

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said on Wednesday that there will definitely be a 2020 season.

"We're going to play baseball in 2020," Manfred said in an interview with Tom Verducci on MLB Network prior to the start of the Draft. "One hundred percent. If it has to be under the March 26 agreement, if we get to that point in the calendar, so be it. But one way or the other, we're playing Major League Baseball."

The agreement Manfred referenced is a pact between MLB and the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) made on what was to be Opening Day, just as the COVID-19 pandemic had shut down the season.

The MLBPA's most recent proposal, as reported by The Athletic, is for an 89-game season, which would include full prorated salaries. Manfred said Wednesday the league will be making a counterproposal shortly.

"It will be a proposal that moves in the players' direction in terms of the salary issue," he said. "We're hoping it's a proposal that will elicit reciprocal movement from the players' side, that they'll get off the 100 percent salary demand and recognize that 89 games in this point of the calendar and in a pandemic is just not realistic."

"I remain committed to the idea that the best thing for our sport is to reach a negotiated agreement with the MLBPA that plays as many games as possible for our fans. We do have rights under the March 26 agreement and there could come a point in time where we exercise those rights."

Amid the logistical and financial issues is also the health aspect. While MLB consults regularly with health officials as it plans the start of the season, tracking the trends of the coronavirus is an additional factor driving the decision-making process. It's for that reason that extending the season into November is likely not realistic.

"It's easy to say you can just push into November," Manfred said. "But the primary reason is our medical experts are telling us we should be finishing earlier, not later, because of the risk of a second wave of the pandemic."

Logistics will play a role, too.

"We have commitments to our broadcast partners to provide content at particular points in the calendar, and just up and deciding we're going to provide it two weeks later is problematic," Manfred said. "I don't want to be responsible for the additional health risks to going later into the fall, the risk to not completing the season, the disaster that would be. I think the most prudent course for everybody is to follow the advice of the experts on this one."

Manfred's MLB Network interview covered several topics, including the recent death of George Floyd that sparked countless demonstrations across the nation and the world. Verducci asked why MLB's response came later than other teams that had released statements addressing issues of race.

"I was responsible for the timing, and it was because I was listening," Manfred said. "We have a large and diverse organization. I want to make sure when I put the statement out, that it was consonant with what people in the organization really believed, that it was consonant with their ideas about what we needed to do."

"The principal tenet of that statement was the need for action, not just words. We have tried to make short-term actions -- phase one, if you will -- of actions to demonstrate our commitment on this issue. We're working with our Diverse Business Partners program to provide financing to minority-owned businesses that were damaged during the demonstrations in recent weeks, we've organized an educational program for our employees, giving them materials to review. We're going to have an open forum on these issues to get additional input, to understand exactly where our employees are, to hopefully promote understanding among that group."

In conjunction with the Draft, MLB and the 30 clubs committed more than \$1 million in support of five organizations: Campaign Zero, Color of Change, Equal Justice Initiative, Jackie Robinson Foundation and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. While this initial funding is connected to the MLB Draft, additional efforts will be announced in the coming weeks.

Manfred opened the broadcast of the Draft with a statement supporting Black Lives Matter. As he spoke, representatives from all 30 teams held up signs that read "Black Lives Matter/United for Change."

"For many reasons, these are unprecedented times in our country, and also painful times," Manfred said. "We share in the sadness and outrage that has resulted from the national tragedies that include the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and others. Tonight, I join our 30 club baseball operations officials as they recognize, on behalf of our entire industry, that systemic racism and inequality are devastating problems, that we can each do more to help. That baseball can do more as an institution. That black lives matter and that we are united for change."

"This moment is a call to action, to acknowledge the ills that exist, to show solidarity with the black community in its efforts to end racism and injustice. We want to utilize the platform afforded by our game to be not only allies, but active participants in social change."