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**THE INNOCENT MAN**

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**MLB managing to lose this race****The Score**

BY T.J. QUINN

DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

It passed with no official notice from Major League Baseball, with barely a comment from anyone in the game.

When Dusty Baker and Frank Robinson said goodbye to their woeful teams, baseball was back to one African-American manager, Willie Randolph. One out of 30. It was also notable that Robinson was the first of his kind, a testament to the limited size of the pool baseball is drawing from.

For all of Bud Selig's efforts to break the Old Boys network of the clubbiest game in sports, requiring teams to interview African-Americans when there are openings, the numbers can't drop much lower.

We are in a time when the past two secretaries of state have been black, when black CEO's and black head coaches in other sports are becoming less novel all the time.

But since Robinson took over the Cleveland Indians in 1975 as a player-manager, this is the entire list of African-American managers in the major leagues: Larry Doby, Maury Wills, Don Baylor, Cito Gaston, Lloyd McClendon, Dusty Baker, Jerry Manuel, Willie Randolph and Robinson a few times in between. That's just about enough guys to fill out a coaching staff, with bullpen catchers, for one team.

This is not about filling spots in order to make a liberally minded part of the population happy with the arrangement of colors, as though managers were flowers. For some reason, this game, which sustained entire leagues of black players for 66 years, still does not develop talent from a population that overflows the ranks of other sports leagues.

Black kids in this country (we're excluding black Latin players because they come from countries where baseball dominates) aren't playing baseball. There are cultural and economic reasons, partly because basketball and football have developed far deeper roots in black communities, and because baseball is becoming a sport of wealthy suburban kids who can develop their skills with private lessons. Most of those kids are white.



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So we don't have any more black catchers in the game. Not enough black starting pitchers for a three-game series. Those African-American players who do make it to the majors rarely become coaches and managers. The point is, the national pastime doesn't look like the nation.

Baseball once showed enlightenment by integrating its ranks before the rest of segregated America integrated its own, beating the United States armed services by a year. The decision to bring Jackie Robinson to the majors was as economic as much as it was progressive, because Branch Rickey knew that there was vast talent in the Negro Leagues. But we also saw in the 12 years it took for the Boston Red Sox to sign Pumpsie Green, finally integrating the last club, how stubborn individual owners could be.

MLB has developed academies in black urban areas of the country, giving kids from disenfranchised areas a chance to learn the skills baseball requires. It will take a generation for those programs to produce results. In the meantime, we can at least take notice of what is going on.

Buck O'Neil died Friday, a man who found a mission in the later years of his life reminding the world of the tragedy and glory of the Negro Leagues. It's hard to imagine that he died in an age when there was just one black man managing in the bigs. And wonderful to imagine what it would have been like if someone had ever offered O'Neil a chance to do it himself.

## The score hears...

### 'Pussycat' spat roars at Columbia

By MICHAEL O'KEEFFE

Aren't people at Ivy League schools supposed to be smart?

Columbia University's administration still doesn't get it when it comes to the First Amendment. After weeks of criticism, the university lifted the semester-long suspension it imposed on the men's hockey club over a sophomoric flyer.

But the club still will be suspended for two preseason, non-league exhibition games.

"Unfortunately, Columbia continues to avoid addressing the underlying free speech concerns about its action," says Samantha Harris of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a nonpartisan free speech watchdog. "Columbia's president strongly endorses freedom of speech, but the university's actions, here and elsewhere, simply do not match that rhetoric."

The hockey club's problems began at the beginning of the semester when its members posted recruiting flyers around campus that said "Don't be a pussy," a silly play on Columbia's team name, the Lions. The flyer offended the presidents of Columbia's four undergraduate councils, who sent a joint letter to university administrators asking them to take action.

Columbia bigwigs responded by suspending the club for the entire semester, which would have effectively killed its season. But after weeks of criticism from FIRE and other groups, the university backed down "a little. Under an agreement between the club and the university, the hockey team will sit out two games and remain on probation for a year. Members will also participate in leadership training sessions.

"Not only was Columbia's decision to suspend the club for posting an 'offensive' flyer an absurd overreaction, it showed a stunning lack of respect for freedom of speech," FIRE vice president Robert Shibley says. "If Columbia was willing to take

such severe action against students for using a 'bad' word, imagine what might happen to students who communicated religious or political views that others found 'offensive.'"

### **Gotta glove it**

Steroids aren't the only advantage available to 21st century athletes " modern-era baseball gloves are peach baskets compared to the tiny little things players used back in previous eras.

Dennis Esken, the nation's top glove expert, owns the glove Mickey Mantle used during his 1956 Triple Crown season. Mantle used that glove exactly 50 years ago today, when he made a terrific running catch on Gil Hodges' blast to Yankee Stadium's deep left-center field, preserving Don Larsen's perfect World Series game.

"Mantle used a smaller glove than players use today, so he had to make that play, not the glove" Esken says. "That was Larsen's day, but it was Mantle's day, too. He hit a home run and saved the perfect game with that catch."

Esken, a Pittsburgh-area collector, has loaned the 1956 glove to the Baseball Hall of Fame, but he won't be lonely today " he also owns the gloves Mantle used in 1961 and 1966.

### **Olympic-size problems**

Al Oerter feels a little sorry for modern-day Olympians.

The Long Island native and winner of four consecutive gold medals in the discus, says today's athletes don't get the opportunity to build friendships. "The guys I competed against, we're still friends," Oerter says. "But the egos are so big and the pressure to win medals is so great now, it makes it hard to develop relationships."

"Look at basketball," Oerter adds. "Do we really need all those pros in the game? When it was college kids and guys who just missed the NBA cut, the whole country got behind them. Now we're disappointed if they don't win every game by 30 points." Oerter was the first athlete to win gold medals in the same event in four consecutive Olympic games; Carl Lewis, the only other member of that club, won the long jump in 1984, 1988, 1992 and 1996.

Oerter now lives in Florida, but he'll be in New York this week to attend a dinner at the New York Athletic Club, which is marking the 50th anniversary of his gold winning performance in Melbourne, Australia.

## **Ohm's Dating Game**

*The Dating Game and Ohm Youngmisuk are asking players to offer their best dating advice for guys and gals who read the Daily News. Can't decide on a game plan? In a scoring drought? A free agent who needs to land that max contract? E-mail Ohm (oyoungmisuk@nydailynews.com) and he and his offensive coordinators " including Dating Game contributor Richard Jefferson - will devise a winning strategy. (Note: We'll keep you anonymous as long as you keep it clean.)*

This week, The Game sat with Jets linebacker Jonathan Vilma to help a brother who sounds like A-Rod " a guy with money who thinks and strikes out way too much.

Dear Dating Game,

I have a friend who is in his mid 30's and is a financial analyst. But he's picky, even though he doesn't have much dating experience and his approach to women is like

trying to solve a trigonometry equation. He tries too hard, constantly acting instead of being himself. He is always working on material or the line that will win women over. After failing so many times, he is shy now, scared of rejection, gets nervous around girls and no longer puts himself out there. He resists set-ups, online dating and speed dating. What do you recommend to get him over his insecurities and inexperience?"

- Derek, Brooklyn



**VILMA:** You got to put him in a setting where there are a lot of single women (like) Happy Hour or a lounge. You don't want to put pressure on him, but if you see a female looking his way . . . you might have to egg him just a little bit. (Also) I always say 'truth hurts.' You (might have) to give him tough love sometimes: 'You are over 30, you don't have a lot of experience, you need to get to work.' Tell him that, but then once you get him out there, don't force it on him. Ask him, 'What do you think about that girl? Do you think she is cute?' Then you can ask her, 'Hey, my friend thinks you are cute. What is your name?' And get them to meet. If he is nervous, I'd do a double date. Hopefully, he will start to relax around her. And you can help him start conversation."

## Say What

"I'm not even that too concerned with football right now. I'm just loving life."

Raiders WR Randy Moss, whose team is 0-3 and has scored a league-worst 27 points

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