

# Orioles' Mike Mussina remembers when pitching was done on the field

Mike Mussina seems transported to an earlier, happier era when he reminisces about the last time he set foot in London, Ont. It was back when he was a promising young talent on his way to the major leagues, every day spent on the road to the next ball game.

"We spent 11 hours on the bus getting here, from Hagerstown [Mussina played AA ball for the Baltimore Orioles farm club at the time]. I remember stopping at a McDonald's for some Twinkies and soda. After our game the bus caught on fire, and after that was settled there was a fight in the back of the bus between some of the guys on the team.

"It was an interesting three days," the lanky right-hander says with a smile. "I spent six weeks in Double A and the one thing I don't miss is the bus trips."

But five years later, one look at the 26-year-old tells you he'd rather be barreling down the interstate with a group of sad-sack minor-leaguers than standing in a posh conference room where lighting and microphones hem him in — a far cry from the island-like isolation of the pitching mound.

His brief major league career thrust him into the spotlight, but now the mound has been replaced by a podium, and a turtleneck sweater replaces the familiar Oriole logo. In the midst of the league's labor war, he's a permanently relieved starter, his skill replaced by his wordiness, and optimism toward his growing career relegated to sombre resignation.

"For a long time I tried to be optimistic," he says. "I

told myself we'd be back by spring training, but now it doesn't look like that's going to happen. "Now I'm pessimistic, I thought I'd try that out. Maybe reverse psychology will work," he said.

But the Stanford grad will be the first to admit that psychology isn't his strong suit, nor is he particularly drawn to his bureaucratic duties as a players' representative.



"I've never really been interested in politics," he admits. "It's a busy job, there's a lot of meetings and a lot of people involved. We're not getting paid and we're probably working harder than we did when we played."

It isn't hard to see where his interests lie. Mussina is just the second Oriole pitcher to make the All-Star team in each of his first two full seasons in the majors and has the second highest winning percentage among active pitchers behind Toronto's Juan Guzman.

True to his schooling in economics, Mussina's market-

value isn't lost on him. "We're the reason people come out to see games, we're the entertainers," he says with animation, as if the truth of the oft-cited words just struck him. "The fans aren't paying to see Bud [Selig, owner of the Milwaukee Brewers] or George [Steinbrenner, owner of the New York Yankees]. They can't entertain us. We're the ones out there entertaining on the field."

Mussina put his entertainment career on hold believing the growth potential of the league, and player-owner negotiations, is most important. "Every year the industry is increasing. We've had great World Series the last couple of years, and expansion to Colorado and Florida. It's something like a \$1.9 billion industry and it's going up at a very steep angle. How bad can the industry be? If it were bad no one would want in."

With the growth curve on a parabolic bend, it's clear Mussina and company are looking for their cut of the diamond. The paragon of control pitchers — averaging just one walk per 18 batters — finds himself striving for control of a different sort.

But Mussina may be out of his league.

What began as a dispute has become a war of words and paper, and both sides have laid siege to the sport. It's almost enough to make a certain Pennsylvania native wish he'd accepted a football scholarship to Penn State instead of jumping on a minor-league bus that stopped in places like London, Ont.