

Cultural Daily

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Sports Expendables

Jerry Kavanagh · Thursday, February 16th, 2012

In *The Mikado*, the Lord High Executioner Ko-Ko compiles his little list of “society offenders” who, if executed, “would not be missed.” Among other expendables, he notes, “There’s the pestilential nuisances who write for autographs [and] all people who have flabby hands and irritating laughs.” I once asked several notable sports figures and writers what they would not miss if it were eliminated from sports, and got a range of responses. Enjoy the sports expendables.

The late Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter **David Halberstam** said, “I think noise at a sports event is terrific, but I wouldn’t miss the gratuitous noise of rock-and-roll stuff that they put on all the time. I would not miss the departure of the DH. I wouldn’t miss the celebration of self. I wouldn’t miss Barry Bonds, if he hit a home run, pausing to admire himself before going to first base. Not just Barry Bonds, but everybody else who does it. I believe in the old idea of get down to first base and then you can break into your trot. The manifestations of ego, the sack dances.... Some of those emotions are really genuine, but an awful lot of them we could do without. There’s too much self-celebration based on too little evidence.”

Daniel Okrent, the former ombudsman for the *New York Times*, said, “I wouldn’t miss the shouting, and when I say shouting I mean not just the broadcasters but also the strutting and shouting of the players — the me-me-me attention that they get. I wouldn’t miss the home-run game. I like the small-ball game better, but we’re in a home-run-game era. I wouldn’t miss the language of war being applied to football, which I think began in the Nixon administration and hasn’t left.”

Armen Keteyian, the head of research for CBS News, said, “I wouldn’t miss poker on television if it left the planet. Nah, that’s not a sport.” Echoing Okrent, he added, “I wouldn’t miss the self-aggrandizement, the look-at-me culture that has long past crept in and has now buried in many respects what is really pure and good. And anything that has to do with sports and reality television. This, to me, is cringe TV.”



Sandy Alderson, the GM of the New York Mets, had just one item on his list: organ music.

Likewise, **John King** of CNN offered the briefest of lists: “The wave.”

New York Times columnist **Harvey Araton** said he would not miss the three-point shot. NBA Hall-of-Famer **Jerry West** agreed and added, “I can do without the dunk shot, too, by the way. One point for a dunk.”

Fellow basketball Hall-of-Famer **Joe Dumars** said, “The touch fouls. The game is so physical, and

then all of a sudden a touch foul is called. That's why you see guys saying, 'You have got to be kidding!'"

Former **New York Times** columnist **Ira Berkow**, said, "Every time a guy gets fouled in basketball, he argues. Every time a batter gets a close pitch, he looks like he's going to run at the pitcher."

Steve Kerr, former President and GM of the Phoenix Suns and now a broadcaster for Turner Sports, said he wouldn't miss "that little circle underneath the basket where the players take charges. I wouldn't miss time-outs. I wouldn't miss the circuses that go on at half-time of NBA games."

Peter Gammons of the MLB Network said that he would not miss the DH. "And I'm not an old-schooler," he said. "I just think the game is more versatile without the DH. I think one rule is better for the game. It's silly to have separate rules, with American League teams having the DH in National League parks and vice versa."

Sean McManus, President of CBS Sports, said he would not miss "any performance-enhancing drugs — an absurd phrase. I read that as being cheating. It's a stain that's been put on the entire sports world."

National Magazine Award-winning writer **Gary Smith** of *Sports Illustrated* compiled a short list: "Bats that break so easily. I have a real fear that somebody's going to lose an eye before they get a grip on this. I wouldn't miss PSLs. I wouldn't miss baseball games starting at 8:30 and ending after midnight and days off in between tournaments and games and playoffs and World Series where they just stretch out forever. I wouldn't miss boxing, you know, with the total way that it's legislated and run."

Broadcaster **Marv Albert** said he wouldn't miss "some of the long pre-game shows where the same stuff is being discussed over and over. People are making predictions. I always feel, 'What do predictions mean?' I realize they're filling time, and it's a very inexpensive way to fill time because you don't have to spend money on production pieces. But there are so many people, particularly during the football season, making predictions. I don't think it has any significance at all. It's a guess. You may have all the information in the world, but it's a time-filler. I wouldn't miss that."

John Walsh, Executive Editor at ESPN, said, "The clichéd, robot-like responses to questions by athletes, coaches and owners, and everybody in sports. That would be right up there."

Sports agent **Tom Reich** said, "Some of the questions that are asked of the players are so far afield, are so inappropriate, it's like nails across a chalkboard. Sometimes I wonder how the players can possibly deal with some of the questions."

Images: Opera Australia's 2011 production of The Mikado; the boredom of TV poker.

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