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## John Rocker's SI Interview

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It wasn't all that long ago that John Rucker was complaining about being stereotyped by Met fans and New Yorkers. He said that New Yorkers seemed to think that everyone from Georgia had one tooth and married their cousin. The self-styled good old boy resented this sort of sweeping generalization about Georgians and Southerners.

One would hope that John would know exactly how people would react to his comments in this week's SI interview. He may even grasp the irony of it all although that may be asking too much.

Among those on Rucker's offended list are Japanese women drivers, foreigners especially those not speaking English, Asians, Koreans, Indians, Vietnamese, Russians, Spanish people, punkers, mothers with four kids, gays with AIDS, people just out of jail, New York subway riders, the city of Beirut, Mets fans, Bobby Valentine, Ozzie Guillen, thirty-eight-year old guys, and a black teammate whom he called a fat monkey. Also offended are many of his teammates, his manager, his pitching coach, the Braves organization, Hank Aaron, much of Atlanta, and much of America.

No doubt Rucker has expressed his feelings accurately, although he insists he is not a racist and not prejudiced. He only seems that way to those of us who don't understand him.

When Marge Schott made her famous comments on a conference call with other owners she was duly and rightly disciplined by major league baseball. When she made more foolish and racist comments she was drummed out of the game and forced to sell her team.

When Jimmy the Greek in a drunken stupor offered his comments on athletic abilities and slavery, he was surreptitiously dumped by CBS from whatever ill-defined role he played there as studio odds maker.

When Al Campanis said on "Nightline" that Blacks didn't have the necessities for management positions in major league baseball and that they didn't swim well, the Los Angeles Dodgers immediately fired him. They understood not

only that this was a public relations disaster but that it would cause problems on the team and in the organization.

Many of Rucker's teammates are foreigners and some do not speak English at all times. Rucker may want to ask Andruw Jones or Javier Lopez how they got into the country. Perhaps he could insist that all his teammates speak English when he is around.

There is free speech in America but not when you make comments as a representative of an organization. If Rucker wasn't in a Braves uniform most of us would not even know of him and he could say whatever he wanted to say without consequences. One might add that Rucker's comments are not as far out of the main stream as some commentators are suggesting.

So what is to be done?

It would seem that baseball must discipline this immature fool with the strong left-arm, and it would seem prudent if Atlanta sent him packing. It is difficult to imagine what kind of apology Rucker could offer his teammates that would suffice, although it is not difficult to imagine what his continued presence in the clubhouse might do to team chemistry.

In the spirit of the season the National Football League is also dealing with a sticky situation. Orlando Brown has been suspended indefinitely by the league for pushing an official to the ground. Brown's actions were prompted by the fact that the referee's flag hit him in the eye and has caused an eye injury whose severity is yet to be determined. Brown has been kept in a Cleveland hospital as more bleeding was detected in or around his eye on Wednesday.

Clearly some punishment is imperative. Equally clear, the extent of Brown's injury should argue for proportionally less punishment. Brown may be paying with his sight in one eye for this freak accident. To hammer him further seems to me to be excessive. To close the case might be a nice gesture in the spirit of the season.

As for the National Football League perhaps they could consider taking the weights out of the flags, having the official simply drop the flag, or at least instructing the

officials not to throw the flag at a player or towards the action.

Finally I was stunned a few weeks ago by the praise heaped on the Columbine High Football team for its role as "healer" by winning the state championship in a come-from-behind victory. I have a vague recollection that an overemphasis on athletics and an atmosphere of privilege for athletes were a part of the problem at Columbine in the first place. To now praise the football victory for "healing" the wounds left by the shooting seems to me to further misinterpret the significance of athletics and athletes at the school and in American life.

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

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