The Plot to Get Mariotti

Just because everybody’s firing at once doesn’t mean it’s a conspiracy.

By Michael Miner

Jerry Reinsdorf said this about Jay Mariotti on WBBM radio on June 22: “The best thing to do is for people to bring to the public’s attention the things that he does that are inappropriate. And I think you’ll see more of that happen going forward.” Oh, and Reinsdorf, the White Sox chairman, also called him a “fucking fag.”

Columnists such as Rick Morrissey of the Tribune and Rick Telander of Mariotti’s own Sun-Times soon weighed in to regret Guillen’s language but endorse his larger point: that Mariotti’s way of ripping athletes in his column without showing his face in the clubhouse betrayed the sports-writer’s code. Under withering fire, Mariotti mysteriously disappeared from the Sun-Times, and on July 5 the Web site Jay the Joke posted a letter from Ozzie Guillen, the White Sox manager, calling Mariotti a “fucking fag,” and Reinsdorf and Cubs president Andy MacPhail jointly sent an e-mail labeled “If you’re a sports columnist, you show up in the clubhouse to face the music” to Mariotti in an e-mail labeled READ, LEARN.

Then along came David Peterson. A political analyst of the Noam Chomsky school, has a hunch that behind the Web site Jay the Joke there’s a PR firm hired to destroy Mariotti. Peterson believes Reinsdorf all but acknowledged such a campaign with his “I think you’ll see more of that happen going forward” remark. He points to Jay the Joke—teeming with mockery and enjoying some 800 visitors a day since it was touted on June 27 by Tribune sports media columnist Teddy Greenstein. Peterson wrote in an e-mail to me to wake up: “There’s a little spring to my step these days. . . . I think you know why: Mariotti has been missing from the Sun-Times for 9 days! That’s right, folks. Ozzi Guillen called Mariotti a ‘fag,’ and who got in the most trouble? The best thing to do is for people to bring to the public’s attention the things that he does that are inappropriate. But this was not true over the years when Mariotti has written about the reigning Sports Lords from within the ranks of the various ownership regimes. None more effectively, by the way, than when he’s written about Major League Baseball’s. And Jerry Reinsdorf.”

In Peterson’s view, Guillen’s “fag” comment was insignificant, “because Guillen’s opinions about the world beyond Baseball are both ignorant and trivial.” But this was not how the rest of the Chicago and national sports media treated it. More important, other sports-writers began to attack Mariotti. To Peterson, this wasn’t “beautiful”—it was suspect. Only a handful of columnists had written about the Sean Tracey incident, he observed, “Mariotti the most intelligently. Mariotti’s reward was a ‘sneer campaign.’ Peterson believes Reinsdorf and Cubs president Andy MacPhail jointly sent on March 28 to Sun-Times publisher John Cruickshank a letter to Mariotti, but Peterson has a hunch that behind the site there’s a PR firm hired to destroy Mariotti. He notes that Jay the Joke posted a letter Reinsdorf and Cubs president Andy MacPhail jointly sent on March 28 to Sun-Times publisher John Cruickshank protesting a Mariotti column on baseball commissioner Bud Selig and steroids. How could Jay the Joke get that letter, Peterson wondered, unless there was collusion? He told me, “I regard this if you’re a sports columnist, you show up in the clubhouse to face the music’ to be a canard—a false issue. When was the last time our brave heroes such as Rick Morrissey or Teddy Greenstein (times literally dozens of others) actually wrote one critical word about the ownership regimes around Chicago that was anything more than trivial?”

This week Peterson defiantly came to Mariotti’s defense on Jay the Joke, quoting a Mariotti column written just before
I'll begin with the joke.com.

The name on the record. He said his Northwestern grad student of young goofs, not a PR firm. Celebrity (and an occasional young fellow) Greenstein is Matt Lynch, a PR
dent for communications, what he didn’t want him implicated. So the son’s lying low—where his
now, to go public with their beefs. At any rate,Mariotti thinks

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