

# MLB Media Conference

Thursday, December 2, 2021

New York, New York, USA

## Robert D. Manfred Jr.

Major League Baseball Commissioner  
Press Conference

ROB MANFRED: To my disappointment, I have to report that effective at 12:01 a.m. this morning, we instituted a lockout of Major League players.

We took this action with the support of all 30 clubs after we failed to reach a new agreement with the Players' Association despite our very best efforts.

We came to Texas to make a deal. We committed to the process. We made proposals, and it just did not happen.

After the owners' meeting in Chicago, I made clear the rationale for an offseason lockout. It's the norm in professional sports, and we feel it's the best strategy to protect the 2022 season for the benefit of our fans.

We made the mistake of playing without a collective bargaining agreement in 1994, and it cost our fans and our clubs dearly. We will not make that same mistake again.

It's important to keep perspective on the lockout issue. The lockout is part of the process that's designed to move the parties towards an agreement. Despite the lockout, we remain ready to bargain whenever the Players' Association wants to bargain, and we are steadfast in our desire to get a new agreement.

I'm not going to say much on the substance at the table. Suffice it to say that the Players' Association, as is their right, made an aggressive set of proposals in May, and they have refused to budge from the core of those proposals.

Things like a shortened reserve period, a \$100 million reduction in revenue sharing, salary arbitration for the whole two-year class are bad for the sport, bad for the fans, and bad for competitive balance.

I am really proud of the effort that was put forward by our negotiating committee. The committee made creative proposals to address union concerns, including proposals that would materially increase salaries for young players, eliminate draft choice compensation, create a universal



DH, and create a draft lottery in baseball for the first time.

Let me finish by reiterating our willingness to bargain at any time and our sincere desire to get a new agreement so that we can all enjoy a great and uninterrupted 2022 season.

**Q. How much damage does a lockout do, even if it's only an offseason lockout?**

ROB MANFRED: Look, it's not a good thing for the sport. It's not something that we undertake lightly. We understand it's bad for our business. We took it out of a desire to drive the process forward to an agreement now.

**Q. How does a lockout move you toward that agreement?**

ROB MANFRED: You know, look, it's part of the theory that underlies the National Labor Relations Act. People need pressure sometimes to get to an agreement.

Candidly, we didn't feel that sense of pressure from the other side during the course of this week, and the only tool available to you under the Act is to apply economic leverage.

**Q. Is there any consideration as far as delaying the lockout to a week after winter meetings or later this month?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, delaying the lockout once the contract expires gets complicated legally, and frankly from our perspective, we wanted to move the process now because we want an agreement now for our fans.

**Q. You spoke in Chicago that fans will understand the difference between a lockout relatively early in the offseason and one that causes cancellation of games. Do you think they'll still be understanding if, say, the union's resolve does not change and the owners' resolve does not change?**

ROB MANFRED: Look, it's my -- it is my hope and expectation that the parties will get back to the table and get an agreement done.

**Q. I know you'd said to make the lockout was to**

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**preserve -- hopefully preserve the 2022 season. Do you have a drop-dead deadline in which to do that, to make sure the games will not be affected?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, I just think speculating about drop-dead deadlines at this point is not productive, so I'm not going to do it.

**Q. Do you have further meetings planned?**

ROB MANFRED: We don't have anything scheduled. I'm sure there will be communication between the parties, and again, it is our desire to get back to the table as quickly as we can.

**Q. Rob, what about the union's proposals was bad for the sport, bad for fans, and bad for competitive balance?**

ROB MANFRED: Let me take -- let's take five-year free agency. I think we already have teams in smaller markets that struggle to compete. Shortening the period of time that they control players makes it even harder for them to compete.

It's also bad for fans in those markets. The most negative reaction we have is when a player leaves via free agency. We don't see that making it earlier, available earlier, we don't see that as a positive.

Taking \$100 million away from teams that are already struggling to put a competitive product on the field, I don't see how that's helpful.

**Q. I think there would be skepticism that teams are struggling. Can you explain or elaborate on that suggestion, that teams are struggling to put competitive teams on the field?**

ROB MANFRED: Look, I've watched this game as an insider for more than three decades. I think that most people who understand the game realize that in our smaller markets it's a lot harder to win than it is in our bigger markets.

**Q. You said, Rob, that you guys made best efforts to make a deal. Could you have made more proposals throughout this process?**

ROB MANFRED: Could make more proposals. I'll give you one example. We made a proposal yesterday that if it had been accepted I believe would have provided a pretty clear path to make an agreement.

**Q. Is there anything accomplished in these three days**

**in Texas? Did you learn anything?**

ROB MANFRED: Oh, yeah, look, it's the process, right. You always learn things. You get new ideas. You get a better feeling for people's priorities. I don't want to -- we didn't get there, but they were not wasted days. It was worthwhile in terms of the process moving forward.

**Q. You say you see a clear path somewhere. Do you believe the union sees the same thing, and if so, is there a deal that could come together quickly?**

ROB MANFRED: You know, the timing of a deal, you're always one breakthrough away from the deal. That's the reality. I can't answer it better than that. I'm not trying to duck you, but literally I think a big piece of the process is trying to make proposals, have conversations, make suggestions that could lead to that breakthrough that shows you the way.

**Q. How open is the league to allowing players who are rehabbing injuries as well as in constant contact with mental health professionals on the club side to continue that relationship?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, it's not a question of league willingness. That's a legal issue upon which we do not have flexibility.

**Q. I do think in the past the NHL has done that.**

ROB MANFRED: Again, I'm not going there because it involves legal advice that we've been given, and it is -- from our perspective it is a legal issue.

**Q. To continue off of that, are club employees in any danger of furloughs or layoffs because of --**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, we've had conversations -- certainly no danger in the central office. We've had conversations with the clubs. There is no expectations at this point in time that there's going to be furloughs of front office employees.

**Q. I would ask the same question of the union, too, but are owners on you guys' end prepared to make concessions to players going forward to make a deal, and do you think you have made enough --**

ROB MANFRED: I mean, let me say two things about that. We are willing to continue to commit to the process to get to a fair agreement. If that involves making further concessions, it involves making further concessions.

Just as a matter of perspective, we proposed the

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elimination of draft choice compensation. This industry had a strike over that issue in 1985. That is a major concession that has been the source of friction as to how the free agency system has operated.

We have made concessions.

**Q. A lot was made last night about the website, scrubbing photos, taking down stories. Is that a legal issue?**

ROB MANFRED: It is.

**Q. Did you guys make a proposal for any on-field changes, and why or why not?**

ROB MANFRED: On-field changes were the topic of discussion at the table. We did make a proposal early on about a joint process with respect to on-field changes. We did not make any specific rule change proposals.

We are in the process of still evaluating changes, and frankly, based on the discussions at the table, we saw it as another contentious issue and tried to put it to one side in an effort to get to an agreement on the theory that we could deal with it mid-term of the next agreement.

**Q. In your letter in describing the lockout as defensive, can you elaborate on what you mean by that? Is it mainly that teams' inability to be competitive, or does it go beyond that?**

ROB MANFRED: No, defensive in the sense that you want to control the timing of the dispute. It really refers back to the 1994 experience. If you play without an agreement, you're vulnerable to a strike at any point in time. What happened in 1994 is the MLBPA picked August when we were most vulnerable because of the proximity of the large revenue dollars associated with the postseason.

We wanted to take that option away and try to force the parties to deal with the issues and get an agreement now, which is what we continue to believe is best for the fans.

**Q. Bigger picture, I know you've used words like frustration and that the other side was unwavering, they weren't changing. Why do relations between the two sides seem so fraught and tense right now, and what can be done to --**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, I don't feel frustrated. I'm disappointed we didn't get to an agreement. That's different than being frustrated.

I think we're in a process. I'm prepared to continue that

process, and I'm optimistic that we're going to get a deal.

Secondly, the whole relationship issue, I think people put way too much emphasis on that issue.

At the end of the day it's about the substance. We're here, they're there. We need to find a way to bridge the gap.

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