

THE CASE FOR FAN UNIONS

If you're a young person with some time on your hands and a not-small interest in your local billion-dollar baseball team, you should think about starting a fan union.

It would help if you are good on the platforms of social media that the young'uns are on, and it would help if you have enough creative talent to build an attractive website. You'll have to maintain it a little: maybe create a steady stream of content for it. A clever name would help: "Dave Parker's Boppin' Boys" for a Pirates union, "You're Killing Me, Fish" for the Marlins. That's both a Hemingway line and a nod to *The Sandlot*, incidentally. I'm not sure the Rockies have fans older than forty, but if there are some ancient Rockies fan who wants to join in, the "Blake Street Boomers" is probably available.

Once you have a name, draft yourself an agenda. Keep it simple: "We are a collection of Angels fans who remember the good old days when our team name actually matched its geographic location, and we're tired of having an ownership group that can't hire a decent HVAC person to keep the weight rooms comfortable. Our goal is to get enough members so that we can embarrass Arte Moreno enough to sell the team."

And then set some dues: membership is \$3 dollars for the 2026 season. For that, a member gets a laminated card with their name on it to stick in their wallet or put on the fridge. Keep track of everyone who joins and make sure they get their cards. Send out messages throughout the year and at the end of the season announce a party at a local bar or a food truck, or just rent a picnic table at a park and bring a few coolers of beer. Use all the dues that you collected to throw a party: the first fifty people to flash their union cards at the bar get a free beer or a taco. If you're at the park, your membership card gets you unlimited access to Busch Lights until the coolers are empty.

At that party, tell people you have a poll up on your website, and you'd like all members to put their name and membership number down, and answer three questions:

- 1) What price should we have our membership be next year?
- 2) What do we want to do with the funds we collect? And,
- 3) What priorities would you like us to focus on in the coming year?

That's when the real work begins.

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I'll tell you the story of when I was radicalized.

It started with Bill getting in trouble. Way back in 2018, Bill James got into hot water over a comment he made on that erstwhile platform of social discourse that we used to call Twitter and now call it by its more accurate name: a cesspool of chaos. Bill opined:

If the players all retired tomorrow, we would replace them, the game would go on; in three years it would make no difference whatsoever. The players are not the game, any more than the beer vendors are.

This comment, by itself, didn't radicalize me. I had known Bill long enough by then to recognize what he was doing: using a bold declaration to get us to think critically about something we take for granted. A lot of us at the time took for granted that Mike Trout and Miguel Cabrera were somehow *baseball*. Bill wanted to challenge us on that notion, shake that assumption around and see if it held up under scrutiny.

I think Bill was right, and I think that a lot of people misunderstood his meaning. He wasn't criticizing the worth of players: he was saying that baseball's capacity to endure from one year to the next had much less to do with the stars of the day than we assume. If the best players disappeared overnight, new stars would emerge tomorrow, and baseball would survive into the next week or season.

That is a relevant point to the moment we're in now, but it is actually at a distance from the subject of this essay. It wasn't that statement that changed me. What changed me was the response.