



The New York Times/Bob Glass

Parimutuel clerks at Aqueduct jeering yesterday as cars containing nonunion personnel passed by

Red Smith

## Dave Kingman's Unforgivable Sin

Dave Kingman has committed an unforgivable sin, and if he goes to hell, M. Donald Grant will be saddened but not surprised. Not only does the most prolific hitter of home runs ever employed by the New York Mets want to be paid twice as much money as his employers wish to spend; he has compounded the sin by taking his case to the press.

For this, eternal damnation is mandatory. Baseball clubs have always used the newspapers to present their side of the case to the public. A way back when John McGraw managed the New York Giants, he delivered rousing, and highly printable, statements about what a lousy first baseman young Bill Terry was and how Terry, instead of holding out for an undeserved raise, should be grateful that he was tolerated in the

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big leagues. Some of the liveliest interviews Connie Mack ever gave had to do with holdouts. "He's a good player," he conceded one spring when little Wally Moses, the fastest man in the league going down to first base, wanted to be paid for batting .320 and hitting 25 home runs. "He's a good player, but he thinks he's a hell of a player and he's not. He's got too strong a weakness!" He was referring to the fact that ground balls occasionally got past Moses in right field. They did, but the weakness wasn't all that strong. And only last year in the Mets' camp, management was painting Tom Seaver as a greedy ingrate selfishly putting his family ahead of his team.

Taking its case to the press is standard operating procedure for management, but when a player does it he is consorting with the enemy. In a press conference that he held in St. Petersburg last week, Kingman disclosed no secrets and betrayed no confidences, but the fact that he held the conference was enough to harden management's position. "All hopes on both sides that this money war not be fought in the newspapers are gone," one paper reported. "It is all out in the open now."

Until then, nothing had been out in the open except what management leaked to the press.

### Blue-Collar Vote

Kingman called the conference because he felt his position had been misrepresented in the press and he hoped to correct that. He said published reports that he was seeking a long-term contract worth \$3 million were mere speculation. He said he had never mentioned such a figure. Yet he refused to say what he was asking, the only possible way of correcting errors. All that did was invite further speculation.

Putting his statements together with statements by Joe McDonald, the general manager, the reporters concluded that Kingman was demanding a bonus and six-year contract for a total somewhere between \$2 million and \$3 million. Dave didn't win that one.

"Don't say I blasted the Mets," he asked the reporters. In the New York Daily News, the headline over that read: "Kingman Levels Blast at Mets." He didn't win there.

"And now I leave it to the New York fans to decide who is right," he said. He's not going to win that one, partly because he refuses to give the fans the facts on which to base a decision. Instead, The Daily News has turned his own words against him.

Presenting its own unsupported version of the facts—salary for last season, \$95,000; club offer this year, \$200,000; player's demand, a \$1 million bonus plus \$350,000 a year for five years, totaling \$2.75 million—the paper is inviting readers to vote for one side or the other by postcard. Can anyone doubt how the blue-collar electorate will vote on the basis of those "facts"?

### The Dark Ages

Like everybody else, Kingman looked on while free agents sold themselves for millions this winter and other players of quality were signed to multiyear contracts with annual salaries up to \$400,000. Though baseball players still have a long way to go to achieve financial parity with basketball players, it may well be that 1977 wage standards in baseball have been blown up out of proportion. If so, the restraints of the marketplace will remedy that situation.

Meanwhile, players survey the market. Kingman's special talent is hitting baseballs out of sight. The Mets' press guide celebrates this, telling of one "which made Mickey Mantle gasp. 'I've never seen one hit further!'" and quoting Bobby Bonds's prediction that Kingman would be "the next man to hit 60 home runs."

Until he was injured, Kingman led the majors in home runs last year and had dead aim on Hack Wilson's 46-year-old National League record of 56. He finished with 37, one behind Mike Schmidt of Philadelphia. Then he read about Schmidt's getting a six-year contract worth something like \$2 million. Kingman is confident that if he is sound all season he can hit more home runs than Schmidt, at least 45.

So he asked for the sort of pay the others are getting. He is aware that he is the Mets' sole gate attraction outside the pitching staff. "How can you ask for more than Seaver gets?" McDonald asks him. "After what he has meant to this club." "What's Seaver to me or me to Seaver?" Kingman says. "I play every day, he works every fourth or fifth day."

Besides, he says, if Seaver hadn't signed a three-year contract in 1976, the Mets would have to pay him far more this year than his basic wage of \$225,000. The Mets, Kingman says, are living in the Dark Ages. Seaver's salary is their wage ceiling. Even clubs like Milwaukee, Montreal and Atlanta outbid them for free agents and they wound up empty. They are getting a reputation for themselves that would not please the late Joan Payson, their open-handed founder.

"I'm doing it for the fans," Joe McDonald says. "We've got to keep prices down." And quality, too?

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