

The Archdiocese of Baltimore, pro sports and the Sabbath

The Baltimore Orioles open the 2018 season at Camden Yards March 29, which happens to be Holy Thursday.

The conflict between entertainment and worship recalls the Orioles' 2012 opener, which fell on Good Friday – and, before that, an era when “blue laws” restricted most business operations on Sunday. In the city, that meant Major League Baseball and National Football League games could not start before 2:05 p.m., which played a secondary role on another March 29, one that lives in Baltimore infamy.

On one side was Maryland Churches United, which, in response to continuing challenges to blue laws, as reported by the Catholic Review in November 1979, “adopted a resolution urging all churches to call upon the (Maryland) legislature and other governing agencies to ‘preserve and strengthen’ the uniqueness of Sunday.”

The MCU board, which included Father Brian Rafferty, pastor of Resurrection Parish in Ellicott City, said in its resolution that “in our modern day of hurry, hassle and hypertension, all persons need a day of rest, recreation and reflection.”

On the other side were department stores and other commercial enterprises, most notably the Baltimore Colts.

Even with the 2:05 p.m. kickoff, worshippers at the former St. Bernard in Waverly and other churches in the vicinity of Memorial Stadium on 33rd Street knew that it was easier to walk rather than drive to later Masses on Sunday morning.

The success of John Unitas and the Colts spurred interest in the sport, which led to lucrative TV contracts and uniform kickoff times for nationally televised games, 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.

The Colts' late start time was among the laundry list of grievances owner Bob Irsay aired as the franchise endured six straight losing seasons from 1978 to 1983, and the departure of the good will that had peaked around Unitas and company in the

1960s.

Baltimoreans awoke March 29, 1984, to the news that, under the cover of darkness, Irsay had relocated the team to Indianapolis.

Father Joseph Breighner, in the next issue of the Catholic Review, spoke for many when he wrote that “In terms of social injustice, we have, as a city, learned something about the cruelty of capitalism that no bishop’s letter could ever teach. We have learned that it is greed, not gratitude for past service, that motivates many rich people. ...

“The bottom line is not loyalty. The bottom line is ownership.”

The Orioles moved the first pitch of Sunday games from 2:05 p.m. to 1:35 p.m. in 1988. This year, their Sunday home games will start at 1:05 p.m.

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