

Women Working in the Management of Professional Baseball: Getting to First Base?

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Introduction

Women are slowly beginning to make in-roads into many professions. Estimates indicate women will constitute 47% of the workforce by the year 2000 (Sullivan, 1992). Labor Department statistics from 1990 stated women held about 40% of all managerial positions (Marlow, Marlow, & Arnold, 1995). Women now hold approximately 10% of positions on Fortune 500 companies' boards of directors (Townsend, 1996).

Women are starting to become a presence in many non-traditional male-dominated professions as well. Non-traditional occupations have been defined as those having less than 30–34% women in their ranks (Hayes, 1985). Women have made gains in areas such as insurance (Wojick, 1997), photojournalism (Riccihardi, 1998), logistics (Lynagh, Murphy & Poist, 1996), banking, finance, and health care, and other male-dominated areas as well (Gallman, 1997). Although the picture in some industries may be getting slightly brighter, in some traditionally male dominated professions, such as electronics (Elliott,

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1997), the clergy (Morgan, 1994), law enforcement, and the military, progress has been slow.

Another traditionally male-defined industry is the sport industry. Most certainly men have dominated the playing fields in terms of number of participants, salaries earned, and media coverage. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to examine gender issues on the field, but rather in the front office.

The sport industry is made up of a number of different segments, including professional sport, intercollegiate sport, health and fitness, recreational sport, sporting goods, event management and facility management (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 1998; Parks, Zanger, & Quarterman, 1998). General overviews of women's involvement in sport management internationally are offered by Hums, Barr, and Doll-Tepper (1998) and by Hums, Moorman, and Nakazawa (1998). In specific industry segments, extensive research has examined women working in intercollegiate and interscholastic athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 1996; Fitzgerald, Sagaria, & Nelson, 1994; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996; Pastore, 1991; Pastore, 1994; Sisley & Steigelman, 1996). Women in leisure services management have been examined as well (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1996; Vanderveer, 1990). Feitelberg (1996) indicated the number of female executives in the sporting goods industry has risen from five in 1981 to over 100 in 1996, although the field is still managed predominantly by men. Lapchick (1998) in the 1997 Racial Report Card observed the following about women working in sport management: (a) regarding hiring women and people of color in management, the NBA has the best record while Major League Baseball (MLB) has the worst; (b) college sport has the worst record of all for hiring practices for women and people of color; and (c) the glass ceiling severely limits opportunities for women and people of color in top management positions in teams (Lapchick, 1998).

McKay's (1997) work focused on women working in sport management in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. A study by Black (1996) examined employment patterns by gender in Major League Baseball. Aside from these studies and the information contained in the Racial Report Card, which is numerical only, no formal scholarly studies of the careers of women working in the management of professional sport have been undertaken.

Given the dearth of information about women in professional sport management, this study attempted to establish some baseline information about women in one area—professional baseball. This article

focuses specifically on women in the management of professional baseball. A handful of women have been involved in the management of professional baseball in the past. One most often mentioned was Effa Manley, who along with her husband, jointly owned the Newark Eagles in the Negro Leagues in the 1930 and 1940s (Berlage, 1994). She actively managed team affairs, and was well respected by her male peers (Zoss & Bowerman, 1996). There have been a number of women who have been involved on the ownership level of professional baseball including Joan Payson, Jean Yawkey, Joan Krok, Ethel Posey, and Helen Hutton (Hastings-Ardell, 1998). Currently the two of the highest ranking women in professional baseball are both Assistant General Managers—Elaine Steward with the Boston Red Sox, and Kim Ng, with the New York Yankees. Ng's career began with an internship and then employment with the Chicago White Sox. She moved into the American League office and became Director of Waivers and Player Records before moving to her position as Assistant General Manager with the Yankees (Byrne, 1998a). Since Bud Selig has been officially named Commissioner of Baseball, it appears his daughter, Wendy Selig-Prieb who was serving as a Vice President with the Milwaukee Brewers, will most likely become president of the ballclub (Beaton, 1998). While the popular press has provided information about women currently working in the management of professional baseball, no scholarly inquiry has looked at them in terms of their career paths.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this descriptive study were as follows:

1. Describe women working in management of professional baseball (demographics);
2. Examine the career paths of women working in the management of professional baseball;
3. Determine the most enjoyable and least enjoyable aspects, and the greatest challenges of being a woman working in management of professional baseball;
4. Determine career advice women working in management of professional baseball would offer to women wanting to enter this profession;
5. Determine short-term and long-term career aspirations of women working in the management of professional baseball.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were women listed in the *1997 Baseball America Directory* as working in major league or minor league baseball. For purposes of this study, "minor league baseball" includes teams in the National Association of Professional Baseball, as well as Independent League teams. Just over 50% of the participants were under age 30. Almost 50% earn less than \$30,000. They are a well educated group, as 81% have at least a college degree, while 94% have at least had some college courses. Communications, Business Management, Sport Management, Accounting, Marketing, and Journalism were the most common undergraduate majors represented. When looking at their current job level, 44.6% of the participants work on the Major League level, and 55.4% on the minor league level.

Instrument

The survey instrument was divided in several parts. First participants were asked their present position in baseball. Next participants were asked about their work experience in the past 10 years in three areas: (a) in baseball, (b) in the sport industry outside of baseball, and (c) outside the sport industry. Participants were specifically asked to provide the following information about their previous 10 year job history: (a) their job titles; (b) the type of organization for which they worked; (c) the number of years they worked at each position.

Next participants were given a list of the most common methods of finding employment in professional baseball. They were asked to indicate from this list how they got their first job in baseball. There was then a question on compensation package, asking the participants if they thought their compensation package was higher, lower, or equal to their male counterparts working in professional baseball.

The next section included the following open-ended questions: (a) what was the best part about being a woman working in the management of professional baseball? (b) what was the worst part about being a woman working in the management of professional baseball? (c) what were the biggest challenges faced as women working in the management of professional baseball? (d) what advice would they offer to women wanting to make a career in the management of professional baseball? (e) what were their career goals in five years? (f)

what were their long-term career goals? Finally, participants were asked provide demographic data, including age, income, education, and major in school.

Procedures

The survey instrument was developed and then examined by a panel of outside experts. After considering their suggestions the instrument was finalized. All 441 women listed in the *1997 Baseball America Directory* were sent surveys. One hundred fifty two usable surveys were returned, for a return rate of 35%. For an in-season survey in this particular industry, this was an acceptable return rate, therefore no follow up was deemed necessary for non-respondents. As this was a descriptive study, means were calculated for the quantitative data. The qualitative data were examined for themes and trends in the participants' answers to the open-ended questions.

Results

Career Paths

Participants had worked an average of 2.06 years at their present job. Sixty-six percent of participants held at least one previous job in professional baseball. They also averaged 4.64 years of working in baseball at some level. Twenty-one percent of the participants had previous job experience in the sport industry but outside of baseball. Participants who worked outside of baseball worked in intercollegiate athletics, professional hockey, or professional football. On average, participants worked less than a year in the sport industry outside of baseball. However, 51% of participants held previous jobs outside of the sport industry. On average, participants had worked 2.33 years in jobs outside the sport industry. Places of employment outside the sport industry included law offices, accounting firms, retail, and graphic design. While participants worked in a variety of areas in their current jobs, the most commonly named areas were Community Relations, Marketing, Tickets, Group Sales, Broadcast/Communications, and Accounting.

Participants provided information on how they acquired their first jobs in professional baseball. Participants were provided and could choose more than one method. Almost one third (31.8%) of partici-

pants indicated they acquired their first job through an internship. The category chosen next most frequently was "Other," indicated by 30.2%, which included being recommended by someone, being contacted by the ballclub, or having a part-time job turn into a full-time job.

Most Enjoyable and Least Enjoyable Aspects

In responding to the most enjoyable aspects of their jobs, participants' responses could be grouped into three categories. The first category of responses were altruistic in nature, including responses about community involvement, helping other women, working with fans, or working with and helping players. The second category suggested feelings of self-actualization, such as being respected, being one of few women in their position, being successful in a men's world, proving a women "can do it," and being allowed to be creative on the job. The third category involved the respondents' love of baseball, with responses about enjoying the challenging environment, the business aspects of the game, marketing the team, and just being around the ballpark and game itself.

When discussing the least enjoyable aspects of their jobs, the themes in the responses began to have more of a gender related slant. Six themes seemed to emerge. First, participants mentioned always having to prove themselves. They mentioned struggling for credibility, not being taken seriously, having to work twice as hard as their male counterparts, having their opinions devalued and being paid less. Second, the participants indicated they had to deal with a number of misperceptions, including the stereotype that they are only there to meet and marry a ballplayer, that people see them and assume they are secretaries, or that because, as women, they never played the game, they cannot possibly understand it. A third theme dealt with not being part of the network. The women felt left outside of the "good old boys network," and coupled with a lack of female counterparts, often felt "left out." They also wrote about the fact that it is hard to be "one of the guys," and the problems that go along with trying to be "one of the guys." Limited access emerged as a fourth theme, in two ways. In one sense women faced a glass ceiling and could not access higher management positions, while in another sense, women physically lacked access to playing field or locker room areas. Fifth, the sometimes non-woman friendly environment was an issue for some

women, including dealing with a traditionally male dominated environment, chauvinism, and even occasionally, sexual harassment. The sixth theme involved the amount of time their jobs consumed, including long hours for home stands and the difficulty balancing family and work.

Greatest Challenges

In terms of the greatest challenges they face on the job, the five themes which were present often were related to overcoming the mostly gender related, least enjoyable aspects of their job, and again had gender related tones. First of all, the women said proving themselves was a challenge. They felt they needed to gain respect, be taken seriously, establish credibility and prove they could do the job. Second, participants faced the challenge of overcoming misperceptions, including getting people to realize they understand the game, and that they are not secretaries. The biggest misperception they felt they had to overcome, however, was the stereotype of only working in baseball to meet and marry a player. Third, participants mentioned the challenge of the networking dilemma, by not fitting in with the "good old boys' network." The challenge of choosing to "be one of the boys" or dealing with not "being one of the boys" was prevalent here. The challenge dealing with the male dominated environment was again mentioned, and included dealing with sexist comments and sexual harassment. The last theme dealt with balancing family and work, as participants mentioned the difficulty of integrating the role of spouse or mother into the long hours of the baseball lifestyle/workplace. Many of these themes were similar to what McKay (1997) observed in his work with women working in sport management in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

Career Advice

Responses here fell into two main categories—basic career related advice useful to anyone and gendered responses which seemed to reflect some "unwritten rules" women should be aware of as they enter professional baseball. Basic workplace advice included responses such as learning to network, utilizing an internship, getting experience, working hard, being prepared for long hours, being confident, starting low and working your way up the hierarchy, going for the highest level of education, and being yourself. The "unwritten rule" responses

included things such as don't date players or staff, always act professionally, don't try to become "one of the boys" but work hard to understand them and be understood by them, never take "You can't" for an answer, develop a good sense of humor and a thick skin, be prepared for male attitude and a male world, and learn to play golf.

Career Goals

The responses to these questions were as expected. In the short term (3–5 years) participants wanted to move up in their own or another organization, or move up to working in Major League Baseball, although a number felt there was not room for advancement and mentioned leaving baseball altogether. In the long term, participants expressed the desire to become a General Manager or Vice President of a ballclub, own a ballclub, move up to the Major League level, or again, move out of baseball.

Compensation Packages

Participants were asked how they felt their compensation package compared to their male counterparts. Roughly half (49%) indicated they felt their compensation package was less than their males counterparts, while thirty nine percent said their compensation package was equal to their male counterparts, and only four and one half percent thought their compensation package was greater than their male counterparts. Seven percent did not answer. It is interesting to note that on the Major League level, 54% of women felt their compensation package was equal to their male counterparts, compared to only 28% who felt that way on the minor league level. In the minors, 60% of the women felt their compensation package was less than their male counterparts, compared to 34% at the Major League level.

Discussion

This study provided a wealth of information about the women who work in the management of professional baseball, and raises some interesting points which career counselors should consider. Practically speaking, this study offers valuable information for women wishing to break into the management of professional baseball, or any professional sport for that matter. Career counselors working

with Sport Management programs or other programs (Business, Communications, Journalism) sending students into the sport industry should share this information with both male and female students. It is important for women to understand what may be facing them, but it is equally important for men to understand how they can work with women to help eliminate existing barriers. It may be that men are not even aware of these issues for women in the professional baseball environment. Providing this information gives students an insider's look at the professional baseball workplace, directly from the people who work in the industry.

This study looked specifically at women working in the management of professional baseball. Additional information is needed on women working in other professional sport segments. A parallel survey to examine women working in the management of professional basketball is already underway. Basketball was chosen because it may present an interesting contrast to baseball. By most accounts, baseball is considered perhaps the most tradition laden, American based, conservative of the major sports. Slow to integrate African-Americans, and with only recent opportunities for women even to play the game on an organized level, baseball's perception is quite different than professional basketball. Basketball is an international sport with a young, diverse demographic, and two women's professional leagues operating in the United States and many more overseas. Lapchick's (1997) Racial Report Card suggests NBA front offices are the most diverse of the Big 4, while Major League Baseball lags behind.

It is interesting to note the areas in which most women worked—Community Relations, Marketing, Tickets, Group Sales, Broadcast/Communications, and Accounting. For the most part these women worked on the business side of the game, as opposed to the baseball operations side. The baseball operations side deals more directly with player development, scouting, and minor league operations. According to Priscilla Oppenheimer, Director of Minor League Operations for the San Diego Padres, the hardest place for women to break in to the industry is baseball operations (Byrne, 1998b). This study backs up that particular thought. Also, a number of these areas, with the possible exception of Accounting, tend to pay less, and have less stature within an organization. General Managers, for the most part, tend to develop more often from the baseball operations side than from Community Relations or Broadcasting. While it may be that a glass ceiling exists, in essence there may also be "glass walls" prohib-

iting women from accessing power positions within the organization. This is similar to what exists in football with minorities who aspire to be head coaches. Head football coaches most often come from systems coaches (i.e. offensive or defensive coordinators). Often, minorities are relegated to coaching peripheral positions such as wide receivers or defensive backs, thereby denying them access to the assistants' positions which could help them move up the ladder. This, too, may be a sort of a glass wall effect. Similarly, Townsend (1996) suggested women who worked in staff, rather than line, positions impeded their potential to move upwards through company hierarchies. In these instances, people who have not held power positions in the past are systematically denied the opportunity to advance. This would be an interesting area for additional research.

It is interesting to note that a number of participants mentioned the desire to leave baseball. On average, women had only worked in the profession 4.64 years total and only 2.06 years in their current positions. Combined with the large percentage of women under the age of 30, this may suggest something about the baseball environment. Career counselors need to know that careers in professional baseball extract a high toll. The hours are long, the salaries are low, and women have to deal with overcoming a number of stereotypes and misperceptions about why they are working in baseball at all. Participants also mentioned a lack of female counterparts in the workplace, which may lead to feeling left out or isolated, and may exacerbate other feelings and frustrations already present. Perhaps the industry needs to develop a trade association such as a Women Working in Baseball association in order to help these women overcome feelings of isolation and create their own networks.

Career counselors must be aware to advise women about the type of environment they may be entering. The information gathered in this study illustrates that conditions of sexual discrimination currently exist in professional baseball workplaces. This information should be used to better educate general managers and other decision makers with regard to the political climate in their offices and how this climate could be improved, namely through seminars or other forms of education. Having long-term female employees and having female employees hold positions of prominence can only occur if the workplace promotes the type of atmosphere conducive to professional growth and enhancement.

Although this study provided good baseline information about women working in the management of professional baseball, the

study has its limitations. Only women were studied and it would be interesting to examine their male counterparts' answers to similar questions about women working in this capacity. Only professional baseball was examined. As mentioned above, the next group to be examined is women working in the management of professional basketball. After that study, some interesting comparisons could be made, and future studies could examine women working in other industry segments such as intercollegiate athletics, health and fitness, or sporting goods. This study was descriptive in nature. Future studies could go into more depth as to the gendered nature of sport organization, such as McKay's (1997) work on women in sport management in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Finally, this study is limited to baseball in North America. More work in professional sport in the global sport marketplace would extend this study even further.

Progress for women managers in the sport industry continues forward, albeit at a slow pace. Women face a number of barriers which can potentially be overcome through a cooperative effort in the workplace. By listening to these women's voices we can come to understand what it is like to work in this particular facet of the sport industry. There are valuable lessons to be learned and more questions to address.

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