

# MLB, players must play ball, make deal



**Bob Nightengale**  
Columnist  
USA TODAY

PHOENIX – Stop it. Enough already.

We want to watch Yankees ace Gerrit Cole face Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez at Yankee Stadium, not MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred and players' union chief Tony Clark arguing behind closed doors.

We'd rather listen to the banging of trash cans at Minute Maid Park in Houston than the eerie silence of major league ballparks across America.

There are 36 million Americans who filed for unemployment the past two months during the coronavirus pandemic.

Do you think they really care who is right or who is wrong as owners and players debate the economics of playing baseball without fans?

The last thing anyone can stomach is listening to billionaires and millionaires arguing over money before they can start the 2020 baseball season.

If the season was unable to start because of COVID-19, with too many players and employees fearful of their safety, it'd be perfectly understandable.

If the season couldn't start because governmental and health officials refused to open their municipalities, that's their prerogative.

But when MLB and the union are actively discussing an exhaustive safety and health plan that might be restrictive but perhaps necessary with states re-opening and governors are welcoming professional sports back, baseball cannot be shut down simply because of in-fighting over money.

If there is no Major League Baseball played this year because the owners and players can't agree on salaries, it would make the cancellation of the 1994 World Series feel like a doubleheader rainout in June.

It would destroy the sport.

Look, everyone in the game is going to lose money this year.

Teams are projecting losses between \$84 million to \$312 million.

Players will lose nearly half of their income, with their up-front payments – paying players with guaranteed contracts \$4,750 a day – ending May 24.

Team employees, from club presidents to their amateur scouts, are having their salaries slashed, with others being furloughed until the winter and many fearing they'll be terminated when their contracts expire in October.

It is ugly. It is terrifying. It is heartbreaking.

So please, now is not the time to try to win a public relations battle with the fans, leaking internal documents to the news media or waging a war of



MLB is hoping for a 2020 season that could see sights such as the Braves and Freddie Freeman celebrating a run.  
ADAM HAGY/USA TODAY SPORTS

words to legal teams.

No one wants to hear it.

Not now.

The owners want to start the season by the first week of July, playing at least 82 regular-season games, but insist it's economically impossible to play without fans unless the players agree to further salary reductions.

The players want to play tomorrow, if they could, with at least a 100-game season, but have difficulty believing the owners will lose \$4 billion this season if their salaries remain the same. They simply can't buy the notion that teams will lose more money by playing than having no season, even without fans.

Yet with hopes of teams gathering for spring training by June 15 and playing games by July 4, the two sides still have not had a single exchange of a proposed economic plan.

MLB owners agreed to present a 50-50 revenue-sharing plan 10 days ago, but once Clark and agent Scott Boras publicly decried the proposal, saying it would be immediately rejected, the union hasn't received a proposal.

The union might still scoff at any idea of a revenue-sharing plan but will tell you they are open to listening to any

proposal MLB wants to offer.

MLB will tell you that if the union flatly refuses any revenue-sharing plan, then the union should propose an economic plan.

It's possible this will come to an end this week. Let's hope.

Manfred and MLB attorneys plan to present an economic plan to the union by Friday, two people with direct knowledge of the negotiations told USA TODAY Sports, perhaps outlining with greater detail their projected losses in 2020. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were unauthorized to publicly discuss the negotiations.

The union is eagerly awaiting the proposal and then can spend the Memorial Day weekend poring over it, formulating a counterproposal.

The players want the owners to at least prove their economic duress, which they formally requested a week ago. If the owners demonstrate their projected financial losses, the players might be amenable to softening their stance on restructuring salaries, which already is costing them about \$2 billion.

Perhaps there can be a compromise if the two sides can agree to defer a por-

tion of the salaries this season only to provide economic relief.

Maybe the players will be willing to assume part of the risk if a second wave of the coronavirus prematurely ends the season, wiping out about \$1 billion in anticipated postseason revenue with the expanded playoffs.

Maybe it's as simple as the owners guaranteeing more regular-season games to the players, or even giving the union a cut of the postseason money.

There is no drop-dead deadline for negotiations, the two sides say, but the longer it drags out, fewer games will be played, and more money will be lost.

They each are hoping an agreement can be reached by June 3. The players report to spring training on June 10. The regular season starts July 1. And the entire postseason is completed by Halloween.

It's still unfathomable, no matter how much the rhetoric is put on public display, to believe that baseball won't be played this summer.

It will happen.

Really, there is no choice.

But the clock is ticking.

It's time for baseball to save itself before it's too late.

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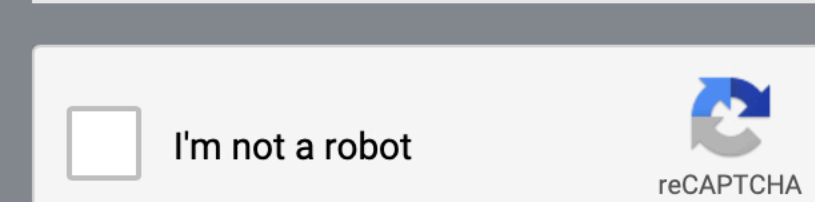


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