

The Color Bar Gets Raised in Baseball

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Special for the Sports Business Journal

Published in The Sports Business Journal
Section: Opinion
Title: "Baseball's Hiring Practices Put to the Test"
Date: 11/26/01

Dave Stewart's charges of racism against the Toronto Blue Jays for not naming him as general manager highlight baseball's Achilles heel on the issue of race. Along with Omar Minaya's perfunctory interview with Texas for their GM job, it can easily be read that the Blue Jays and Raptors interviewed them to meet Commissioner Selig's charge on hiring practices. The Commissioner ruled more than two years ago that for the top decision-making positions, but especially manager and general manager, teams had to interview candidates from communities of color. Stewart says outright that he will no longer be part of the process and will not be used.

Omar Minaya, the talented and highly respected Senior Associate GM for the New York Mets, is staying in the chase so that he might become baseball's first Latino general manager. There are observers saying Stewart is a hothead and that is why he did not get the job.

What defines a hothead? If someone shoots off at the mouth and irrationally blames everything on someone else, then he fits the bill for me. But Dave Stewart endured as a fine pitcher when there were few African-American on Major League mounds. He has paid his dues to prepare to be a GM. He spent seven years in front office posts until he resigned after he was not promoted from Assistant GM, a post he held with the Blue Jays for the last 3 years.

Dave Stewart angrily headed for Milwaukee as the pitching coach for Wendy Selig's Brewers. Her father, who happens to be the Commissioner, was quoted as saying, "For our own good, we need to do much better." Some writers criticized Selig's interview policy as a sham. They were quick to forget that same interview process resulted in a tripling of Major League managers who were either African-American or Latino.

In the 2001 Racial and Gender Report Card, Major League Baseball continued to improve regarding race, especially in the area of managers where it received its first ever A-. MLB also received A's for player opportunities, coaches and team professional administration. MLB got a B+ for people of color in the league offices. It did not get an A there because the top five people under the Commissioner are white males. MLB got a B/B+ for team senior administrative posts. Not bad for a sport that had consistently pulled the lowest grades in the Report. However, MLB received an F for general managers with White Sox GM Kenny Williams as the only current GM of color and one of two in the history of the sport. The NBA had six African-American (21 percent) of its GMs while the NFL had 4 African-Americans (13 percent) in the past season.

To make a point of how far baseball is behind the NBA in this position, MLB has had six out of more than 100 seasons in which a GM was African-American (Bobby Watson was the first). The NBA had six in 2000-2001 and that was below its years with the highest percentage when 9 or 31 percent of its GMs were African-American in the 1994-95 and 1993-94 seasons.

Including Stewart and Minaya, baseball had only six assistant general managers who were people of color in the last season.

Others included:

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| * Boston's Elaine Weddington Stewart | * Cincinnati's Doc Rogers |
| * Philadelphia's Ruben Amaro | * and the Yankees Kim Ng. |

Coincidentally, Kim Ng left the Yankees on the same day Stewart left Toronto leaving two African-American (Stewart and Rogers) and two Latinos (Minaya and Amaro) as assistant GMs in all of Major League Baseball. The percentage of African-American players was at a record 30-year low of 13 percent in Major League Baseball last season. At 59 percent, whites were within one percent of their lowest point in decades and were 11 percent below their 70 percent total as recently as 1990. The drop for both groups is, of course, a direct result of the dramatic rise of the percentage of Latinos who maintained their all time high of 26 percent, double where they were in 1990!

Bud Selig's biggest success story on this issue was with managers. By the end of May in the 2001 Major League Baseball season, there were six African-Americans:

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| * Dusty Baker, SF Giants | * Don Baylor, Chicago Cubs |
| * Davey Lopes, Milwaukee Brewers | * Jerry Manuel, Chicago White Sox |
| * Lloyd McClendon, Pittsburgh Pirates | * Hal McRae, Tampa Bay Devil Rays |

And one Latino manager:

- * Tony Perez, Florida Marlins.

That was MLB's highest number ever (double the number in 1999) and I believe it was a great sign for sport, especially baseball. At one time, breakthroughs as managers was the number one target regarding racial hiring practices. Those breakthroughs have taken place at last in Major League Baseball. But if we had not noticed it before, Dave Stewart has now raised the bar.

Dave Stewart, who said he had been offered the Toronto manager's job but turned it down to stay on track for the GM post, told the press, "If it's their preference that we fill roles only on the field as managers and coaches, they should say that. ... for me, the system doesn't work. It's pitiful, and the good thing is, I don't have to play it anymore."

Hothead or four-time 20 game winner who paid seven years of dues to reach his goal and left in understandable anger when the goal was smashed? With a total of only two African-American and no Latino general managers in the history of Major League Baseball, I can understand Dave Stewart's candidly expressed anger. I only wonder how Omar Minaya is keeping his cool.

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