

# MLB Media Conference

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New York, New York, USA

## Commissioner Rob

## Manfred

### Press Conference

ROB MANFRED: Good afternoon, everyone. I had hoped against hope that I would not have to have this particular press conference in which I am going to cancel some regular-season games.

We worked hard to avoid an outcome that's bad for our fans, bad for our players and bad for our clubs. I want to assure our fans that our failure to reach an agreement was not due to a lack of effort by either party. The players came here for nine days. They worked hard. They tried to make a deal, and I appreciate their effort.

Our committee of club representatives committed to the process. They offered compromise after compromise and hung in past the deadline to make sure that we exhausted every possibility of reaching an agreement before the cancellation of games.

So far the parties have failed to achieve their mutual goals of reaching an agreement. The unfortunate thing, maybe the most unfortunate thing, is that agreement, the one we've offered to our players, offered huge benefits for our fans and for our players.

We have listened to the Players' Association throughout the process.

A primary goal of the players' Association has been to increase pay for younger players. I said in Orlando and I'll say it again, we agree and share that goal. We offered to raise the minimum salary to \$700,000, an increase of \$130,000 from last year.

We offered to create an annual bonus pool of \$30 million for our very best young players.

In total, we're offering nearly a 33 percent raise to almost two thirds of Major League players, and we're adding more than \$100 million annually in additional compensation for this younger player group.

The proposal also addressed player and fan concerns



about issues like service time and competition. Baseball would for the first time have a draft lottery, the most aggressive lottery in professional sports.

Also for the first time ever, we agreed to an incentive system to encourage clubs to promote top prospects on opening day.

We also proposed that the first- and second-place finishers in rookie-of-the-year voting in each league would receive a full year of service, no matter how long they were in the Major Leagues.

The MLBPA asked us to make free agency more robust. For the first time ever, we agreed to eliminate draft pick compensation, a change that the MLBPA has sought for decades.

On the competitive balance tax, we offered a significantly larger first-year increase than in the last two agreements, bearing in mind that the competitive balance tax is the only mechanism in our agreement that protects some semblance of a level playing field among the clubs.

The international draft would have more fairly allocated talent among the clubs and reduced abuses in some international markets.

We also listened to our fans. The expanded playoffs would bring the excitement of meaningful September baseball and postseason baseball to fans in more markets. While we preferred the 14-team format, when the format became a significant obstacle, we listened to the players' concerns and offered a compromise by accepting the 12-team format.

Finally, we offered a procedural agreement that would allow for the timely implementation of sorely needed rules like the pitch timer and the elimination of shifts to improve the entertainment value of the game on the field. And we agreed to the universal DH.

So what's next?

The calendar dictates that we're not going to be able to play the first two series of the regular season, and those games are officially canceled. We're prepared to continue negotiations. We've been informed that the MLBPA is



headed back to New York, meaning that no agreement is possible until at least Thursday.

As such, camps could not meaningfully operate until at least March 8, leaving only 23 days before the scheduled opening day.

The clubs and our owners fully understand just how important it is to our millions of fans that we get the game on the field as soon as possible. To that end, we want to bargain and we want an agreement with the Players' Association as quickly as possible.

**Q. This has been out there a little bit, but I just want to be super clear, was that your last, best and final offer in a legal sense?**

ROB MANFRED: We never used the phrase "last, best and final offer" with the union. We said to them that it was our best offer prior to the deadline to cancel games.

Our negotiations are deadlocked right now, but I'm not going to get into -- that's different than using the legal term impasse, and I'm not going to do that.

**Q. If it's not your last, best and final offer, why would they have accepted it if they knew they could get something better later?**

ROB MANFRED: Look, I think that take it or leave it in a negotiation is not something that I think is usually productive. I think always at the end there's a little wiggle room somewhere, and I think that we like to keep the idea that we're willing to go back to the table and figure out whether we can make an agreement.

**Q. What do you say to the fans who say they're fed up with both sides of this and possible loss of revenue from them not buying tickets?**

ROB MANFRED: The only thing I can say is that from the perspective of the commissioner's office and the clubs, we are doing our very, very best to try to reach an agreement.

Unfortunately it's not something that's solely within our control; it takes two parties to reach an agreement. We will continue to be committed to that process.

**Q. What timeline -- is there another session potentially scheduled?**

ROB MANFRED: All I can say, nothing is scheduled right now, and we made a proposal this afternoon. I believe without exception, every topic we have made the last proposal. Every single issue in the basic agreement, we

have made the last proposal. You draw your own conclusion as to who ought to go next.

**Q. When you guys are weighing these offers with the owners and talking things through, how much if at all do you weigh the financial impact on people who aren't in the room, the workers at the stadiums who get affected and obviously the fans?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, look, I think that the concern about our fans is at the very top of our consideration list, followed closely by places like where we're standing where people's livelihood depends on baseball, Spring Training baseball, and certainly part of the calculus for us and for our owners.

**Q. Could you explain the league's position on why you say cancellation of games and why not say rescheduled or still the hope to fit the full season in?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, you know, we have a first-time situation in terms of loss of regular-season games. Since we've gone to Interleague play every day, we've never canceled games. If you think about the way that the schedule works, every single day you have an Interleague series where those teams are not back together enough to make rescheduling feasible.

**Q. So do you think the pay and service time will be something you have to negotiate with the union players?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, you know, I think that our position is that games that are not played, players will not get paid for.

**Q. Obviously there were some good things in the deal for the players, including over a 20 percent rise for the minimum paid players. However, the CBT, how do you explain -- it was \$210 million, so you're raising it to \$220 million, that's less than a 5 percent rise, and then it's repeated the next two subsequent years at \$220 million. So it's basically only a 5 percent rise over three years. They would tell you that inflation is up 7 percent now, their salaries have stagnated, and obviously they wouldn't like that part of the deal. How do you explain that?**

ROB MANFRED: Well, I think that it's important to look at the pattern of increases in the CBT thresholds over the last several agreements, and I think the proposal that we made is right in line with the type of increases we've seen in the past.

I think you also need to remember that the last five years

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

have been very difficult years from a revenue perspective for the industry given the pandemic.

You know, this is -- and last, look, we have a payroll disparity problem. To weaken the only mechanism in the agreement that's designed to promote some semblance of competitive balance is just something that I don't think the club group is prepared to do right now.

**Q. (No microphone).**

ROB MANFRED: Look, I didn't take -- I know where the clubs are. I know they are 100 percent behind the proposal that was made and the decision to cancel games given where we are in the negotiation.

**Q. Given the progress made leading up to the deadline the last couple days, are there any thoughts about having another deadline in the future?**

ROB MANFRED: Look, we're in the process of -- we went through a really long nine or ten days. We had a really late night last night and not a particularly productive day today.

We need to regroup and figure out how we're going to move the process forward. That's the best I can do for you.

**Q. Understanding that deadlines create urgency, you locked out the plays to jump start the negotiations, it feels like real bargaining went on just in the last 24 to 36 hours. I'm sure people are wondering why not over the last three months or even longer to get to a point where you're not necessarily cancelling games because there's some momentum here.**

ROB MANFRED: I think the best answer to that question is the last 10 days. We've been here, ready to bargain, full committees, owners, players, for 10 days, and it got going two days before the deadline. You know, that's the best explanation I can give you.

**Q. Is the sport in a more perilous position now than it was in '94 and '95 because of the number of entertainment options there are out there, how easy it is for people to turn to Netflix or whatever it is on their cell phone?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, look, the entertainment market today is different than in 1994. My deepest hope is that we get an agreement quickly, we're back on the field, and we get back into that market and compete effectively.

**Q. You've said many times you see yourself as a deal maker; you take pride in the previous agreements**

**you've made. So how much do you see this outcome as reflecting on you as commissioner now?**

ROB MANFRED: Look, the difficult thing about this, if it was solely within my ability or the ability of the clubs to get an agreement, we'd have an agreement. The tough thing about this process is it takes both parties to make an agreement.

I'm really disappointed that we didn't make an agreement, and I'm really committed to doing everything possible to get one.

**Q. You could argue that this is not a surprise when you look at the developments of the past five years. Really since shortly after that 2016 CBA there's been a lot of chatter on their side. I'm wondering if you regret -- understanding it takes both sides, regret not having done more on your side to try to avoid this disastrous outcome?**

ROB MANFRED: Yeah, look, what I would say is we did take a stab at some early negotiations. Throughout the five-year period, there was a lot of rhetoric about dissatisfaction with the deal that they made. A lot of the rhetoric was negative with respect to clubs, the commissioner's office, me. That environment someone else created, and it's an environment in which it's tough to build bridges.

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