

Manager, GM choices will define next era for Mets

BY KYLE STACK
Special to amNewYork

Consecutive sub-80-win seasons have put the Mets at a crossroads, and the team made that official yesterday by firing manager Jerry Manuel and general manager Omar Minaya.

With a talented and expensive collection of players in their prime, the Amazin's reportedly desire a win-now manager who can bring energy back to the ballclub. Yet an American League team executive told amNewYork the Mets could trade their more valuable players in a rebuilding effort.

"It wouldn't shock me if they take a few steps back in 2011 to take a few steps forward in 2012," said the executive, who did not wish to comment publicly on another club's deliberations.

Here are the candidates rumored to become the team's next skipper:



Joe Torre, 70

Say what you want about Torre's sleeping habits on the bench, but the man gets results. Before retiring from the Dodgers bench last month, he led Los Angeles to consecutive appearances in the NLCS from 2008-09. His stint as Mets manager from 1977-81 was dismal, but Torre's teams have finished with a winning record in 19 of the 21 full seasons he managed with the Braves, Cardinals, Yankees and Dodgers. He and Mets owner Fred Wilpon know each other from their days growing up in Brooklyn.

15-to-1 odds



Wally Backman, 51

A history as a player (1980-88) and a manager (Class A Brooklyn this past season) in the Mets organization has turned Backman into a legitimate candidate. Even though he's never managed above Double-A, Backman does have a history of being chosen as a MLB manager. The Arizona Diamondbacks hired him in 2004, but he was fired shortly after because of his previously undisclosed legal and financial difficulties. He represents a truly fresh voice with a Mets pedigree.

10-to-1 odds



Tim Teufel, 52

Yet another former Met (1986-91), Teufel has instructed and managed in the Mets organization nearly full time since 2001. He was promoted to Double-A Binghamton this season ahead of Wally Backman, although Backman seems to be the preferred option for a team looking to introduce an "energy" guy.

30-to-1 odds

Bobby Valentine, 60

Valentine understands the pressure that comes with managing in the Big Apple. He led the Mets to five straight winning seasons from 1997-2001, including a World Series appearance in 2000 against the Yankees. The time he spent away from the Mets, including a half decade working in Japan, may have helped him restore the vigor necessary for the demands of the managerial position. Valentine might best understand how to extract all the potential out of David Wright and Jose Reyes.

4-to-1 odds



As for the next GM ...

Now that the Mets have disposed of Omar Minaya, they'll need a general manager. Here's a short list of candidates who have the baseball wherewithal to turn things around and the gumption to stand up to the Wilpons.

(ERIN PALLADINO)



JOHN HART

62

The ex-Indians and Rangers GM now serves as the Rangers' senior adviser and a MLB Network analyst. In Cleveland, he won six of nine AL Central titles and went to the World Series in 1995 and '97. His track record and recognized wisdom make him the favorite.



GERRY HUNSICKER

60

This would be a homecoming for the Rays' senior VP of baseball operations, who served as the Mets' assistant general manager before getting the GM job in Houston. He built a four-time division champ there that went to the World Series in 2005. A winner.



SANDY ALDERSON

63

The former Athletics GM is now working with the commissioner's office investigating corruption in the Dominican Republic after four years as San Diego's CEO.



JOSH BYRNES

40

The young buck of the group, he's available after his recent firing as GM of the Arizona Diamondbacks. Byrnes is known for combining new-age comparative analysis with old-fashioned eyeball scouting to find talent.

HEADLINES

MLB

• Sabathia starts ALDS Game 1 at Minn., tomorrow at 8:37 p.m.

• Lowly Pirates sack manager Russell, keep GM Huntington

• Twins 1B Morneau ruled out for 2nd straight postseason

• Cincinnati rewards manager Baker with 2-yr. extension

• D-Backs give Kirk Gibson 2-yr. deal, remove interim tag

NBA

• Report: PF Noah's extension with Bulls for \$55M, 5 yrs.

NCAA FOOTBALL

• MSU coach Dantonio (blood clot in leg) out of hospital

NFL

• Giants RB Bradshaw to get tests today on hurt ankle

• No breaks, but QB Vick's rib injury may sideline him Sun.

• Carolina WR Smith likely out vs. Chicago (high ankle sprain)

NHL

• Ex-Isles F Fedotenko signs \$1M, 1-yr. deal with Rangers

OLYMPIC SPORTS

• Report calls luger's death accidental, cites safety issues

TENNIS

• Querrey, Verdasco, Berdych suffer early exits in Beijing

• Recovering Del Potro sent off by Lopez in Japan Open 1st rd.

NFL STANDINGS

AMERICAN FOOTBALL CONF.

EAST	W	L	T	PCT
JETS	3	1	0	.667
Miami	2	1	0	.667
New England	2	1	0	.667
Buffalo	0	4	0	.000

NATIONAL FOOTBALL CONF.

EAST	W	L	T	PCT
Washington	2	2	0	.333
GIANTS	2	2	0	.500
Philadelphia	2	2	0	.667
Dallas	1	2	0	.333

Late Pats-Dolphins not included

TV SPORTS TODAY

NBA PRESEASON

NBATV Detroit at Miami, 7:30 p.m.

NCAA FOOTBALL

ESPN2 Troy at Middle Tennessee St., 8 p.m.

SOCCER

FSC U.S. Open Cup, Columbus at Seattle, 10 p.m.