

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 477 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost, David Feldman. Hello, David.

David Feldman: Good morning.

Steve Skrovan: David, we're finally—after nine years of doing this program—going to talk about something I actually know about: baseball.

David Feldman: Oh, I thought you were going to say losing... at baseball. Don't you play baseball?

Steve Skrovan: I do. Yes. Yes. And you're not...you're not wrong. And we have the man of the hour to join us on that, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello. Well, today's show is a little respite from the torments of the world we have so many guests on, so have an open mind, listeners. This is more about sports and its impact on life in many ways.

Steve Skrovan: But before we get to that, Ralph, let's talk a little bit about a great activist who just passed away this week, Harry Belafonte. Talk about him.

Ralph Nader: Harry Belafonte was a great entertainer and a great social activist for justice, civil rights, African Americans. He grew up in the Caribbean and he never faltered. He never was corrupted. He never put ambition before his candid statements again and again on the violations of civil rights of people who were powerless. I remember when he came to fame so many years ago, I would hum his Calypso songs going back and forth to my classes at law school. He was a sensation in introducing Caribbean music. But then he went into great serious areas of conflict, and he used his fame as an entertainer to help a lot of other civic activists who couldn't get media. So we're going to miss him badly—Harry Belafonte.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you for that, Ralph. And before we get to our intro here, we're going to have another live taping coming up on Monday, May 1st, to mark this year's Law Day. We'll be partnering with the American Museum of Tort Law to bring you a conversation with distinguished trial attorney and law Professor Shanin Specter, who we've had on the program before. Just go to ralphnaderradiohour.com to sign up to be in our live Zoom audience. It's on a Monday, not Wednesday, when we usually tape. Monday, May 1st, 12:30 PM Eastern time, 9:30 Pacific.

Ralph Nader: A short course in tort law, listeners, from a master practitioner and educator, Shanin Specter, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Steve Skrovan: Today the topic is sports, specifically baseball. And a month into the new season, we are delighted to welcome the national baseball writer for the *New York Times*, Tyler Kepner. His latest book is *The Grandest Stage: A History of The World Series*. It's one of those books that I predict will be an instant classic of the genre. Kepner delves into the drama, the

pressure, the unlikely heroes, the unfortunate goats, and gets inside the heads of the athletes who have been lucky enough to perform on this grandest of stages. We'll also talk to him about some of the broader issues that the sports world that he covers, like corporate sponsorships, stadium building, and gambling.

And to that end, we have also invited Ken Reed back to the program to participate in the conversation with Tyler. Regular listeners know that Ken Reed, a doctor and passionate sports fan, is also the director of League of Fans, the group founded by Ralph that fights for the higher principles of justice, fair play, equal opportunity and civil rights in sports, while also encouraging safety and civic responsibility. Ken is also the author of *How We Can Save Sports: A Game Plan*, which now has been updated since it was first published eight years ago.

As always, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. And Ralph will have some choice words about Bernie Sanders' endorsement of Joe Biden running for President again. But first, let's talk sports. David?

David Feldman: Tyler Kepner is national baseball writer for the *New York Times* where he has covered every World Series game of the last two decades. He's not just a sports reporter, he's a sports historian. He's the author of *K: A History of Baseball in Ten Pitches* and *The Grandest Stage: A History of The World Series*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Tyler Kepner.

Tyler Kepner: Thanks for having me.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Tyler. Well, it is a real pleasure. I've spent so much time reading your wonderful articles on baseball, which is your beat, and your role as a historian is well established now. I've got your [*The Grandest Stage:*] *A History of The World Series* in my hands right now, and I wanted to see how you dealt with that story of Babe Ruth in the 1932 World Series with the Chicago Cubs, when he allegedly pointed to the centerfield stands before he hit a home run off the well-regarded Charlie Root (pitcher). And sure enough, you exposed it for a fable, which was good promotion as a fable for the Yankees.

But what actually happened was he held up his two fingers if I remember it right. And what he held up was that he had two strikes on him and that's the way his opponent Charlie Root interpreted it. And instead, the fable was that he pointed to the centerfield stands and had hit of home run over the center field fence. And what Charlie Root said later was quite compelling, he said to the *New York World-Telegram* in 1956 when he was coaching for the Milwaukee Braves, "If Ruth had pointed to the stands, I'd have knocked him on his fanny with the next pitch—believe me. He just held up two fingers to show there were only two strikes, and he still had one coming."

So let me come to the present time, Tyler. I could reminisce for a long time about Mel Allen, the announcer, and when I became a Yankee fan as a little boy, after I heard that Mickey Owen dropped the third strike in the World Series between the Dodgers and the Yankees, and the Yankees came back to win the game and the series. But I want to talk about the Yankees now. And one question we had, Ken. I sent a very serious letter to the physician of the Yankees, because the injuries were unbelievable, and we just couldn't understand why there were so many injuries in the Yankees. This was a couple years ago when they had better helmets, when they

had gloves, when they had better trainers than the old days, when they had padded walls in the outfield, so if they crashed into them as an outfielder, they wouldn't get as injured. And yet they had all these injuries. So it was a very serious letter, and they never acknowledged it. And they never responded to it. How do you interpret all these injuries, Tyler?

Tyler Kepner: Well, you know that that's been a big question in the baseball industry for a while now—why when the athletes are so well conditioned and when they have so much awareness of injuries and so many facilities for them—why guys get hurt so much. And I think part of it is that awareness. Part of it is that the way they can detect and measure any little bit of discomfort, and they try to account for that and sit a guy down or back him off a little bit in hopes of keeping him healthier or long term. It doesn't always work, of course, but a lot of times they don't want to take any chances. So they'll put a guy on the injured list for a little while. Whereas in the past, guys might have pitched through something or played through something or not really known that they were hurt or didn't want to speak up. Maybe they didn't have guaranteed contracts as much or whatever. But I think now there's just such a focus on risk management and risk aversion, that if there's any risk at all in terms of playing somebody when he is not close enough to 100%, they're going to be cautious and sit him out. I really think that's what it is. I think back in the day you probably had as many injuries, but maybe there were shortened careers because of it, and we don't really know what those careers would've looked like because they never got too far off the ground because of injuries. So it's a complicated answer and I think it goes beyond just the fact that guys are in better shape now, so why do they get hurt.

Ralph Nader: Is there anything to their muscling up? They have bulging biceps now like [Giancarlo] Stanton. Does that increase the possibility of ligament or tendon injuries?

Tyler Kepner: It could be in some cases, yeah. I'm sure having a great physique will keep guys healthier or make them more productive than they would be otherwise. But in some cases, it does seem like certain guys' bodies just aren't quite equipped for the six-month grind plus spring training plus post-season. And Stanton, I know, works really hard and really wants to be out there and he is in incredible shape, but something always happens, it seems. And he's very frustrated by it. But it may just be something with the makeup of his body. I don't know that he could change it much. I'm not qualified to say if he could change it, but it certainly worked for him to give him a great career and a great living. But it's been hard for him to stay on the field.

That's the thing that older generations of players used to say up until the '80s or so. They would tell you to stay out of the weight room in the off-season. They didn't want you to get too muscular, too coiled, too bulky. They were worried that you would lose the flexibility that you would need for that long grind of a season. So there probably is something to that, but they have strength and training guys to figure it all out.

Ralph Nader: Tyler, let's talk about the game from the fans' perspective. I and a lot of other people happen to listen to the Yankee games on radio. And in the old days, they never had ads except between innings. They just focused on the game. Now they've gone berserk with ads, and they're not the only team. We did a survey of 30 games in April, early of 2022, when all 30 teams played on April 9th. And we found that the Yankees had more than 50 ads in between plays.

We're talking about baseball now, listeners. Once in a while in this tormented world, we have to have some relief. And it just kills the spirit of listening to the game when John Sterling calls "it's a home run" brought to you by Kia, the auto company. Or "it's a call to the bullpen" brought to you by Geico or "the strikeout is brought to you by"... some other company. And I'm sure that Sterling is overwhelmed by how many ads he has to insert when there should instead be commentary about the play.

So we sent this report to Robert [Rob] Manfred, the [Major League] Baseball commissioner, as well as to the New York Yankees. We'd sent a prior similar report in 2012 and they never answered. But Mr. [Richard] Sandomir, a reporter for the *New York Times*, wrote it up. This time we got a letter from Commissioner Manfred, and he punted on that as by basically saying Major League Baseball doesn't have any influence on what the teams do with their local radio stations other than police offensive language. And that's the business model that makes it all possible. But as baseball reporters, and *New York Times* has quite a few baseball reporters, why haven't you all written about this? It seems to be newsworthy. And this was new data, and the fans deserve some attention. We're going to talk later on between you and Ken Reed about the sports and the point of view of players as well as the fans. But what's your take on that? Just talk like a baseball fan.

Tyler Kepner: Yeah. I've noticed that on Yankee broadcasts in particular, going back a long time, I don't know if they've increased markedly, but I just remember listening in the 90s when they seemed to have a lot of ads during the broadcasts. But advertising creep has really gotten more and more pronounced. I've been very vocal, more than any other reporter that I've seen about the ads on the uniforms. I'm the one who asked Commissioner Manfred about it. At opening day, I asked hedge fund manager Mets owner Steve Cohen why the Mets need an ad patch on their jersey. They did change the style of it yesterday. Now it's a little more in keeping with their color scheme at least. It's a little scaled down from what it was for the first 20 games or so when it was quite garish. But that's a line that I would've drawn. I think a radio station, or a TV station ought to balance what revenue they're going to get from those ads versus how much it will turn off their listeners or viewers. And if they see that they're not turning off their viewers or listeners or discouraging them from listening, then they'll probably just keep doing it.

Ralph Nader: Tyler, the interesting thing is, as advertisers know, if you cluster too many ads together, you get less response to the ad. And they're so clustered together that they irritate the listener. I don't know why the advertisers keep putting their ads on. Listeners are really upset about increased add interruptions, because it constantly distracts from the focus of the game. And Sterling has been around forever, and he's got a lot of commentary, but instead, he has to go to an ad.

People who want to get this report can go to leagueoffans.org for it. It is getting worse compared to our 2012 survey. It's gotten worse for all the teams. Curiously, although the Yankees have over 50 in-play ads, the Houston Astros, in our survey, only had 12, and the Kansas City Royals only had six. So there's something different with their business model, obviously, and we'll have to leave it at that.

We're going to now go to, listeners, some very important issues affecting sports. I've often mentioned that the sports pages should really be called "spectator sports pages" because they

don't deal with intramural, they don't deal with physical ed in schools and so many other issues affecting recreational activity like in the neighborhoods and so forth. So I'm going to bring Ken Reed on here and let's talk first about your findings on physical education and its gradual disappearance in elementary and high school, Ken, and why.

Ken Reed: Well, it's a sad situation that kids have never been less active **than** today. The childhood obesity epidemic is worse than ever. And it's not all tied to the schools, but part of the responsibility belongs to the schools. They dropped physical education—which used to be a daily class three times a week; **now** you're lucky to get one time a week, and a lot of schools don't even require it. In fact, I read recently that in Georgia, they're building some elementary schools now, and gyms aren't even part of the school. So today we're left with a situation where only 5% of kids are meeting the 60-minute daily goal for exercise. Over 75% of kids don't even exercise 20 minutes a day. It's video games; it's social media. COVID[-19] made things worse. But it's a huge problem health-wise. What used to be called adult-onset diabetes is now happening in kids 13, 14, 15 years old.

Ralph Nader: Tyler, can you respond to that? Don't you think that is a recurrent newsworthy subject for the sports pages?

Tyler Kepner: **S**ure. I'm the baseball columnist, so it wouldn't be under my radar. But we have plenty of general assignment sports writers who look at lots of different aspects of things from the sports world. So, maybe it would be something that would interest them.

Ralph Nader: That was good. Because we send it around to all the sports writers and Robert Lipsyte, who is revered as a sportswriter—I know you know him—thinks very highly of Ken's writings; **so did** [Frank] Deford, before he passed away, who was a great writer, and essayist on sports. Let's go to what Ken and others have written about concussions. Concussions have been widely reported in the sports pages, but there's a dimension that has not been widely reported and it involves high school football too. Ken?

Ken Reed: Yeah, just as a prelude to that, every year at League of Fans, makes a list of the top ten contemporary sports issues. And for the last ten years, brain trauma, concussions and CTE [chronic traumatic encephalopathy] has been number one. And for a lot of years, the only media attention the issue got was with the NFL [National Football League] and a little with the NHL [National Hockey League]. And we wrote about that as well. But the scary part to me, is colleges, and even further down, high school athletes and **U** Sports [**governing body or Canadian university sports**] where there's football practices all the time by the hundreds and thousands where there's no medical personnel on the field at the practices or the games. Most coaches aren't aware of all the signs for concussion or brain trauma. And so it's a pretty scary situation, especially when you consider that the human brain is still developing till about age 21 or so

Ralph Nader: But isn't it worse, because you don't have to have a concussion now just repeated blows to the head that's dealing with this brain trauma later in life?

Ken Reed: Exactly. CTE was associated strictly with concussions for a long time, but the latest research is showing that repetitive sub-concussive trauma is just as dangerous. For example, what the linemen do in football where they constantly bang heads, they're not getting concussions, but they're getting damaged all the time.

Ralph Nader: Tyler, I went up to Minnesota to interview Coach [John] Gagliardi of the St John's [University] team because from day one - and he's won more college games in his career than almost anyone else - he had a winning team year after year at St. John's in their league. **During practice** he would never have the players hit each other, and he said they were less likely to injure themselves or be tired for the Saturday game. **But** none of the other coaches in the league followed them. Yet, he kept winning and winning. And now Dartmouth College has started saying, "No hitting in practice." **Maybe** the Ivy League schools will start. Don't you think this is a very important subject because high school students are now facing increasing insurance premiums that the insurance companies are **levying** on the high schools, and there's doubt about the future of most high school football teams because of this? I'd love your reaction on that.

Tyler Kepner: Yeah, the *Times* has written more about concussions than probably any other media outlet. Alan Schwarz years ago was really the one pushing all that reporting. It should have won a Pulitzer in my opinion. We've written about it so many times, maybe other places don't as much. But yeah, we write about all aspects of that issue very often in my opinion. Maybe we could write about them more in someone else's opinion. But anytime there's a public safety issue, public health issue regarding concussions and brain injuries the *Times* has taken that issue very, very seriously.

Ken Reed: Yeah, I would second that and I would give kudos to the *New York Times* on their coverage. I think what's really scary for me, though, **as a parent** of a youth sport athlete, seeing that the latest studies are showing that you're getting brain damage without concussions. And so parents might not even know what's going on with their kids. The results of this last study explained why about approximately 20% of athletes with CTE never even suffered a concussion. And that's because of the repetitive sub-concussive blows they sustained throughout their career.

Ralph Nader: Another area that Ken has written about and we focused on is the over commercialization and professionalization of youth in high school sports. The win-at-all-cost mentality of too many adults, coaches, and parents in youth sports. Can you elaborate that, Ken?

Ken Reed: Yeah, this is a growing problem with all the club sports and AAU [Amateur Athletic Union] travel teams and when we all grew up, we probably played with the neighborhood little league teams, but now, parents are taking kids all over to play on club sports teams and that creates an income gap. I wrote about it yesterday that there's a huge income gap in terms of sports activities, physical activity in general, between lower-income families and higher-income families. **Lower-income** families just can't afford to keep up with the Joneses, if you will, and playing all these elite showcase tournaments and club teams, et cetera. The other recent study that I wrote about recently was that there's a huge referee shortage now because crazy, abusive parents and coaches are driving refs out of the game and there's 50,000 officials that have left high school ranks now since 2018/2019 just because of the abuse from coaches, fans and parents.

Ralph Nader: Do you think that's something that should be covered? So it's the Lombardi syndrome, I guess, Tyler. You've come across that even in baseball, obviously, not just football and hockey and basketball. What are your takes on those?

Tyler Kepner: Ken makes some really important points there. I don't know if it's so much win-at-all-costs, but certainly in the development of baseball players, so much of it is now geared

towards showcases and travel teams, which are very expensive. But also, I think what scouts and teams are seeing is more and more of these amateur players are playing to the radar gun or playing to the metrics of exit velocity or how hard they hit the ball or how much they spin it versus the way to actually play the game. The instincts needed to play the game and the things you need to do to win, are not as ingrained in young players as they once were. Because they know that to attract scouts, they need to show the measurables, like the spin rate velocity and exit velocity and related stuff. So, I'm sure there's a lot of that like over parenting/over coaching that always has been. But the biggest issue in that regard for baseball now is that it just costs so much for kids to play it that it becomes in this country very much a rich person's sport and baseball is aware of that and they have a lot of programs to try to attack that problem, but it's still fundamentally an expensive sport. And now there's an added layer of you can't just star for your high school team and then be seen and be drafted. You got to do all these other programs too.

Ralph Nader: I didn't know this until recently, until Ken pointed this out that the physical, mental and the emotional harms that comes when kids are pushed to specialize in a single sport at an early age like middle school and then the rest of the kids become spectators to see these stalwart young athletes perform, not just high school and college. You want to talk about that, Ken?

Ken Reed: Well, yeah, it's the whole trend to elitism or over commercialization or professionalization of youth sports. Another factor is intermural programs that schools used to have for kids that didn't want to play varsity sports or weren't good enough, so they could still have an opportunity to compete and play. And the intermural programs have gone the way the dinosaurs in a similar manner as PE classes. And I read recently that some middle schools sports are going away along with freshman sports. Some schools are even dropping JV [junior varsity] programs in order to put more money and focus on the handful of kids that are good enough athletes to play varsity sports. So if we think sports have merit and are good physically, mentally, and emotionally, which the research shows it can be if done right, we should be finding ways to get more kids participating instead of fewer, and the trends are going in the wrong direction.

Ralph Nader: And of course it improves academic performance too when kids do physical exercise.

Ken Reed: Exactly. It's almost a straight correlation between fitness levels and academic performance according to the research. And in this era of mental health problems with young students and athletes, daily physical exercise and sports participation is also beneficial for emotional health.

Ralph Nader: You know, you might be interested in knowing this, Tyler. Ken and I visited ESPN about four years ago. He came from Denver to visit our Tort Museum, the only tort museum in the world, and we went over to Bristol and met with the investigative core. There were about four or five around the table and they were very interested in all of these things and other issues too. And it never materialized. I think the unit has either shrunken or disbanded and it raises a larger issue. When I started advocating for consumers, the business pages hardly ever referenced consumers; it's like the marketplace didn't include consumers. It was all business news seller-side news, so to speak. And we broke some ground. The *New York Times* did a great job covering the auto safety battles. And now, even though there's a lot to be desired, the

business reporting does include consumer concerns, abuses, credit abuses, safety, health. There are now consumer columnists in newspapers like Michelle Singletary of the *Washington Post*. There used to be consumer reporters on TV, local news. That sort of dried up, unfortunately. But in the sports media, there's remarkably little on the plight of consumers, fans, taxpayers. So let's go to the taxpayers' stadiums. I've been really fighting against this, in part because if they're going to spend money, they should develop neighborhood recreational facilities, which are often non-existent in cities or deteriorating for young, middle-aged, and older people to enjoy sports as they can define it and exercise. Instead, they fund these giant arenas owned by billionaires. So the latest one is Governor [Kathy] Hochul's announcement, and it was hardly subjected to any legislative review, that she was going to subsidize the Buffalo Bills' new stadium because the Bills are threatening to leave Buffalo. That's the extortion that these teams do. The owners of the Buffalo Bills are worth \$5.8 billion according to *Forbes*, and yet they got the equivalent of \$1.2 billion, if you include maintenance, for this new stadium. The argument is always it increases jobs, but when they're only ten games, two exhibitions and eight plays, you're not creating many jobs per year. That's a hoax that's been exposed by a lot of sports economists at universities.

Ken, explain briefly your frustration on this issue, and it doesn't seem to be an investigative trail. The *Times* and other papers will report the Bill's stadium issue, but there's a lot more to investigate behind the scenes, including how they're dealing with the naming rights, which I think should all be called taxpayers' stadiums since they're funded by taxpayers. What's been your experience, Ken?

Ken Reed: Well, it's a long-time issue because of the system of professional sports in this country. They're all basically unregulated monopolies. Major League Baseball had an antitrust exemption for a long time. And other sports have other things that are similar that allow these franchises to put pressure on the cities to create new stadiums for them. We're seeing that now in Oakland where they are probably going to move to Las Vegas and Tyler probably knows more about this than I do. But to your point, they're billionaire owners. John Fisher, the owner of the Oakland A's [Athletics], I think is worth like \$2 billion, but he wants \$500 million or more to build a stadium and it looks like Vegas is going to do it for him. In a way, that's the way the system works. So if the Pegulas [owner of the Buffalo Bills] who are worth \$5.8 billion are getting it, then Fisher figures he should get it no matter how rich he is. It's a crazy system and I think it all goes back to the fact that these leagues are unregulated monopolies and can hold cities hostage.

Ralph Nader: What's your reaction to that, Tyler?

Tyler Kepner: Yeah, we've seen in baseball, there's only been one franchise that actually moved since 1972. That was the Montreal Expos to Washington. So all the extortion threats, I guess, worked because these cities do tend to get new stadiums. The A's have tried for many, many years to build all over the place in the Bay Area and it just has never worked for them. And it's certainly a shame and borderline disgraceful that you have some owners who are just billionaires and don't want to put enough of their own money into these projects. If there's money out there to be had from public handouts, they're going to take it. It's one of these things in professional sports, I know it's been covered a lot. It's just the way things are now. My area of coverage is the players themselves and the teams and the sports and how the sports are managed, and the competition and how the teams are put together and all that. And some of that obviously has to

do with revenues. But a lot of times these owners really have the revenues. It's just a matter of how much they want to spend on their payrolls.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Tyler Kepner, the star baseball reporter for the *New York Times*, author of the new book, *The Grandest Stage: A History of The World Series*, and his prior book, which was a bestseller, called *K: A History of Baseball in Ten Pitches*. And we're speaking with Ken Reed, who has been a varsity player and a coach, and worked in the marketing area before he wanted to talk about the dark side of sports and what can be done about it. And that's his book that's out called *How We Can Save Sports: A Game Plan* that I was fortunate to write the introduction to. And he is our policy director for leagueoffans.org. And you can go to leagueoffans.org to get more information. You got to indulge me in the Yankees on this. The last World Series Yankees were in was 2009, is that correct?

Tyler Kepner: That's right. Yep.

Ralph Nader: Right. And I don't think the sports press has been adequately critical of Brian Cashman. In fact, they've been almost laudatory. And over the years he's made a lot of mistakes in terms of the players he's recruited or the players he has sold. Why is the press so uncritical of Bryan Cashman? He's well named. He's had the biggest hoard of cash you can imagine. The New York Yankees is the number one valuation team in Major League Baseball, and they've had plenty of money, and yet it goes year after year and it's getting embarrassing. They're getting whipped by the Minnesota Twins, the Miami players, never mind Tampa Bay, and they don't look good this year either. The bottom half of their **batting** order is fairly weak. Can you give your take? I've never seen such patsy questions than the press asks managers after the game. , It's almost embarrassing. They talk to a player, "How did you feel when you hit that home run?" There's no strategic or tactical questioning at all.

Tyler Kepner: I disagree with that. I think that's the cliché perception that all the media asks **is** how does it feel to do X, Y, Z? I don't hear that question—I hardly ever hear that question personally. Maybe you do. How you feel about this? How do you feel about hitting a home run? I don't hear that. And as far as the Yankees, the Astros have been the dominant team for a long time and some team **has** got to be number two. And the Astros have beaten the Yankees in the 2015 Wild Card game. And then in the 2017 LCS [League Championship Series] and in the 2019 LCS and the 2022 LCS. So the Yankees have gotten the playoffs six years in a row. They've won—I could look it up easily—probably the most games in the American League since their last trip to the World Series. They lost in the LCS in 2010. They lost in 2012. They lost—as I said—those other three times the Astros. So they've given themselves a lot of chances and generally something will break through. The Phillies last year not made the World Series since 2009 and they were mostly terrible since 2011. But they got the last Wild Card spot last year and they got hot at the right time. Does that mean the Phillies have been better than the Yankees all this time? No, but they got hot last year, and they ran right up to game six of the World Series. So that was great. But the Yankees just haven't had that. Whether it's luck or design; **it's** both, I think. I think they strike out too much when it comes to big games in the post-season, which makes them vulnerable to the great kind of pitching that you'll see in October. But they get there. And last year, they were on a historic pace until Aaron Judge really just dragged them into the playoffs when the rest of the team got injured or fell apart in the second half. I mean, I liked Cashman's moves last year at the deadline. I really thought he had put the Yankees in a great position for the

playoffs, but then I don't think you can hang it on Cashman that Andrew Benintendi got hurt and [Scott] Effross got hurt. You probably can hang it on him that [Frankie] Montas got hurt because he was already hurt. [Harrison] Bader really came on in the playoffs and he was great. So, it's complicated. Plenty of teams with lots of money don't do as well as the Yankees and some teams do. Some teams do better. The Dodgers generally have been better than the Yankees and they have a lot of money. But most teams would take their chances with the amount of wins the Yankees get and the amount of playoff runs they have that one of those years they'd break through.

Ralph Nader: By the way, just a simple question. Who do you think the two or three best baseball players in the major leagues are right now?

Tyler Kepner: Shohei Ohtani is the best baseball player in the world. That's really clear. I still think Mike Trout is way up there. Mookie Betts can do it all. So those are the first three who come to mind. Ronald Acuña, Trea Turner. There's a lot of great players—Manny Machado, Bryce Harper. But the first couple that come to mind are still Ohtani and Trout and then Mookie Betts for me.

Ralph Nader: What's your take, Tyler, on the gambling connections that universities now are making with gambling companies? I know the *Times* has written about that, and also the differential monetary awards that have been given, say, to college basketball players where a few stars make a lot of money, and the rest of the team makes nothing.

Tyler Kepner: Yeah, the college sports is not my beat, but I know what I've read just probably the same as you about how it's intertwined with colleges and these gambling sites, these apps is terrible because some of the colleges, who partner up with DraftKings or whatever the companies are encourage kids of still impressionable age—they're adults technically—to get involved in gambling; they're enticing them and they have financial incentive to do that. We all know that gambling can be an addiction and parents pay enough for college, let alone having their kids run up some gambling debts. So, certainly that's a problem on the college campuses and baseball and other sports have gotten tied up with some of these companies as gambling has become legalized in many places. They say they want to have it in-house so they can regulate it, but obviously, there's a lot of issues there where it could be prone to corruption and it's not a good look for universities or teams.

Ralph Nader: The first shoe has dropped. The National Football League has just suspended five NFL players—three for the season and two for some games—because they were caught gambling. So it's already begun. Steve, can you get in here before Tyler has to leave?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Very quickly, Tyler. The title of your book is *The Grandest Stage*. Why do you think baseball and the World Series in particular is the grandest stage?

Tyler Kepner: Well, historically, it always has been. Certainly, it's the apex of the season, the thing that every fan ultimately looks forward to. The World Series as an event has had some challenges. Certainly, the Super Bowl has overtaken it in terms of eyeballs, but that's just one game. The World Series is a week-long event. It's always fascinating to me the history behind it, the way it's managed within the games, the way certain players respond to that spotlight, and the way momentum can turn so quickly. We saw last year Philadelphia's up two games to one at

home and then all of a sudden Houston takes it back with a no-hitter in game four and then a close win in game five. They get home and they win it all. So I love the back and forth of the way those series go. Wish they weren't all so late at night on the East Coast, but I love Coast. But I do love that baseball has finally addressed some of that with the rule changes and getting the games to go at a much brisker pace. So hopefully, that'll allow some East Coast kids to watch to the ninth inning a little more. But yeah, thanks, Steve. It was a fun project to work on. And I've been really attentive to the World Series ever since I was a little guy.

Steve Skrovan: Well, I love how you talk about the psychology of the game players—the ones who are the goats or the ones who are the heroes, the unlikely heroes, the quirks of the game. Before you go, will you just relate one more story about something that stands out for you as far as a player dealing with either great success or great failure in the World Series?

Tyler Kepner: Yeah, for me it was important to talk to Mike Schmidt for the book and he was great because Schmidt's the greatest third baseman of all time, one of the best players ever, the big star of the team I grew up rooting for—the Phillies. And Schmidt was the MVP of their first World Series in 1980, their first championship. And then three years later, all he could manage was one hit. He was one for 20 with a broken bat single in 1983. That was the first World Series game I ever went to. And Schmidt was great talking about how locked-in he was in 1980 and how he was even able to bunt here and there. Imagine that, the big slugger bunting, and how that ended up helping him later in the series. The threat of the bunt had George Brett playing in and Schmidt was able to smash a key single past to him. But then by 1983, same stage of his career, same guy, theoretically, should be even more confident. He had just come off a great LCS (League Championship Series). He was one for 20 and he was pressing, and you could just see it in his at bats. And the boos were surfacing. And he talked about just being in his own head and how important it is to try not to be Kareem Abdul-Jabbar or Michael Jordan. They can't pass you the ball whenever they want. It's baseball. You got to wait your turn. You got to accept that your teammates have their part to play too and not just put it all too much on yourself. And it just showed me that those are some lessons that even the all-time greats have to deal with. And past success is no guarantee of future results even for those who have done it. So that was really cool talking to Schmidt and Jim Palmer and Dennis Eckersley and several Hall of Famers—Joe Torre, Cal Ripken, guys like that. Reggie Jackson was really a thrill for the research as well as talking to some of the unsung heroes.

Ralph Nader: Tyler, is your new book, *The Grandest Stage*, in audio yet?

Tyler Kepner: Yes, it's audio. I recorded the audio for it last August, so it's out there in audiobook form as well.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Tyler. We've been speaking with Tyler Kepner. His latest book is a *History of the World Series*. It's called *The Grandest Stage*. One story after another, very intriguing. He has the reporter's skill of non-fiction accuracy with the novelist's skill of making his stories irresistible to read. Thank you, Tyler.

Tyler Kepner: Thanks for having me on.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Tyler Kepner. We will link to his book, *The Grandest Stage*, at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Ken Reed: One thing I was going to throw out there before he left is in the part of the book I read, Scott Boras, the super-agent, was pushing away for the World Series to get some of its fame back and catch up with the Super Bowl. Boras has pushed for a long time about putting the World Series at a neutral site and making it a week-long festival and having sponsors and corporations there like the Super Bowl does. And I thought that was a pretty intriguing idea to make World Series all games at one site that could just be the center of the sports universe for a while. What do you think about that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: That would be very good. He would, I think, approve of that because for young people, the World Series isn't anywhere near as much of an event as it was a few decades ago. And one way is to speed up the game and the others to do things like you just described. The NFL really knows how to boost interest. They are public relation geniuses for professional football, but baseball doesn't seem to have to be able to do that because it's a more tactical and strategic game in many ways than football. And that tends to bore young people. So they've got to think their way through this. By the way, Steve, I heard that exact question. How does it feel hitting that home run? He took umbrage at that.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, a lot of times I would say, Ralph, after the games, that's usually what happens, but they're usually pre-game shows that get more into the strategic event of it. It's immediately after when they're trying to capture these players at the end of games that you have your sideline reporters saying that.

Ralph Nader: They don't ever second guess the managers. Look at the way he handled Cashman. Cashman is a disaster. He's got the richest team in baseball. Yet it doesn't matter how many times they're in the playoff. They haven't won the World Series since 2009.

Steve Skrovan: But Billy Beane, the general manager of the Oakland A's said very famously, "Once you get into the playoffs, it is a crap shoot." And the goal is to get to the playoffs because it's like he said of the Phillies last year, a team gets hot, there's an injury. So you really can't look at the result as much as you can look at the fact that the Yankees, or my team, the Cleveland Guardians, have won more games than the... they're only second to the Yankees in games they've won in the World Series and sometimes they even make the playoffs. So you can't take that playoffs because once you get into that, you can have a team that just barely made it and somehow, they get hot at the right time.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, it's because they have extended playoffs where in the old days you won the American League, you went to the World Series. Now you got to go through three out of five or four out of seven and the risk is much greater that a team gets hot for a few games and knocks you off. But still, even considering all that, look at how the Astros have taken the Yankees to the cleaners year after year after year.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. And I'm trying very hard to care about the Yankees as you say this, Ralph.

Ken Reed: Yeah. How about me? I'm from Denver, the Colorado Rockies.

Steve Skrovan: The Colorado Rockies, yes.

Ken Reed: For 30 years, we haven't even won the division once.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. The **plight** of the Yankees is not at the top of my list, Mr. Yankee. I want Hannah [Feldman] to jump in here because Hannah is not necessarily a baseball fan, but she is a sports aficionado. So, Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Briefly, on the topic at hand, one of the things I found really interesting about Tyler's book is he briefly goes through some of the championship droughts, and that it's actually pretty common in the past 20 years for teams to break these 20, 30, 40, 50-year World Series droughts. And so I'm sure because it's your team, Ralph, it feels like the Yankees are failing you. But I found that so interesting that they're **one** of the most thrilling things is for a team to have a streak of disappointment and then break that, so they might actually just be building you up to an incredible catharsis in the next couple years when you win again.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, you're complaining about 2009. I'm from Cleveland. Try 1948.

Ralph Nader: Lou Boudreau.

Steve Skrovan: That's right. **Not since** Lou Boudreau and Satchel Paige have the Cleveland franchise won the World Series. and he talks a lot about it in his book, the 2016 World Series, where the Cubs had a drought from 1908. And so you had a club from 1908 and a club that hasn't won the World Series since 1948. One of those curses was going to be broken, and unfortunately, it was broken by the Cubs and not my team. And part of that was just a freaky thing where there was a rain delay where the Cubs were able to regroup after the Indians—at the time they were called—**tied** the game on a three-run homer, I think, in the seventh or eighth inning.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, but the Guardians, formerly the Cleveland Indians, always have a 10th player on the field. It's called birds.

Steve Skrovan: Well, yeah, birds, midges, insects, I think, is what you're referring to there.

Ralph Nader: Oh, insects. Yeah, right, right.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. They were midges that come off—

Ralph Nader: Off of Lake Erie.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, that messed up Joba Chamberlain in the 2007 playoffs.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, I remember.

Steve Skrovan: So that's one of our best memories.

Hannah Feldman: I have a very impassioned counterpoint to the suggestion of turning the World Series into a week-long festival similar to the Super Bowl. I actually would argue that part of having the games in the series played on home turf for each team rather than a neutral ground—you have the hometown celebrations when the team wins, and you have the community that comes every week to these games on the hometown fields get to take part in the series as well. And I think that helps maintain some of that community spirit of it being America's pastime.

Steve Skrovan: I think you're right, Hannah, because baseball has always been a regional game. Every team has its own market—it's more consolidated now—and those markets dictate how much money they have to spend. That's why the Yankees have so much money because it's a huge market. Same with the Dodgers. And the Yankees have their own network. Teams like the Guardians, the smaller market teams, have to share in the revenue. The fascinating thing to me about sports in general is that you have all these very wealthy capitalist owners in the most socialist situation ever—always complaining about leveling the playing field, fighting for revenue sharing.

Hannah Feldman: Financial fair play rules. That's to bring it to the corporate malfeasance arena when you look at the Super Bowl or the World Cup, which would be an analog to the World Series being a week-long event in one location. When you look at the corruption and you look at all the criticism that comes with these centralized, consolidated, mega sporting events, I hadn't really thought about it before this discussion, but maybe that's part of why we don't see—or at least I could be wrong, correct me if I'm wrong—that same type of criticism levied against Major League Baseball, because they don't have that opportunity for a few really powerful rich men to just screw everyone else over because they hold the keys to the kingdom.

Ken Reed: Hannah, this is Ken again. From a nostalgic fan perspective, I agree with you. I like how the home team gets a shot to host these events, but I temporarily had my old marketing hat on there and we were talking about ways that the World Series could be boosted in prestige closer to the Super Bowl. And I think just from a pure marketing perspective, it would be such a monster event for a week-long occasion. But otherwise, with my baseball hat on, I agree with you.

Steve Skrovan: We're still talking about sports. Let's talk about the update of your book, *How We Can Save Sports: A Game Plan*. Tell us about what's been updated.

Ken Reed: Well, Thank you. It's interesting that I got a call out of the blue from an editor at Rowman & Littlefield who published my book, *How We Can Save Sports: A Game Plan*, seven or eight years ago. And this lady was a new sports editor at Rowman & Littlefield and was going through their collection and came across my book and said, “These issues are as important or more important today than they were when this came out. we got to get this book reissued and updated and put out again.” So she called me and we talked about it. I wrote a new introduction, updated some sections, and updated the resource sections in the back for people who want to be sports reformers, which I call citizenship through sports activism. It's ways that anyone out there can get involved with the local little league or on any issue that they're passionate about and try to improve the sports experience for all stakeholders. So it's in a paperback version now. The original was a hard copy and it's updated with some new research, etc. And it came out in paperback a couple months ago.

Ralph Nader: And I might add, there are very, very few books like this that look at the dark side of sports—professional, amateur, football, basketball, hockey, baseball, high school, middle school, college—and look at the solutions, such as how we can make sports have less of a dark side, less of a win-at-any-cost or be so profit oriented and give millions of people an opportunity to have adequate recreational facilities in their neighborhoods and communities and to revive physical education time in our elementary and high schools with all the health advantages of that

and with all the improvements in academic performance that studies have demonstrated as the link between physical exercise and their schoolwork. So we can thank Ken Reed for doing all this.

Ken Reed: It's interesting Ralph, that some people ask me, "Why do you hate sports or why are you so angry about sports?" And ironically, I'm probably one of the most passionate people there are about sports, but I think if you love sports, you have to be angry at some of these issues that we talk^{ed} about. And I always go back to RFK, Robert F Kennedy quote that I love: "The sharpest criticism often goes hand in hand with the deepest idealism and love of country." And I think that applies to me with sports and that's why we do what we do at League of Fans by working to try to make sports better for all stakeholders.

Ralph Nader: And every library needs this book, listeners, because they don't have a book like this. It's called *How We Can Save Sports: A Game Plan* by Ken Reed. I wrote the foreword. Give it as a gift to your local library, high school, community library, college library and to whoever you want to get more physically exercising, whether it's a relative, coworker, neighbor, or friend. It's a book for all seasons.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Ken Reed, policy director for League of Fans. We will link to the updated version of his book, *How We Can Save Sports: A Game Plan*, at ralphnaderradiohour.com. When we come back, Ralph has some choice words about Bernie Sanders' endorsement of Joe Biden's candidacy for 2024. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, April 28th, 2023, I'm Russell Mokhiber. **The** top lobbying group for hospitals has given former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi an award for her "incredible efforts in advancing health care" after the former House Speaker spent the past four years fulfilling the industry's top legislative priority, namely blocking consideration of Medicare for All or any other major reforms to the insurance-based health care system.

While the American Hospital Association [AHA] says it's dedicated to providing high-quality care to all patients, the lobbying group actually serves the financial interests of its hospital chain members, which profit immensely from the country's private insurance system. That's according to a report in *The Lever Magazine*. *The Lever* was denied access to the award ceremony at the AHA's annual meeting in downtown Washington. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*—**me**, Steve, David, Ralph, Hannah. Before we go, Ralph, President Biden just announced that he will be running again for president in 2024 officially. And you had some thoughts about Bernie Sanders endorsing him.

Ralph Nader: I think it was a strategic mistake. He endorsed him without any conditions. He didn't get any commitments from Joe Biden for his endorsement. And because of his leadership role among progressive politicians, he has undermined progressive legislators from holding out

and pulling Biden and the corporate Democrats more into progressive territory. I was shocked by his early endorsement and receiving nothing in return.

The only explanation is that Bernie Sanders fears fascism more than he fears Democratic Party corporatism. And except for the civil liberty/civil rights aspect of it, which is very important, corporatism and fascism overlap, and it's shameful that he pulled the rug out from under his colleagues who were trying to pull the Democratic Party toward progressive policies that he has championed—single payer, living wage, cracking down on corporate crime, revising the tax system, reducing the impact and range of the empire, adhering to the rule of law in the Constitution by runaway presidents. All these things he has commented about **and taken** positions on **in** the past and he has thrown them over the side with his unilateral endorsement of Joe Biden for re-election in 2024.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests again, Tyler Kepner and Ken Reed. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up," which includes *In Case You Haven't Heard* with Francesco DeSantis. A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to tortmuseum.org to explore the exhibits, take a virtual tour, and learn about iconic tort cases from history.

David Feldman: We have a new issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. It's out now. And to order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight," go to capitolhillcitizen.com. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music, *Stand Up, Rise Up*, was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when our guest will be trial attorney and law Professor Shanin Specter and we'll be taping that episode live on Law Day Monday, May 1st, at 12:30 PM Eastern. Go to ralphnaderradiohour.com to sign up to be in our live Zoom audience. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. Please try to attend the session with Shanin Specter. The cases that he has won are gripping and they're very telling about what the use of tort law can become on behalf of wrongfully injured people.