

Jeffrey Loria and Foot in Mouth Disease

Written by Maury Brown

Wednesday, 27 February 2013 14:18



Contrary to popular belief, most writers covering sports do not enjoy writing articles month after month, year after year, in which they report nothing but negativity around this facet or that. In all honesty, it's tiresome.

At the same time, those of us that spend a great deal of time watching over teams, clubs, and leagues, are passionate and actively engaged in wanting to see actions done in the best interest of the fans. When there are owners that have a consistent track record of being poor stewards of a club, it makes not only them look bad, but the game.

So, with it, that thread-worn story of current Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria turned another page. Once again, we heave a sigh, shake our heads, plug our noses, and breath in deep the stench. He's been silent since the massive payroll dump to the Blue Jays (Loria likes to call this a "reset"), but after hiring a new PR firm for the club (why would you need a PR firm unless you're in need of damage control?), he spent the better part of three days addressing the media in one form or another. I'm not sure who the new PR firm is, but giving Loria that much press time may go down as one of the biggest PR blunders in MLB history. You get the sense that even Marge

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Schott is shaking her head in the afterlife.

Instead of being able to focus on Spring Training, Loria served up tripe as if it were a fine dish on one of his Paris jaunts he name dropped in the midst of his rambling answers to the media.

At the heart of the massive trade to the Blue Jays, and other players such as [Hanley Ramirez](#) during the course of the 2012 season, was this repeated line:

“It didn’t work.”

Then, if the free agency signings were a mistake, it begs the question, why did the club go down the 2011 Winter Meetings path of signing [Jose Reyes](#) , [Mark Buehrle](#) , and [Heath Bell](#) in the first place? If the problem is bad foresight with free agents, and the need to develop “fresh, exciting young talent”, why have they stunk up the NL East for the better part of eight years, not wrapped up the good talent that they have had at their disposal, and how did, as Loria say it, did the minor league system become one of the worst in the league?

The answer is simple: it was the man holding the press conferences.

The one nugget of truth that Loria did say was that the buck stopped with him (although, he tried to back out of that when the media cornered him saying that he didn’t hit, pitch, and field). In that, Loria really said as much about the failures of the club as anything else. That at the heart of it all is ineptitude. At the heart of the matter is lack of vision. At the heart of it all are excuses rather than accountability. We all sit back and ask, if the Rays can be smart, why can't the Marlins?

Loria doesn’t seem to care much about those things. He’s too busy pawning snake oil to be concerned about all that. He’s too busy saying that the Marlins will never have a \$100 million payroll again until their television deal comes up for renewal, even though some of free agent contracts (most notably Reyes’) signed in December of 2011 were back-loaded. So, by extension, if the TV deal was not suitable enough to support the player payroll load, then all those signings were smoke and mirrors designed to sucker the Miami-area baseball fans into

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season tickets and suite purchases. When some have tried to back out, the front office has told them it's too late. So, what is it, Jeffrey? [Did you lose your mind](#) when you signed the free agents, or when you traded them all away nearly as fast as you signed them? Either way, it shows a reactive, knee-jerk reaction that flies in the face of how well-organized clubs conduct baseball business.

Loria went on to say that until revenues were balanced, player payroll would slide downward. So, let's put him on the spot and ask; when the new national television contracts start in 2014, does that mean that when those revenues double you'll use them to develop a team properly? You can see him crossing his fingers behind his back as he says, "We'll see."

The worst thing about this behavior is that it's poisoning the market. The Marlins don't have much history to lean upon. This is still the first generation of baseball for the Marlins. This isn't the Yankees or Red Sox, or even the Brewers. What Loria and Co. are offering is a sports fan's version of battered-spouse syndrome. You get a few glimpses of happiness and a lot of abuse. Along the way, he's saying it will all be better. Just stick with him and in a few years, it will all be sunshine. And, each year, it's something new. Each year, it's a new excuse. Each year you don't really see any actions that speak louder than words. No developed talent is given extensions (unless they are forced to, [as was the case in 2010](#) when the MLBPA nearly filed a grievance with the league over them, and with it, they decided then would be a good time to give [Josh Johnson](#) an extension. Where exactly is he now?), no-trade clauses are about being able to jerk the wheel of the Titanic called the Marlins this way and that rather than about long-terms flexibility that makes sense. It's all making it up as they go.

None of this gets into bamboozling the public out of the stadium that will be mostly empty in its second season in the league. [I believe](#) that not only will the Marlins not sellout a single game this season, but they will see the largest drop in second year attendance for a new ballpark since Bud Selig's tenure began.

Speaking of Bud, he's grabbing the antacid today. You see, Loria isn't Frank McCourt. He's sneakier than that. The former Dodger owner ran the club into bankruptcy, and that was the ammo he and the owners needed to leverage him out of the game. For Loria, his actions are enough to make everyone's blood boil, but he stands at the very edge of the dogs on their leashes, snubbing his nose as they bark just out of reach. As one high-revenue club said, "We don't like them (the Marlins) very much."

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So, the blight on the league continues. At some point, Loria will no longer own the club, and as was the case with Tom Hicks, and Frank McCourt, fans will rejoice. The question will be, has he so derailed the market as to have it rebound in his wake? In some senses, you wonder whether he would relish in that. "Look at all I've done," he might say... as he snubs his nose, yet again.

In the meantime, the press dusts themselves off and gets ready for the inevitable next round with the club. I'll be on 790AM/104.3FM The Ticket in Miami at 7:30AM ET and the segment will replay at 11:30AM ET on Thursday to talk about this more.



Maury Brown is the Founder and President of the [Business of Sports Network](#) , which includes The Biz of Baseball, The Biz of Football, The Biz of Basketball and The Biz of Hockey. He [writes for Baseball Prospectus](#) and is a [contributor to Forbes](#)

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