

# Players Walk Out on April Fool's Day

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ST. LOUIS, Mo.—April 1, 1972, will go down as a black date in sports to mark the first general strike in the 102-year history of Organized Ball.

The strike called by the Major League Baseball Players Association forced the cancellation of a number of spring exhibition games and, for the time being, put all or part of the regular season in doubt.

However, Marvin Miller, executive director of the players' association, announced April 3 that the strikers, who are seeking an increase in pension benefits, would accept the last money offer made by the owners, but with one string attached.

The owners had offered an additional \$490,000 to take care of the higher costs of the medical, hospital and dental benefits that the players receive, but had balked at extra pension contributions as being unreasonable. The players were seeking more money to compensate for the 17 percent increase in the cost of living since the last pension agreement was reached in 1969.

With the addition of the \$490,000, the club owners would pay a total of \$5,940,000 into the pension and benefit plan each year for the term of a new agreement. Under the players' original demands, however, the amount would have soared to \$7,012,000.

## Interest Money Involved

Miller made his announcement of a compromise after meeting with John Gaherin, the club owners' negotiator, for the third time since the strike was called.

"We have accepted the owners' offer of an annual \$5,940,000 contribution to the players' pension fund, the same offer they made to us in Phoenix," Miller said, "provided the players' association can use the six percent interest potential the money earns."

He explained that the pension fund is set up on the premise that it will earn 4½ percent interest, when actually it was bringing in six percent and would continue to do so.

The players are proposing, Miller said, that the six percent interest be used to pay for higher pension benefits rather than be allowed to accumulate in the reserve fund.

Although the owners have said that they doubt the fund will continue to earn six percent annually, Miller said the players' association was ready "to put its money where its mouth is."

"We will put up the difference if it does not earn six percent," he asserted.

## Miller Raps Owners

At that point, Miller could not resist taking a swing at the owners. He charged, "Money is not the issue. The real issue is the owners' attempt to punish the players for having the audacity not to settle and for having the audacity not to crawl."

After Miller told of the players' proposal, Gaherin said, "We are considering acceptance of this offer, but you have to understand that what they are proposing is a restructuring of the entire plan."

"It's true that this offer represents movement in the negotiations, but not necessarily the type of movement that will end this dispute. As for the opening of the season, I would have to say nothing has changed. The chances are extremely grave."

Later, Gaherin called Miller's proposal "an imprudent approach to the problem." He said he had presented the offer to the owners and they had unanimously agreed not to accept it.

The owners of the 24 major league

clubs were scheduled to meet in Chicago on the evening of April 4 to review the situation further after receiving Gaherin's report.

The players also had asked for a four-year extension of the pension plan but had expressed willingness to settle for one year. The owners want to renew it for only one year so that it will expire concurrently with the present Basic Agreement between the clubs and the players' association. Their idea is that everything then could be negotiated in one package.

On the eve of the strike, the players for the first time publicly came up with a surprise gimmick to cover the higher costs of their proposal.

As explained by several player representatives, the pension fund, after catching up with all requirements, built up a reserve of \$817,000 during the past year. This money, being held in escrow, accumulated from higher interest on investments, overfunding of expected retirement payments and overestimating the cost of disability benefits.

## Dierker Gives Details

Larry Dierker, player representative of the Astros, explained that the pension fund needed \$1,072,000 in 1972 to assure higher future pension payments.

The \$817,000 in escrow, plus an additional \$255,000 in club contributions at the rate of a little more than \$11,000 each, would cover the bill, according to the players' calculations.

"It would bring our pension back to what it was worth in buying power three years ago," Dierker asserted.

President Mike Burke of the Yankees countered with the statement that the players' proposal for financing the 17 percent increase in pensions was not sound.

"Taking out the escrow would undermine the fund," Burke said. "Part of the strength of the fund is that reserve."

However, the whole dispute over the escrow money was set aside with the new proposal by the players.

As in the fall, winter and spring of 1968-69, pension plan negotiations between Gaherin and Miller dragged on for months. Three years ago, many of the players stayed away from the spring training camps until an agreement was reached. This year, the players went through almost all of their spring training before time ran out.

## Visit to All Camps

Miller and Dick Moss, the association's attorney, visited all 24 of the camps and polled the players for strike sentiment. "We have a solid mandate," Miller said, after reporting the final vote was 663 for a strike, 10 against and two abstentions.

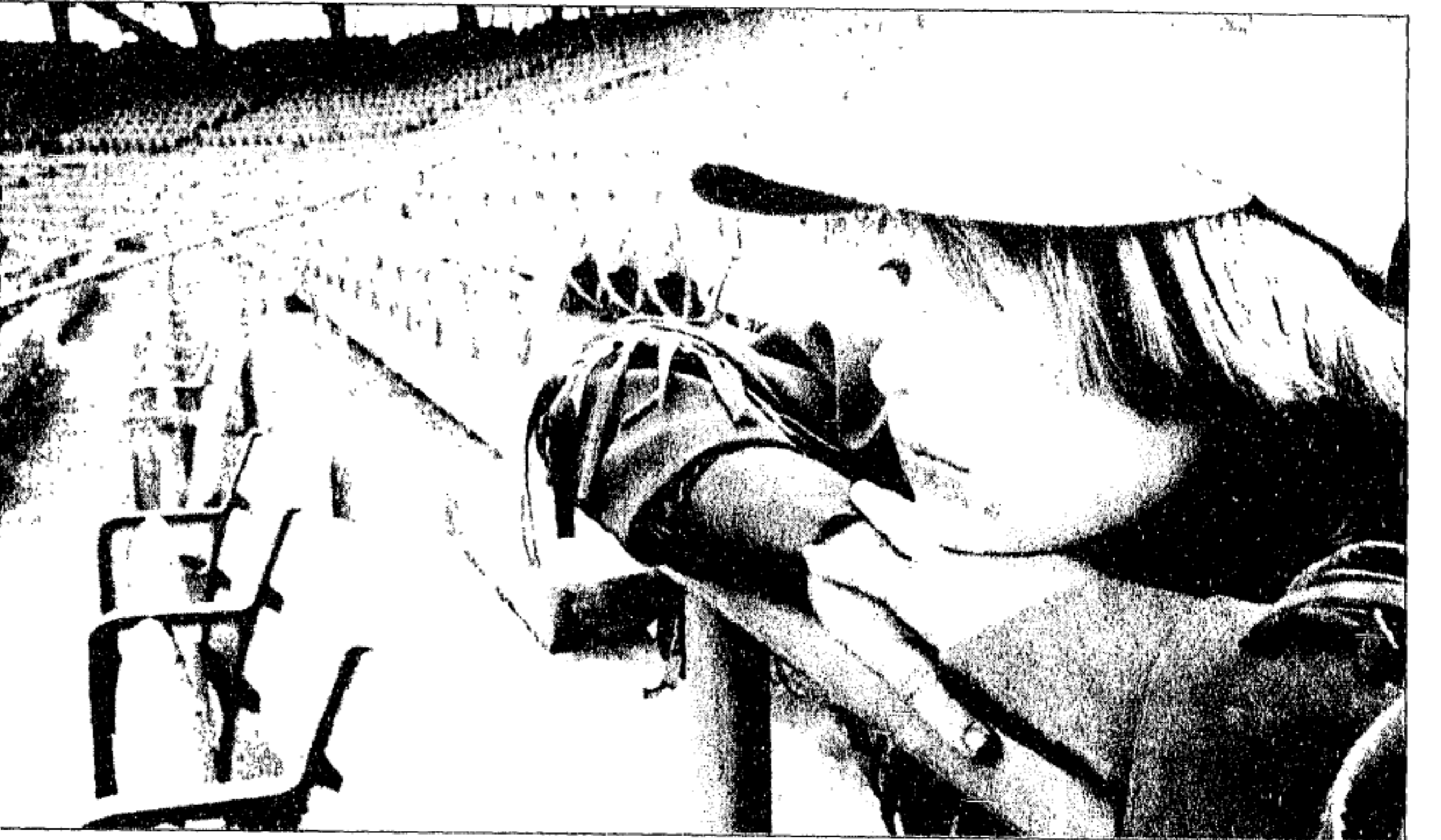
The final strike action was taken at a meeting of all the player representatives and alternates at Dallas March 31. The meeting lasted four hours. Miller said, "I believe every person spoke at least once and most of them two or three times. All possible developments were discussed at great length."

Presidents Joe Cronin of the American League and Chub Feeney of the National League wanted to attend the meeting, but backed off because of the conditions laid down by Miller.

"We wanted a format in which the issues could be debated, but Miller wanted some sort of limitation on the meeting and we couldn't agree to that," a spokesman for Commissioner Bowie Kuhn said.

Although a number of the player reps present expressed regret that a

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**THREE VIEWS** of baseball's first player strike—Cardinal Owner August A. Busch, Jr., explains management's side of the picture for Jack Buck and St. Louis radio audience from St. Petersburg, Fla. (top photo); Baltimore players collect expense money for their trip

home from Miami, Fla. (middle photo), and Jeff Annas sits hopefully, but dejectedly, in the West Palm Beach stadium awaiting a game between the Texas Rangers and Montreal Expos that was cancelled because of the strike April 1..