



THE BRO SHOW IS UNDERWAY

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So far as first impressions are concerned, yesterday's introduction of Brodie Van Wagenen as the Mets new general manager was a complete disaster if you ask me.

Of course, I wrote a column last week that endorsed the hiring of Tampa Bay baseball executive Chaim Bloom, and my opinion that he should have gotten the job has not changed. However, I was open-minded heading into yesterday's press conference and found myself fascinated at what Van Wagenen would say when he was introduced.

Beyond some slogans and platitudes, Van Wagenen didn't really say that much at all, however, if you're a Mets fan seeking someone who sounded more like Tony Robbins than a baseball executive with a plan then Van Wagenen might be your guy.

Van Wagenen was introduced by Jeff Wilpon, who once again showed that he should never be allowed near an open microphone because Wilpon is a cringe-inducing public speaker who inspires not confidence, but rather, confusion, and statements backed up by absolutely nothing in the way of details.

For instance, Wilpon noted that during the interview process Van Wageningen talked about so many 'bright ideas' that Van Wageningen would bring to the team. However, if there were so many of these ideas that Wilpon spoke about he never bothered to mention a single one of them. Wilpon also stated that the Mets considered about 40 candidates for the position, but that Van Wageningen was the front-runner from the start which makes me believe that he was a shoe-in all along — and that the overall process of selecting a new general manager was more of a farce than anything else.

For his part, Van Wageningen said a few things when he addressed reporters, but like Wilpon, there was nary a mention of any concrete plan of action, no specifics beyond his words about how the Mets were going to "win now and win in the future", and nothing that could be considered credible to any objective individual who was watching or listening. Like Wilpon before him, Van Wageningen never once talked about so many of the great ideas that apparently won him the job.

Now, let me also add that while Van Wageningen has absolutely no credentials and was clearly the least equipped and most undeserving individual considered by the Mets to become their next GM, that this *could* work, although, it is likely that it won't. Then again, I come back to the question of; why make it harder than it has to be?

Here is an organization that most often finds itself rudderless as far as leadership and accountability is concerned, here is an organization that lacks credibility and has found itself distrusted by its fan base for years and years, and here is a franchise that refuses to let go of the steering wheel while insisting that they know best when clearly the results have shown the exact opposite.

Here is a COO in Jeff Wilpon, who should have gone into this process on finding new front office leadership for his club by insisting that the Mets locate the most accomplished high-ceiling executive possible.

The Mets should have been seeking a progressive general manager who had a demonstrated track record of success in assisting in the building of a franchise while also checking all the boxes in terms of being involved with things like drafting and evaluating talent, being involved in trade talks and other player procurement processes, and being plugged in and familiar not only with the Mets personnel, but with the personnel and the organizational depth of each and every franchise in baseball. Such a person is much more Chaim Boom than Brodie Van Wageningen.

Please don't insult me by claiming that Van Wageningen knows a lot about baseball, or that Van Wageningen knows the Mets upside down and sideways, in addition to the other 29 clubs in the game like someone who is knee-deep in this stuff 365 days a year.

Van Wageningen, unlike someone like Chaim Bloom and many others, isn't cramming his head with intimate franchise player information the way that a true baseball executive would, simply

because, in his previous role as a player agent Van Wagenen would have no reason to do such a thing.

His central role and responsibility in his previous line of work was to ensure his clients got the best deals possible, not to know major and minor league baseball personnel on a sophisticated level. Thus, there is a significant learning curve that comes with this role for Van Wagenen which begs the question; is this something you want for a baseball general manager in a city like New York for a franchise like the Mets?

While I'm willing to concede that Van Wagenen has a cursory knowledge of the Mets and a few other clubs, so do many of you, and I'm willing to bet that my own knowledge of many major league player systems is better than Van Wagenen's is right now.

Let me ask you something. How many other teams would have done what the Mets did yesterday? How high was Brodie Van Wagenen on the San Francisco Giants list of candidates to become their new general manager?

The Mets should have been seeking their own Brian Cashman, their own Theo Epstein, their own Jeff Luhnow, their own Dayton Moore, their own John Mozeliak, their own Erik Neander, their own Jeff Bridich. Instead, they rolled the dice on a player-agent apparently fascinated with the idea of switching roles and becoming a baseball general manager without an ounce of previous accomplishment and undeserving of such a role, be it with the Mets, or any other franchise.

The naming of Brodie Van Wagenen to the post should be the latest indication that Mets ownership, most specifically, Jeff Wilpon, have no plans to divorce themselves from the franchise in terms of allowing any baseball executive with the kind of autonomy that is needed to truly be effective and to put their imprint on a franchise.

If anything, I get the feeling that Jeff Wilpon felt like he was kept at an arm's length distance under the previous GM, Sandy Alderson, and here was his opportunity to get closer to the steering wheel again by hiring what essentially amounts to a guy who has been Jeff Wilpon's friend for a number of years now.

Jeff Wilpon indicated yesterday that his daddy, Fred, was elated with the Van Wagenen hiring, so much so that according to Jeff, his dad hadn't been so happy with a hire in years...or probably not since daddy made the brilliant decision of replacing Bobby Valentine with Art Howe. Think about that. Fred Wilpon was happier than he's been in years over the hiring of an individual who has never worked in a major league baseball front office at any time previous to yesterday's announcement.

Perhaps sensing that their new GM wasn't prepared for this moment like someone else might have been, I found it more than curious that the Mets PR staff shut down questions for Van

Wagenen after only 5 of them were lobbed from the peanut gallery by those in the press in attendance yesterday.

If you thought, like I did, that Van Wagenen's presser at The Ballpark In Queens was bereft of anything inspiring confidence, it actually got worse for BVW when later in the afternoon he appeared on Mike Francesa's program on WFAN Radio.

On Francesa's program, Van Wagenen sounded much less like a baseball executive with a plan and much more like a Mets fan who was calling into Francesa's program from Far Rockaway who wanted to argue about the Mets current positioning.

Francesa asked Van Wagenen what kind of a team he envisions, what kind of a philosophy Van Wagenen might have that he'd like to see from the Mets. Van Wagenen responded by saying: "I like guys that can prevent runs and guys that can score runs, I want guys that can hit the ball out of the ballpark and guys that can run the bases, I want guys that can pick it up, I want a guy that isn't afraid to throw a fastball by somebody, and I want guys that have the fortitude to go out and be accountable for it." Let me just say that based on those words that this was a stunning and novel recipe for success and I now understand what Jeff Wilpon was talking about when he mentioned so many of the ideas that his new general manager had expressed during the interview process.

When pressed by Francesa on whether or not the Mets could win now, Van Wagenen said; "I think we can...we can talk in July and see how we're doing." What?

Francesa then correctly pointed out that the Mets as presently constructed have some holes on the roster that need fixing to which Van Wagenen responded by stating: "The beauty of it is that we can fill those holes and our competition has holes too." Their competition has holes too? Okay, while there might be some truth in such a statement why in the hell is Brodie Van Wagenen talking about the holes on other clubs? Was this the newly minted general manager of the Mets — or a fan wanting to call into a sports radio program to argue silliness? This sounded like a GM to you?

Van Wagenen mentioned that he's headed to the Arizona Fall League to talk to Mets minor league first-baseman Peter Alonso to; "see what his head (Alonso's) is saying to me right now." Huh?

Francesa asked Van Wagenen a simple question about how Van Wagenen sees the Mets right now as a ballclub. Van Wagenen was confused by the complexity of such an inquiry and asked Francesa to repeat the question which Francesa did, and Van Wagenen said: "I think our club is good. I think it's a good everyday lineup that I want to go and build off of."

Francesa seemed incredulous at the suggestion that a Mets lineup this past season that struggled to generate consistent offense was being described as a 'good lineup' by the new GM.

Van Wagenen then went on to say: “Mike, I think I got a team I can compete with and I can add to it. I have confidence in a lot of the guy’s names in that clubhouse.”

Then, Van Wagenen really took the opportunity to sound like a fan from Far Rockaway by asking Francesa; “who in the National League East is gonna beat us and why?” You can’t make this stuff up.

As I sat in my car and was listening to this I was trying to think of a more dubious first day for a previous front office executive who sounded so utterly foolish and unprepared as Van Wagenen did yesterday — and the only other name I could come up with was Mike Milbury, when he was introduced by the Islanders back in 1995.

Van Wagenen didn’t sound ‘confident’ to me, he sounded like an unprepared and ill-equipped person who was attempting to utilize bluster as a way to make him appear competent and ready which to anyone with a working brain is an insult.

Make no mistake, it is business as usual for the Mets and anyone who suggests anything else is clearly drinking nothing but orange and blue Kool-Aid each day while fooling nobody but themselves.

Don’t make the mistake of believing that the Mets were operating outside the box or outside their comfort zone with the selection of Van Wagenen as the new GM. On the contrary, this was exactly within the Mets comfort zone, a known commodity and a person who can be guided by the hands of Jeff Wilpon to do what Jeff Wilpon wants him to do. Period.

If I had known the Mets were going to hire Van Wagenen I would have suggested they keep the current front office model in place, or that they would have insisted that Omar Minaya take the job, or John Ricco, or Doug Melvin, or anyone other than Brodie Van Wagenen.

As I noted at the top, can this work? Look it, I guess that anything can work, lightning can strike, the winning lotto numbers can come in one day. But the chances are that this will not work and that despite Fred Wilpon’s rapturous state of mind with this hire, this, like many other Mets ideas will ultimately fail to materialize as they had hoped.

Why are the Mets all too often an irrelevant and second class citizen in their own town? A lot of reasons, actually. But in this case, the Mets hired a wet behind the ears and learn on the job neophyte as their next general manager while the Yankees would never do such a thing for obvious reasons.

Brian Cashman is the Yankees general manager.

The Cubs went out and got Theo Epstein to direct their front office.

The Astros took Jeff Luhnow away from the Cardinals to direct their affairs.

The Indians continue to win with Mike Chernoff as their GM.

Jeff Bridich is one of baseball's most underrated front office executives with the Rockies.

The Red Sox just won a World Series under the very experienced hand of Dave Dombrowski.

The Mets?

They just hired an ex-agent, Brodie Van Wagenen, as their new general manager.

Jeff Wilpon got his man, got his 'front-runner', so to speak.

The Mets...continue to do Mets things.