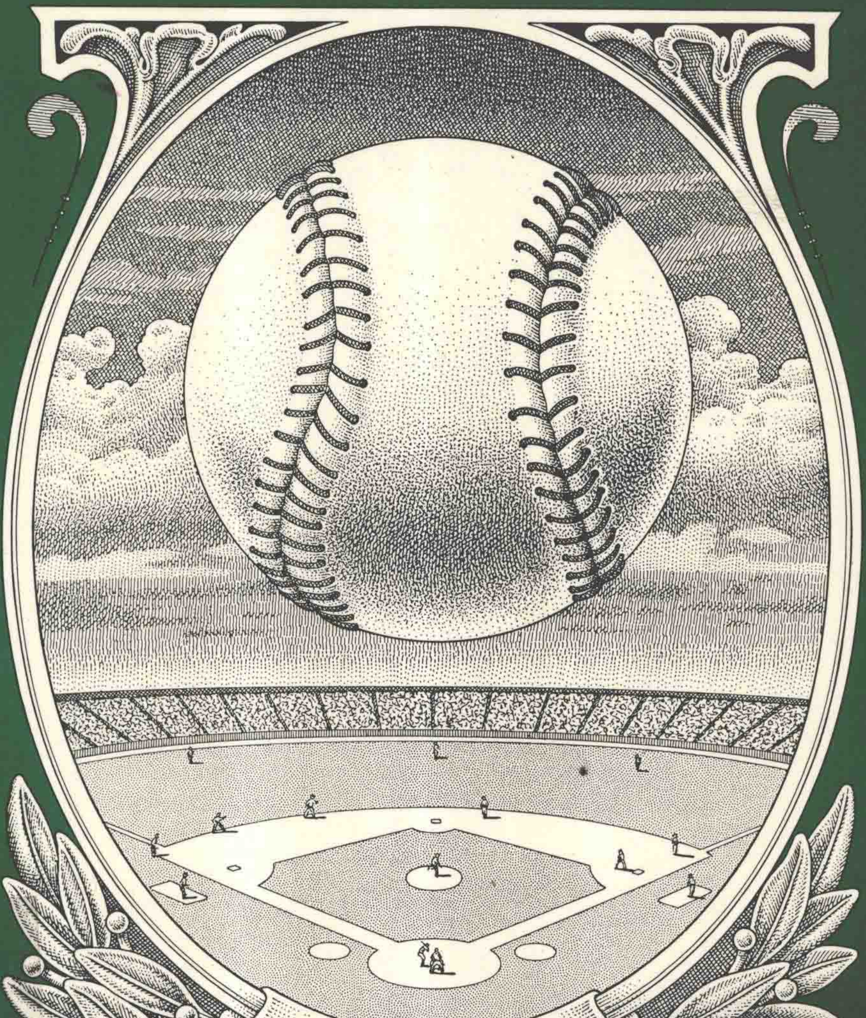
The Baseball Business

Pursuing Pennants and Profits in Baltimore



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Preface

In a rare moment of grammatical clarity and simplicity, the New York Yankees' famed manager Casey Stengel once remarked, "Baseball's business." Professional sports have become an important part of the entertainment business and a significant factor in the nation's economy. Not only do millions of spectators pay anywhere from five dollars to more than five hundred dollars per head to see professional sports in person, the public appetite for athletic entertainment has opened the way to multimillion dollar television contracts for promoters, lucrative personal endorsement agreements and enormous salaries for successful athletes, and the utilization of millions in tax revenues to provide new stadiums and services for owners and fans. Sports is business, and professional baseball, which occupies center stage for more than six months of the athletic year, is a central element in athletics for profit.

In a November 1983 essay, Roger Angell, the *New Yorker*'s resident baseball sage, pronounced the Baltimore Orioles "the dominant American League team of our time." During the previous quarter-century, the Baltimore team had been the major leagues' most consistent winner. Between 1966 and 1983, the team participated in seven American League championship series and six World Series. The thirty years during which Baltimore consolidated this dominant position were also an era of radical change within the baseball industry.

This study focuses on six aspects of the business of baseball: (1) the changing relationship between the major and minor leagues; (2) marketing, especially by means of television; (3) the evolution of one club's management from community ownership to one-man control; (4) organized baseball's increasingly complex and costly labor relations; (5) the peculiar partnership of for-profit sports teams with local governments, particularly the utilization of tax dollars to construct public stadiums; and (6) baseball's treatment of its most significant minority, blacks, as it is manifested on the field, in the front office, and in marketing.

The Baltimore club is a useful vehicle for studying the changes that have taken place in the baseball industry since the 1950s. St. Louis owner Bill Veeck's 1953 decision to move his franchise to Baltimore was one of the first significant responses by major league baseball to its postwar difficulties, and the move ushered in an era of franchise shifts and expansion. The Orioles built their highly successful farm system at a time when minor league baseball was undergoing a series of fundamental changes. During the 1970s, the club struggled to deal with serious personnel losses brought about by the introduction of "free agency" in the labor market. Later, it made a major and disastrous investment in free agent players in an effort to maintain its competitiveness. The relationship between the club and the city's political and business elites has always been close, and the effort to attract and maintain major league baseball in Baltimore has been a critical part of the city's attempt to refurbish its image and attract new industries. The nearly twenty-year debate over replacing Memorial Stadium with a more modern facility is a case study of the often-difficult relationship between sports enterprises and state and municipal governments. Working in a limited market area, the Orioles have frequently been a pioneer in developing new techniques to attract paid attendance. Under the leadership of Edward Bennett Williams, the club was very successful at utilizing up-to-date sales methods, including cable television technology, to maintain its profitability despite a series of mediocre teams. Finally, and regrettably, Baltimore's handling of racial issues has frequently mirrored the general pattern of baseball discrimination.

The book is organized into an introduction, three parts, and an epilogue. The Introduction provides an overview of major league baseball at the beginning of the 1950s. Part 1, Community Baseball (Chapters 1–5), traces the development of the Baltimore Orioles from their establishment in 1953 to the 1965 season, emphasizing the changing relationship between the major and minor leagues, the painfully slow process of racial integration in baseball and in the community, and the struggle within the Baltimore board of directors over the personalities and policies needed to build a winning and profitable team.

Part 2, The Hoffberger Years (Chapters 6–11), looks at team management as the Orioles became a marketing arm of a larger corporation. During this period, which extends from 1965 to 1979, the Orioles won their first World Series, in 1966, and achieved their greatest sustained success, dominating baseball from 1969 to 1971 and the American League East from 1973 to 1975. In spite of these successes, the club's financial position became increasingly perilous as a result of low attendance and the onset of a revolution in labor-management relations. By the mid-1970s, owner Jerold Hoffberger was actively seeking to sell the club. The book chronicles these negotiations and the efforts of Baltimore civic groups to retain a major league franchise, as well as the growing involvement of the state of Maryland in efforts to meet the demands of the city's major professional sports franchises for a new stadium.

The Williams Era, 1979–88, is the subject of the book's third part (Chapters 12–14). Unprecedented success in marketing baseball accompanied the gradual collapse of the Orioles on the field. This section explores the decline of the Orioles once-proud minor league system and the struggle over control of baseball operations that followed successive poor seasons. It discusses the marketing techniques that Williams employed to turn the Orioles into a profitable regional franchise. The Williams years saw the struggle between labor and management reach new depths of bitterness, and the book looks at the issues that divided the two sides. It also analyzes the events that led Maryland's political leadership finally to approve a costly and controversial plan for the construction of two new stadiums in Baltimore.

Shortly before his death, Edward Bennett Williams reorganized his club's management in an effort to rebuild the Orioles into a consistent winner. The ultimate success or failure of this effort and the club's continued profitability hinged on his choice of a management team and on the ability of organized baseball to adapt to serious changes in its most important economic and political relationships. The Epilogue examines the current state of baseball's complex relationships with the media, local government, and its own unions, and the renewed efforts of blacks to win equal treatment.

Historians venturing to study contemporary sports are naturally concerned with both the paucity of solid studies and the problems of finding adequate documentation. A few excellent studies have helped to inform and guide my own research: David Voigt's *American Baseball*, Jules Tygiel's superb *Baseball's Great Experiment*, Kevin Kerrane's *Dollar Sign on the Muscle*, Roger Kahn's *Good Enough to Dream*, Benjamin Rader's *In Its Own Image*, and Murray Polner's *Branch Rickey*. Among dozens of memoirs, those of Bowie Kuhn, Earl Weaver, Bill Veeck, Frank Robinson, and Curt Flood were particularly helpful. Regrettably, Lee MacPhail's memoirs appeared too late for use in this volume.

The other problem facing the historian of professional baseball is the quality and quantity of sources. Like most historians, I have a strong prejudice for written primary sources. Baltimore records repositories—the City Archives, the Maryland Historical Society, and the Pratt Library—provided some useful materials, as did the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis. However, the best collections, particularly on issues that affected the entire sport, were located at the National Baseball Library in Cooperstown, New York, and the National Archives and the Library of Congress in Washington. Librarians at the University of Rochester and the University of Michigan provided assistance with the papers of former senators Kenneth Keating and Philip Hart. Congressional hearings were another excellent source. I am very conscious of the debt I owe to archivists and librarians at all these institutions for their assistance.

I supplemented the written record with interviews. I am very grateful to Hank Peters, Harry Dalton, the late Jim McLaughlin, Brooks Robinson, Lee MacPhail, the Hon. Frank Horton, and the late Jack Dunn, who without exception were gracious with their time and frank in their discussion.

Finally, I have relied heavily on the sporting press. *The Sporting News*, which until the 1970s functioned as a trade newspaper, and Baltimore newspapers—the *Sun*, *Evening Sun*, and *News Post* and its successor, the *News American*—provided increasingly sophisticated coverage of baseball's business side. Since the departure of the Senators in 1971, the *Washington Post* has offered first-class coverage of the Orioles' on- and off-the-field activities. The press in Rochester and San Antonio aided my efforts to understand the travails and triumphs of minor league baseball. The *New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, and, more recently, *Baseball America* and *USA Today* are helpful in treating the broader issues confronting baseball during the past four decades.

As a young man I passionately followed two rival major league teams, the Orioles and the Washington Senators. Their contrasting fates gave birth to the question that lies at the heart of this book: Why were the Orioles so successful and the Senators so woebegone? In the last five years, this question has returned in a new form as the Orioles moved from mediocrity to collapse. Fynnette Eaton turned the question into a book by introducing me first to Earl Weaver's entertaining memoirs and then to Jules Tygiel's study. Weaver's book started me thinking about the business side of baseball. Tygiel showed me that the topic could be dealt with in a serious manner. Fynnette, Eric Edelman, and Ted Weir patiently read the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. The book is dedicated to Fynnette, who inspired it, with gratitude.

The Baseball Business

Contents

4,264 chairback seats and contracted to install escalators to the upper deck at an additional cost of $130,000. The 1965–70 Baltimore capital improvement plan committed another $1 million to stadium upkeep. The city permitted the Orioles to make a number of capital improvements in the park, including the construction of a restaurant, in order to improve club profitability. Baltimore absorbed large losses from stadium operations.[38]

These improvements failed to satisfy the Colts' blunt, aggressive, millionaire owner, Carroll Rosenbloom. In September 1965 Rosenbloom announced that he was putting together financing to build a domed stadium at an unspecified location and that Hoffberger was ready to join the initiative. He denounced conditions at Memorial Stadium and warned city leaders to build a new stadium or risk losing major league sports in Baltimore.[39]

City leaders politely ignored Rosenbloom's threats and his demand for a new facility. The Colts owner was a persistent man, and two years later Rosenbloom repeated his demand for a new facility, again claiming Hoffberger's support. Rosenbloom stressed that he could "easily" raise financing for a private stadium, and reiterated that without city action to build a new park, professional sports might flee Baltimore.[40]

This time the city responded. Douglas Tawney, the director of the city's Department of Parks and Recreation, bluntly replied that the city could not afford a new stadium when it was hard-pressed to maintain Memorial Stadium. The city would continue its efforts to modernize the existing facility, recognizing that "to fail to keep the present structure in an up-to-date well-maintained condition is the best method to have the . . . major league franchises locate elsewhere. . . . The city of Baltimore would certainly be left with an $8 million white elephant."[41]

Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro III attempted to pacify Rosenbloom by ordering a special study of Memorial Stadium improvements. Tawney met with Colts and Orioles officials and then drew up a list of improvements that he claimed the city could make in the existing stadium. Tawney's final report recommended a major overhaul: enclosing the park, putting a dome over it, increasing the number of seats by approximately 5,000; providing a total of 15,000 parking spaces; improving lighting, concession stands, and toilet facilities; building offices for both clubs; and installing luxury boxes. Tawney estimated the total cost of these extensive renovations would be $10 million.[42]

Rosenbloom, who had already angrily rejected Tawney's preliminary report, continued his campaign for a new stadium. Hoffberger took a more moderate stance, expressing his willingness to discuss the proposed improvements with city comptroller Hyman Pressman.[43] Hoffberger's comments were significant since they indicated that a considerable gap existed between his position and that of the Colts owner.

The city moved forward with its study of major stadium renovations. In the winter of 1969 Mayor D'Alesandro commissioned a New York consulting firm to draw up plans for improving Memorial Stadium. The consultant's report of July 1969 offered the city three alternative plans ranging in price from a minimum of $5 million to a maximum of $19.3 million. None of the proposals included the cost of placing a dome on the facility. D'Alesandro immediately ruled out the two more expensive plans and announced that the city would attempt to meet the goals of the $5 million renovation project on a piecemeal basis. He indicated that Baltimore would seek contributions from its professional sports franchises to support the work.[44]

The debate over Memorial Stadium became more complex during 1970–71. Rosenbloom continued to insist that a new facility was the price of retaining the Colts in Baltimore. He quarreled with Hoffberger and took the city and Orioles to court over his rights to use the stadium for a Monday night football game.[45]

Rosenbloom's pique with Hoffberger had multiple roots: the natural rivalry between the two franchises, anger that the Orioles had a better stadium contract, and a belief that the baseball club enjoyed a privileged relationship with city government. The city sided with the Orioles when the baseball team claimed that a Monday night football game would do serious damage to the stadium playing field. Rosenbloom was angry about the Orioles' control of stadium concessions. At a November 1970 press luncheon he complained that his club was a "second-class citizen" in Memorial Stadium utilization and planning.[46]

In February 1971 Rosenbloom announced that he would pull out of Memorial Stadium when the Colts' lease expired in 1972 and move his team into a new stadium outside the city limits.[47] Initial reaction to Rosenbloom's announcement was polite indifference. Neighboring counties showed no enthusiasm for having the Colts as tenants. However, Rosenbloom's threat suddenly awakened state leaders' interest in the stadium issue.[48]

On 3 April 1971, Governor Marvin Mandel summoned representatives of the city, Colts, and Orioles to Annapolis. Mandel pledged state action to assure the modernization of Memorial Stadium.[49] Mandel's subsequent actions and comments showed that the governor believed that the impasse between city and sports teams had to be broken by outside action. Mandel faulted D'Alesandro for unnecessarily antagonizing the proud Rosenbloom. The governor became convinced that the only way to retain both sports franchises in Baltimore was by building a new stadium.[50]

State involvement in the Baltimore stadium issue complicated an already difficult issue. It raised fundamental questions about the use of public funds to assist a select few businessmen in making a profit. It also made settlement of the issue more difficult since the whole population of Maryland, through their elected representatives, became involved in the special concerns of Baltimore.

On 28 March 1972 the Mandel administration introduced bills in both houses of the legislature that would establish a Maryland Sports Complex Authority. The General Assembly approved the bill on 8 April and Mandel signed the legislation on 5 May. The bill authorized the Authority "to provide for a sports complex and related facilities in the greater Baltimore region" and to find means of financing the project without the use of state funds.[51]

The Authority began its work in June 1972. Its membership of five was weighted toward the city's progrowth political and business establishment. It included William Boucher III, the executive director of the Greater Baltimore Committee, who had already publicly supported building a new facility, and William Sondheimer, Jr., who was chairman of the board of the corporation redeveloping the city's business center and Inner Harbor. Sondheimer, like Boucher, was receptive to arguments favoring the construction of a stadium as part of the city center renewal.[52]

The Authority's efforts were aided by the July 1972 departure from Baltimore of Carroll Rosenbloom. The Colts' contentious and embittered owner swapped his NFL franchise for one in Los Angeles. Rosenbloom wreaked a probably unintended revenge on the city when he turned the Colts over to Robert Irsay, a pugnacious, devious, and emotional Chicago-area businessman. Irsay speedily ruined one of professional football's model franchises. However, the initial effect of Rosenbloom's departure was to open the way for renewed cooperation between the Colts and Orioles.

In early August the Authority arranged an Irsay-Hoffberger meeting that resulted in an apparent accord on the requirements for a new stadium. Meanwhile, the members of the Authority toured new stadiums in other cities and discussed problems related to their construction and maintenance with local officials. They also met with the officials of the Colts and Orioles and with the representatives of the city Department of Parks and Recreation. They reviewed the previous consultant's study on rehabilitation of Memorial Stadium and discussed acquiring the Camden Yards (old railroad yards) in downtown Baltimore as a new stadium site. The Authority hired a new consulting firm to draw up plans for both a total upgrading of Memorial Stadium and a new stadium in the Camden Yards.[53]

In January 1973 the Authority issued its preliminary report. It began with a review of the history of the construction and installation of improvements at Memorial Stadium. The Authority concluded: "Comprehensive planning for Memorial Stadium was non-existent at the time of initial construction as well as during several modifications. Although the present stadium is approximately only 20 years old it is beset with adverse conditions."[54]

Among the defects the report cited a lack of parking; 3,000 obstructed-view seats; wooden seats; poor leg room; no handicapped seating; problems of converting the stadium for use by baseball and football teams; inadequate concession stands, restrooms, and press and administrative facilities; and the difficulties of maintaining a natural turf playing surface on nearly a year-round basis. The study pointed out that the Memorial Stadium neighborhood had become poorer, racially mixed, and older. Finally, the report assessed city revenues from the stadium, noting that while city income derived from football was steadily increasing, baseball rental payments were erratic. The Authority concluded that baseball was not a growth sport in Baltimore.[55]

The Authority's final report, issued 21 February 1973, endorsed the construction of a new stadium in the Camden Yards. It estimated that the cost of a 70,000 seat domed facility with underground parking for 4,500 cars would be $114.1 million. The report concluded that a complete renovation of Memorial Stadium would cost $91.7 million but stressed the difficulties in acquiring financing for this project and estimated that a new stadium would produce twice as much revenue for the city.[56]

Irsay had already endorsed a new park. The Orioles stated they could live with either project. The critical question, the *Sun* editorialized, was "who will pay?" The Sports Authority act prohibited the state from shouldering the cost, and opposition to the use of state revenues remained strong inside the General Assembly. The city of Baltimore was so hard-pressed for revenues that its initial 1974–79 development plan did not include major improvements to Memorial Stadium.[57]

Both Colts and Orioles officials attempted to build support for a new stadium by discreetly hinting that, although they wanted to stay in Baltimore, failure to provide improved facilities would force them to look for new homes. As a practical demonstration of their determination, both teams refused to renew expiring long-term agreements for the use of Memorial Stadium.[58] In December 1973 the Orioles and Colts provided the Sports Authority with written assurances that they would sign long-term agreements to play in a new stadium. Significantly, Cashen reversed the Orioles' previous position, telling reporters that Memorial Stadium "is incapable of being remodeled in such a way as to make it attractive for fans over the long term."[59]

Governor Mandel and the Sports Authority launched a publicity campaign designed to rally popular support behind the Authority's plan to sell bonds to finance construction. The campaign collapsed when both the Colts and the Orioles refused to sign a thirty-year lease until stadium construction began. The Authority declined to request the General Assembly's permission to sell bonds without signed leases. Plans for a new stadium had reached an impasse. The city rushed forward with an improved lease for Memorial Stadium that provided the Orioles with low rental and a city commitment to continue improvements on the park through 1979. The team had the option of withdrawing from the agreement at any time.[60]

In early March 1974 Jerold Hoffberger assessed the future of baseball in Baltimore. He was "disappointed but not discouraged" by the Stadium

Authority's refusal to forward a bond authorization request in 1974. He stressed that a team's financial situation was conditioned by the type of facility in which it played. The Orioles continued to be hampered by poor attendance that Hoffberger felt was at least partially attributable to the stadium. The club was saddled with the largest payroll in its history and remained dependent on participation in postseason play for its profit. Toronto, Seattle, and New Orleans were actively seeking a major league franchise. Hoffberger stressed that he had no plans to sell the club but as a prudent businessman faced with the possibility of serious losses, he would have to listen to any offers. "If I see the losses are great, I'm going to have to do something. . . . I'm not giving up any of my options." If attendance stayed low and the team remained without a satisfactory stadium: "I will bow to the will of the people. I think then the people of Baltimore will have told us what they want to tell us. First, they don't want a new park and, second, they don't want a club."[61]

Nine months later Baltimore voters approved a referendum barring the use of public funds to build a new stadium.

Baseball on the Block

One of the most most obvious explanations for the willingness of rich businessmen to own apparently money-losing professional sports teams is that they derive major tax benefits from them while basking in public approval. Another appealing factor for the businessman-owner is that sports franchises almost invariably bring major profits when sold. In a classic example of the law of supply and demand, the scarcity of major league franchises and the surplus of rich men ready to buy them have generally kept purchase prices high. One Orioles vice president observed in the early 1970s that the combination of a five-year tax depreciation benefit and the lure of large profits from the sale of teams created a fast turnover in ownership because the two factors encouraged quick sales to maximize profits.[62] He might also have added that the frustrations of maintaining a profit on a year-to-year basis provide another incentive for selling out.

While these factors have had a major impact on baseball, alone they are inadequate to explain industry trends. The economics of baseball is difficult to fathom because each team is a separate economic entity. Many are profitable enterprises. A few are tax shelters for larger corporations. Others are subsidiaries whose profitability is less important to their owners than their "fit" into a larger (usually broadcasting) market strategy. In the case of the Orioles, the major tax benefit of ownership, amortization of contracts, had long since expired. Another obvious benefit of ownership that was specifically applicable to Hoffberger, utilization of the team to sell his major product, beer, was of limited value. In fact, during the decade of public identification of the Orioles with National Brewery, the brewery, the centerpiece of Hoffberger's business empire, lost its primacy in the regional market. In the 1960s a few large breweries consolidated control over a major share of production and distribution. Hoffberger's far-flung regional operations were unable to compete. In January 1975 National made small cuts in its Baltimore work force and began to consider shutting down its Miami brewery. The company was able to recoup a major share of the dominance it once enjoyed in the local market with the introduction of Colt 45 malt liquor. However, National's production costs were rising, and the need to improve its competitive position led Hoffberger into a merger with Canadian giant Carling before the end of the year. As part of the merger agreement, Carling took over Orioles broadcast rights. Hoffberger transferred his family's Orioles stock into the O-W Fund, Inc., a holding company.[63]

The Orioles were an independent corporation again. Hoffberger needed higher attendance to offset rising player salaries or he would face major losses. He wanted a new stadium to stimulate higher attendance. Adding to the Orioles' difficulties, the team's radio network was collapsing. WBAL, the team's 50,000-watt flagship station, reported that it had lost $300,000 over the previous three years because of lack of sponsorship.[64] WBAL declined to renew a long-term contract with the Orioles, insisting upon yearly pacts that would permit the station to reduce its rights payments if sponsorship remained weak. The team's network fell from its 1960s' high of eighty-five stations to twenty-four in 1974. Washington station WEAM dropped the Orioles in the middle of the 1974 season due to lack of sponsor interest. Faced with persistently low attendance, falling broadcasting revenues, and a deadlock over stadium financing, Hoffberger acted like a prudent businessman. In January 1975, Cashen reported to stockholders: "For the Baltimore Orioles, 1974 was very similar to many previous years. The club was successful on the field and less than successful at the box office." Although participation in postseason play again permitted the Orioles to show a profit of $82,700, Hoffberger had decided to throw in the towel: "The club is for sale. Discussions are taking place with interested parties."[65]

The financial problems of both the brewery and the baseball club were the proximate cause of Hoffberger's decision to sell. Cashen commented that Hoffberger decided to quit "when we kept playing brinkmanship with the budget."[66] However, money apparently was only one motivation for Hoffberger's decision. He was clearly disillusioned with the players after five years of labor unrest. He was also tired of dealing with Commissioner Kuhn, whose efforts to put a new team in Washington were sabotaging the Orioles' best hope for increasing attendance and profits. Hoffberger had major charitable and personal interests that demanded greater attention, among them an increasingly active participation in Jewish community affairs.[67]

The absence of baseball from the capital of the United States was a particularly grating issue for Orioles management. Washington's business and political elite was determined to secure a new team and its gaze repeatedly settled on the Orioles. In September 1972 two congressmen approached Hoffberger to sound him out about the possibility of arranging a sale of the team and its transfer to Washington. Hoffberger, a man of immense civic pride, showed them the door. Commissioner Kuhn continued to encourage the efforts of Washington's leaders to acquire an existing franchise. After Walter O'Malley blocked a Washington group's bid to buy and move the San Diego Padres in 1973, Baltimore became the major target.[68]

In 1974, with Kuhn's blessing, the American League tried to nudge the Orioles toward Washington. The league suggested that the Orioles play a number of games in Kennedy Stadium. Hoffberger initially refused. On reconsideration, however, the Orioles high command decided to agree in principle to the league request. As Cashen explained: "It was just a question of keeping our options open."[69] The league office came up with a plan for playing fifteen games in the capital but never put it into operation. By agreeing to the league's Washington plan, Hoffberger succeeded in reducing league pressure on himself while building a small fire under Baltimore city officials. A clause that the team negotiated in its 1974 lease agreement permitted the Orioles to schedule twelve of eighty-two home games outside Memorial Stadium. While Cashen and Hoffberger vehemently denied using pressure tactics, they scheduled three exhibition games for New Orleans during the 1975 spring training season. New Orleans was on the verge of completing a massive new indoor stadium, so large it was to be called the Superdome. The chairman of the new facility contacted Hoffberger about the terms for purchasing the Orioles.[70]

The Orioles' willingness to play baseball in Washington and New Orleans produced desirable results for the franchise. Washington leaders were indifferent to the suggestion, effectively killing the American League plan. The Orioles gladly let the project die. When the plan initially surfaced, Cashen had reacted negatively: "I really can not foresee . . . any great windfall over there. In the past, playing here, we always outdrew the Senators."[71] The threat of an Orioles move, reinforced by Hoffberger's announcement that he would sell the club, finally galvanized Baltimore's leaders into action to save their major league franchise.

In October 1974 Hoffberger set $12 million as the "starting point" for bidding on the Orioles and reiterated that he would accept "any reasonable offer." At the same time, Hoffberger repeated his desire to keep the team in Baltimore and urged city interests to step forward.[72]

The outlook for local purchase of the franchise was poor. One city businessman told the *Sun*'s Bob Maisel that there was "absolutely no way you could pay $12 million for the Orioles and come close to breaking even in

Baltimore." Money markets were tight, the team's salary structure was inflated and its operating expenses were rising, and Baltimore appeared unable to provide the attendance and television rights income needed to offset these factors.[73]

While Krieger and Hoffberger maintained that a new stadium would mean a major increase in attendance, other observers were uncertain. One Orioles official, overlooking the club's record of indifference on racial issues, suggested the city's changing racial composition would be lethal for baseball: "White people are moving to the suburbs. And the Blacks don't support baseball." Blue-collar workers, an important part of baseball's traditional base of support, were hard-pressed to maintain their standard of living and as a result had little money to spend on entertainment.[74]

By mid-October 1974 Baltimore political and business leaders were discussing three options to save the team: forming a private syndicate to buy out Hoffberger, city purchase of the franchise, or finding funding to build a new stadium. Mayor Schaefer favored building a new stadium and was trying to encourage the formation of a business syndicate to purchase the team. City comptroller Hyman Pressman wanted the city to buy the team and rehabilitate Memorial Stadium, arguing this approach was cheaper and would ensure the permanence of the franchise.[75] All three plans faced the same difficulty: financing. The city needed authorization from the General Assembly in order to build or rehabilitate a stadium or to float a bond issue to finance a municipal purchase of the Orioles.

Mayor Schaefer believed that private participation in the effort to save the Orioles for Baltimore was the best way to avoid a franchise shift. On 16 October 1974 the mayor appointed a group called the Committee to Save the Orioles, under the chairmanship of former Johns Hopkins University president Milton Eisenhower. The committee included many of the city's business leaders. Schaefer instructed it to meet with Hoffberger to discuss ways to arrange a sale of the club to local interests. The Orioles owner announced that he would hold off discussing the sale of the club to outside interests until the Baltimore group had a chance to put together a syndicate with adequate financing.[76]

By the end of October at least three Maryland groups were trying to put together financing to bid on the Orioles. The most serious was backed by Baltimore businessman F. Barton Harvey, a stalwart of the Greater Baltimore Committee and co-chairman and spokesman for Eisenhower's committee. Harvey wanted to meet Hoffberger's purchase price with a combination of public and private funds: private capital providing $5 million and the city assembling another $5 million through a bond issue. While the Harvey plan was $2 million under his asking price, Hoffberger agreed to give the local group thirty days to come up with its half of the financing package. If it