

An Acta Desperation?

Written by {ga=godhatesclevelandsports}

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Manny Acta's career record as a manager, in two and a half years as skipper of the Washington Nationals ... it's not pretty. 158 wins and 252 losses. A winning percentage of just .385. Of those who led their teams for at least 320 games, only nine of 294 managers in baseball history have posted a worse record than Acta. In Mike Stein's latest (after a couple year hiatus) column for us, he takes a look at the nine managers in MLB history who have posted worse career winning percentages than Acta. Who were they? Where did they go? And what happened to their teams after they left?



Eric Wedge has to feel pretty good about his future job prospects now that the Indians have hired Manny Acta as their new manager.

After all, Acta's career record of 158-252 in 2½ seasons with the Washington Nationals makes Wedge look like Earl Weaver in comparison. [Acta might be first alphabetically of all the people who have ever managed a big-league team](#), but he's almost last in terms of results. Those years with Washington resulted in a .385 winning percentage for Acta. Of those who led their teams for at least 320 games, only nine of 294 managers in baseball history have posted a worse record than Acta. Onion's been more successful in the Sugardale Hot Dog Derby than Acta has been as a manager.

Yes, almost no one in baseball history has a worse managerial record than the Indians new manager. Even Wedge is right in the middle of that list, 155th all-time with a .495 career record. He's as average as it gets.

The 2009 Cleveland Indians are a step up for Manny Acta. [No wonder he left Houston in the dust.](#)

Just consider, Acta's career winning percentage is .385. This year's Indians? The 97-loss team that cost Wedge his job? The worst team we've seen in Cleveland since the 105-loss monstrosity of 1991? It won at a .401 pace. How about a show of hands for all those who believe the Indians will lose 100 games next season? Guess what - a .385 winning percentage is exactly 62-100.

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Take a look at the nine managers in MLB history who have posted worse career winning percentages than Acta. Who were they? Where did they go? What happened to their teams after they left? Here's the list:

9th -- ALAN TRAMMELL (186-300/.383)

2003 TIGERS: 43-119

2004 TIGERS: 72-90

2005 TIGERS: 71-91

Him you know. A Detroit Tiger legend, he managed the team to one of the worst records in baseball history in 2003 (43-119), then "rebounded" to 72- and 71-win seasons then next two years. The Tigers never finished higher than fourth in the five-team AL Central. He was dumped following the 2005 season. Jim Leyland came in and the Tigers immediately went to the World Series. Coincidence? Trammell is now a bench coach for the Cubs.

8th -- ART FLETCHER (237-383/.382)

1923 PHILLIES: 50-104

1924 PHILLIES: 55-96

1925 PHILLIES: 68-85

1926 PHILLIES: 58-93

The Phillies weren't quite the Phillies of today back in the 1920s. Fletcher led them to three 90-plus loss seasons and an 85-loss season from 1923-1926. The team finished last twice. Using the if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em strategy, Fletcher joined the Yankees as a coach just in time for the 1927 season. He stayed there for 19 years and even served as acting manager for 11 games in 1929 when Miller Huggins was struck with erysipelas and soon died. Fletcher never managed again after the Phillies, aside from his short stint with the '29 Yankees.

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Oh, and the Phillies were a lost cause for most of their existence, well before Fletcher came along and well after. Despite a World Series championship last year and another shot this year, the Phillies are 1,149 games under .500 all-time. From 1918 to 1948 they finished last 17 times and next-to-last eight times. Then from 1951 to 1973 they finished last seven times and were better than fourth place just twice.

7th - MICKEY VERNON (135-227/.373)

1961 WASHINGTON SENATORS: 61-100

1962 WASHINGTON SENATORS: 60-101

1963 WASHINGTON SENATORS: 14-26 (FIRED)

A seven-time All-Star as a player, mostly as a Washington Senator (he did play 2½ solid seasons with the Indians in 1949-50 and 1958), he turned into a 100-loss manager when he took over the reigns of a new Senators expansion team following his retirement as a player. The Senators lost 100 games in 1961, 101 more in 1962, and started off even worse in 1963 with a 14-26 record. He coached for several teams following his Senators stint, but never managed again. The Senators posted one winning year (1969) in Washington, then moved to Texas and became the Rangers in 1972. It took the franchise until 1996 to make the playoffs, but it is still looking for a playoff-series victory.

6TH - ZACK TAYLOR (235-410/.364)

1946 ST. LOUIS BROWNS: 13-17 (FINISHED SEASON)

1948 ST. LOUIS BROWNS: 59-94

1949 ST. LOUIS BROWNS: 53-101

1950 ST. LOUIS BROWNS: 58-96

1951 ST. LOUIS BROWNS: 52-102

Not to be confused with Jake Taylor from "Major League" who led a dog-eared Indians team to a division title, Zack Taylor led a dog-eared St. Louis Browns team to, well, oblivion. They lost 94 or more games during each of Taylor's four years.

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Taylor is 2-0 in games in which former Indians owner Bill Veeck planned publicity stunts and 233-410 in all other games. On Aug. 19, 1951, Taylor used 3-foot-7-inch Eddie Gaedel as a pinch-hitter on orders from Veeck. Two years prior Veeck sold the Indians in order to fund his divorce settlement. ([Sound familiar, Frank McCourt?](#)) Veeck bought into the Browns in 1951. Also during that season Veeck staged an early version of the Ask the Audience feature from "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" The team passed out signs to fans in attendance which allowed them to vote for a player to swing, bunt, take, and other things. Taylor based his decision on the fans' votes. It resulted in another Browns victory.

Two years later Veeck sold his share of the Browns, who then moved to Baltimore and became the Orioles. Taylor didn't go to Baltimore with the team. He had been dumped after the 1951 season. He coached and scouted for other teams, but never managed again. It took the franchise until 1960 to have another winning season. It finally won the World Series in 1966.

5TH - JOE CANTILLON (158-297/.347)

1907 WASHINGTON SENATORS: 49-102

1908 WASHINGTON SENATORS: 67-85

1909 WASHINGTON SENATORS: 42-110

Just like Eric Wedge with Cliff Lee, Joe Cantillon couldn't win with Walter Johnson. In 1907 Cantillon discovered Johnson and brought him to Washington where he started his Hall of Fame career. Of course, with Cantillon in the dugout the Big Train went 32-48. As soon as Cantillon was booted following the 110-loss 1909 season, Johnson turned in 10 straight winning seasons, all of 20 or more games. The Senators recovered to a winning record in 1911 but didn't win the World Series until 1924. They made it again in 1925 and 1933, losing both time, then returned to irrelevancy before becoming the Minnesota Twins in 1961.

Apparently Cantillon wasn't much better as a manager than he was as an umpire. Yes, Cantillon had served as an umpire in 1901 and 1902. During one game in Boston, fans attacked him. He never managed in the majors again after his Washington stint, but was very successful leading the Minneapolis Minors of the American Association for years afterwards.

4TH - ROY HARTSFIELD (166-318/.343)

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1977 TORONTO BLUE JAYS: 54-107

1978 TORONTO BLUE JAYS: 59-102

1979 TORONTO BLUE JAYS: 53-109

Hartsfield never had a chance. Think of him as Chris Palmer with the Browns.

Hartsfield was the first manager of the Blue Jays from 1977-1979. His team lost at least 102 games each season. Hartsfield had been successful as a manager in the minors before and after his Blue Jays stint, but never got another chance in the bigs. The Blue Jays finally broke through with a winning season in 1983 and strung together 11 straight winning seasons capped by two consecutive World Series victories before settling into mediocrity ever since.

Oh, and Acta was hired as Tribe manager on Hartsfield's 84th birthday.

3RD - FRED TENNEY (202-402/.334)

1905 BOSTON BEANEATERS: 51-103

1906 BOSTON BEANEATERS: 49-102

1907 BOSTON DOVES: 58-90

1911 BOSTON RUSTLERS: 44-107

Known as the originator of the 3-6-3 double play, Tenney didn't turn enough of them in his stint as player/manager for Boston's National League franchise around the turn of the century.

The team lost 103 and 102 games in 1905 and 1906, respectively, Tenney's first two years as player/manager. A name change to the Doves in 1907 bought them a dozen more wins, but they still lost 90 games. Tenney was traded to the New York Giants after the 1907 season and played for two 90-win teams there before being released.

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Tenney's one of only two people on this list to get another full-time managerial gig after his first one ended. And that was under extenuating circumstances. [In 1911 he returned to Boston as player/manager only because the team promised to buy back stock Tenney owned in the club.](#) He was fired after a disastrous 107-loss season. Because he had a two-year contract, Tenney was paid a salary for 1912 despite having no job. This probably made up for getting no extra money for taking managerial duties the first time around -- a job the club promised him he could keep as long as the team was breaking even financially. Sound familiar?

After baseball he went on to a long career at the Equitable Life Insurance Society in Boston. It took the franchise just three years after jettisoning Tenney to win the World Series in 1914. Then it was back to mediocrity for many years before losing to the Indians in the 1948 World Series. They made that nickname using the nickname Braves, then moved to Milwaukee in 1953 before settling in Atlanta in 1966.

2ND - JOHN McCLOSKEY (190-417/.313)

1895 LOUISVILLE COLONELS: 35-96

1896 LOUISVILLE COLONELS: 2-17 (FIRED)

1906 ST. LOUIS CARDINALS: 52-98

1907 ST. LOUIS CARDINALS: 52-101

1908 ST. LOUIS CARDINALS: 49-105

Another turn-of-the-century skipper, McCloskey kept Tenney company in the National League basement from 1906-1908. The team lost 98 games and finished one spot ahead of Boston in 1906, then lost 101 to finish behind Boston in 1907. Tenney was shipped away from Boston after that season but McCloskey stayed one more year in St. Louis as his team plummeted to the basement with a 105-loss season.

And that was it for McCloskey. Add in a failed stint with the Louisville Colonels in the 1890s National League and you've got one dismal record. [McCloskey did go on to found five baseball leagues](#), including the first one in Arizona. Meanwhile, the Cardinals did not finish higher than third place until 1926. They then became one of baseball's model franchises.

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WORST - DOC PROTHRO (138-320/.301)

1939 PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES: 45-106

1940 PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES: 50-103

1941 PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES: 43-111

Hey, another Phillies manager! Prothro managed the Phils for three years during their 16-year streak of losing seasons, 1939-1941. His teams suffered through at least 103 losses each time. After that, he returned to the minor league Southern Association as manager of the Memphis Chicks. He never again managed in the big leagues.

So there they are, nine managers in MLB history with worse career records than Acta. Only two of them ever managed in the bigs again, and they were both from around the early 1900s (Tenney and McCloskey). Two of them were part of the most dismal franchise run in history -- well, at least until the Pirates passed them this season (Fletcher and Prothro). Two of them were the first managers for expansion teams (Vernon and Hartsfield). Only one of them even managed within the last 30 years (Trammell). The other two managed for two of the most dismal franchises in baseball history, the Washington Senators (the ones who have moved or folded three times, not the current ones whose manager the Indians now have), and the St. Louis Browns (Taylor and Cantillon).

None of this means Acta will fail in Cleveland. Just because almost every other manager with a record worse than Acta's never got another chance doesn't mean that Acta didn't deserve one. Heck, the Tribe has even gone down this type of road before. [In 1958 they hired Bobby Bragan as manager after he posted a 102-155 mark in just more than a season and a half with the Pittsburgh Pirates.](#) That's a .397 winning percentage. Bragan didn't even last a season with the Tribe, going 31-36 before getting canned. Acta should be very thankful for his three-year contract. If he makes it all the way through he'll have managed even longer than he did in his first miserable go-round.