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Arbitration has been hailed as a method of alternative dispute resolution capable of easing the burdens on an overloaded court system while offering a quicker, less expensive arena in which to solve disagreements. Over the past two decades, employers in a wide range of industries have turned to arbitration to settle disputes over everything from salaries to sexual harassment to wrongful discharge. Although not the first to jump on the arbitration bandwagon, professional athletic teams have been among the most visible employers of this form of dispute resolution. Some would argue that this pairing has produced brilliant results. Arbitration is quick, relatively private, and sets no legal precedent—perfect for both owners and players in an industry in which drawn-out and highly public legal battles can devastate reputations and destroy tightly scheduled athletic seasons. Others, of course, point to sports arbitration’s spectacular failures, including the recent baseball strike, the NBA lockout, and the Sprewell incident in which a basketball player assaulted a coach.

On May 7, 1999, The Roundtable hosted our second symposium of the year, “Employment Arbitration and Professional Sports: A Brilliant Pairing or a Bad Idea?” We invited five experts in sports arbitration to debate and discuss these issues with the University community. Among these five sports arbitration leaders were: Roger I. Abrams, Dean of Northeastern University School of Law and a professional baseball arbitrator; J. Gordon Hylton, Associate Professor at Marquette University School of Law and Director of the National Sports Law Institute; Barry P. Meister, an attorney in private practice who represents many of professional baseball’s top athletes and who has participated in more than 100 salary arbitration cases and more than 250 major league contract negotiations; Lester Munson, a nationally recognized sportswriter, Associate Editor at Sports Illustrated, and an alumnus of The Law School; and Allen Sanderson, a Senior Lecturer in Economics at The University of Chicago and a frequently cited authority on sports economics issues and the business of sports.
Following our symposium, Professor Abrams kindly permitted us to print a chapter from his forthcoming book, *The Money Pitch: Baseball Free Agency and Salary Arbitration*. In addition to being Dean and Richardson Professor of Law at Northeastern University School of Law, Professor Abrams has served as a professional baseball salary arbitrator since 1986, is a permanent arbitrator for Walt Disney World and the United States Customs Service, and has written what Lester Munson described as one of the best books available on sports and the law (*Legal Bases: Baseball and the Law*, Temple University Press, 1998). His article *Inside Baseball’s Salary Arbitration Process* describes the history of salary arbitration in American major league baseball and outlines many of the issues our panelists discussed during the symposium.