

*United States v. Curtis Strong* (CR 85-129)  
Judge Gustave Diamond

In May 1985, Curtis Strong was charged with distributing (and possessing with intent to distribute) cocaine. Through catering work that he had performed for the Philadelphia Phillies, Strong had become acquainted with a number of major league baseball players. They gave him access to locker rooms used by major league baseball teams, thereby enabling him to sell cocaine to several players.

Although Strong was charged with multiple counts of distributing cocaine during a period of four years, he was not a major drug dealer. His trial became the most publicized trial in the history of the Western District of Pennsylvania, and one of the most publicized in the United States, because it involved the sale of cocaine to major league baseball players who had been granted immunity from prosecution in exchange for their testimony. Some would later say that this case put major league baseball on trial for permitting its players to abuse drugs.

Each session of the trial was attended by reporters, sketch artists and representatives from every major newspaper, magazine, radio station and television network in the country. Camera crews camped outside of the courthouse for a chance to photograph the celebrity witnesses as they entered and exited the building. The courtroom was filled to capacity for every court session. Half of the courtroom was set aside for the more than ninety members of the news media assigned to cover the proceedings.

During the trial, several baseball players testified that they had purchased cocaine from Strong. They included Lonnie Smith of the Kansas City Royals, Enos Cabell of the Los Angeles Dodgers, John Milner of the Pittsburgh Pirates, Dave Parker of the Cincinnati Reds, Dale Berra of the New York Yankees, Jeff Leonard of the San Francisco Giants, and Keith Hernandez of the New York Mets. Their testimony implicated others in the illegal activity.

After a two-week trial, the jury convicted Strong of eleven of the fourteen counts with which he had been charged. After the return of the verdict, Strong's attorney was found guilty of contempt of court for multiple violations of court orders which had been issued during his closing argument to the jury. The attorney was sent to prison for thirty days. Strong's conviction and sentence were affirmed on appeal, as was the sanction which had been imposed on his attorney.

The *Miami Herald* reported on March 1, 1986, that Baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth had imposed conditional one-year suspensions on the baseball players who had admitted to using cocaine. He indicated that he would withhold the suspensions from the players who were willing to contribute ten percent of their earnings to drug prevention programs, submit to random drug testing for the duration of their careers, and spend roughly two hundred hours performing community service over the following two years.