



Greg Maddux ‘money quotes’ that too few read in 1991

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December 9, 2017 is a date likely passing without note or significance to the Chicago baseball fan.

It should be remembered. The day marks 25 years since Greg Maddux formally bolted from the Cubs, seemingly stiffed the New York Yankees and signed with the hard-charging Atlanta Braves, thereby changing the history of all three franchises, most notably his original team.

But let’s wind the clock further back to the late summer of 1991. Maddux, then a durable right-hander completing his fourth full season in the majors, sat down with me in the Cubs dugout at Wrigley Field. We talked about the art of pitching and Maddux’s future.

He was going into his option year prior to free agency in 1992. What Maddux told me would be “money quotes” by any standard. They were used in an Oct. 1991 feature, “Greg Maddux: A Steady Rock in the Cubs’ Rotation,” in Chicago Sports Profiles magazine, a bi-monthly slick publication that published from the mid-1980s until 2000. Sports Profiles’ circulation was not robust. It was not a must-read at the downtown news outlets so Maddux’s quotes did not get secondary play in the newspapers. The Score, the city’s first all-sports radio station, would not sign on with morning host Tom Shaer’s voice until the following January.

The proverbial “if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around, does it make a sound?” axiom applies here. Nobody in the then-fluid Cubs management saw these quotes. Team president Don Grenesko and GM Jim Frey were being reassigned and demoted, respectively, in Oct. 1991. Former Tribune Co. CEO Stan Cook, who had overseen the sale of the Cubs to his firm 10 years previously, refused to retire at 65. He instead was put in



**Greg Maddux was honored with Fergie Jenkins at Wrigley Field with their No. 31 being retired in 2009. Deep down, Maddux likely wished the honor was for a career-long stay as a Cub.
Photo credit [ScottRanselmo](#).**

charge of Tribune Co.'s smallest and likely most financially insignificant subsidiary – the Cubs. I doubt Stan Cook got ahold of a copy of Sports Profiles to read these Maddux quotes:

‘I’ll hold up my end of the bargain’

“If I don’t sign anything by next spring, there’s a very good chance it will be my last year in Chicago,” he said, although his own preference would be to pitch a lifetime with the Cubs. “However, if I do sign something by the spring, then I’ll probably look to buy a place here in Chicago.

“Longevity and security are probably the most important things. Two years ago, when they guaranteed my money for this year, I told them I would talk to them. I would negotiate openly and freely. That was part of the deal two springs ago, so I’ll hold up my end of the bargain.”

Maddux did exactly as promised.

With Frey successor Larry Himes just starting, Cook and hired-gun attorney Dennis Homerin made re-signing Cubs demi-god Ryne Sandberg to baseball’s richest contract their off-season priority. Maddux was a semi-afterthought. But Cook – exposed enough to baseball player transactions the past decade – should have known Maddux was a rarity, a home-grown ace with not a hint of arm problems. He had slipped to 15 wins each in 1990 and 1991 on mediocre Cubs teams, achievements in themselves. In 1988-89, at ages 22 and 23, Maddux won 18 and 19 games, respectively.

The corporate boys tendered Maddux a five-year, \$25 million offer. Apparently he was too slow in agreeing to the deal due to off-season vacations and such. Once Maddux got around to it, he showed he wanted to stay a Cub so much he dropped a no-trade clause in the proposed deal. He agreed to the numbers, but Cook and Homerin had pulled the deal off the table. Apparently, Maddux did not OK the deal by an artificial 5 p.m. Friday deadline.

Cook had a budding ace of aces who did not want to go anywhere. The Cubs were his first, second and third choice. Maddux said Wrigley Field played like the spacious Astrodome when the wind blew in. He loved pitching on the grounder-gobbling high in-field grass.

Angered, Maddux stiffened, backed wholeheartedly by hyper-effective agent Scott Boras. He would go into the 1992 season as a potential free agent.

Another attempt to re-sign Maddux at the ‘92 All-Star break failed. His price went up from \$25 million. Cook would not budge higher. Himes, loyal to Cook for rescuing him from under-employment as a part-time scout in 1991 after his firing as Sox GM, would not push his boss to lock up Maddux.



Stan Cook apparently did not know the value of retaining your own home-grown ace.

Calling pitches for two other rotation mates

The ultimate competitor and teammate, Maddux simply geared it up in the second half of 1992. He finished 20-11 with a 2.18 ERA, second lowest by any Cubs starter since World War II. He also called pitches for fellow starters Mike Morgan and Frank Castillo through a secret set of signs relayed through the catcher. Maddux pitched well enough on a sputtering offensive team to have won up to 25 games if he had gotten better support.

He got his just due post-season. Maddux won the NL Cy Young Award on Nov. 12, 1992. As the New York Yankees entertained him, even recruiting Donald Trump to pitch him on the Big Apple, his first choice after he was disrespected by Cook and Himes was still the Cubs. He tried a back-channel option of showing his interest in staying to Himes. Boras was told the GM had already spent his free-agent bucks on the likes of starter Jose Guzman and relievers Randy Myers and Dan Plesac.

The Yankees, trying to get back to the postseason after an 11-year drought, thought they had Maddux in tow with a \$34 million offer. Maddux directed Boras to cut a deal. But Boras, always squeezing out the extra million or two, demanded \$37.5 million. The Yankees declined. Then the Braves swooped in with a \$28 million offer. Having appeared in two consecutive World Series and with John Smoltz and Tom Glavine already anchoring the rotation, Maddux chose to go south. He never would not finish in first place the remainder of his Braves days while collecting a World Series ring in 1995. Nineteen years after that ring and with 355 wins to his credit, Maddux delivered an earthy acceptance speech at his Hall of Fame induction.

Only a rudimentary internet existed in the fall of 1991. A reader would have had to either subscribe to Sports Profiles or go to a limited number of retail outlets to pick up the magazine. Maddux's quotes told the entire story. He wanted to be a Cub for life and go to the mat to get signed.

For all their other faults, who knows if the Cubs might have made a World Series in Maddux's prime in the 1990s if he had re-signed as desired? I'd put my money on it.

So much fake news and lowbrow content makes it on-line now. The money quotes that really mattered were 15 years too soon to get wide dissemination.

In researching a book, I pulled out a half-crumpled tearsheet of the Maddux story from the file into which it was consigned in 1991. Now we're reprinting the quotes for potentially the entire world to see.

Too little, too late? Sure. But an educational process nevertheless. Moral of the story: even the arrogant types waiting for their golden parachute like Cook need to do their research. Money and power is no shield against ignorance blowing up in their faces.