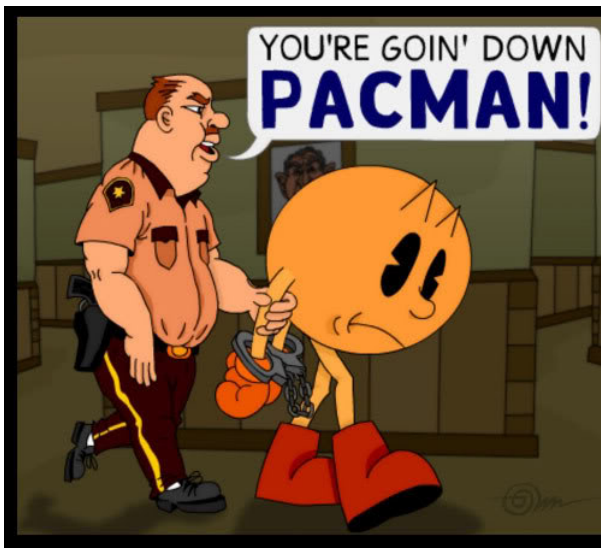
Great, great stuff here from Gary Benz, who uses his latest column to examine the vast differences in how Major League Baseball and the National Football League are governed using two recent examples. Roger Goodell dropping the hammer on malcontent "Pacman" Jones. And Bud Selig's handling of the early season weather fiasco.



All you ever needed to know about the difference between the way major league baseball and professional football are governed came this week.

In short order, the figurehead running baseball, Commissioner Bud Selig, scratched his head, wrung his hands, and addressed a freak early spring snow storm in Cleveland by sending the Indians to Milwaukee to play a home series, thereby depriving Cleveland fans of at least 3 home games. Meanwhile, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, fed up with a string of embarrassing incidents of off-field misconduct, put his foot down on the litany of player misconduct and reconstituted the league's conduct policy and sent its two poster boys miscreants, Adam "Pacman" Jones and Chris Henry, packing for the better part of next season.

In the first case it was just another in an embarrassing string of weak and poor decisions by one of the great thumbsuckers of all time. In the latter case, a commissioner running a major sport asserted his authority and literally dared anyone to disagree. The difference in leadership may not be the only reason one sport is healthier than the other, but it's the main reason.

Consider the evidence. When steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs emerged as *the*

issue threatening the integrity of major league baseball, its players, and nearly every key offensive statistic in its record book, Selig was ever the man of inaction, so afraid that any move he might make would incur the wrath of union head Donald Fehr. As a result, baseball had a joke of a drug testing program that allowed steroids to run rampant and unchecked. Fehr winked as he hoisted himself and his clients on the podium of personal privacy knowing full well, as did everyone else, that the real motive was economic. Chicks not only dig the long ball, so do the fans and players who can hit it far or throw it faster make more money. After all, a high tide raises all ships.

Rather than take Fehr on, Selig has instead allowed Fehr and his misguided agenda to control the best interests of the game. It was only when Congress stepped in and literally threatened to eliminate baseball's precious but antiquated antitrust exemption that the drug policy changed. Even with that, the policy is still a joke when compared to its counterparts in nearly every other sport, including amateur sports.

But this was hardly the only example of Selig's spineless leadership or his handing over of the steering wheel to Fehr and the players union. Selig has never been able to negotiate a salary cap with Fehr despite its presence in every other professional sport. Likewise, he has not been able to use the gravitas of his office to convince the owners that revenue sharing is in the best interest of their sport. Instead, he wrings he hands, complains that this and every issue is hopelessly complicated and what the fans are left with is a situation whereby the New York Yankees can spend $189 million on players while the Tampa Bay Devil Rays have a payroll of $24 million.

The adoption of the unbalanced schedule in baseball, ostensibly to create better intra-division rivals, has had any manner of unintended consequences and is responsible, in great measure, to what happened to the Indians this past weekend. Amazingly, the opening day weekend visit by the Seattle Mariners is the only time that team will be here all season! Same for the Los Angeles Angels. Given that this is necessitated by an unbalanced schedule and inter-league play, it begs the question as to why both teams had to visit in April as opposed to having Cleveland open in either city where weather wouldn't have been an issue. But again, Selig wrings his hands and complains that the issue is soooooo complicated. No one seriously expects Selig to ask the owners to shrink the schedule a bit in order to eliminate early April games or November playoffs, but he could at least take control over the schedule to the point where it's not necessary to ask the players union for permission to add an additional day/night doubleheader or two. As strong as the United Auto Workers might be, they don't get the right to determine how many cards the auto companies are allowed to produce.

Football, under first Pete Rozelle then Paul Tagliabue and now Roger Goodall, may not be perfect, but it's never been the management mess that is major league baseball. The various commissioners always have maintained control over their sport in a way that must make Selig envious, assuming he could recognize the difference. Football's drug testing system may not be as stringent as that used in the Olympics, but it's significantly stronger than that in place in baseball and has been in effect for many more years. But the biggest difference between the two sports was starkly illustrated by Goodell's moves on Tuesday.

Simply put, Goodell wasn't paralyzed by inaction nor did he feel constrained by how the union might react. Instead, he put the hammer down on Jones and Henry and in the process sent a message to every person affiliated with the league that he is in charge and either this kind of conduct stops immediately or there will be sever consequences. And, more importantly, he didn't wait to see whether the union would give him permission to shorten the leash. Upshaw's comments to ESPN were the most telling. "The NFL Players Association and the Player Advisory Council have been discussing this issue for several months," Upshaw said to ESPN. "We believe that these are steps that the commissioner needs to take and we support the policy. It is important that players in violation of the policy will have the opportunity and the support to change their conduct and earn their way back."

Goodell's approach was the polar opposite of how Selig would have handled it. Faced with a problem calling for decisive action, he discussed his concerns with the union but he didn't wait for their permission to act. In asserting his authority, Goodell also essentially dared Upshaw to try to defend the indefensible conduct of a growing cadre of thugs in the league. Upshaw, a more pragmatic leader than Fehr anyway, didn't dare take on Goodell over this issue and instead supported it. He didn't complain or threaten legal action but instead embraced what was in the fans best interest. While this may something good about the kind of leader Upshaw is, it also firmly establishes that there is no question who is running the sport.

One can only imagine if Selig had this matter on his plate. Undoubtedly he would have talked tough to the press until Fehr essentially said negotiate or else. Selig would have then set up some worthless ad-hoc committee to make recommendations that would be ignored the next time the parties decided to get together at the bargaining table to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement.

The situation with Pacman Jones in Tennessee is a national joke. The situation in Cincinnati, in other ways, is even more serious. And in both cases, action from the top was needed because in both cases neither ownership nor management was adequately addressing the problem. It wasn't Jones' first time to the rodeo and the same was true for Henry. Moreover, the number of players arrested on the Bengals no longer suggested coincidence but culture. With these suspensions and the concurrent tightening of league conduct policies, Goodell sent a message to both teams, and everyone else, that continuing to allow that kind of culture to exist will not only result in action against the player but also against the team. The most likely target will be draft choices. In a league where draft choices are treated like the crown jewels that will certainly get some attention.

In the end, Goodell did what he had to do. It's refreshing to actually see that happen in professional sports.