



Are you tired of seeing political ads? Me too. It's that horrible time of year where mud-slinging reigns supreme and blanket statements are made about what candidates did or didn't do and largely unsupervised political action committees run ads demolishing the character and achievements of the candidate they oppose. It is part of the reason why our country seems to take more steps backwards than it takes forwards. There's nothing wrong with having an opinion, an ideology, or a set of beliefs and values, so long as you're willing to work with somebody who differs a lot or a little from what you believe.

With all of the issues surrounding our country slowly coming to the forefront during an election year, just to be swept under the rug when political positions aren't on the line, it got me to thinking. What if sports franchises ran like local or state governments? What if the fan base was able to vote for the candidate they most approved of for a certain position? What would the re-election rate actually be? What if two conflicting ideologies were forced to campaign against each other for the votes of the fans? What kind of dynamic would that create?

We like to think that, as a nation, we reward our elected officials for a job well done by giving them another term in office. Wouldn't it be cool to have the chance to do that with our sports teams? Or, would it be more detrimental than anything? There's no telling the fireworks that could happen with a system like that. It's safe to say that, in most cases, people are more emotionally invested in their sports teams than social, political, or economic issues. At least, if we're talking about the voting demographic that would care enough to get out to the polls to vote for a team's front office and even coaching staff.

Take the Dolans, for example. I don't think there's any doubt that they would be voted out of "office" if there was a candidate (cough Dan Gilbert cough) that the fans would rally around. In

order to pretend with this hypothetical, we'd obviously have to keep in mind that the team would have to be bought and sold to different ownership groups, which is definitely a stumbling block because the Indians are a private entity and the public has no financial stake in the company.

It would be refreshing, though, to force personal accountability. If a Congressman or a judge screws up, the way that the public lets them know is by not voting for them. If a General Manager or ownership of a sports franchise screws up, the only way to let them know is by not attending games, and, as we all know, profits are still made whether Joe Sixpack goes to the game or not.

Ownership would probably be the most difficult thing about a vote to realign a sports team's front office. The terms would have to be at least 10-12 years in length because you would not want a lot of turnover. That would just create a lot of problems. Business partnerships, contracts, etc. would just become a gigantic hassle.

But, the General Manager, his staff, and the coaching staff would be fair game. It would be no different than being a politician. Interested candidates would have to come up with an agenda and run on a platform. Words like "rebuild" would be harmful with public approval. Promises would be made, kept, and broken. Turnover would be inevitable. Just like modern day politics, some newly-elected candidates would inherit a mess that they had to clean up. Decisions would have to be made like raising ticket prices to increase revenue or make ballpark improvements.

Certainly, there would be logistical nightmares, just like there are with political campaigns. Incumbents are forced to stay focused on their jobs while vying for re-election. It would make the world of professional sports even more interesting than it already is. There would be added emphasis for coaches and executives to play things more aggressively. The competitive nature of sport would go through the roof. Managers and coaches wouldn't have to operate under the fear of being fired. They would know exactly when their term was up and would have a defined period of time to work toward staying in their office.

Elections would happen in the offseason, so the new regime could have things in place by the start of their respective season. Ample time would have to be given for free agency preparations and drafting. Scouting staffs would have to be named during the season so that they had time to prepare in advance of the draft. They would, of course, be named by the General Manager.

What would happen with the Indians? A lot of fans are convinced that as long as the Dolans own the team, Mark Shapiro and Chris Antonetti are basically bolted to the ground in their offices. Having open voting would allow for some change. Would Shapiro or Antonetti stand a chance if they came up for election? I guess it would depend on the other candidates, but the court of public opinion has certainly soured on both guys.

Both Shapiro and Antonetti have resumes of success and failure. Would voters be sympathetic to the limited financial resources of current ownership and decide to give Shapiro and Antonetti a shot with a different ownership group? Would voters want to completely clean house and start anew?

Continuing to ask questions, since I don't know the answers, what kind of leeway would GMs get? How demanding would fans be? Is the minimum mark of success a playoff appearance or is it merely improvement? Wouldn't it be awesome to see a candidate for GM have to pick a running mate to be the assistant GM?

Talk about the basis for a "What If" ad campaign:

"What If" you voted for more of the same?

"What If" you had the opportunity to demand change?

"What If" executives were held accountable for their decisions?

I'm getting excited just thinking about this, and that's as somebody who, up until recently, would have staunchly defended the jobs done by Shapiro and Antonetti under their financial straitjackets. But the whole status quo, standing pat thing has pissed me off. So, you know what? Sign me up as one of those people who want something different.

Front office members would name the Minor League coaching staff, but the Major League

coaching staff is fair game. Would you vote for Manny Acta as manager at the end of the season? All things considered, he's done an admirable job milking every bit of overachievement out of a mediocre roster for portions of the last two seasons. Eventually, the lack of talent just catches up with him and the team goes into a tailspin. What if bench coach Sandy Alomar Jr. ran against him?

Head coaches and managers would have to at least assemble a list of coordinators (football), or name an assistant/bench coach (baseball, basketball, hockey, etc.) to be their running mates. The other position could be named after the fact, in the same manner that a President names his Cabinet.

Unlike public office, the system wouldn't allow interested parties to just get signatures on a petition to be eligible. These people would have to have real, legitimate credentials, whether as coaches or as players. Some blogger couldn't just put together a petition and get a list of signatures from the site's readers.

The league offices could establish term limits. General Managers have to be given time for their drafted players to develop. So, let's say, we give them terms of six years. We could give managers three-year terms, because four seems too long and two seems too short. Managers could still remove Cabinet members as they pleased, but could only be fired from an impeachment process, spurred by the voting electorate, with a lot of hoops to jump through.

Obviously, this is a pipe dream. Naturally, the public would screw up from time to time, like they have in elections for centuries. Uninformed voters would sometimes dictate elections, just like they already do. But, we can all agree that it would be awesome to listen to a debate about the sacrifice bunt, the use of sabermetrics in player evaluation, the play calling, the drafting, and free agency between candidates. It would eliminate fan apathy, anyway.

Most working people are measured by their productivity. I may just be a jaded Indians fan because I haven't seen consequences for a lack of productivity, but the current makeup of the Indians front office is not working and changes should be made. As somebody who generally fears public opinion when election time rolls around, the depressed, self-deprecating fans of Cleveland deserve this much, the ability to have some say in the franchise. Hell, even with proof of a birth certificate, transplanted Clevelanders could still vote via absentee ballot!

People are already divided on issues about sports. Some people loved the Johnny Damon signing. I hated it. Some people subscribe to statistical analysis of a player. Others subscribe to the eye test. Some people would stand firmly behind their candidate while others would be on the fence and swayed by the debates or interviews. Some people would want managers/coaches who were former players while others wouldn't. Some people wouldn't mind paying extra for tickets for a better team while others would not. Candidates wouldn't be tied to the bullshit two-party system that has stunted growth and development in this country more in recent years than ever before. Candidates would all run on independent platforms and ideologies.

What if you truly had a say?