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Baseball's Musical Managerial Chairs: Minority Hiring Weak

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Over the past few weeks I have noticed a familiar phenomenon in baseball which is reflective of sport generally. The annual purge of the managerial ranks in baseball has begun after a relatively quiet regular season. The most spectacular of the regular season firings was that of Tommy LaSorda in Los Angeles although it was thinly disguised as a resignation for health reasons. Bill Russell was named interim manager and after some doubts were raised the former shortstop had the interim removed yesterday.

Since season's end Jim Leyland has left the Pittsburgh Pirates and signed on with the Florida Marlins, who dumped Rene Lachemann during the season and replaced him with John Bowles. Gene Lamont has been hired to replace Leyland, while every franchise that had an opening and several that did not coveted the services of Leyland. Kevin Kennedy was fired in Boston, Jim Fregosi in Philadelphia, and in Houston Terry "we hardly knew 'ya" Collins was replaced with Astro broadcaster and former pitcher Larry Dierker. What all these people have in common is the color of their skin.

I found it curious that there has been almost no mention of such things as affirmative action or the need for more Black and Latin managers. Instead for the most part there has been a list of usual suspects named for each opening, or a short-list of newcomers all of whom seemed to be white guys well placed within the organizational and managerial networks. The only exception was Hal McCrae, whose name surfaced this past week as a possible candidate for the Phillies' job.

A couple of years ago the most prominent African American mentioned as the next black manager was former Yankee and Brave Chris Chambliss who worked his way up the Braves farm system earning an excellent reputation in the process. I have not seen his name in connection with any of the recent openings. It seems to be very much business as usual.

This may be surprising to those who remember the Al Campanis-Nightline incident. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color line in baseball (and in a few short months we will celebrate the 50th anniversary) Al Campanis, a member of the Dodger front office and former teammate of Robinson, was invited onto national television on the eve of the opening of the baseball season. In a stunning

interview with Ted Koppell Campanis talked about the lack of blacks in managerial and front-office positions in very embarrassing terms. The baseball world and sportsworld were stunned by his comments and the Dodgers fired him the next day.

Baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth used the embarrassment of the incident to prod baseball owners into hiring minorities, and he hired University of California sociologist Harry Edwards to serve as a special consultant to promote minority hiring in baseball. Indeed the spotlight remained bright through the next few years whenever an opening occurred in managerial and front-office ranks, and some progress was made.

Over and over again the hiring practices of all major sports franchises were examined, the all-white nature of the hiring networks was analyzed, and Edwards spoke of the need to develop alternative networks and did, in fact, put some of these in place. Since that time Edwards has gone on to be hired by the San Francisco 49ers and others as a consultant on racial issues. In fact the job opportunities for Edwards seem to have increased much more rapidly than they have for other African Americans in sport.

Each year since the Campanis incident the Center for the Study of Sport and Society at Northeastern University has tracked progress in all sports. Each year it has issued a report card for the major sports. At the top management levels in baseball little progress has been made in the past few years and in fact there has been some slippage. Although there was an overall increase in minorities in league offices, there has been a decrease among department heads, as well as coaches and vice-presidents. The Major League Baseball Players Association which was graded the lowest of all such player groups in 1995, declined to report in 1996.

It is clear that baseball has the poorest record of the three majors in nearly all areas of minority hiring. The basic policy of "round up the usual suspects" when management openings occur seems to permeate the entire sport. As we approach the 50th Anniversary of Jackie Robinson's dramatic breaking of tradition, the voices of the African American community remain muted in the positions of leadership in baseball as well as the other major sports in which they dominate the arena and the playing field.

There seems to have been a return of indifference to these issues in sport as American society generally has turned against

the concept of affirmative action. Or perhaps the leadership of baseball, such as it is, simply doesn't have the necessities.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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