

ANALYSIS

How new MLBPA head Bruce Meyer plans to build support for bargaining



Bruce Meyer was unanimously voted to be the MLBPA's seventh leader. Richard Drew / AP



By **Evan Drellich**

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PHOENIX — Bruce Meyer’s phone blew up as congratulations streamed in from friends, some of them mentors, from as far back as childhood.

times he envisioned himself leading one. He didn't expect it would happen quite this way, though. The union's last executive director, Tony Clark, [resigned Tuesday after players learned that he had an inappropriate relationship](#) with his sister-in-law, a union employee.

"I'm not going to say it's never crossed my mind," Meyer said Thursday afternoon in his first meeting with reporters as the union's leader. "I was operating under the assumption that Tony was going to be here for a long time, and that's really all I was thinking about, was doing my job, helping others do their jobs, and ultimately helping players."

Meyer technically has an interim tag, which he said he expects will last through collective bargaining with Major League Baseball. That process is likely to begin in April and could last until some time in 2027, depending on how well talks go. It's up to the players to decide if a wider search will eventually be conducted. Meyer said he would support them if that's what they want.

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Who is Bruce Meyer? The MLBPA's interim head is known for his blunt negotiating style

Since joining the MLBPA eight years ago, Meyer has developed a reputation for unwavering conviction and limited interpersonal charisma.

The union has a new leader at a time when the stakes are particularly high, and there's a lot to determine in short order. He plans to try to improve the union's relations with agents, a key matter in creating enough solidarity to withstand whatever the league will throw the players' way in negotiations that are expected to produce a lockout.

One of the congratulations calls Meyer received? From his counterpart at the league office, deputy commissioner Dan Halem.

"He was very nice, very gracious, very classy," Meyer said. "Despite occasional reports to the contrary, we have a good relationship, professional relationship, and I



Bargaining priorities

MLB's owners are preparing a push for a salary cap, which the union has historically fought against. Meyer's opposition to a cap is no different than Clark's or any other leader in the union's history.

But what does the union plan to push for during bargaining instead?

"Players play the game as competitors. They try their hardest every day. They want to see every team doing that," Meyer said. "So competition is key for us, but particularly teams that can afford to compete and don't, or don't want to or make excuses not to."

Competitive balance, and whether enough MLB teams have a fair shot every season, has already been a hot topic leading into the negotiations. The current market system "is not perfect," Meyer acknowledged.

"A market system is absolutely crucial for the players, so we're dedicated to preserving and improving that system for players at all levels," he continued. "It's been a priority for us, it was last time in bargaining, to get younger guys paid earlier, given that our system basically doesn't give them access to their rights for a long period of time, starting from when they're in the minors."

Meyer also pointed to raising the luxury-tax thresholds and protecting player benefits as key areas of interest. He also wants to preserve (if not expand) salary arbitration — a player's first significant raise before free agency, and something the league would like to eliminate.


Reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Tarik Skubal [recently won a landmark case](#) against the Detroit Tigers. A panel of arbitrators decided he should be paid a record \$32 million for 2026, rather than the \$19 million the Tigers proposed.






Tarik Skubal's salary for 2026 smashed David Price's \$19.75 million record for the highest pitcher arbitration salary. Jamie Squire / Getty Images

“Salary arbitration is a crucial right,” Meyer said. “It’s something that players fought for decades ago. ... It gives the player the ability for the first time in his career, to say, ‘I deserve more, I believe I’m worth more than what the club is offering, and I have the right to go to an independent third party to try and vindicate that right.’”

Meyer is going to have to fight against the perception of haves and have-nots across the sport. The minimum salary in baseball this season is \$780,000. Some players make north of \$50 million annually. 

One of Meyer’s tasks, particularly if the league makes a cap proposal that greatly increases the minimum salary, will be explaining to players and the public why they should believe the current system is better than a cap-and-floor set-up that could pay players more money when they’re younger. 

“Players believe in a system that rewards players for performance,” Meyer said. “That’s all we’ve ever really asked for, is for players to have the ability to recognize the value that they produce. Our system gives players at all levels the ability to do that. We don’t believe in a system that’s basically a zero-sum game that says, ‘If we pay

“We can make improvements for players at every level, in many ways, without going down the road of something that this union has fought against for literal generations.”

Building cohesion

Meyer was hired by Clark in 2018 to lead the union’s collective bargaining efforts. He’s still going to do so, but to be as effective as possible in the top job, he must rally as many players and agents behind him as possible.

A former litigator with a dry, pull-no-punches approach, Meyer hasn’t always been the fastest to make friends professionally. He’s heavy on firepower, but not always on charm. But he said he’s looking forward to the tough conversations that come with building support.

For both management and workers, success in labor relations is typically determined by solidarity.

“We want and expect players to express their views, to express disagreements, to talk it out, and we want to educate players,” Meyer said. “If, at the end of the day, we are not 100 percent on the same page, that’s unfortunate. But that’s to be expected, and it doesn’t mean we can’t accomplish our goals. This union has always been the strongest union because it has been the most solid and the most unified at the end of the day, and I don’t expect that to ever change.”

Many opinions exist among a major-league union membership of roughly 1,200, plus several thousand more on the minor-league side.

“You’re never going to get everybody on the same page, but you try and do the most you can,” Meyer said.

Then there are the player agents, who have jobs distinct from union staffers, even though they both exist to support players. Satisfying agents is key for the union, because they have tremendous influence on the players.

In Meyer’s time in baseball, he believes the MLBPA could have done better at courting agents.



going to say we've always been perfect. Tony wouldn't have told you that. We've really redoubled our efforts in that regard in the last couple of years.

“There are agents who pick up the phone and call and ask what's going on, and any agent who does that, we're going to tell them. But not every agent does that, and I think one of the things that we've come to learn is that you can't rely on and we shouldn't rely on that.”

The union met with more than a dozen agencies at the Winter Meetings this year and holds an annual agent meeting in the offseason.

“I believe, and have believed my entire career in sports working for the various unions, agents are absolutely vital,” Meyer said. “Agents are the ones in the trenches. We can make proposals in bargaining, but the agents are the ones who are going to know automatically what the effect is going to be.”

Agents have their own set of politics. Many dislike Scott Boras, who has been highly successful and represents top-tier players, the kind of players that baseball's current economic structure, without a salary cap, benefits the most. Some agents, fairly or not, believe that Meyer favors Boras.

“I almost don't want to dignify it,” Meyer said. “Scott is an agent who represents a lot of players. He has no more influence over the running of the union than any other agent. And the continuous suggestions to the contrary, which I believe are mostly originated by the league, are really just an attempt at divisiveness.”

“Every agent is valuable to us. Every agent represents players who are our clients, our constituents. Every agent has our ear, and we take it all very seriously.”



The day-to-day

Another top lawyer at the union, Matt Nussbaum, will share some of the duties vacated by Clark.

“My focus is going to continue to be on collective bargaining,” Meyer said. “Players were very clear that they expect that. And again, I have Matt and others to rely on to fill a lot of the voids.”

“Matt, as general counsel, has been intimately involved in a lot of things, in terms of operations of the office,” Meyer said. “No balls are going to drop, that’s the most important thing.”

The union doesn’t appear to be pursuing additional help at the moment. This week, Don Fehr, the former head of the MLBPA and also the hockey players’ union, was bandied about by agents as one name worthy of the union’s consideration.

“He was my client when I was at my law firm. Don hired me at the NHLPA,” Meyer said. “Don is somebody that I have always had access to and will continue to have access to. And, we have people like Jeff Kessler who are part of our outside legal team and helping us with bargaining. We have a woman named Susan Davis, who’s probably the best labor lawyer, union-side labor lawyer in the country.

“If we need to hire additional resources or talent, I will, of course, go to the players, but I don’t suspect that’ll be a problem at all. So we’re going to be ready with everything we need going into the next round of bargaining.”



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