Chronological History of the Major League Baseball Players Association

The 1960's

Late 1965. Recognizing a need for more comprehensive representation, the Executive Board authorizes the hiring of a full-time Executive Director and the establishment of a permanent office. Houston pitcher Robin Roberts, Chicago Cubs outfielder Harvey Kuenn, and Philadelphia pitcher Jim Bunning are named to the search committee.

Late 1965. Bunning, Kuenn, Bob Friend and several others meet with Richard Nixon to sound out his interest as a possible candidate.

Late 1965. Bunning, Kuenn and Roberts interview Marvin Miller for the Executive Director's position.

1966

January 1966. At the urging of Bob Friend, the players offer the Executive Director position to Judge Cannon. He eventually turns the post down, primarily because the players won't place the association office in Milwaukee or Chicago and would not assure him a pension equal to what he would receive as a judge.

March 5, 1966. At an Executive Board meeting in Miami the players nominate Marvin Miller as Executive Director, pending a vote of all players.

March 1966. Miller canvasses minor league camps in Arizona, then Florida, speaking to every team, one at a time. Votes are held on Miller's election by every club.

April 11, 1966. Miller is elected by a vote of 489-136. He is given a two-and-a-half year contract (starting July 1) at $50,000 per year, plus a $20,000 expense budget.

May 3, 1966. Commissioner Eckert informs Miller about something Miller already knew: that the clubs cannot fund the union office ($150,000) as the owners had previously agreed to do because it violated the Taft-Hartley Act.

July 1, 1966. Marvin Miller officially assumes the Executive Director position. The MLBPA has a bank balance of $5,700, no office, and a single file cabinet.

July 11, 1966. In St. Louis at the All-Star game Miller holds his first formal meetings, initially with the player reps and then a joint meeting with the owner reps. With their pension agreement expiring on March 31, the players are adamant that they maintain their existing percentage cut: 60% of World Series TV and radio money and 95% of All-Star game revenue (including gate receipts).

November 29-30, 1966. In a meeting of the Executive Board, Miller introduces Richard Moss as general counsel, effective January 1, and the union establishes its office in the Seagram Building at 375 Park Ave, leaving its temporary quarters in the Biltmore Hotel.

December 1, 1966. Miller signs a deal with the owners eliminating the player's pension contribution of two dollars per day (up to $344 per year), which had gone directly into the pension fund, and replacing it with voluntary dues check-off of the same amount that would serve as union dues. This new arrangement covers the MLBPA's $150,000 annual budget. The check-off was 99 pct. subscribed.

December 1, 1966. Miller and the owners reach a new pension deal, covering 1967 and 1968. The owners agree to funnel $4.1 million into the pension plan each year, replacing the previous agreement that was strictly tied to World Series and All-Star game money. This new arrangement amounts to a 100% increase in benefits for all players, coaches, managers, and trainers active since 1957. Miller also negotiates increased life insurance, health insurance, and widow's benefits.

Fall 1966. MLBPA starts its group licensing program -- allowing companies to use players' names and pictures to sell products. With help from Frank Scott, Miller signs a deal with Coca-Cola to use player photos on the underside of Coke bottle caps, netting $60,000 per year for two years. This agreement helped the union survive before dues are technically activated in May 1967. Because the owners demanded money from Coca-Cola to use the team logos, Coke had to airbrush the logos off the players' hats.

Fall 1966. Marvin Miller met with Joel Shorin, the president of Topps, the sole manufacturer of baseball cards. At the time Topps signed minor league players for $5.00 to lock them up for five years, and agreed to pay $125.00 for each season the player was depicted on a card or appeared in the major leagues for 31 days. Topps paid no additional royalty. Miller wanted a better deal for the players, but Topps resisted.

<u>1967</u>

Spring 1967. Marvin Miller conducts an anonymous player salary survey in spring training. Results show that the average 1966 salary was $22,000, the median was $17,000, and 6.1% of players made the $7,000 minimum.

April 28, 1967. Players and their representatives from all four major North American sports meet to discuss common issues.

May 3, 1967. The MLBPA returns a $1,032 check to White Sox owner Arthur Allyn that had been intended to cover dues for a manager (Eddie Stanky) and two coaches.

July 10, 1967. Marvin Miller, Dick Moss, and Tim McCarver meet with the owners' negotiating team (Player Relations Council) before the All-Star game in Anaheim. Miller tells PRC chairman Joe Cronin that the union intends to negotiate not just a minimum salary, but a large set of issues: scheduling, length of season, grievances, travel, etc.

July 21, 1967: The players approve the MLBPA constitution and bylaws.

Late July 1967. Players send a "statement of policy" to the owners outlining desired changes, including: no doubleheaders after night games, no split doubleheaders, guidelines for temperature and wind that would force postponements, revisions to reserve clause, an increase in the minimum salary, a reduction in the length of the season, and an impartial arbitrator for grievances.

November 27, 1967. The association's Executive Board travels to Mexico City, site of baseball's winter meetings, expecting to meet with the owners or the PRC. The owners refuse to meet with them.

November 27, 1967. In the Executive Board meeting Miller reports a budget surplus of $28,970, plus $265,000 in commercial contracts. Under the MLBPA's policy, licensing money is distributed to the players unless the Executive Board approves another use for it. In a subsequent press conference Tom Haller announces that Miller was unanimously given a new deal through 1970 at $55,000 per year (a $5,000 raise).

1968

February 1968. Topps re-engages with the Players Association when players (at Miller's urging) are unwilling to re-sign or pose with the trading card company.

February 21, 1968. (CBA-1) The players and clubs agree to a first-ever Collective Bargaining Agreement, covering two years, effective January 1, 1968. It includes: a minimum salary increase to $10,000; an improved and standardized contract form; increases in cash allowances for incidentals such as meals and spring training; a formalized procedure for grievances (to be heard by the commissioner); and new scheduling rules.

Summer 1968. Players file their first three grievances:

1. Curt Blefary had been fined by Orioles for participating in an off-season basketball game with players on the Senators, in violation of an Orioles rule. Blefary loses.

2. Milt Pappas, Cincinnati's player rep, protests that Reds players had been bumped out of first class in lieu of the press. First class accommodations (if available) are required for the players under the CBA. Miller meets with Reds president Bob Howsam, who relents.
3. A group of American League players file a grievance in protest of staying at the Lord Baltimore hotel in Baltimore. Eckert upholds grievance, but John Gaherin has to pressure manager Eddie Stanky to get the White Sox to comply.

September 1968. To gain leverage, Miller advises players not to sign their 1969 contracts until a new pension agreement (to replace one expiring on March 31) is reached.

November 19, 1968. Miller strikes a deal with Topps. The new agreement doubles the annual stipend to $250 per player, plus Topps would pay a royalty of 8% on revenue up to $4 million in sales, 10% thereafter. In the first year of the deal the players collect $320,000 in royalties.

Early December, 1968. At the winter meetings at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, the union's Executive Board is once again told that the owners are too busy to see them (as they had been in Mexico City twelve months earlier). After their own meeting, the board calls their players around the country looking for commitments to not sign contracts without a pension agreement. A total of 450 players agree, and Miller holds a press conference and reads off the names of all 450 players.

December 1968. The owners' first pension offer is for a $5.1 million annual contribution, an increase of $1 million. Miller logically counters that there are four new team owners, and four new teams worth of players/beneficiaries, so the proposed increase is only from $205,000 per team to $212,500 per team, and in no way reflects the massive new television deal.

<u>1969</u>

February 3, 1969. One hundred twenty five players attend a meeting at New York's Hotel Biltmore. Miller gives a long detailed report of the past four months of pension negotiations, supplemented by the two league reps who had been to every meeting. After the reports many players chimed in as well.

Mid-February, 1969. The MLBPA proposes a three-man arbitration panel to settle the current pension dispute. The owners refuse.

February 17, 1969. The owners increase their pension offer to $5.3 million. Miller recommends a "no" vote, and the reps vote the offer down 24-0.

February 25, 1969. Owners and players reach a compromise over the pension dispute. The owners' annual contribution is raised to $5.45 million, and the agreement increases benefits (e.g., adding a new dental program), lowers pension eligibility from five years to four, retroactive to 1959 (therefore covering more than 50% of all players for the first time, previously 41% were provided for), and lowered the earliest age a player could begin collecting his pension from 50 to 45.

March 17, 1969. Atlanta general manager Paul Richards trades holdout catcher Joe Torre to St. Louis for Orlando Cepeda. Upset with Torre's active stance in the players union, Richards offered Torre a 20% pay cut (the maximum allowed) and refused to negotiate.

Spring training, 1969. Miller and Moss tour the spring camps and encourage the players to close ranks. Miller explained what had been gained in the negotiation and urged players to stick together. The players applauded him at every stop.

April 24, 1969. The players and owners hold the first meeting of the Joint Study Committee on the reserve clause, which had been created by the CBA a year earlier. The attendees included John Gaherin, four club owners, Miller, Moss, and Jim Bunning. In their opening statement the owners claim that chaos would ensue if any changes were made to the clause.

July 31, 1969. At another meeting of the Joint Study Committee, the owners claim that the reserve clause protected the rank-and-file players. Miller responds, "What about Bob Barton?" referring to a third-string catcher on the Giants who had never gotten the chance to show he could play." Owners have no response.[i]

October 8, 1969. Curt Flood is traded from the St. Louis Cardinals (for whom he had starred in center field for 12 years) to the Philadelphia Phillies. A month later he meets with Miller in New York and tells him he wants to sue baseball. Miller invites Flood to the upcoming player meetings to talk to the Executive Board.

December 13-14, 1969. After being rebuffed at the winter meetings the previous two years, the players make their own plans in 1969 and meet in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Kuhn comes and speaks to the players, telling them he was their commissioner too and hoped the new CBA negotiations would speed up (the current one would be expiring on December 31). Several players voice complaints regarding AstroTurf, stadium design, the new All-Star voting by the fans, and the CBA negotiations. Players repeatedly stress that they have no say in issues that involve them.

December 13-14, 1969. Curt Flood appears at the Executive Board meeting and tells the players of his plans. They ask tough questions about his motivations – does he want more money, is this a "black power" thing -- but Flood firmly voices his conviction that the trade is unjust. The players unanimously vote to support his legal case financially and otherwise. Arthur Goldberg, former Supreme Court justice who had earlier worked with Miller at the Steelworkers union, is hired as Flood's attorney.

December 24, 1969. Flood writes a letter to Kuhn, claiming he should be a free agent. “After twelve years in the major leagues, I do not feel that I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes.”[ii] Kuhn denies his request.

Late December, 1969. Carl Yastrzemski writes to Miller objecting to the decision to back Flood without first hearing from the entire membership. The letter is made public by Yastrzemski. After the letter comes out, many players indicate their support for Flood.

December 31, 1969. CBA-1 expires, and needs to be replaced by April 5, the day before season starts.

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[i] Korr, 81.
[ii] Flood, 194.