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Newsmakers



JIM BOUTON

JIM BOUTON'S 1970 BOOK "BALL Four" made the former Yankee pitcher a pariah to the pooh-bahs and a counterculture hero. Bouton, 64, is about to publish "Foul Ball," about his battle to preserve a historic ballpark in Pittsfield, Mass. He touched base with NEWSWEEK's Mark Starr.

In hot water with the establishment again, huh?

I didn't try to be. We actually *went* to the establishment, the guys who want a new stadium, and said, "Here's a better idea: a locally owned team in a renovated, historic ballpark. Save your \$18.5 million. Build something we actually need, like a civic center."

Why should anybody outside of Pittsfield care?

It's a battle that's raging all over the country. I call it America's most costly hostage crisis: "Build us a stadium or you'll never see your team again." This has resulted in 113 new minor-league ballparks. And the fight goes on in major-league cities, too—like New York.

What did you make of the Hall of Fame's giving Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon the boot?

This country seems divided almost the same way it was when "Ball Four" came out—that same "Are you for us or against us?" mentality.

Back then, baseball was the center of our sports culture. Do you despair about where it fits now?

I despair about the presentation of the game. I don't like the home-run thing, the glitz and the noise. What you experience when you walk into a major-league ballpark now is very similar to what you experience at a rock concert or a professional wrestling match.

Is this just a question of taste?

I also think it's a marketing mistake. When you can't distinguish your product from other types of entertainment, people will say, "What do we need *that* for?" The owners seem to have no respect for the game. They're saying, "Don't bother watching batting practice or listening to the ball hit the bat. Look up at this big TV screen and watch us do silly games, promotions and advertisements." The beauty and subtlety of the game is now lost.

Forever?

It seems like it.