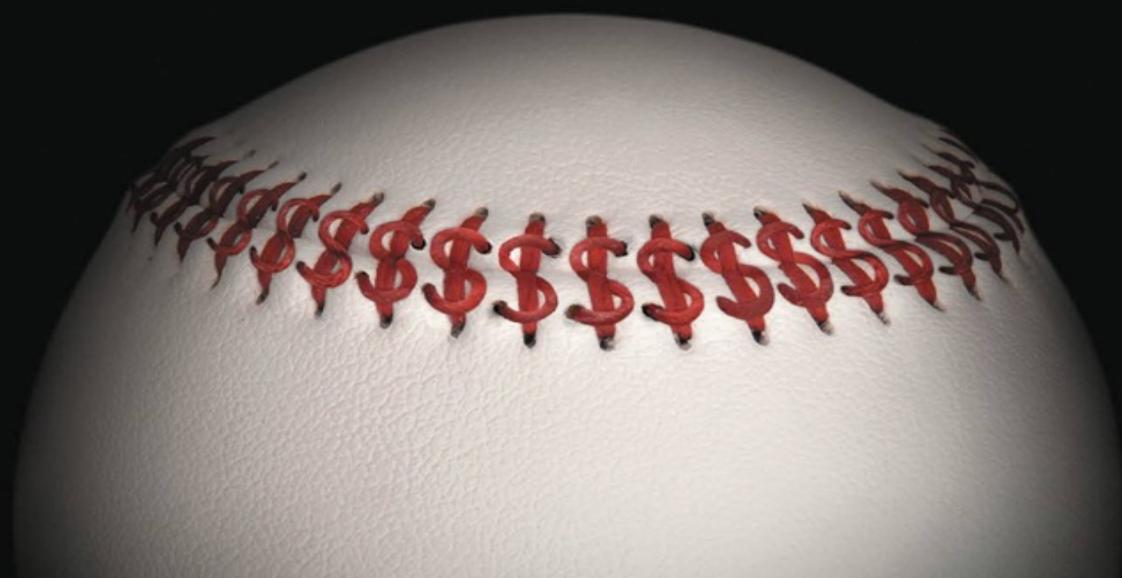


THE GAME

INSIDE THE
SECRET WORLD *of*
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL'S
POWER BROKERS

JON PESSAH



THE GAME

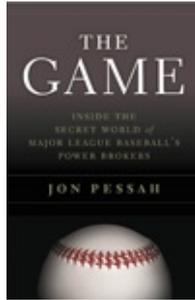
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To Suzi,
and in memory of Harriet

Prologue

THE BESPECTACLED 66-YEAR-OLD man in the blue blazer, white shirt, and red tie is walking across the thin stretch of grass between the first baseline and the home-team dugout. His name is Bud Selig, and it's several hours before his favorite team takes the field for batting practice. Selig usually enjoys being surrounded by people, but this quiet period before a baseball game is one of the Commissioner's favorites. It's April 6, 2001, and only a few stadium workers dot the stands. He's not sure if it's the serenity of the moment, the simple beauty of the manicured field, or the sweep of the grandstand that evokes the game's past. But for a man who has a lifelong love affair with baseball, it feels like walking into a cathedral.

He glances over at the pitcher's mound, his blue eyes squinting, and marvels at just how high it rises and how gosh-darn close it feels to home plate. He looks beyond the mound to the green walls stretched across the sprawling outfield. Even on his best days growing up on Milwaukee's ball fields, he could never knock a ball over those fences. No; the players who could do that were gods.

There's much about the game he cherishes, though maybe not as much as he did in the '70s, when he was a young owner and the game seemed simpler. So much has changed, so many battles have been fought, so much blood spilled. He often finds himself thinking back to 1992, when he led the revolt against his friend Commissioner Fay Vincent, took control of the game, and saved it. The game was in chaos back then. Yes, he'd sacrificed a World Series, but it was his good judgment, his innovations, and his political skill—especially his political skill—that brought the game back to life. He's sure of that.

Baseball is too important a social institution to fail—isn't that what he's told every fan, reporter, and lawmaker ever since? If that weren't true, how had he been able to help raise billions in taxpayer money to build baseball stadiums? The game has 11 sparkling new stadiums because Selig persuaded local governments to give him what he wanted—what he *needed*—to keep baseball alive in their cities.

Nowhere is that more true than here in Milwaukee, where the stadium closest to his heart is finally ready. In a few hours the first pitch will be thrown at the \$414 million Miller Park. There are still many in this town who bitterly resent bailing out his debt-ridden team, but even the harshest critics admire the architectural wonder he's given them.

Selig's eyes roam his team's new home. The one-of-a-kind fan-shaped retractable roof. A plaza lined with restaurants, shops, and luxury suites. Soaring brick archways that keep the promise voiced in the Brewers' new promotional video: *Miller Park, where a fan can't help but feel the reincarnation of baseball's romantic past.*

Selig walks a few steps down the baseline, his hands in his pockets, his slight slouch familiar to any baseball fan. How many times has he already watched the six-minute promo? He loves the clip of Hank Aaron and the Braves winning the '57 World Series and the celebration that followed—the first and last the town's enjoyed during its 50 years of baseball. And the clip of Robin Yount getting his 3,000th hit in a Brewers uniform. He's especially fond of the final passage, which will soon play on the 48-foot-wide screen in center field.

Miller Park will create a barn fire of passion for the team. The eyes of the baseball world will focus on Milwaukee, and talk of the inadequacies of small market baseball will give way to praise and the recollection of a time when fans lived and died with their team and the team waged battle for their fans. A time when loyalty to the grand old game was shared equally between players, owners, fans, and corporations.

Selig smiles. He was the town's 35-year-old boy wonder when he brought baseball back to Milwaukee in 1970. His reward: a team to run as he saw fit. Now he stands in his new stadium, running not just his team but also his entire sport.

Selig takes one more look around the park, then walks slowly into the Brewers dugout. He ambles through a series of tunnels and onto an elevator that brings him up to the .300 Club, where his friends and the city's leaders are gathered to celebrate the place that took him almost 15 years to build. He spends a few hours there, shaking hands and accepting congratulations, until word comes that he is needed back downstairs.

It's time to greet the man who once believed he would become the Commissioner of baseball.

President George W. Bush is working his way through Miller Park's visitors locker room surrounded by Secret Service agents and White House reporters. Just 24 hours earlier, Bush was in D.C., where the popular new President pushed Congress closer to passing his \$1.35 trillion, 10-year tax cut. He'd promised his old friend Buddy that he'd throw out the first pitch the night Miller Park opened, and it was a promise he planned to keep.

So he'd flown into Milwaukee on Air Force One earlier this afternoon with Laura, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and his Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, the former Wisconsin governor who helped build Bud's stadium. And now Bush is doing what he loves—hanging with major league players, sharing stories of his days running the Texas Rangers, and autographing a baseball for Hall of Famer Rod Carew, now the Brewers hitting coach.

"Something's wrong with this picture, me signing this for you," Bush tells Carew as he hands him the baseball. Everyone laughs. Bush is radiant in his black cowboy boots and dark slacks, a blue satin Brewers warm-up jacket pulled over a 40-pound flak vest. He's smiling broadly as he shakes hands with player after player.

"You've got my support on the tax cut," Cincinnati Reds pitcher Scott Sullivan tells him.

“It’s going to be a heck of a lot bigger than anyone thought,” Bush shouts back.

Bush is clearly enjoying himself, Selig thinks as he follows the President on his tour of the clubhouses. The two men developed a bond when Bush joined baseball in 1989, a few months after helping his father win the White House. They had much in common. Both grew up close to their mothers and wanted desperately to impress their fathers. Both were accustomed to being underestimated, something each uses to his full advantage.

And both have an abiding love for baseball. As a boy in grade school, Bush carried a bat to class every day, idolized Willie Mays, and talked about owning a baseball team, just like his uncle, one of the original owners of the Mets. But his real dream, one of Bush’s best friends told a magazine writer just before the 2000 election, was to become baseball’s Commissioner.

“He wanted to be Kenesaw Mountain Landis,” the friend said. “I’m still convinced that’s his goal.”

Chances are Selig has seen that article. There isn’t much concerning baseball that he doesn’t read, listen to, or watch. While some scoffed at the notion after Bush was elected President, Bud and others inside baseball know how much George W. Bush wanted to be Commissioner. And how close he had come.

It was one of the many challenges Selig faced after Vincent’s removal in September of 1992. Vincent is a longtime friend of the Bush family, and George openly supported the Commissioner right down to the day of his forced resignation. Selig assumed control two days later, but the last thing he wanted was to alienate a friend. Especially one with such powerful connections. So Selig made Bush a promise: he would support his dream to become baseball’s next Commissioner.

It was a promise Selig would never keep—there was just too much at stake, and Bush wasn’t battle-tested. The owners were preparing for another war with their players and union leader Don Fehr, a war Vincent was not prepared to fight. “The Commissioner should represent the players and the fans as well as the owners,” Vincent kept telling Selig. That’s when Selig knew Vincent had to go.

No, this was not the time for someone else to run his game—no matter how often he told Bush the job could be his.

Selig is sure he made the right decision back in 1992. And he is even more certain now, in 2001, for history seems ready to repeat itself. The labor deal he accepted after the 1994 strike was a truce, not a peace plan. Players are still making too much money. George Steinbrenner—with four titles in the last five seasons and a cable channel soon to launch—is still spending too much money. And Don Fehr is still in charge of the union. The power struggle between Selig, Steinbrenner, and Fehr—which in many ways has defined this era—has not abated.

Billions are again on the line, but this time there is a difference. Selig has made the owners even richer, doubling the value of their franchises and tripling their revenues with new stadiums and television deals. He’s growing rich, too, thanks to this new stadium and the \$3 million salary—plus bonuses—he now earns as Commissioner.

And he has far more power, too. Last time his main focus was bringing the owners together—a task once thought near impossible. Nothing, he knew, could ever get done without a united front. That accomplished, he now has complete control of labor negotiations. He’s spent millions lobbying Congress to get to this moment, and he has

a popular friend and ally in the White House, one who's just passed a landmark tax bill favoring many of the rich men who own baseball teams.

How could things have worked out any better?

Every one of the 42,024 seats at Miller Park is filled with fans who've already splurged on overpriced hot dogs, beer, and Brewers merchandise. They've watched the huge bald eagle leave its left-field perch next to Bernie Brewer and swoop down to the pitcher's mound while kids from every county in the state held the edges of a giant, outfield-covering flag. They've listened to longtime Brewers announcer Bob Uecker's well-worn but oddly entertaining jokes and paid equal attention to the introductions of Yount and Rice. Now they're ready for the main event.

"Mr. President, Mr. Commissioner, it's time," a Brewers official says just minutes before the first game's scheduled start.

Bush practiced pitching for an hour with White House spokesman Ari Fleischer a day earlier while waiting out the tax vote. He entertained reporters earlier that night by telling them he was still deciding between throwing a split finger or a straight fastball to Brewers manager Davey Lopes, who is now standing behind home plate ready to catch the first pitch. The President and the Commissioner, still chatting away, follow their escorts into the Brewers dugout.

The two men pause, then Selig climbs the steps and strides to the top of the pitcher's mound. He will throw out the first pitch. The President will have to wait his turn.

Selig is, after all, the Commissioner.

And this is his game.

PART I

CHANGING OF THE GUARD
(1992–1994)

Chapter 1

IN BUD WE TRUST

September 3–September 9, 1992

IT'S THE THIRD day of September in 1992, and Milwaukee Brewers owner Allan “Bud” Selig turns his black Lexus sedan south on Interstate 94 for the short drive to Chicago that’s been a long time coming. He’s called a meeting to decide the future of Commissioner Fay Vincent, the man he now considers the most urgent of baseball’s many problems. Most of the game’s other 27 owners want Vincent to resign, a rare display of unity, but Selig isn’t sure their resolve will hold. Nor is he certain they can fire Vincent without an ugly fight.

What Selig does know is this:

He has to persuade Yankees owner George Steinbrenner to share his rapidly growing revenues, which Selig’s Brewers have no hopes of ever matching.

He has to force union leader Don Fehr to accept a cap on the players’ rapidly growing salaries, which his Brewers have no real hope of paying.

And he has to twist the arms of Wisconsin politicians to build a new stadium so he can pay off his rapidly growing debt.

There’s only one way to make sure all this happens: take control of the game. Now. The survival of his baseball team—and every other small market team—depends on it.

Vincent didn’t have to be shoved aside like this, Selig thinks as his car barrels down the highway. He’s been warning Vincent for months that his Commissioner’s job was in jeopardy if he didn’t agree to stay out of the upcoming labor negotiations.

Sure, there are other issues that have put Vincent’s job at risk. American League owners are still irate that Vincent gave them less than a quarter of last year’s \$190 million expansion fees—\$42 million to the National League’s \$148 million—even though both leagues supplied the same number of players to stock the new Colorado and Florida teams. Of course the owners somehow forgot they’d asked Vincent to decide the split after they couldn’t agree among themselves.

And the Tribune Company is now taking baseball to court over Vincent’s decision to move their Chicago Cubs to the NL West along with the St. Louis Cardinals. Again, it was the NL owners who asked Vincent to make that call. But by next season the Tribune Company will pay seven teams for their broadcast rights, so that request was easy to forget, too.

Truth is, Vincent was never a comfortable fit for the game’s owners. He was

already a wealthy man when he was swept into office two days after his close friend and Commissioner Bart Giamatti died of a sudden heart attack on September 1, 1989, after only five months in office. He was elevated to stardom a month later for the calm hand he displayed after a 6.9 earthquake hit minutes before Game 3 of the Giants-A's World Series, killing 63, injuring 3,700, and paralyzing the Bay Area for days. Working with local authorities, Vincent and baseball played a key role in guiding a crippled San Francisco back to life. A dedicated baseball fan and star athlete until a fall in college left him hobbled, Vincent felt the Commissioner should tend to the interests of the owners *and* the players and fans. And that meant wading into labor negotiations when they stall, as they have like clockwork for almost two decades.

But the labor contract holds the key to fixing the owners' problems, and labor talks have been Selig's domain ever since he took over the Player Relations Committee, the owners' bargaining unit, in 1985. Going up against Fehr and the union was *his* job. And Selig desperately wants Vincent out of the way.

Selig and his allies have no intention of allowing a replay of 1990, when they felt Vincent double-crossed them by meeting secretly with Fehr at his Greenwich, Connecticut, home during the owners' long spring training lockout. Vincent undermined management's position during that visit, taking their salary cap proposal off the table and giving in to union demands. At least, that's the way the owners saw it. The resulting agreement left free agency intact and player salaries continued to climb.

No, Selig isn't taking any chances this time around. Not when he has so much at stake.

Quite simply, Selig knows he can't keep things going in Milwaukee unless the game's economics change—and change dramatically. He already has so many liens on his franchise that he was forced to take \$35 million from baseball's line of credit just to pay this season's bills. He's certain to lose a host of players to free agency in a few months, including his team's biggest star. And he needs a new stadium, but those talks are going nowhere with the game's financial structure in doubt.

Fehr's solution: move the Brewers to a bigger market. Selig was a 31-year-old car dealer and the largest nonvoting shareholder of the Milwaukee Braves when his team packed up and moved to Atlanta for the 1966 season. It took four years for him to beg, borrow, and all but steal a team out of a Seattle bankruptcy court to bring Major League Baseball back to Milwaukee. He'll be damned if his hometown will lose a baseball team for the second time.

Selig's mind turns to his relationship with Fehr. Nothing infuriates baseball's owners more than the media calling Fehr the game's most powerful man. Selig believes all Fehr really cares about is getting big money for his players. And that's why he has to be stopped, if not driven from the game completely.

Not that Selig hasn't already tried and lost. It was Fehr who took the owners to arbitration—*three times*—after they stopped bidding on free agents for three seasons in the late '80s. Each time Fehr accused the owners of collusion, and each time an arbitrator agreed. It cost the owners \$280 million—almost \$11 million each—to settle all cases. Selig is still working to pay off that bill.

Selig glances in his rearview mirror and sees the man who negotiated that settlement, Foley & Lardner lawyer Bob DuPuy, sitting in the backseat of the Lexus, behind Bud's daughter Wendy. DuPuy looks a bit nervous, and Selig jokes that they

both need to relax instead of worrying about how fast he's weaving his car through traffic.

Was it only last May that he instructed DuPuy to work with a growing number of owners who wanted to sack Vincent? What began as a group of six teams grew to 18, and Selig had DuPuy monitor their meetings, coordinate with their lawyers, and report everything back to him. When Vincent got word of these meetings, he told them what they were considering was meaningless—the game's constitution clearly states that a sitting Commissioner cannot be removed. It became DuPuy's task to find a hole in Vincent's argument, a task that turned into a full-time job.

Selig glances over at his daughter. He's been grooming Wendy to run his team almost since the morning his then 10-year-old little girl burst into his bedroom, tears streaming down her cheeks, demanding to know why her father had traded pitcher Marty Pattin—her favorite player!—while she was fast asleep. Now 32, Wendy is smart, driven, and as big a Brewers fan as her 58-year-old dad.

Milwaukee was a great baseball town when Selig was young, setting attendance records and celebrating Hank Aaron and Warren Spahn when the Braves won a World Series title back in '57. But that was before free agency made winning far more complicated—and a whole lot more expensive. And long before the size of a team's television market mattered more than the number of tickets sold.

The cable television explosion in the late '80s changed everything. Steinbrenner's record-setting \$486 million, 12-year deal with the MSG Network in 1988 was just the canary in the mine, warning owners like Bud of the trouble that lay ahead. Now, in 1992, 60 percent of America is wired for cable, a number that's growing fast. The cable monopolies are in need of programming to fill their 24/7 systems, and baseball offers 162 reality shows a season.

But Milwaukee, bound by Chicago to the south, Minnesota to the west, and Lake Michigan to the east, is an old Rust Belt town with a shrinking population. Cable television will bury Milwaukee, not save it—unless Selig can persuade the Steinbrenners of baseball to share their growing profits.

Selig thinks about the clashing agendas he'll encounter in Chicago. Most of the owners don't care much for each other—too much wealth, too many egos—but Bud is a friend to them all, a skill he learned long ago as a salesman for his father's Ford dealership. He doesn't mind the dysfunction—hell, he's learned to benefit from it—but he does hate the way most of them do business.

Seven teams—the Yankees, Mets, Dodgers, Red Sox, Blue Jays, Cubs, and Orioles—earn the lion's share of baseball's bounty, a record \$1.2 billion this season. And they want to keep it that way; revenue sharing isn't in their vocabulary. Teams in the middle—the Cardinals, Rangers, Indians, and the like—spend wildly when they think they can win. But too often, they simply get burned.

Seven others—the Pirates, Expos, Twins, Padres, Royals, Mariners, and Bud's Brewers—have just about given up hope. With the wealth gap growing ever larger, Selig would just as soon follow the advice of his close friend, White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf, and use a lockout to shut down the game and force a change rather than continue fighting a losing battle.

Selig's thoughts shift back to Vincent. *He's been in baseball for all of three years, and thinks he has all the answers.* Bud's been in baseball for 32 years, longer than all

but three owners, and no decisions are made without his blessing. Yes, baseball's constitution allows the Commissioner to weigh in on any issue, but all Vincent's predecessors understood they worked for the owners. Rarely did a Commissioner cross them. And when they did—"Commissioneritis" is what the owners call it—they were dismissed at the end of their terms.

Damn, Vincent just never listened.

Vincent is already threatening to take them all to court if they try to fire him. But he's crossed so many owners in his three years that most of them have been calling Selig regularly for months, demanding Vincent's head. *Let him sue*, they're telling Bud. *We'll take our chances*. The Commissioner still has his supporters, including one whose father sits in the White House, but as Selig and his two passengers approach Chicago, he knows a tipping point has been reached.

It's time for Fay to go.

And time for Bud to take charge.

Selig looks around the Hyatt Regency O'Hare suite Reinsdorf rented for a pre-meeting strategy session. About 18 owners are present, lawyers in tow, all of them ready to move on Vincent. Everything is proceeding as planned.

Bud's happy to see his mentor, 77-year-old Twins owner Carl Pohlad, among the arrivals. The two men grew close soon after the billionaire bought the Twins in 1984, and it's become Pohlad's practice to send a new suit, dress shirt, and ties to Selig every Christmas in a valiant attempt to improve the younger man's appearance. The two men spend at least an hour on the phone every Saturday morning, talking business, politics, and baseball.

For most of the past year, the conversations have focused on how poorly their byzantine game is run. The American League office manages its league, the National League office oversees its 12 teams, and any efforts to get the two to work together and maximize profits are feeble at best.

Selig knows that no matter how much money Carl has—Pohlad's net worth is an estimated \$765 million—he's tired of owning a franchise he insists is bleeding money despite winning its second championship in five years last October. And that's why he refused to match Toronto's two-year, \$10.85 million offer to his star pitcher, Jack Morris, last December. Morris claimed a place in World Series history last fall when he shut out the Braves for 10 innings to win Game 7 and the title. Pohlad was furious when the 37-year-old pitcher turned his back on the Twins' offer in favor of bigger bucks in Canada.

Pohlad hired the accounting firm Arthur Andersen this spring to draw up a better business model and soon started holding meetings with a handful of owners. The Pohlad Group, as it came to be called, began with six owners—with Selig as a cofounder—and soon grew to 20. The mission was to alter the game's business plan, focusing on capping player salaries and creating equitable sharing of local television revenue.

Although Pohlad started this uprising, Selig knows it's Reinsdorf who's led the charge. Reinsdorf lost faith in Vincent well before this season. He still talks about sitting in the Commissioner's Park Avenue office in the final days of the 32-day

lockout in '90, when Fehr delivered what he called the union's best and final offer. Selig, Pohlad, and three other members of the bargaining team were there, too. "I'm begging you to take this deal," Vincent told them. "I'm begging you."

Pohlad and Reinsdorf stood up, excused themselves, and walked slowly down the hall and into the men's room. Standing at the urinal next to Reinsdorf, Carl turned to Jerry and said, "We have to get rid of this guy."

Vincent keeps pointing to Article 9 of baseball's constitution, which states there can be "no diminution" of a Commissioner's powers, as proof that he cannot be fired. Fact is, the constitution contains no mention of removing the Commissioner from office before his term expires. Reinsdorf and Selig have been talking about how many votes they need to oust Vincent, and they settled on a minimum of 18. They also scheduled this meeting six days ahead of the already planned quarterly meetings in St. Louis to give Vincent time to realize that a fight against two-thirds of ownership would be fruitless.

At least, that is their hope.

The media often portrays Selig as Reinsdorf's puppet—the two friends are convinced it's Fehr who pushes the story, hoping to drive a wedge between them—but the truth is the two men complete each other. No one questions Reinsdorf's intellect or his detailed grasp of the business of baseball, something few other owners have taken the time to learn. But Reinsdorf lacks political skills, which are Selig's stock-in-trade.

Yes, Reinsdorf can be charming, but he's far more comfortable being combative. Selig also has a temper—as anyone who's stood next to him when his Brewers are losing will attest—but he understands the value of relationships and is willing to work hard to maintain them. If it's Reinsdorf who crafts the deals, it's Selig who knows how to close them.

Reinsdorf will rarely call an owner—other than Bud—unless he has something important to discuss. Selig could not be more different. Before there were cell phones and the Internet, there was Bud on his office phone for hours on end, talking to one owner after another, casually but carefully gathering up information. No one knows more about what is happening in this game than the man in Milwaukee.

And no one knows the value of money—and the credibility and power that come with it—better than Selig, who has far less of it than any owner in baseball. The son of a baseball-crazy schoolteacher mom and a father who owned Wisconsin's largest Ford dealership, Selig now lives a comfortable life in one of Milwaukee's leafy upper-middle-class suburbs. He earns \$463,000 a year running the Brewers, along with what amounts to spare change as president of Selig Leasing Company, Inc., the company his father started years ago to cater to local businessmen.

His most valuable asset is his stake in his beleaguered baseball franchise. But if the sport's economics are not tilted more in Selig's direction, he'll either have to sell or move the team. Neither option is palatable. And that is why Selig is at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare today.

Reinsdorf was an early supporter of the Pohlad Group, even though he turns a nice profit while his team plays second fiddle to the Cubs. The Brooklyn-born son of a sewing machine salesman made his money fashioning tax shelters for doctors and lawyers when the top tax rate was 70 percent. He sold his practice to build an investment company that soon raised \$650 million to buy up real estate in Chicago,

more than enough to partner with TV executive Eddie Einhorn and buy the White Sox for \$19 million in 1981.

Reinsdorf sold his investment firm to American Express for \$102 million a year later, then spent \$9 million to buy the Chicago Bulls in '84. As luck would have it, the team drafted a kid named Michael Jordan later that summer, and they've already given Reinsdorf two NBA championship rings.

But it's a World Series title Reinsdorf wants most. Pushing Vincent out and ushering in Selig—with his anti-union and pro-small market stances—is all part of making sure the teams with the biggest payrolls don't always have the best shot to win. Or the only shot. Reinsdorf wants the next Commissioner to be the game's CEO, reporting directly to the owners. For the last 10 years, others have been suggesting that Selig take the job, and Reinsdorf has now joined the chorus.

All they have to do is get rid of Vincent first.

A pack of baseball writers is already assembled in the Hyatt Regency's lobby when Selig and his friends arrive. "No comment" is all they get from the owners attending the pre-meeting strategy session, but that changes when Rangers minority partner George W. Bush strolls through the doors.

Bush loves his role in baseball, but he arrives in Chicago a man conflicted. George was a kid when Fay, the best friend of his uncle Bucky, worked in his family's oil fields. George H. W. called from the White House to congratulate Vincent when he was named Commissioner, and both father and son count Fay as a good friend.

Neither Bush wants to see Vincent forced out of office. But if Vincent is no longer the Commissioner, Junior would love to have the job.

Bush's Rangers partners know political operative Karl Rove is using their baseball team as a marketing tool for George's eventual run for governor of Texas, just as he will later use a ranch in Crawford to market W's run for the White House. But Bush has often told Vincent that he'd rather sit in the Commissioner's chair than the governor's mansion.

Many in baseball have heard him say similar things. And while most of the owners resent the attention Bush attracts from the media, they all recognize his rare social intelligence—a certain magnetism—which draws even the most successful men to his side. Still, as Vincent's fate grew uncertain, a few owners were already whispering that George was not sharp enough to run their game.

Reporters flock around Bush, who's accompanied by his team of Secret Service men, and he slows just outside the meeting room to enjoy the attention and state his case. "Vincent is my friend, but I happen to also believe this guy is a good man who's being made a scapegoat," Bush tells them. "Generally the scapegoat is not the solution. We have to get our own house in order."

Bush has been trying to help save his friend's job for months, defending him to the owners while encouraging Vincent to stay on the sidelines in the upcoming contract talks. A majority of owners now want a salary cap and increased revenue sharing, Bush told Vincent, and they appear willing to shut down the game to get their way. Vincent told his friend he considered it his job to make sure all sides—the owners, the players, and the fans—are treated fairly. He didn't think a salary cap was fair—or

attainable—and had reservations about Bud and Jerry’s revenue sharing ideas. And shutting down the game was clearly not in the best interest of the fans.

The odds are clearly against the Commissioner, but Bush warned the owners that this man wasn’t going to leave without a fight. Vincent has already hired Brendan Sullivan, senior partner of the elite Washington law firm Williams & Connolly, to take his case to court if necessary. Sullivan received wide acclaim when he successfully defended Colonel Oliver North in the Iran-Contra affair five years ago. Word is he’s relishing going up against the so-called Lords of Baseball.

And that’s not the owners’ only worry. There’s talk that baseball’s banks might freeze their credit if they move on Vincent, which is especially worrisome to those owners counting on loans to bankroll their forays into this winter’s loaded free agent market. It was Vincent who closed the deal on their line of credit a year ago, when the agreement almost fell apart, and the thought of a protracted legal battle is already making some of baseball’s bankers nervous.

It’s almost time for the meeting to begin, but Bush is taking a small bit of delight in the fact that some of the anti-Vincent forces are annoyed watching him publicly defend the Commissioner. “It doesn’t matter what the vote is,” Bush says. “We’re dealing with a man of integrity. He’s not going to leave.”

The doors to the large ballroom swing closed as each owner walks to his or her assigned seat. Breaking custom, the National League and American League owners are intermingled, a move Selig and Reinsdorf made to separate Vincent’s allies. Toronto Blue Jays President Paul Beeston, the man they’ve chosen to chair this meeting, stands behind the head table, a league lawyer on either side, and gavels the proceedings to order.

The league lawyers have drawn up a resolution of no confidence, the Blue Jays executive tells the owners, calling on Vincent to step down immediately. “Each of you will have a chance to speak,” says Beeston, who’s been given a carefully crafted order of speakers. This meeting will last almost four hours, and it will be quite some time before anyone has a chance to speak in Vincent’s defense.

Beeston calls upon Pittsburgh chairman Doug Danforth to speak first. It’s a strategic choice. Danforth is widely respected for the four years he spent running Westinghouse, where he shed divisions, doubled profit margins, and tripled its stock price. Danforth led a group of local executives who bought the Pirates seven years ago, and their team is on its way to its third straight NL East title and drawing 2 million fans.

But Danforth says the team can no longer afford to pay its stars. Last season it was All-Star third baseman Bobby Bonilla who bolted for the big market Mets. Already this year, star pitcher Doug Drabek and left fielder Barry Bonds, the game’s best player, have told Pirates management they will be gone at season’s end. No small market owner could miss this message.

The 70-year-old Danforth likes Vincent and just a few weeks ago visited the 54-year-old Commissioner in New York, trying to convince the younger man to walk away. But Vincent wouldn’t hear of it, and now Danforth is calling for his removal.

“I personally have no confidence in Fay’s leadership,” Danforth says. “Players’ salaries are too high. Clubs are on the verge of collapse. Media leaks come out of his office, and he’s intervened in areas he had no business getting involved in.”

And then the dagger.

“Baseball cannot move forward under his leadership,” Danforth says.

Four more of the game’s elder statesmen—Fred Kuhlmann of the Cardinals, Bill Giles of the Phillies, Stanton Cook of the Cubs, and Peter O’Malley of the Dodgers—all rise and echo Danforth’s words. Soon it’s Pohlrad’s turn.

“All Fay is interested in is having the spotlight on himself,” says Pohlrad, reminding his fellow owners of Vincent’s frequent visits to ballparks and his routine of sitting in a golf cart on the field talking to players, answering questions for the media, and signing autographs for fans. How will any of that solve the owners’ problems?

“Fay’s incompetence,” Pohlrad declares, “is a cancer.”

Nine men speak before Beeston recognizes Bush. “You all are inconsistent as hell,” says Bush, reminding them they’ve all changed their minds about Vincent depending on the issue. “I don’t agree with the first nine speakers. Fay makes tough calls, and even if Bush doesn’t agree with them, he respects them.

“Fay doesn’t play politics. He’ll go to court to keep his position, I assure you of that. There’s no point in firing him, because he’s not leaving.”

Boston’s Haywood Sullivan and Baltimore President Larry Lucchino also come to Vincent’s defense. “He can’t be fired,” insists Lucchino, citing the game’s constitution, “and he won’t resign.” Mets co-owner Fred Wilpon, who sees the Commissioner as the firewall between his franchise and owners with revenue sharing agendas, pitches a compromise. Rather than fire Vincent, they should convene a committee to restructure the Commissioner’s role and the way the game is governed.

None of this makes any difference to Reinsdorf, who pulls out a list he’s been compiling for months entitled “Bad Things Fay’s Done” and begins reading. He’s botched our labor negotiations and George Steinbrenner’s suspension. He leaks stories to the media. He even refused to allow Minnie Minoso to come to bat for the White Sox and become the first man to play in five different decades.

“Vincent has done a terrible job,” Reinsdorf says. “He’s simply incompetent.”

On and on Reinsdorf talks, his voice rising and his words coming faster, until almost 20 minutes have passed. Finally, a sheepish look creeps across his face. “I’ve probably talked too much,” he says, sensing that everyone in the room thinks he reached that point long ago.

“That’s right,” Selig says. “Give him the hook.”

Selig rises and turns serious. “This is a very traumatic day,” he says, the emotion clear in his voice. “I wrote a memo after the 1990 negotiations which was very critical of the Commissioner. [Houston owner] John McMullen called me and said I was far too easy on him.

“Fay has had an opportunity to propel us forward, but instead he’s held us back. I was one of the last to come to the conclusion that Fay must go, but he really doesn’t care for the institution. There will be less damage if we make a change and move on so we can propel the industry forward.”

When Mike Illitch, the new owner of the Tigers, and Mariners CEO John Ellis speak in favor of the resolution, Selig and Reinsdorf know they have their 18 votes. Beeston collects and counts the secret ballots, though he never doubted the outcome. He’s been around Selig long enough to know Bud never brings anything to a vote without first knowing the result.

The final count is 18–9 in favor of demanding that Vincent step down, with one abstention. If Vincent refuses, the Executive Council will decide the next step at the owners meeting in St. Louis six days from now.

National League President Bill White is asked to call Vincent with the news. The conference room doors swing open again, and all Vincent's supporters rush past reporters without commenting—including Bush, who marches quickly behind his wall of Secret Service agents, anger etched on his face.

Beeston emerges and says he'll read the resolution but won't take any questions. The most damning passage: "The major league clubs do not have confidence in the ability of the present Commissioner, Fay Vincent, to carry out the responsibilities of the office of the Commissioner, and under his direction it is impossible for baseball to move forward effectively and constructively."

Done reading, Beeston folds the document in half and excuses himself. "That's all, boys," he says, with a wave of his hand.

The vote may have been secret, but the lobby is abuzz with how it all went down. The Cubs, White Sox, Yankees, Dodgers, Angels, Giants, Cardinals, Phillies, Pirates, Brewers, Twins, Indians, Blue Jays, Rockies, Padres, Mariners, Tigers, and Braves all asked for Vincent's removal.

The Mets, Orioles, Astros, Rangers, A's, Marlins, Red Sox, Royals, and Expos voted against the resolution. Cincinnati's Marge Schott, who got up and walked out of the meeting early, abstained.

"It would certainly be difficult if 18 clubs are asking you to resign," says Joe Molloy, appointed the Yankees managing partner until his father-in-law, George Steinbrenner, returns from suspension in March. "The industry is paralyzed. The hope is that Fay recognizes that."

Several other owners linger in the lobby, speaking with reporters, none more eagerly than Reinsdorf. "Now, for the first time, Vincent can see the numbers against him," says Reinsdorf, who can't restrain a smile while holding court in the center of the lobby. "Before this, he may very well not have realized there were 18. Now he knows."

The questions come fast, and Reinsdorf is happy to answer every one of them. Could the owners fire Vincent in St. Louis if he refuses to resign? "We didn't discuss that today," he says, "but I see no grounds for compromise."

Vincent has already announced he plans to attend the quarterly meeting in St. Louis. What happens then? "He will not be permitted to preside."

And how will this affect the next labor talks? "When we go to war with the union," says Reinsdorf, "I want the Commissioner to have an obligation only to the owners."

True to form, Selig is more reserved—and evasive—than his partner. "I don't have any reaction other than to say the resolution speaks for itself," Selig says. "It was a very, very constructive meeting. There was a discussion of real issues and not personalities."

A reporter asks if today's outcome is a big step toward solving baseball's problems. "Only history will tell," says Selig. "I'm always optimistic."

Another reporter relays the news that Vincent has issued a press release in New York, vowing to remain in office. Selig sighs, answers a few more questions, then gathers up Wendy and DuPuy for their drive back to Milwaukee.

He thinks about how all their lives are about to change. Wendy has been the Brewers' general counsel for the past two years, and she'll soon pick up more of her father's work, especially the negotiations for the new stadium. Bud's still telling the Milwaukee media he'll build a new ballpark himself, but both Seligs know they'll be asking taxpayers to build it once baseball gets its house in order.

He'll send more of baseball's legal affairs to DuPuy when Vincent comes to his senses and resigns. And he'll assume the role of Commissioner, focusing first on picking up the pieces from today's meeting, where there were many bruised feelings. Then he'll start selling his strategy for the coming confrontation with Fehr, this time without worry about interference from Vincent.

Bud is cruising on I-94 when he reaches for his car phone. It's long past time to check in with Lori Keck, his assistant. Keck has been with him since '72, doing the same job she did for Vince Lombardi before the Packers coach left Green Bay for Washington. No one in the Brewers organization, maybe not even Wendy, knows Bud better.

For 20 years, Keck has sat outside Bud's cramped, cluttered office, screening his calls, keeping him on schedule, telling him when his bills are due—and overdue. Keck still remembers the early years when she would pull out a step stool so Bud could peer out the windows along the top of his office wall and count cars as they entered the County Stadium lot, hoping there would be enough paying customers to cover the team's bills.

She knows all the owners who come in to see Bud—Steinbrenner, a frequent visitor, is one of her favorites—and because Selig never closes his door, she knows just about everything that's going on in the game. And Keck already knows the news coming out of Chicago—and what it means—when she picks up her boss' call.

“Good afternoon,” says Keck. “Commissioner Selig's office.”

She could swear she hears Bud almost swerve off the road.

It's been four days since the owners meeting in Chicago and still no word from Vincent. It's Labor Day afternoon, and Selig's legal counsel Bob DuPuy is spending the holiday sitting at his kitchen table, a telephone pressed to his ear. He's on a conference call with Reinsdorf, Bill Giles, and lawyer David Boies, debating what to do should Vincent show up at the owners meeting in St. Louis two days from now.

All the four men know for sure is that Vincent went off to his summer home in Harwich Port, Massachusetts, to ponder his next move. They've heard Bush, Marlins owner Wayne Huizenga, and a few others are urging Fay to fight. If he does, they all consider Brendan Sullivan a formidable opponent and know a court battle could linger well into next year.

There's another conference call scheduled for later today, and DuPuy is hoping it doesn't completely wipe out his day. Like many in Milwaukee, he's caught up in their baseball team's magic season, and he'd like to catch at least some of today's game on TV.

The Brewers, picked to finish in the bottom half of the AL East, are the surprise team of baseball and enter today's game in third place, just 5½ games behind division leader Toronto with 26 to play. But the future of the team's two best players—

designated hitter Paul Molitor and pitcher Chris Bosio, both free agents at season's end—has also been a big part of the team's story for the last few months.

Everyone knows about the team's money problems—heck, Bud and Wendy talk about it almost every day. It was driven home again just a few days ago, when Toronto acquired Mets ace David Cone—and the pitcher's big contract—off waivers. Bud could only tell his players and fans it was a deal he couldn't afford.

Still, pennant fever is alive and well in Milwaukee, and Robin Yount's pursuit of his 3,000th hit has been a nice bonus. DuPuy has been a Brewers fan since coming to Milwaukee's Foley & Lardner in 1973. It's been 10 years since the Brewers made their lone World Series appearance, and, like every other Milwaukee fan, he's hanging on every game.

But DuPuy and the other three men on the line still have an unwanted Commissioner to deal with. They are debating the merits of the strategy baseball's legal team has suggested—Vincent can be replaced, they say, if the owners pay off the \$1 million and change left on the last 18 months of his contract—when Giles starts shouting. “Fay's quit!” he yells. “I just saw it on ESPN. It's all over!”

DuPuy hangs up, then dials Selig's number to give him the news. Vincent decided a win in court would be a Pyrrhic victory. Too many of his employers, Vincent wrote in his letter of resignation, “want the Commissioner to represent only owners and to do their bidding in all matters. I haven't done that, and I could not do so.” So he decided to resign.

One could almost hear the collective sigh of relief across baseball. In the absence of a Commissioner, the game's Executive Council is now in charge. The Council will appoint a chairman to serve as Acting Commissioner, and it's no secret Selig will fill that role. All that remains now is the formality of the Executive Council vote in St. Louis.

Selig tells DuPuy he is no longer needed in St. Louis, and the lawyer is happy to cancel his flight. There is a pennant race to watch. Yount is three hits away from 3,000. And DuPuy has tickets for the next three games.

What could be better?

The large black limo comes to a stop, the back doors swing open, and out comes Bud Selig and his daughter. They walk briskly to the County Stadium owners' entrance with fellow travelers George Bush, Padres owner Tom Werner, and American League President Bobby Brown trailing close behind. It's September 9, and a few hours ago they were all at the Adam's Mark Hotel in St. Louis, where baseball's Executive Council voted Selig the game's Acting Commissioner. Then they hopped on a private plane and flew to Milwaukee.

And now Bud, Wendy, and their friends are rushing to Selig's suite to see if Yount will rap out his 3,000th hit. The Brewers' average attendance is just under 23,000 a game—16th in baseball—but 47,589 fans jam into rickety County Stadium tonight, hoping to witness history. Selig hasn't seen the place this alive in years.

Yount bats second, and everyone, teammates included, rise to their feet as Robin steps in against Cleveland right-hander Jose Mesa. Milwaukee fell in love with “The Kid” back in '74, when the 18-year-old shortstop hit a game-winning home run in his