

Steinbrenner's latest move hard to believe

By Doug Hall
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Viewpoint

Come on George!
You don't really expect us to believe that you've hired Billy "I didn't punch that doggie" Martin to manage your New York Yankees for a fifth time.

Certainly we've all heard of the revolving-door policy of major league managers, but five times is too much to handle.

After all, what's Martin going to do in 1988 that he couldn't in his previous four stints at the Yankee helm?

Let's ask the masked masher of marshmallow salesmen himself:

"I'm anxious to return as Yankee manager and I'm looking toward bringing an exciting and winning team to Yankee fans," Martin said in a statement Monday.

But a winning team is not sufficient for George Steinbrenner, a.k.a. the master-of-manager-disaster.

Lou Piniella, in only his second year of managing in the majors, guided the Yankees to an 89-73 record. A winning season by anyone's account.

Furthermore, the Yanks' .549 winning percentage would have been sufficient for a first-place finish in the Western Division of the American League and one game behind the National League West champion San Francisco Giants. At

present, however, Steinbrenner's Stooges happen to play in the major leagues' most competitive division — the American League East.

In comparison to the Detroit Tigers, Toronto Blue Jays and Milwaukee Brewers, 16 games over .500 meant a fourth place finish for the Yankees.

What undoubtedly prompted Steinbrenner's promotion(?) of Piniella to the general manager spot was the Yankees' slide out of first place in August and September.

In early July, Piniella's team was locked in to a two-team race for the division title with Toronto. Detroit was still recovering from an abysmal start and Milwaukee couldn't find an even keel between winning streaks and losing skids. Piniella, according to those in the know, was expertly handling the pressures of a mid-summer pennant race and the mindless meddling of Steinbrenner.

But New York soon lost the services of spark-plug center fielder Ricky Henderson and team leader Willie Randolph, whose number of managers is quickly approaching the number of shortstops he's teamed up with.

The Yankees' record, like its two stars, went on a serious disabled list.

Meanwhile, George was trading the services of knuckleballer Joe Niekro to the Minnesota Twins (look who's in the World Series), relocating pitcher Steve Trout (an unprofitable trade) and spending untold thousands of dollars in shuttling players between New York and its Triple A affiliate in Columbus.

As the Yankees stumbled, George began to gripe. He blasted Piniella for failing to receive a phone call at the designated hour. He questioned the will of players like Henderson and berated everyone who faulted him.

Meanwhile he was preaching the "bottom line" to his team.

As in win the pennant. Or else.

Piniella was probably glad to get off the field and in to the office. At least there he can claim he was in a meeting when Steinbrenner calls.

As for Martin taking over — let's be serious.

Steinbrenner is just buying time (like he tries to buy everything else) until a more established candidate surfaces. The latest word is that he's waiting for former Yankee shortstop Bucky Dent to get rid of the rough edges on the Triple A level.

Martin apparently had been telling friends for some time that he would be returning to the Yankees. A fact that undoubtedly didn't sit well with Piniella.

And if the 1987 season proved anything, it's that quibbling between

general managers and field managers produces mediocre seasons.

Point of fact — Houston Astros, GM Dick Wagner (recently fired) and Hal Lanier. The Astros stumbled 10 games under .500 and 20 games off last year's pace.

Point of fact — New York Mets, GM Frank Cashen and Davey Johnson. The Mets also stumbled and bumbled, despite making a late season run at the title.

Counterpoint: San Francisco Giants. GM Al Rosen provided Manager Roger Craig with just what the doctor ordered — three pitchers and a quality third baseman.

Steinbrenner, on the other hand, wields his scalpel much too freely. In searching for the "bottom line," George has once again cut the platform out from under the Yankees' podium.

"Nothing Lou did hurt us in any way," Yankees first baseman Don Mattingly said. "He did what he could. He put the best players on the field every day and made the right moves. We just didn't produce. We didn't play well when we had to. But we never lost respect for Lou. Never. We played hard for him."

Such kind words were seldom heard with respect to the fiery Martin, who confronted his players more times than Ollie North pleaded ignorance.

New York deserves another owner, not another manager. Especially a fifth-time runaround.

McMahon expects to win starting job again

LAKE FOREST, Ill. (AP) — Jim McMahon is not only ready to quarterback the Chicago Bears again after a layoff of nearly a year, but he expects to assume his starting role soon.

"I feel ready to play," McMahon said Wednesday, "and if I do well in Tampa Bay, I'll expect to start the following week."

McMahon underwent shoulder surgery last December. Although doctors told him it would be at least a year before he could play again, he reported to camp last summer determined to start the opening game

against the Super Bowl New York Giants in September.

"That was unrealistic," said McMahon, who was placed on the injured reserve list until Coach Mike Ditka said he would be activated this week.

"So, I set my sights on week seven, and this is week seven," said McMahon, who earlier this week went to Los Angeles to get final clearance from Dr. Frank Jobe, who performed the surgery.

"Dr. Jobe was very happy with what he saw, and the arm looks good," McMahon said. "It is

stronger, and the endurance that wasn't there in training camp is there. I'm ready to play. I don't think he'll (Ditka) start me, but I hope to get in the game this week."

As for his starting job, McMahon believes he is entitled to it whenever he is ready, in place of Mike Tomczak who started seven games last year after McMahon was injured and won them all, plus two this season before the strike.

"I don't think I did anything before I got hurt to lose my starting job," McMahon said. "I feel the start-

ing job is mine, but that's not my decision.

"Tomczak has played well, but I don't feel I should be demoted. Mike is playing better, and he's going to get better. But I can do things on the field that he hasn't gotten to yet."

As for Tomczak, he said he's happy to see McMahon return.

"I've been pulling for him," Tomczak said. "But the better quarterback is going to play, and right now I'm playing well. Jim has missed almost a complete year, and I think a lot of questions have to be answered in his mind."

Oiler replacements return to previous jobs

HOUSTON (AP) — Steve Superick will be back on the golf course at Hilton Head, S.C. this weekend as an assistant teaching pro when the regular Houston Oilers football team plays the Atlanta Falcons in the Astrodome Sunday.

Dwain Turner likely will return to high school coaching, and Larry Joyner may re-enroll in college to earn a degree in human relations. Offensive lineman Doug Kellermeyer may want to work on his hobby as an amateur opera singer.

But they'll all remember the experiences they've had the past three weeks, helping the replacement Oilers compile a 2-1 record during the three-game NFL players strike.

"I'd like to play some more, but it's out of my hands," said Superick, who averaged 33.6 yards on eight punts. "I made some money that I wouldn't have made doing anything else."

"It doesn't get much easier than punting a football once a week, but it'll be nice to get back to the golf course."

Joyner, cut by the Oilers during training camp this season, still has dreams of an NFL career.

"I wouldn't take anything for this opportunity that we've had," Joyner said. "I hope I showed enough that maybe some other team will give me a chance."

The Oilers cut one group of players Monday, following Sunday's replacement finale, a 21-7 loss to the New England Patriots, and sent 10 more packing on Tuesday.

The Oilers can keep as many as 85 players this week, but must declare a roster of 45 by Saturday for Sunday's game.

Kellermeyer, who owns an automotive company in Phoenix, Ariz., and running back Herman Hunter were among the second group to be released.

Hunter gained 121 yards on 28 carries in the replacement team's 15-10 victory over Cleveland on the Browns' home field.

The replacement team won back-to-back road games at Denver and Cleveland, a feat the regulars hadn't accomplished since 1981.

A total of nine players were cut from the replacement offense, while 10 were released from the defense.

Major problems missing from Cowboys' practice

IRVING (AP) — There were some empty "rhinestone" Cowboys lockers at Valley Ranch Wednesday, and more will follow as the replacement Dallas players feel the heat from the veterans' return.

"They shouldn't be here," player representative Doug Cosbie said of the replacements. "We don't need a lot of extra people around."

Nevertheless, there were no big problems on the first full day of a mixed veterans-replacements practice.

"I don't see that much of a problem," said 14-year veteran John Dutton. "There was a lot of talk, but talk is cheap. There is no sense in trouble. It wouldn't help."

Outspoken linebacker Jeff Rohrer said there were a "few sparks and stares," but said the team was following Coach Tom Landry's advice: "Keep your personal feelings off the locker and field."

Of the replacement players, only free agent wide receiver Kelvin Edwards appears to have a place on the roster clinched.

"He's the kind of young talent you want to keep around," Landry said. "He's shown a lot of ability to run away from people and catch the football."

Edwards, a fourth-round draft pick by New Orleans who was cut in

training camp, wasn't taking anything for granted.

"I don't even want to think about it," he said.

The replacement players were working this week against the veterans and taking things one day at a time.

"I feel I can do the job, make a contribution somewhere, but it's not up to me," said safety Johnny Haynes. "It's up to the coaches. I really don't know about my chances. They haven't kept a safety in a long time."

Haynes was spectacular in Dallas' three replacement games, intercepting two passes in Monday night's 13-7 loss to Washington.

Offensive lineman Steve Cisowski said "I'm going at it hard. I really want to play for the Cowboys and I might get a break."

"There has been a great camaraderie with the (replacement) players," he added. "We have developed a lot of friendships over the past three weeks. We have all become real close."

Defensive tackle Mike Dwyer, who has been a Cowboys' fan favorite because of his enthusiasm, said, "I think I played well enough to get a close look the next couple of weeks. I'm hoping."

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