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Astros' general manager resigns after falling-out with manager

HOUSTON (AP) — Dick Wagner, who battled with Manager Hal Lanier throughout the season, resigned as Houston Astros general manager on Wednesday, saying he wasn't always certain what owner John McMullen expected of him.

"I have a hard time reading what he wants of me or what he expects of this job," Wagner said. "But this is a very friendly parting. This is not what might be a typical shouting at one another."

"I have great respect for the man. He's very demanding but all successful people are demanding."

Wagner said at one point last week, McMullen offered to extend his contract another year.

"I went to John last Friday and I was the aggressor in the thing, I told him I thought we should settle my contract," Wagner said.

Lanier complained publicly several times during the season that Wagner had failed to make key trades to bolster the Astros bullpen, shortstop and catching.

But Wagner said there was more to his departure than his disagreements with Lanier.

"There are some problems where Hal is going to have to mend his ways but that's one thing," Wagner said. "I felt John was not happy with the club and wasn't happy with certain things that had happened."

"I wasn't sure of what he wanted of the job and from me. You put all that together and that's when I made the move."

Lanier could not be reached for comment.

McMullen told the *Houston Chronicle* in a copyright story that the rift between Wagner and Lanier could not be solved.

"It got to where I couldn't resolve it," McMullen told the newspaper. "It's unfortunate. I have no problem with Dick. He has a lot of pride, and he's been hurt."

"You know the problem, and you know I can't let the other guy (Lanier) go. They'd bring the town down on me. This is one of those unfortunate circumstances that happens."

The Astros were National League Western Division champs in 1986, the first with the Astros for Wagner and Lanier. They finished 14 games behind champion San Francisco this season, winning 11 of their final 26 games.

Wagner said Lanier failed to work with the organization and had publicly criticized his players during the season.

"If Hal is to succeed as a major league manager, he must mend his ways," Wagner said. "You can't function by criticizing the players and the front office."

"A good manager brings his team together to win. Looking at it, Lanier came up short this season."

Wagner, 59, replaced Al Rosen, who resigned to take a job with the San Francisco Giants.

Wagner previously was general manager of the Cincinnati Reds where he made several unpopular moves in trading players.

He followed the same trend with the Astros, replacing popular announcer Gene Elston last season and deciding this season not to resign left field Jose Cruz, voted the most popular Astros player in the team's history.

While Wagner was at the Astros' helm, they obtained pitchers Jim Deshaies, Danny Darwin and Rocky Childress, outfielder Billy Hatcher, Davey Lopes and Buddy Biancalana.

"Buddy's really the only one at this point that hasn't proven satisfactory," Wagner said.

Deshaies compiled an 11-6 record and 4.62 earned run average this season, despite a shoulder injury. Darwin finished the season with a 9-10 record and 3.59 ERA.

Childress had a 1-2 record as a 2.98 ERA. Lopes hit .233 as a pinch-hitter and Biancalana hit .042 in the same role.

More Pokes defy strike, go to work

IRVING (AP) — Star guard Nate Newton and two receivers on injured reserve defied the NFL players' strike Wednesday, bringing to the Dallas Cowboys who have been on the picket line in the 22-day stoppage.

Rookie Kelvin Martin, fourth-round draft pick of Boston College, and Ron Anderson, who has Canadian Football League experience, also went back to Valley Ranch.

Only Martin was given a go-ahead to be available for Monday night's game against Washington Redskins in the Stadium.

Newton, who underwent throsopic knee surgery weeks ago, said financial conditions were too great for him to stay away.

"I didn't want to do it, to do it," Newton said. "I'm trying to help me and the team. The bottom line is it was Newton has got to do it."

Newton said he wasn't sure if the union had added "I know many guys I'd heard was released."

He didn't decide to go across until minutes before noon deadline. Newton said he weighed himself.

"It doesn't look like I said."

Then he ate a sandwich made his decision.

"I really wasn't sure if I was going to do until I got Newton said."

The Cowboys now have players on the active roster have crossed the picket line nine on injured reserve.

Dallas bolstered its offensive line ranks Wednesday signing free agent George Liliya, who was with Cleveland Browns in 1987.

Club President Tex Schramm said there "are a lot of rumors going around" about the return by the players' union.

"We'll just see what Schramm said. The deadline was noon, the NFL Management rules."

"Schramm doesn't care the fans, he just cares his wallet," linebacker Jeffery said.

UT buries Lady Aggies in 3 games

The Texas A&M volleyball team was quickly dispatched by the University of Texas in three games at the Frank Erwin Center in Austin Wednesday night.

In losing 15-8, 15-4, 15-7, the Lady Aggies dropped to 9-14 overall and 0-3 in the Southwest Conference. The 10th-ranked Lady Longhorns improved to 10-6 and 3-0 in SWC play.

Cheri Steensma led A&M with 12 kills on 27 attempts for a .333 percentage while Kelli Kellen had two solo blocks and four assisted blocks.

The going was slow for A&M, which fell apart after jumping out to a 2-0 lead in the first game.

"We didn't play the way we are capable of playing," A&M Coach Al Givens said. "I'm a little at a loss... to explain why. No matter what combination we put on the court it doesn't seem to work."

Strike may end soon; 89 players cross lines

NEW YORK (AP) — The 23-day-old NFL strike seemed near an end Wednesday night, with the players one point away from going back to work without a new contract. The end was unlikely for at least another day, and it was unclear whether normal football could yet be played this weekend.

The new discussions came on a day when some of the biggest names in the game broke ranks with their teammates and led 89 players back to work.

"There has been progress made," said Mike Lynn, general manager of the Minnesota Vikings. "If you can resolve an issue, it can be resolved at any time. But time is running out to play this Sunday. I would say if there wasn't anything done tonight, it would be difficult to get the players ready for Sunday."

There were some reports that the walkout was already over, with players to report for this weekend's games, but chief management negotiator Jack Donlan left his office early Wednesday night and spokesman John Jones said nothing was likely before Thursday.

Gene Upshaw, executive director of the NFL Players Association, talked twice by telephone Wednesday with Donlan. And while both union and management spokesmen said nothing was resolved to end the walkout immediately, sources on both sides indicated that more discussions might be imminent as the union faced the fallout from the worst day of defections since the strike began on Sept. 22.

One source close to management said accord had been reached on four points that would allow the players to go back to work: mediation; protection of player representatives; financial protection of striking players, and no retaliation against strikers. All were raised by the union Monday when it first proposed returning without a contract.

"There's still a major issue remaining that has not been resolved," Lynn said. "I'm not at liberty to tell you what that issue is."

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