back to covering triviality, greed, ego, politics, I guess. That's what we'll do. A week from tonight, Art Hackett will be here as host. I'll be on vacation. I'm Dave Iverson. Thanks for joining us. Good night.

[jazzy piano]