

Hot dogs, apple pie, alignment?

By JEREMY FURTICK
THE BATTALION

Rangers President Tom Scheiffer discusses future of baseball

watch them. With more fans watching the games, more will follow the team. It's just better for everybody.

Q: MLB's television revenue would obviously increase if more games were played in prime time in each time zone. Is this the main goal of realignment?

Mr. Scheiffer: You could enhance television revenues, but I think you could enhance the number of people who come to the ballpark also because more people will watch the games and want to see you when you play at home. It will bring more revenue into the game, but it will also be more convenient for the fans, better for the owners and good for the players because of less travel time. It would be a win-win situation for everybody.

Q: There has been talk about realigning teams from the same city into the same divisions. What is the likelihood of this proposal and your opinion?

Mr. Scheiffer: It's a possibility, but I think it's less desirable than putting teams in geographic regions. The problem with same-city teams would be the visiting team coming in twice. I don't know if marketing the visiting team would be as advantageous

as it would putting same-city teams in different leagues. I think what you do is make a great inter league rivalry instead of a divisional rivalry.

I think we can figure out a way to have the Yankees play the Mets every year without putting them in the same division. I would prefer that.

Q: In a geographic realignment plan like you've mentioned, would teams be willing to switch leagues, including the Rangers?

Mr. Scheiffer: The main thing is people have to be flexible. They have to look at what would be best in the future for baseball as a whole and try to put that in the context of, "What should I do?" But there are some teams that don't want to change leagues. You don't want to see the Yankees leave the American League or the Dodgers leave the National League. But other teams with less tradition? I don't think it makes that much of a difference. I also don't think it would have a

dramatic effect on the game. We would prefer to stay in the American League, but we would consider a move to the National League if it made sense in an overall realignment plan. I don't think we would move for the sake of moving.

Q: So with some probable league-switching in the future, what will be done about the designated hitter?

Mr. Scheiffer: I think the majority of owners would like to do away with the DH. It's pretty evenly split down the middle in the American League and the National League is unanimously in opposition to the DH. The [Players'] Union has lobbied very hard to keep the DH under the theory that they would get more money.

But I think you have a tendency to spend the money on the whole ball club as opposed to one player if you did away with the DH. I would like to do away with the DH just from a strategic standpoint. I think the game is much better and more strategy is involved when the pitcher hits. The Players' Union is very strong, but I hope the pitchers within the Union will want to do away with the DH.

Q: Do you think removing the DH would solve some of the game-length problems the rules committee is looking into?

Mr. Scheiffer: I think without the DH you have faster games. The problem with the additional hitter is that it puts too much offense into the game. In a time when pitching seems to be pretty thin and everybody's looking for pitchers, adding another hitter into the lineup makes too much offense.

Please see ALIGNMENT on Page 4.



GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber

Baseball is a game which has gone virtually unchanged for over a century to become a staple of American society. But the actual game hasn't evolved much, and the face of Major League Baseball is almost design to its 19th Century counterpart — especially after the overhaul baseball has undergone in the past five years.

Starting with MLB's first expansion in 16 teams, the Colorado Rockies and Florida Marlins came onto the scene in 1993. Since then, baseball fans have experienced two shortened seasons and a player's strike in 1994 and 1995, realignment from four to six divisions in 1994 and finally, regular-season interleague play in 1997. But even with its 10-year facelift, baseball will apparently continue to renovate itself through the turn of the century.

Next season, the Arizona Diamondbacks and Tampa Bay Devil Rays will make their major league debuts while realignment follows right on their heels. With other rumors of teams switching leagues, removal of the designated hitter, and even further expansion filling the air around the commission's office, I talked with Texas Rangers' President and General Partner Tom Scheiffer about the future of MLB.

Q: What is the status of the plans to realign MLB?

Mr. Scheiffer: There are a lot of different ideas, but I think people recognize that the interest would be better served if you could line up teams in the same time zones. You could then have a lot more games in prime time, and if you have more games in prime time you get more fans to

Cowboys ride off Haley, Novacek retire from football

IRVING (AP) — Charles Haley, Dallas' best pass rusher in Dallas Cowboys history, tight end Jay Novacek was the best third-down receiver.

Both retired Tuesday because of similar back injuries with eight Super Bowl rings between them. "This is a sad day for our organization," said owner Jerry Jones. "Like we couldn't spell Super Bowl." Charles joined us. He was our missing link. Jay had that magic ability to get open and it was so routine almost took it for granted.

Haley, 33, resplendent in coat of arms, had 97.5 career sacks in his 12-year career and was the only NFL player to own five Super Bowl rings. "I played with all my heart and through my pain because I loved the game," said Haley, who had 10 operations in the last four years. "I wanted to retire as a Cowboy because of the respect I have for Jerry Jones."

Haley thanked everybody, including San Francisco management and some of the 49ers players, though he bitterly left the organization in a 1992 trade.

He also praised Barry Switzer but didn't mention Jimmy Johnson's name. Johnson, who brought Haley to Dallas, wrote a book that caused

a falling out with the defensive end. Novacek, who came to Dallas in 1990 as a Plan B free agent, showed up in a T-shirt, ball cap, shorts and tennis shoes.

"Unfortunately, I have to talk to the media another day," Novacek said. "It's been a heck of a ride. I see Troy [Aikman] in the audience and I want to thank him for what he meant to me. He gave me a great compliment one day when he hit me with a pass while he was going down. I asked him how he did it and he answered, 'I knew you would be there.'"

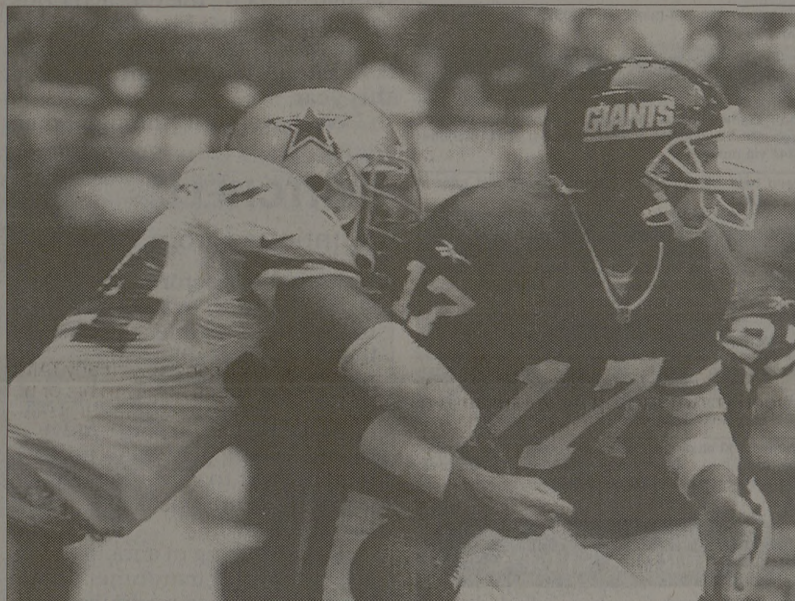
Said Aikman: "I always looked for Jay on third down because I just knew he would be open. Most of the time he was."

Novacek, who missed last season with a degenerative back condition, caught 339 passes for the Cowboys, a club record for tight end.

"Jay was 65 percent of our third down offense and you saw what happened last year when we didn't have him," coach Barry Switzer said. "We were 24th in the league in offense."

Novacek, 34, caught 422 passes for 4,630 yards and 30 touchdowns in his 12-year career that began with St. Louis.

Haley said it was hard for him



PHOTOGRAPH: Associated Press

Dallas Cowboys defender Charles Haley (left) strips the ball from New York Giants quarterback Dave Brown causing a fumble in a game last season at Texas Stadium.

"I've been fighting depression for a long time because of this injury, but you know ... I've had a pretty good career," Haley said. "It's time to move on."

Neither Cowboy plans to ride off into the sunset far away from Valley Ranch.

"I might show up in training camp and help out with some of the

Haley said he would take his family to Virginia for a visit then return to Dallas.

"I told Jerry I owed him to help with some of the young guys on the team," Haley said.

Jones gave them both an impressive piece of crystal and a promise: "They're destined for the Ring of Honor."

Interleague play may save baseball

For those of us traditionalists who don't believe the phrase "possible World Series preview" should ever be uttered except in spring training, interleague play is about as palatable as stewed mustard greens.

What makes the Fall Classic such a classic is that the series pits two teams from differing leagues, each with its own philosophy on how the game should be played. The National League and the American League vying for bragging rights is like Jackie Chan squaring off against Hulk Hogan, before that painted on stubble.

It's force vs. finesse. Power hitting vs. masterful pitching. The designated hitter vs. skinny guys who rarely make contact. And that's what provides such a captivating spectacle for both the die-hard fan and the

Sportswriter



MATT MITCHELL
Senior journalism major

casual observers of America's pastime. Aside from the flap over American and National League rules and which do's and don'ts to use where, the logistics of the whole grand scheme are just plain screwy.

Baltimore traveling to Atlanta to face the Braves is little more than a Sunday drive, but Minnesota traveling to Houston spans roughly the width of the entire country. At least when the Mariners venture from the Pacific Northwest to face the Rangers, division ranking provides possible spoils to the victor.

But in the midst of the hand-wringing and doomsaying, a ray of reality bangs the noggin with the force of a Billy Wagner fastball — interleague play may well save baseball as we know it.

Please see MITCHELL on Page 4.

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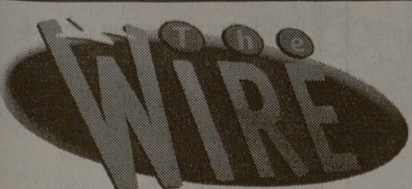
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