

Now, a Word From the Real Moguls . . .

Fantasy League Club Owners Are Nervous About Lockout

By RICHARD ZITRIN

SAN FRANCISCO—The baseball owners are nervous. They sit at their breakfast tables reading the sports pages, with their travel plans in flux and major trades on hold. They don't know who is going to play for them, or when. No, these are not the 26 owners who locked out the major league players. These are the approximately half a million fantasy league owners who never even got the chance to vote.

A decade has passed since New York writer Daniel Okrent and nine of his cronies borrowed the name of their favorite French restaurant and founded the Rotisserie League. The restaurant is defunct, but the league spawned the baseball phenomenon of the 1980s. More and more fans take part in fantasy leagues each year. They draft their own major leaguers, make trades and compete against their friends through the actual day-to-day performances of the players.

But this year, the music has stopped. The lockout meant no pitcher and catcher reporting dates, no early spring phenoms, no spring training. And without base-

ball, the Okrent Fenokees and all the other fantasy teams across the country simply cease to exist.

Joe and Marian Murphy head to Arizona every spring about this time. For years, the Hon. Joseph P. Murphy Jr. sat on the California Superior Court. Now retired, he'd much rather be known as the man with the world's greatest baseball autograph collection. He's proud that his most recent autograph is that of Ted Williams, given back in 1940.

But in the spring, Joe Murphy's fancy turns to the Grapestompers, his fantasy league team. Each year, he and Marian tour the Arizona camps, looking for that one prospect who will put the Stompers (named for Sonoma County, home of some of California's most notable vineyards) over the top. This year, they planned to set up camp at Scottsdale, where they can keep an eye on their beloved San Francisco Giants and Oakland A's.

Will there be baseball this spring? Joe Murphy says yes. He points out that the game is too healthy for petty bickering. Only time will tell if he's being realistic or hopelessly optimistic. But most fantasy leaguers seem to agree that there won't be—there just *can't* be—a spring without base-



ball.

Jim Dawson's Sacrificial Flies of the Greater Shreveport (La.) Rotisserie League won three straight championships before Dawson decided to rebuild "for the good of the league." In a move reminiscent of the way Connie Mack broke up the Philadelphia A's in the 1930s, Dawson auctioned off his stars for draft picks last spring. Now, ready to use those draft picks in 1990, Dawson signed up to attend the Rotisserie League's fourth annual spring training meeting in Clearwater, Fla., to scout the upcoming talent.

The owners of the original Rotisserie League have made an annual pilgrimage to the sun. In 1987, they opened their trip to the public, meeting at Clearwater because of its proximity to six different spring training sites. Dawson attended that first year, and joined fellow fantasy leaguers in endless debates about such young stars as Kal Daniels of the Reds, Rob Ducey and Glenallen Hill of the Blue Jays, and Kevin Seitzer and David Cone of the Royals.

This year, Dawson hasn't made his plane reservations. But he, too, remains convinced there won't be a long-term lockout. He's already planning to use the lockout to strategic advantage against his fellow Shreveporters. He's going to draft a veteran team instead of younger talent, on the theory that the major league clubs will have less time to evaluate the rookies, and will be more likely to send promising youngsters to minor league rosters so they can continue to gain experience.

As serious as a lengthy lockout would be to hobbyists, it could have far more serious consequences to a growing number of entrepreneurs who make their living providing statistics and analysis to fantasy leaguers.

In 1984, Jerry Heath began developing business computer software through his company, Heath Research of Virginia Beach, Va. In 1985, Heath began servicing a few fantasy leagues, calculating statis-

tics, then sending out reports each week showing league standings, and the statistics of every team. By 1986, his cottage industry company was compiling reports for about 50 leagues.

By 1988, Heath had given up on business software to concentrate on fantasy leagues. Last season, Heath Research ran 177 leagues on three computers, grossed over \$100,000, and was the sole support of both Jerry Heath and his wife. It wasn't a Fortune 500 business, but was sure, but they made a decent living.

Heath has announced a fee rebate of 4 percent for each week the 1990 season is dark, just in case. But he has budgeted his usual ads in key baseball publications, and he reports that despite the lockout, renewals from his fantasy league customers are coming in at almost the same rate as last season.

What will Heath do if the lockout extends past March? "I might have to get a real job," he said.

What about Murphy and Dawson? Dawson will content himself by watching the Shreveport Captains, the Giants entry in the Texas League. And the Murphys are heading to Arizona anyway. Joe Murphy may check out the minor league training camps at Scottsdale Junior College.

And if things get really desperate, Murphy has an alternate solution.

"If absolutely necessary, I might even do some sightseeing," he said.

Fantasy League's First Law: You Set the Rules

SAN FRANCISCO—In case baseball's labor strife is resolved, there's still time to get involved in a fantasy league.

Starting your own league can be simple—or complicated. It's up to you. Buy a book like "Rotisserie League Baseball" that is crammed with complex rules. Or just gather some friends and make your own rules. But, first, answer these basic questions:

■ How many players on each team, and at what positions? Some teams have as few as eight, others as many as 35. Most have rosters similar to the majors: one

itymen, a DH, a few extra outfielders, an extra catcher, a starting staff and a couple of relief aces.

■ How will you measure performance? Choose simple statistics computed right out of the box scores. The Rotisserie League uses batting average, home runs, RBIs and steals, but admits that it overvalues power and steals. Try adding runs scored, or better yet, runs per at-bat. For pitchers, the old standbys—wins, saves and ERA—work best.

The easiest way to compute league standings is to rank each

best team, say, 10 points, the next team nine, and so on.

■ Will players be chosen by auction or draft? In a draft, teams take turns selecting players. In an auction, teams bid for each player. There are no George Steinbrenners here, as everyone starts with the same bankroll, so budget carefully. A draft is shorter and simpler. But an auction is more exciting.

■ How will you replace disabled players? Set up reserve squads or pick free agents. And feel free to trade—it's half the fun.

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE (Continued From Page 18)

rates at Bradenton, Royals vs. Astros at Kissimmee (7:35 p.m.), Twins vs. Reds at Plant City, Phillies vs. Cardinals at St. Petersburg, Mets vs. Braves at West Palm Beach, Braves vs. Expos at West Palm Beach (7:05 p.m.), Indians vs. Brewers at Chandler, Cubs vs. Mariners at Tempe.

FRIDAY, MARCH 30—White Sox vs. Rangers at Port Charlotte, Tigers vs. Royals at Baseball City, Pirates vs. Blue Jays at Dunedin, Astros vs. Twins at Orlando (12:35 p.m.), Orioles vs. Expos at West Palm Beach (12:05 p.m.), Cardinals vs. Phillies at Clearwater, Angels vs. Dodgers at Los Angeles (7:35 p.m.), A's vs. Giants at San Francisco (7:05 p.m.), Mariners vs. Padres at Las Vegas (6:05 p.m.), Red Sox vs. Reds at Jacksonville (2:30 p.m.), Cubs vs. Iowa at Des Moines (7:05), Braves vs. Greenville at Greenville.

Red Sox vs. Reds at Louisville (1:30), Angels vs. Dodgers at Los Angeles (7:05 p.m.), Tigers vs. Expos at Montreal (1:35 p.m.), Yankees vs. Mets at New York (Shea Stadium, 1:35 p.m.), Mariners vs. Padres at San Diego (7:05 p.m.), A's vs. Giants at San Francisco (12:35 p.m.), Cardinals vs. Orioles at Washington (1:35 p.m.), Cubs vs. Twins at Minneapolis (7:35 p.m.), Blue Jays vs. Royals at Memphis (1:35 p.m.), Indians vs. Rangers at Oklahoma City (7 p.m.), Denver vs. Brewers at Chandler.

SUNDAY, APRIL 1—Indians vs. Reds at Columbus, O. (2 p.m.), Tigers vs. Expos at Montreal (1:35 p.m.), Red Sox vs. Cardinals at Louisville (1:30 p.m.), Reds vs. Indians at Columbus, O., Dodgers vs. Angels at Anaheim (1:35 p.m.), Mets vs. Yankees at New York (Yankee Stadium, 1:35 p.m.), Cubs vs. Twins at Minneapolis (12:35 p.m.), Mariners vs. Padres at San Diego, Giants vs. A's at Oakland, Royals vs. Orioles at Washington (1:35 p.m.), Blue Jays

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MARCH 5, 1990

PRICE: \$2.25