

JK
4-11-67 237-4608

Tuesday

Jim: Re your query about any attitudes I might have encountered about the Braves.

In Phoenix I talked with Harry Sonneborn, the managing editor of the Milwaukee Sentinel, and Arville Schlaben, the ME of the Mil Journal, about the Braves. As a matter of fact, everybody wanted to talk to them about the situation. I have known both men for a long time, (I gave Sonneborn's brother his first job when he got out of Michigan State so I am certain that their remarks were sincere.)

Both men are really bugged about the Braves and organized baseball and are in a mood to hurt the Braves as much as possible. Sonneborn said, "Imagine what feelings go-and-so (his baseball writer whose name I don't recall.) must have to be without a job after covering baseball in Milwaukee for thirty-some years. We won't have any team after a year."

Schlaben says that the law is on their side and they intend to keep the Braves in Milwaukee as long as possible. He said that organized ball is scared stiff of the courts and the other owners want to let things simmer down and not make a fight to move to Atlanta next season.

He said it's tough to make a wife who wants to get a divorce keep on sleeping with her husband for another year but that is what they intend to do. He said they don't care if nobody goes to the games or if they don't sell a season ticket. He added that the Schlitz company had made a very fine proposition to keep the Braves but now even the brewery people, the city and county officials, the business community is united in the effort to hang on to the Braves through the next year.

I didn't encounter a single editor in Phoenix --- and the topic was well discussed --- who sympathized with Atlanta's effort to get a major league team, steal it was the term commonly used. They don't blame Atlanta because it appears that the Braves were going to move someplace anyway, but they are critical of the greedy owners. Ted Suits pointed out that when Cal Griffith hurriedly moved his club to Minneapolis to take advantage of that TV territory, that the owners became frightened of the consequences and stuck another club in Washington. They were afraid of government meddling.

Ted added that the majors in their December meeting in Houston reportedly will outline an expansion program for several years in the future. That will assign territory and give cities a chance to get ready. Whether it will affect the Atlanta move, I don't know. Ted says that Bflo is not in a good position because NY, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland encroach on our TV territory. We're in much the same situation as Milwaukee.

At the airport in Chicago I ran into Johnny McHale, the Brave GM with whom I went to school at ND. He told me that he has moved his family to Florida and that he has taken an apartment in Chicago where the club has moved its offices. He said, jokingly, that he sneaks back to Milwaukee under cover of darkness but I think he was uttering more truth than poetry.

McHale says the Joe Dock's citizens of Milwaukee don't care whether the Braves stay or not but that the politicians and city fathers are adamant. He said that the mayor of Atlanta (I think it was the mayor but if not the mayor some other high city official.) called the mayor of Milwaukee to arrange a quiet meeting in Chicago to try and talk the matter out and reach some conclusions. The Milwaukee mayor went to the hotel with several officials and was not in a compromising mood. He even summoned the press, according

-2-

to Johnny, and that precluded any chance of arbitration. McHale did not appear very confident about completing the move for next season.

My personal feeling is that the sports fan is very sympathetic to Milwaukee which has been a great sports town. They broke attendance records, built a new stadium, won a pennant and now will be left holding the proverbial bag.

As Sonneborn said, when Lou Ferini brought the Braves to Milwaukee, there was still a baseball team left in Boston. I think there is a possibility of government intervention into organized ball if the Braves go along with a Milwaukee-be-damned attitude.

The owners are scared of a court test of the reserve clause which keeps the ball players in something akin to peonage --- at least in the minors.

The culprit is television. Smits quoted a figure which I don't recall exactly but it was something like the Yankees make more money on television than 12 other major league clubs make selling tickets. And the Yanks, of course, keep it all. If they split the loot like the pro football leagues there would be no Milwaukee problem.

Hope this answers your query.....