WASHINGTON STATE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

WashingtonHistory.org

PLAY BALL!

The Seattle Pilots—Major League Baseball's First Venture in the Pacific Northwest

By Kurt Schaefer

COLUMBIA The Magazine of Northwest History, Summer 2000: Vol. 14, No. 2

The story of the 1969 Seattle Pilots represents one step in Seattle's evolution into a professional sports city. The fact that the Pilots remained in the Pacific Northwest only one year graphically illustrates the difficulty of such an enterprise. The founding of the club, and its eventual relocation to Milwaukee, is a story that has numerous twists and turns. The process was begun with the best of intentions—to heighten the city's national image, enhance the region's economy, and solidify the city's notion of community. By the spring of 1970 all of these hopes had been dashed. The team was gone, several of Seattle's economic and civic leaders had fallen from grace, and a bitter taste was left in the mouths of everyone concerned. In light of the fact that the relationship between cities and major league baseball is still being debated, the Pilots' short tenure in Seattle serves as an interesting case study.

Seattle, like most major American cities, has had a shared past with baseball. This background helped establish the groundwork for bringing the major leagues to town. The city's first organized professional club appeared in 1890. By 1919 the Seattle team had entered the Pacific Coast League (PCL) under the "Indians" banner.

Until 1957 major league baseball only went as far west as St. Louis, so the PCL was the only "show" in town. The league fielded teams from major West Coast cities. Many former and future major leaguers debuted their skills playing and managing on PCL diamonds. Men such as Joe Dimaggio, Casey Stengel, Rogers Hornsby, Ted Williams, Tony Lazzeri, Billy Martin and Seattle's own Fred Hutchinson made the PCL a fan's dream.

The Seattle squad played its games at Dugdale Park in Rainier Valley. Seattle's first dozen years in the PCL were unremarkable, save for a league title in 1924. In 1932, hours after its Independence Day fireworks celebration, Dugdale Park burned to the ground. This obliged the Indians to transfer to the all-dirt Civic Field, the current location of Seattle's Civic Stadium. Over the next several years poor play, shoddy facilities and sparse attendance put the Indians into dire financial straits. By 1937 players were threatening to strike and the Washington state government was suing the club for back taxes. Revenue agents even began seizing the team's property.

Seattle's baseball fortunes improved when Tacoma native and Seattle brewer Emil Sick offered over $250,000 for the franchise. Having made the purchase to promote his beer label, Sick consequently renamed the Seattle squad the Rainiers. Lenny Anderson, an acclaimed sports writer for the *Seattle Times* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, traveled with the Seattle club up and down the West Coast during the 1950s and 1960s. In a recent interview he credited Sick with being an outstanding baseball man who was willing to spend time and resources on the club. In

1938 Sick erected a new stadium at the site of the Dugdale Park ruins, naming the new structure Sick's Stadium. When the $350,000 ball park opened for business on June 15, 1938, it was considered state-of-the-art. Anderson recalled that Sick, with the assistance of general manager Dewey Soriano—a former PCL player and a Franklin High School teammate of Fred Hutchinson—built the Rainiers into a perennially contending club that grabbed championships in 1939-41, 1951 and 1955. The stadium's relative comfort, combined with the home team's winning ways, created a drawing card that helped Seattle lead the league in overall attendance figures for 14 years. It seemed evident that Seattle fans would support quality professional baseball.

The PCL's overall popularity enticed its owners to petition for major league status in 1945. They wanted to create a third league to go along with the American and National leagues. The attempt failed because eastern owners did not feel that the PCL measured up to their expectations regarding fan base and the quality of the league's stadiums, though Sick's Stadium was much praised.

The PCL and the Rainiers were dealt another blow by the major leagues in 1958 when the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants relocated to California. The PCL's stature immediately declined. PCL teams in Los Angeles and the Bay Area folded, while competition from televised big league games caused attendance throughout the PCL to dwindle. Consequently, the independence of the remaining PCL teams ebbed and, before long, Seattle became part of the Cincinnati Reds organization.

Seattle's professional baseball status remained static throughout the early to mid 1960s. In 1961 Sick sold the club to the Boston Red Sox, and when he died in 1964 the City of Seattle purchased his ball park for $1.1 million. The Rainiers were sold again, in 1965, to the California Angels who renamed the team after the parent club.

Major league baseball in California had virtually the popularity of the PCL. Seattle was the largest of the PCL cities that remained, and competition against marquee teams from Los Angeles and San Francisco had given way to squads from Denver and Spokane. Lenny Anderson remembered that after 1957 Seattle desperately wanted to be mentioned in the same breath as San Francisco and Los Angeles, rather than Tacoma and Spokane. Many Seattle citizens were convinced, he said, that a major league ball team would help upgrade their city's identity. Ideas soon led to action.

Seattle's population during the mid to late 1960s seemed to warrant major league status. Some 563,000 people lived in the city, and around 1.5 million resided within a few miles. It appeared that Seattle's geographical location would also be beneficial to a big league team since the closest competitors were in the Bay Area. The Puget Sound area could promote itself as a large untapped market.

Seattle made several early stabs at joining the major league fraternity. In 1964 Cleveland Indians owner William Daley came to town in search of a new home for his franchise. City officials attempted to sell him on the region. Yet, when it came to facilities, the Ohio resident was not impressed. Some major league baseball cities were in the early stages of upgrading their playing fields, and the 26-year-old Sick's Stadium no longer measured up. Daley cited this fact and his team remained in Cleveland.

In August 1967 Kansas City Athletics owner Charley Finley came to Puget Sound looking for a new home for his club. It was Sea-Fair weekend and Finley saw promise in the region, but he,

like Daley, was anything but impressed with the city's stadium. Stan Farber, a former baseball writer for the *Tacoma News Tribune*, recalled that after Finley saw Sick's Stadium he quipped that it was aptly named. Before he left town, Finley advised the city to get a new ball park if it wanted major league baseball.

Unable to lure another city's team, Seattle lobbied for a new club at the 1967 baseball meetings in Chicago. The city was represented by King County officials. Included were Dewey Soriano, president of the PCL and partner, with his brother Max, in Pacific Northwest Sports, Inc., an organization that would undertake the process of implementing the expansion team if it was granted.

Several prominent politicians were also involved in the endeavor. United States Senators Henry M. Jackson and Warren G. Magnuson, in a letter sent ahead of the group, stated, "The awarding of a franchise to Seattle would not only be a prosperous one for the league but the league would have a fine representative." It did not hurt that Magnuson was chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, which had jurisdiction over the major league's business activities. Another important figure was Missouri's Senator Stuart Symington who was upset that Kansas City was losing its team to Oakland.

Anderson today believes that, notwithstanding the efforts emanating from Puget Sound, the most effective politician was Missouri's Symington. After Finley received permission to move his franchise, the Missouri senator wanted a new team for Kansas City. As leverage, he threatened lawsuits that could bring into question the league's antitrust status. Stan Farber feels that, while Symington was helpful, Magnuson was probably the key to bringing major league baseball to the Puget Sound area because of his position on the Senate Commerce Committee. Regardless of their relative influence, both men were able to threaten major league owners because of the league's traditional business arrangement. Until major league players strengthened their union during the 1970s, organized professional baseball in the United States had never had to defend itself against antitrust suits. Consequently, it ran a monopoly when it came to hiring, retaining and compensating players. This system had been sanctified in a 1922 United States Supreme Court ruling, and major league owners had reaped handsome financial rewards as a result. Magnuson and Symington, through their influence, could very well have changed the status quo.

The American League owners acquiesced to the politicians' wishes. Kansas City was given a team first, but since granting that expansion club would give the league 11 teams—an odd number—Seattle was given consideration for the purpose of reestablishing balance in the league. The cities were to receive their clubs no later than 1971, but Symington was still not satisfied. After an 11th-hour meeting, the date was moved up to 1969.

Major league owners met two months later in Mexico City. There the Seattle franchise was awarded to Pacific Northwest Sports, Inc., which had solicited the financial support of former Cleveland Indians owner, William Daley—the man who had spurned Seattle in 1964. He provided much of the $5.35 million fee, giving him 47 percent ownership of the team. Two fellow Clevelanders bought a 13 percent interest in the club. Yet, there were several prerequisites that Seattle had to satisfy before it could have the team. These included: passage of a King County stadium bond issue; enlargement of Sick's Stadium from 11,000 to 30,000 seats by the start of the 1969 season; construction of a new stadium by December 31, 1970; and identification of the team's major stockholders and their subsequent league approval. If any of these requirements were not met, the American League could move the team.

It was evident that if Seattle wanted major league baseball it would have to ante up. The American League's directives clearly stated that major facilities upgrades were needed. In 1950 only the Cleveland Indians played in a publicly owned park. In 1968 Seattle citizens were being asked to help participate in a trend that would have all but five major league teams playing in publicly owned facilities by the late 1990s.

A $40 million bond election was scheduled for February 6, 1968. King County voters were asked to approve the construction of a domed multipurpose stadium. The Sorianos brought in noted athletes and sports officials to persuade Seattle citizens to support the project. Mickey Mantle, Carl Yastrzemski, Joe Dimaggio, and football great Y. A. Tittle were among those hired for this purpose. On election day a majority of the electorate approved the bond issue with a 62.3 percent "yes" vote. A large hurdle had been passed. Major league baseball was on its way to Seattle.

When news of the approval was made official, Pacific Northwest Sports began the process of assembling and fielding a baseball team for Seattle. Within three weeks a front office began to form. Marvin Milkes, a member of the California Angels front office, was hired as general manager. Two weeks later Dewey Soriano stepped down as president of the PCL and replaced his brother Max as president of Pacific Northwest Sports. To manage the club on the field the organization hired St. Louis Cardinals third base coach, Joe Schultz.

With the establishment of the team, Lenny Anderson and Stan Farber became club beat writers for their respective papers. As such, they became intimately familiar with the organization and its people. Regarding the team's administrators, Anderson felt that each man had strengths and weaknesses. He saw Daley as a highly intelligent, personable owner and Soriano as a wise, dedicated baseball man, genuine in his love for the game and his hope to bring major league baseball to the Pacific Northwest and keep it there. The two reporters agreed that the weak link in the chain of command was Milkes. Anderson hesitatingly admitted that Milkes couldn't have scouted Joe Dimaggio. Farber recalled that Milkes was always trying to outsmart everyone by concocting a number of two for one, or three for one, player deals to build up the organization's player pool. Farber thought Milkes was usually the one who got outsmarted.

After the team's leadership was established, attention was directed toward creating its identity. Pacific Northwest Sports ran a name contest during the spring of 1968. The winning entry was "Pilots," submitted by Seattle resident Donald Nelson in commemoration of the region's maritime and aviation history.

Seattle Post-lntelligencer artist Stuart Modrem created the uniform based on an air and sea pilot theme. The design was a takeoff of an officer's uniform, with the team name and logo broadcast across the chest. The home uniforms were white and the traveling togs light-blue. The caps were dark blue with a gold "S" on the front and officer's "scrambled eggs" on the bill. Reactions to the style were mixed. One Seattle newspaper writer, after describing the uniform, noted, "You can hardly be more pilot-y than that." Meanwhile, pitcher Jim Bouton felt that the uniforms were "gaudy" and made the players look like "goddam clowns."

The final task of assembling the Pilots was to garner players. One of the first moves the team made was to purchase the aforementioned Bouton from the New York Yankees. He had had major league success in the early 1960s, but in 1965 he hurt his arm and never fully recovered. By 1968 he was playing for the PCL Seattle Angels. Of course, Bouton is most notable for what

he did off the field. While with the Pilots he wrote the book *Ball Four*, which was an insider's view of major league baseball. He recalled and commented on incidents from his days as a Yankee and his tenure as a Pilot. Fellow players chastised the book and treated him as a pariah, but the fans loved it, and their patronage helped make Bouton's tome a sports literary classic.

Seattle also obtained players through the expansion draft. Both Seattle and Kansas City would alternately select players that were left unprotected by the other American League clubs, at a price of $175,000 each. Seattle won a coin toss and selected first. When each team had accumulated 30 players, the draft was complete.

Seattle's first pick was the California Angels' Don Mincher, a power hitter who had lost some of his batting punch after being beaned by a fastball in 1968. The second selection was the speedy Tommy Harper from Cleveland. The third pick was the Detroit Tigers' Ray Oyler. He was an excellent fielder but a weak hitter. In 1968 Oyler set a major league record for the poorest batting average—.135—for a player with at least 100 game appearances.

Other notable picks included relief pitcher Diego Segui; two-time National League batting champ Tommy Davis; three-time all-star Gary Bell; Jack Aker, who was the 1966 relief pitcher of the year for *The Sporting News*; Lou Pineilla, a 26-year-old with just six major league at-bats; and Mike Marshall, a relief pitcher who was to make his mark in 1974 by winning the National League's Cy Young Award. Farber and Anderson both felt, at the time, that the Pilots would have a tough time competing because the club was using AAA quality players against major league talent—virtually all who were signed had a question mark regarding their age, health or potential. The two writers also felt that the talent pool was short on pitching strength. This would come back to haunt the Pilots over the long summer schedule.

Milkes and Schultz had the Pilots pegged to third in the division. Their prognostication rebutted by *Sports Illustrated*, which stated in preseason report that the Pilots' selection of Tommy Davis could net them a league batting leader but that Seattle's expectations to finish third would probably be foiled.

The Seattle club went to Tempe, Arizona, and worked its way to a 12-16 spring campaign, scoring and surrendering a hefty share of runs. A concerned Milkes immediately began to deal players to cover up weaknesses in the team that had become apparent. One questionable deal involved Lou Piniella, who was traded to the Kansas City Royals for two players, one of which was outfielder and Tacoma native Steve Whitaker. Piniella went on to have a great career, while Whitaker faded into obscurity. Milkes made other trades that he hoped would prepare his club for the regular season, but most of them did not pan out.

The season began on April 8. Lenny Anderson wrote in the *P-I*: "The most significant event in Seattle baseball history takes place tonight at Anaheim Stadium. Seattle begins its first major league season, the climax, for fans in that area, of years of waiting." The game against the Angels made the wait worthwhile.

The next day Anderson described the contest as a "cliff-hanger that had all the drama, excitement and taut suspense of a seventh-game showdown in the World Series." Tommy Harper opened the game by doubling. Then Mike Hegan smacked a home run. In the bottom of the second inning it looked as though the Angels would strike back. Bobby Knoop hit an arching drive to right field. Hegan ran full bore into the lower bleacher barrier a split second after he gloved the ball. It popped loose and the Pilot outfielder crumpled to the ground. Meanwhile,

"the Angels circled the bases with more vigor than judgment." Knoop passed one of the other Angel runners and was called out. The runner he passed was directed to return to second, and Seattle escaped the inning with little damage. The Pilots went on to win their baptismal into the big leagues with a score of 4 to 3.

Two days later the club flew back to Puget Sound to face the Chicago White Sox in the first major league game ever played in the Pacific Northwest. The players were joined by Seattle native Bridget Hanley, a "curvaceous television starlet" who was acting in the series *Here Come the Brides*. One newspaper scribe noted that as the players' wives watched their husbands exiting the aircraft with Hanley, a number of them appeared rather chagrined. The writer jibed, "If looks could kill, at least three ball players' wives would today be pleading justifiable homicide."

The eve of the home opener found the Pilots basking in the limelight of being Seattle's first major league baseball team. The homecoming involved a number of dignitaries, including Governor Dan Evans; United States Senator Henry Jackson; Seattle mayor, Floyd Miller; Joe Cronin, president of the American League; and Angels owner, former cowboy actor Gene Autry. At one gathering, home opener starting pitcher Gary Bell received a garter from Hanley, who publicly urged him to wear it while he pitched against the Sox.

In hindsight, the Pilots' home opener celebration was the apex of the club's residency in Seattle. As accolades were showered on the team, numerous issues remained to be resolved. First and foremost, the stadium was still not ready. This predicament arose because of delays in the original plans. Underestimates in the construction costs, arguments between city and club officials over who would foot the bill, unpaid fees and poor weather all contributed to the problem. Construction workers labored to add more seats in Sick's Stadium for the one o'clock start the next day. The scoreboard had just been set up the day before. Dewey Soriano demanded that all work be completed by 11 o'clock on the morning of game day, forcing the construction workers to labor through the night.

On the morning of April 11 over 17,000 fans to Seattle's Rainier Valley for the Pilots' opener. One of these fans was Darren Lamb, a 22-year-old Tacoma native. Thirty years later he recalled that it was a beautiful spring day, perfect for baseball. After years of being a Tacoma Giants fan, Lamb could not believe he was actually going to see major league baseball live in the Pacific Northwest. When Lamb arrived he found construction crews still hard at work. A number of the patrons had to wait in line while carpenters finished fastening their seats. Some folks were not seated until the third inning. Other fans took advantage of gaps in the temporary fence to watch the game for free. Lamb found his seat amongst the short-sleeved, sun-glassed fans, and they were all treated to a 7-0 Pilot win. "Everyone left the game with a good feeling about the Pilots and the start of the new baseball season," he remembered. Those "good feelings" quickly faded.

By the end of the first month of play the Pilots were 8-17 in the win-loss column. It became evident that the team's talent was not measuring up to what Milkes and Schultz had hoped for. The poor play resulted in fans becoming as scarce as wins. There were spurts of respectable attendance, but folks did not necessarily come to see baseball on its own merit. A promotional giveaway was about the only way to guarantee ticket sales.

Sick's Stadium remained an issue throughout the season. For Jim Bouton the field was a pitcher's graveyard. Trying, albeit facetiously, to look on the bright side, he wrote, "The great

thing about our ball park [is that] when a home run hit off you disappears over the fence your eye catches a glimpse of the majesty of Mount Rainier and some of that bad feeling goes away." Few others found anything positive to say about the park. Sick's rough turf became the bane of players around the league. The clubhouse facilities were second rate, and as fans used the rest rooms throughout the game the water pressure became so weak that the toilets usually quit working after the seventh inning, forcing players to go back to their homes or hotel rooms to shower. Meanwhile, fans had to put up with an aging stadium that had a number of poor vision seats selling for the relatively high cost of $2.50 to $3.50 apiece. When they got hungry they were faced with the highest concession prices in the league.

The stadium situation, poor attendance, and the need for better players were problems that could only be solved with money. Consequently, majority owner William Daley visited Seattle in mid season. He hoped to garner local financial help—a quest that was an unqualified failure. Seattle area businesses and civic leaders turned a deaf ear to Daley's overtures. A major factor was the poor financial health of the region. Boeing was experiencing a severe slump, and there was even talk of the company closing its doors. Supporting the Pilots was not a priority. Both Lenny Anderson and Stan Farber agreed that another problem was the local community's disenchantment with Dewey Soriano. According to Anderson and Faber, business leaders felt that Soriano, despite being a Seattle native, was "from the wrong side of the tracks." This attitude was compounded by a general dislike for Daley. The Pilots' front office had allowed too much controversy to surface for the taste of the Seattle community.

Shortly after Daley returned to Cleveland he granted Lenny Anderson an interview, stating that he would give Seattle another year to support the team. No support meant he would move or sell the club. When these comments were published back in Seattle, the schism widened between Pacific Northwest Sports and Seattle citizens. Mayor Floyd Miller threatened to evict the Pilots from Sick's Stadium on September 8 unless many of the financial issues were resolved. Daley's comments hardened the stance between city and club officials.

The Pilots finished the season in last place in the American League Western Division with a 64-98 record, 33 games behind first place. Milkes and Soriano immediately fired Schultz and his staff and hired Dave Bristol as the new manager. They then traded a host of players. However, fielding a competitive team for the 1970 major league season would be the least of the Pilots' worries. Problems with facilities, finances, personalities and deadlines overshadowed the typical problems of preparing the team for future contests on the field.

The Sick's Stadium renovation remained behind schedule and groundbreaking for the new stadium, for which the American League had mandated a completion date of December 1970, had yet to take place. Six sites had been proposed—the Seattle Center being the most talked about—but each ran into opposition. And in Tempe the team was slapped with a lawsuit because the contractor claimed the organization had not constructed a motel and accompanying facilities near the park as promised.

As things got worse, talk of moving the team began to surface. This prompted Seattle city leaders to consider the possibility of being stuck with a stadium reconstruction bill, a new domed stadium, and no team. A fusillade of charges and demands emerged from both camps. The American League president, Joe Cronin, tried to broker a truce, but after one particular meeting Daley reiterated to the press that Seattle had one more year to prove it wanted major league baseball. Meanwhile, Senators Magnuson and Jackson, along with Slade Gorton, then

Washington's attorney general, promised antitrust legislation if the club was moved. Their threats made it apparent to American League owners that the problem in Seattle could affect the entire league.

The owners met during the 1969 World Series and voiced frustration at the situation in Seattle. By this time Bud Selig of Milwaukee had tendered a $13.1 million offer to purchase the Pilots. He represented a group that wanted to replace the Braves, who had left Wisconsin in 1965 for Atlanta. The American League owners, tempted by Selig's offer, were tempered by the antitrust threats from Jackson, Magnuson and Gorton. However, the October 29, 1969, edition of the *Chicago Daily News* reported that the Pilots would be moving to Milwaukee. The article stated, "The Pilots will be renamed the Brewers and will be under Milwaukee ownership. It is known that Milwaukee has virtually sewed up the franchise." This report was most likely due to the fact that Soriano and Selig had been meeting in Milwaukee.

Mayor Floyd Miller called for a new ownership group that would allow Seattle to keep the team, but he had admitted that the city had a $5 million deficit at that point and would be unable to effect some $500,000 worth of needed stadium improvements. Then, in November, Seattle got a new mayor—Wes Uhlman—who campaigned on a platform that did not support stadium expenditures. The city's hopes would have to be answered by private sector dollars.

In late October 1969 such a possibility became evident when local entrepreneur Fred Danz contacted Daley about purchasing the club. Daley was open to the query, but Danz's bid was less than that of Selig's group. Nevertheless, news of the offer reached the American League owners while they conducted their October meeting in Chicago. They were intrigued because Danz represented closure to the situation. They gave Danz nine days to come up with the funding. Danz was required to produce a $10 million portfolio, double the original cost of the club, because Pacific Northwest Sports had accumulated significant debt. Danz requested and received an extension until December 1.

As the December deadline approached, a new purchase package was created that retained Daley within the organization. The Sorianos, who had little support in Seattle, were to sell all of their holdings. An array of small stockholders were retained, and Marvin Milkes was kept as general manager. The total deal amounted to $10.3 million. It looked like Seattle might keep its club under the auspices of a local owner.

Danz spent much of his time gathering investors and satisfying financial claims from creditors who knew of the team's possible sale. Then he faced a problem he could not solve. One of Pacific Northwest Sports' major creditors, the Bank of California, was calling in $3.5 million on a $4 million loan. Danz had assumed that the bank would let him assume the debt, but bank officials did not think that Seattle could support major league baseball. Danz could not broker a solution and the deal was dead, leaving Daley to frustratingly exclaim, "The Pilots are up for grabs!"

The Milwaukee offer remained on the table, but Seattle did not give up. On January 27, 1970, American League owners met in Oakland and had an audience with Edward Carlson, one of the investors in the Danz group. He had devised an alternative financing scheme for the Pilots, suggesting that the club be purchased by a nonprofit group consisting of business and labor organizations, along with various individuals representing $2.5 million. They would keep the club going until the opening of the domed stadium. Profits would go back into the community and

toward buying off Daley's and the Sorianos' interest in the team. The league owners immediately vetoed the proposal. Stan Farber pointed out that such a plan of public ownership would have devalued the worth of all the other major league teams. At a time when anything resembling communism was held in anathema, Carlson's plan was akin to socializing an industry. Major league baseball would have nothing to do with it.

The owners told Carlson that they would give him until February 6 to develop another plan with a $9 million cash portfolio. He immediately went work assembling an investor group that included 60 businesses, labor organizations and individuals. He was even able to convince the Bank of California to become part of the coalition. When he brought the package to the league in early February it came under immediate attack. They had been burned by the Danz proposal and were skeptical. After some debate they voted 8 to 4 to accept the proposal; nine votes were needed for approval. Thus, the situation was back to square one, with an added new twist—Pacific Northwest Sports was now bankrupt.

It seemed certain that the Pilots would be moving to Milwaukee. America's beer capital began making preparations for the team's arrival by printing tickets, arranging radio and television contracts, and putting Milwaukee's County Stadium into playing shape.

The courts were Seattle's last hope. Mayor Wes Uhlman filed suit in King County Superior Court to prevent the move. He was joined by the State of Washington, which filed to protect some $25 million in investments and potential revenues. At a hearing held several days later, Special State Assistant Attorney General William Dwyer claimed that the American League was "turning America's national pastime into a 'sordid commercial activity' in trying to move the Seattle Pilots baseball franchise." Even the common man got in the act. Seattle attorney Alfred Schweppe, acting "as a ticket holder on behalf of his 'outraged self,'" filed an injunction to prevent the team's departure. He wanted to protect the $775 he had paid for season tickets and parking. Counter suits were also filed by creditors who wanted the team sold so that they could collect money from the bankrupt club operators.

Meanwhile, Senator Magnuson began concocting a challenge to baseball's antitrust exemption. He told one interviewer, "If they move this team after just one year, it would be evidence that they are not a sport but a commercial enterprise."

The injunctions were considered in a morning hearing at Superior Court, while the afternoons were devoted to Federal Bankruptcy Court. Superior Court Judge James Mifflin heard arguments for and against keeping the team in town. However, after hearing a plea by Dwyer, Mifflin responded, "I've passed people on the street who say, 'Take the bloody ball club away. We don't want the damned thing.' No, I don't know how you can keep any operation here under those circumstances." Later Milkes admitted he did not have enough money to pay players, coaches or management staff. The fate of the Pilots would be in the hands of the bankruptcy court.

In front of Federal Bankruptcy Referee Sidney Volinn, the Soriano brothers bemoaned the financial losses and the fact that the outlook for 1970 offered little hope. Volinn heard no testimony that countered their claims. On March 25 Volinn lifted all legal restraints preventing the Pilots from moving. There was still the faint hope that a new local buyer would come forward. But none did. Five days later, just as spring training was coming to an end, Volinn signed a document allowing the Pilots to be sold to the Selig group. A moving van full of Pilots

equipment was parked in Utah, waiting, when Volinn's order directed the crew east toward the Great Lakes. The Pilots were going to Milwaukee.

News of the Volinn decision shocked a number of Seattle fans, including Darren Lamb. He recalled that folks were terribly upset about the situation and couldn't believe the team would do such a thing as move to another city. The anger led to finger-pointing. Politicians blamed the American League, the league blamed the city, the city blamed Pacific Northwest Sports, which in turn also blamed the city.

Obviously, each of these groups had a hand in the Pilots' departure. Poor facilities, a noncompetitive team, low attendance, an unorganized administration and an inflexible league seem fairly obvious factors. But the Pilots were not unique when it came to these problems. Professional sports teams have all faced these situations sometime during their existence. Most survive. Why not the Pilots?

Jim Bouton believed that Seattle, unlike a number of other cities in 1969, was "the kind of cosmopolitan city that may never be good for baseball. People are interested in cultural events. I don't think they're very interested in sitting and watching a ball game." Lenny Anderson agreed with Bouton. He felt that, initially, Seattle really wanted a big league team. Yet, fans did not share the same love for the sport as those from cities like Boston or Chicago. Seattle baseball patrons wanted wins. Anderson, on the other hand, appreciated the fact that, though the Pilots were bad, a number of the teams they played were not. He still recalls watching the 1969 Baltimore Orioles, a team that could boast some of the best pitchers and everyday players of the modern era. This inability to understand the opportunity the Pilots gave the region contributed to the team's poor attendance and meager revenues. Anderson does not think it fair to completely blame Daley, Milkes or the Sorianos for the team's misfortunes.

Determining the significance of the 1969 Pilots, attaching blame for their failure, is not clear-cut. Stan Farber argues that the team is important because it represents the first "major league" sport in Seattle—although the Supersonics were already in town, the NBA was not the league it is today. The Pilots experience led to the establishment of the Seahawks and the Mariners. So, in Farber's view, the Pilots helped put Seattle on the professional sports map.

For Anderson the Pilots represent a bleak period in his professional life; over the years he has tried to put his memories of that year in the back of his mind. He sees the team as an embarrassment that gave the city a black eye. Especially troubling was the way locals vilified the owners. Their accusations that Pacific Northwest Sports was in the project solely for the money trivialized Dewey Soriano's sincere desire to make the Pilots a permanent fixture in Seattle. Anderson was saddened when the local boy from Franklin High School was virtually run out of town by the city's establishment.

Today the city has the Mariners, but that team, like the Pilots, is owned by outside interests whose devotion to the region is not guaranteed. And the question of facilities still remains a focal point of public debate. Criticism of the Kingdome almost caused the Mariners to move to Florida in 1996. Funding was obtained to build new facilities and keep the Mariners in town, but

the construction of Safeco Field, with its delays and cost overruns, seems hauntingly familiar to anyone who can remember back 30 years.

What this story does show us is that, when a region attempts to define itself through its professional sports teams, there are social, political and financial costs that must be paid. In 1969 the costs proved too high.

Kurt Schaefer teaches history at Bates Technical College in Tacoma. He has a passion for baseball and is a lifelong Detroit Tigers fan.