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**TOP TEN Myths Surrounding the Montreal Expos**

**By Gary Whittaker**

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10 – That the Expos lost its fan base after all the English left in the early 80's.

The Olympic Stadium continued to average over 18 thousand visitors per game until 1997. While they were not leaders in attendance by any stretch, it was still a solid base that a strong committed ownership can have grown from.

9 - that the Atlanta Braves are on the verge of their 13th CONSECUTIVE division title.

While this claim may be technically true, it has about as much merit as McGuire's or Bonds' juiced up home run records.

8 - Small market teams like the Expos cannot compete.

Consistency. That is what having \$\$\$ at your disposal every year will give you. Consistency. Assuming, of course, your team is not run by Monkeys (see: New York Rangers), a big budget will get you talked about as a contender every year. But every year, "Cinderella" or small-market teams make a run for it. Every year, one or more of the "David's" take on and bet the "Goliaths". Every few years, Montreal's well-renown scouting and minor league development systems are able to churn out teams that are usually only a couple of pieces away from a playoff run.

7 - The people of Montreal no longer care about baseball.

No one, who has ever been to the Olympic stadium and heard 10 thousand people sound like 30 thousand strong can ever make that statement. Most of us continue to follow the exploits of Vladimir Guerrero or Orlando Cabrera on their new teams. Or the Canadians that are making the major leagues in ever increasing numbers. To go to the stadium and give our money to MLB would be like victims paying to keep their rapist in jail. It simply isn't right.

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6 - The city of Montreal should not be important to MLB.

This is the city where Jackie Robinson played before being called up into the major leagues. This is the city and team that Pete Rose played for when he collected his 4000th hit (there were over 48 thousand that day). This was the first expansion city outside of the United States. This is the team whose pitcher was the 11th in baseball history to record a perfect game. It can even be said that the success of the Expos paved the way for a 2nd Canadian franchise to be established. The Blue Jays went on to become the dominant franchise between 1989 and 1993. No matter what, Montreal will be remembered for its contribution to baseball.

5 - The Expos needed a new stadium downtown.

While there is no question that a stadium, in the heart of the downtown area, would have improved

attendance, it is naïve to believe that it would have been anything more than a band-aid solution. The Expos needed a stable and committed ownership group, not a better stadium. If there is one thing about Montreal, their fan suffers no fools. Players would have to have been re-signed. Quality free agents would have to be brought in. Bottom line, the Expos would have needed to remain a contender to have survived. All one had to do was to read the papers, and check the first few weeks of attendance with Mr. Loria bought the Expos.

4 - Jeffery Loria killed the Expos.

By the time Loria purchased the Expos, the city almost held its breath with the promise of restoring tradition and longevity to a team that has for over a decade seen its best players being sold to what seemed like the lowest bidder. With no local ownership stepping up to become the majority partner, Montrealers knew that this Art Dealer from New York was their last chance. The real plan or plot was soon revealed as Loria turned out to be another pawn by Bud Selig in his plan. The media crucified Loria and he was made the scapegoat. We now have the benefit of history to guide us, and it has become painfully obvious that Loria was simply Selig's patsy. Selig has wanted to get rid of the Expos opening since 2001, but most likely has been working on this since Claude Brochu in the mid 90's. He is a businessman, and if a franchise does not meet targeted revenues, then what better way to line your pockets than the additional monies made for "expansion fees".

3 - Blue Monday was the worst day in Expos History.

While Blue Monday is universally recognized as the dagger in the heart to Montreal's best chance to get to the World Series (in a non-strike year), we believe that there was an undisclosed day that was worse than that. It was some day after 1990 when Claude Brochu and Bud Selig made a deal with one hand, and stabbed the Expos with the other.

2 - Attendance remains low due to indifference of Montrealers.

If there is one thing that Montrealers love to do, it is to go out and party. Any event is good. Jazz festival, Comedy festivals, Canadian Football League, hey, even a North American soccer league. As

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long as you have a liquor license, you have your self a good attendance. Knowing your franchise is leaving, or your owners are major league baseball, well, that is not exactly a party atmosphere. Even the film festival was getting good attendance until the rumors started of it being shut down in favor of Toronto. That won't win you any fans either.

1 - That had the strike not cancelled the 94 season, things would somehow be any different.

People seemed to forget that Montreal already had a 1994 season back in 1981. The Expos will in the lead both times. The difference between 1994 and 1981 was 1 thing. Charles Bronfman. Mr. Bronfman kept his team intact and worked hard to keep Montreal in contention year after year. He only sold the team after having the foresight of the skyrocketing player salaries in his near future. Selig, through Brochu, would have sold off Montreal's star players despite any success the team may, or may not have had during that season. Using recent history as our guide, we see that Selig's new puppet Loria did the same thing with the Marlins. Montreal would have been no different. And the resulting backlash would have allowed him to move the team even earlier.

Gary Whittaker is the editor of T.E.N Magazine. You can visit this site by going to

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### **Montreal Misery**

**By David Ferraro**

We've all done it before. Sportscenter is on showing the highlights off the latest Expos game and they show a snap shot off the bare bleachers. Of course the jokes follow like "It's easier to grab a foul ball at an Expos game than at a Little League game." But hey, who are we to talk?

To underline this point I ask you another question: When was the last time you saw somebody with a "You Gotta Believe" poster at Yankee Stadium? I'm going to go ahead and assume the awnser is not for a while. It is easy to be a Yankees fan. You don't have to believe. They know every year they will have the talent to contend.

It is not like that in Montreal. Their slow start is something that you just hope won't get worse and they've started bad and I mean real bad. They are the first team to score four runs or less in its first 16 games since the 1968 Chicago White Sox. They may or may not be in Montreal next year depending on what offers the owners of the team, Major League Baseball, recieve.

So how did it get like this? Is Montreal just not the place for a baseball club? The awnser is Montreal is just as good as any other location. Heck, Montreal finished second in the National League in attendance in 1983 and barely missed a chance to go to the World Series by losing game 7 to the Dodgers in 1981.

Then baseball started to move into the modern era where you have two types of teams. Insert team

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type one, where the owner takes risks to put more money into the team to keep and bring in talent hoping that wins will increase attendance and revenue. Then there is team two where the owner doesn't keep his talent and puts less money into the team to make a profit.

Obviously today in our profit motivated economy we are going to have most managers picking the latter half of the two types and that is what happened to the Expos. They saw their talent getting moved throughout the 80's. Gary Carter and Andre Dawson went to larger markets and ranked 1st and 15th in salary in 1988. This is the time when the MLBPA gained power by striking in 1981, a two day strike in 1985, a strike in spring training of 1990, and the strike of 1994. Players knew they could get more money and wouldn't let the owners do anything about it.

MLB had essentially already lost the struggle with the players association. The effect was that GM's were forced to start putting in money and change with the times. If one didn't the effect was losing the star players who brought the fans to the stadium.

After having over 2 million in attendance in 1983, the Expos would never reach that again. Their attendance woes were highlighted in the end of 1991 when a giant beam collapsed in Olympic Stadium. This forced the remaining games of Expo's schedule to be played away from Montreal. Interest in the Expos was at significantly low levels despite still being a decent team.

Plus, they were still losing plenty of good young talent. Among the names were Pedro, Larry Walker,

and Moises Alou. Tim Lincecum said, "I feel for the fans more than anything. I think the fans got fed up with having good teams and then losing all their good players. Montreal fans were so used to winning, with the Canadiens there. Then there was this whole series of things that just kind of turned fans away." However in 1994 the Expos looked to be a top notch team with a record of 74–40, the best in majors. Of course we all know that 1994 ended up to a bad year for every team in baseball. The next year the Expos would of have lost Larry Walker and screwballer Ken Hill, who had won 16 games in the previously shortened season and the team finished with just 68 wins in 95.

The attendance continued to drop as it was clear the Expos were just going through the season playing meaningless games. In 1998 they dropped under 1 million in attendance for the season, the lowest in the league. It continued to get worse and went below 650,000 in 2001 amid the contraction talks.

Major League Baseball then took over the Montreal Expos saying that baseball could never succeed there. Despite this the Expos kept on playing there games although there was obviously conflict of interest. This conflict of interest was really brought out when Major League Baseball had them play part of their home games in San Juan. Despite now playing in three different cultures French, English, and Spanish and having a low salary Montreal pressed for the wild card in 2003 but ultimately fell short.

The longer Major League Baseball keeps owning the Expos the more they are killing the value and perception of it. Of course any good young player is going to leave a team where the future of where they are playing is uncertain. That is the situation right now with Jose Vidro and Orlando Cabrera and sure to be issues in the future if something isn't done soon.

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It seems symbolic that the first home game for the Montreal Expos in 2004 was in San Juan. However 16 games into the season it is finally the "home opener" for the Expos in Montreal. They fail to sellout for the game but the hardcore fans say it is because of a Montreal Canadiens game, hopeful that if the Expos make the playoffs some local businessman will come forth and keep the team in Montreal.

Second year stud Marlon Byrd starts the game off with a hit for Philadelphia. Then 2B Placido Polanco follows it up with another single. The slow start brings the Montreal fans into their traditional cheering method where they bang their bodies against the plastic seats and also in many cases the empty ones next to them. The noise is so loud you forget your not at a domed version of Fenway park. The pitch from Claudio Vargas is then crushed into the seats for a three run blast by Bobby Abreu, leaving the stadium to all of a sudden get death quiet. Amidst the stands you can see a proud fan instantly stand up with a large sign that reads, "You Gotta Believe!"

David Ferraro is a writer for

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