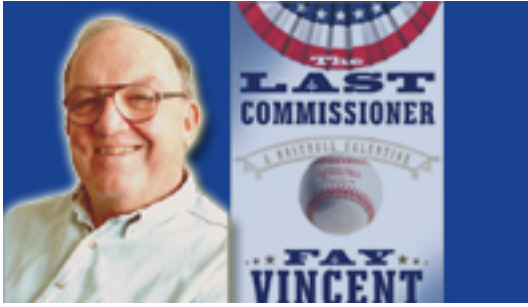


Interview - Fay Vincent - Former Commissioner

Written by Maury Brown

Wednesday, 09 November 2005 17:00



He didn't coin the title of his book. That distinction belongs to George Vescey of the New York Times. Vescey wrote of Vincent, just after his being fired as the commissioner of baseball, and called him "the last commissioner." Of course, this isn't true. Bud Selig is the current commissioner, and after Selig will be another... and another. The reference has more to do with Vincent being the last commissioner that did not hail from the ownership brethren of Major League Baseball, such as Selig has. In that sense, Vincent is arguably the last "independent" commissioner.

Fay Vincent was the 8th commissioner of baseball, following the death of of Bart Giamatti on September 1, 1989. Vincent had been serving as deputy commissioner at the time of Giamatti's passing. Prior to his work in baseball, Vincent was the chairman of Columbia Pictures (beginning in 1978) and the vice chairman of Coca-Cola (beginning in March 1982). In April of 1986, Vincent was promoted to the position of Executive Vice President of the Coca-Cola Company.

His tenure as commissioner lasted less than the 5 years of the term that he had inherited after Giamatti's untimely death. Vincent stepped down in the 1992 after the owners gave an 18-9 no confidence vote. Many issues surround that no confidence vote, but certainly a key event was when many of the owners became angry over Vincent's intervention in the 1990 lockout.

During his tenure, Vincent dealt with the Loma Prieta earthquake's impacts to the 1989 World Series in San Francisco, the lockout of 1990, the banishment of George Steinbrenner from baseball, expansion in the form of the Colorado Rockies and Florida Marlins, and the hotly debated attempts to realign the National League, which played a key role in Vincent's forced removal as commissioner.

If that had been the last of Fay Vincent, it certainly would enough to fill several interviews, but Vincent has remained very much in touch with the current events surrounding baseball, and touches on a great many aspects of it here.

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The following interview touches on the difference between his experiences at Columbia Pictures and Coca-Cola compared to baseball, Bart Giamatti, Pete Rose, the investigations into gambling by umpires in the late '80s, the firing of Barry Rona as the head of the PRC, George Steinbrenner's banishment from baseball over payment's to Howie Spira to get information to discredit Dave Winfield, Vincent's attempts at realignment of the National League, issues he would have tackled if his contract had been renewed, Alex Rodriguez and poker clubs, the relocation of the Expos to DC and how Peter Angelos and MASN factor in that equation, plus his comments regarding ESPN the Magazine's reporting that during Vincent's tenure, a [memo \(PDF\)](#)

was sent to all clubs about the use of a drug that has gained more visibility than the cocaine problems of the '80s and early '90s would ever know... steroids. Vincent is frank, and unfiltered in this extensive interview. Enjoy. – Maury Brown

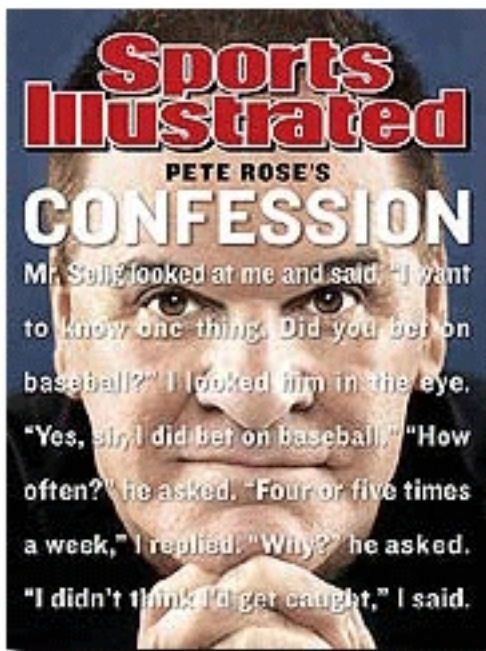
Maury Brown for the Business of Sports Network (BizBall LLC): If not for a twist of fate, you might have been a Jesuit priest instead of a former Commissioner of Baseball. Did your background make taking on Baseball's issues more of a moral calling than a business calling in some senses?

Fay Vincent: You know, that's a very good question, and I don't know the answer to it. I think not. I think that one of the problems in American life is that we tend to add a moral dimension to political and economic issues. I think most of the issues in baseball, when I was there, were economic issues and I think it makes it a lot harder to resolve them if you turn them into moral ones.

BizBall: What was the biggest difference between your experience at Columbia Pictures and Coca-Cola compared to baseball?

Vincent: My position in both places was very visible, though I think there's almost nothing as visible as baseball. I think that one of the differences was everything I did - every decision - was written about by 150 columnists around the country who have nothing to write about except baseball for part of the year. The other difference was that in the movie business, in the entertainment business, there was one objective, to make money for your

"Part of the responsibility was to do well for the owners, but part of it was to represent the public interest, and I had to discipline owners for doing stupid things, like George Steinbrenner."



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"I think the marketing of baseball in the black community has been a disaster."

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**"I remember one of
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But what he was re
the money to pay
colluded."**

**"Congress
years to ge
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that's a go**

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**"Obvious
because
thought
major iss**

**"I think if you're bordering
on manic about baseball you
might like [SABR]."**

Vince Vincent, former MLB Commissioner, on why he likes SABR and how he got into the hobby.
