

Manny Being Manny

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Saturday, August 02 2008 7:00 PM -

It's worth asking, even if the answer seems obvious: at what point will Manny Ramirez realize he finally stepped over the line? Undoubtedly there is considerable sentiment that Ramirez, like most other pampered and spoiled professional athletes, doesn't even possess the gene necessary to express regret. And that may be true. But you have to think at some point on his trip across country to hook up with Casey Blake and the rest of the L.A. Dodgers that it had to flash at least momentarily in his mind that he may have pushed his clown act a tad too far. Gary talks Manny in his latest.



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Teams, particularly contending teams and particularly the defending World Series champs, don't trade a current superstar and lock Hall of Famer in the middle of a pennant race without an awfully good reason. Yet it certainly seemed like the Boston Red Sox had good reason and more to send Ramirez as far away as geographically possible. Now he's left with the realization, whether he owns up to it or not, that he carries a tarnished image to a city where image is everything.

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Ramirez will always be seen as a somewhat beloved overgrown kid to Cleveland Indians fans. Like C.C. Sabathia, Ramirez grew up with the Indians. At every step of his development from the low minors to his pro debut to his last at bat with the Indians, Ramirez possessed one of the sweeter swings ever. He still does. As a neophyte major leaguer, his mostly harmless goofiness gave him the appeal of a Golden Retriever. The stories about a young Ramirez traipsing around like someone's kid brother, absentmindedly leaving five-figure uncashed checks laying around in his car, bumming rides off of the clubhouse attendants, grabbing just about any bat in the rack at any moment, only made him endearing.

When Ramirez left Cleveland, he wasn't excoriated by the fans the way Jim Thome was, even though he made the same unabashed money grab. Sure, there has been the occasional derogatory reference to him as Manny Dinero, but his returns to Cleveland have generated mostly a "wish he was still here" reaction whereas with Thome fans still boo him and consider him to be a traitor.

All of that may be due to the fact that Thome was far more forthcoming and articulate with the media, which ended up costing him dearly with the public. His claims of wanting to remain in Cleveland ultimately rang hollow. Ramirez in contrast never said much of anything to anyone. At the time, he simply let his agent, Jeff Moorad, manipulate the local media as he angled for the best deal for his client. It probably wasn't a calculated move on Ramirez's part so much as it was just another example of his seemingly casual indifference toward his career which to most seemed to consist of the beautiful simplicity of "see ball, hit ball, occasionally cash a check."

To this day, any fan who says he really knows much about Ramirez is basing it more on hearsay than firsthand experience. At least until recently.

One of the strangest interviews that Ramirez has ever given (and he rarely gives them) was to ESPNdeportes.com earlier this week. [In that interview](#) he uttered his famous "the Red Sox don't deserve a player like me" line, a quote that will certainly redefine him going forward at least as much as his "aw

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shucks" persona has defined him in the past. In full measure, the bomb he dropped was audacious in its scope: "During my years here, I've seen how they [the Red Sox] have mistreated other great players when they didn't want them to try to turn the fans against them. The Red Sox did the same with guys like

[Nomar](#)

[Garciparra](#)

and Pedro Martinez, and now they do the same with me. Their goal is to paint me as the bad guy. I love Boston fans, but the Red Sox don't deserve me. I'm not talking about money. Mental peace has no price, and I don't have peace here."

It would be easy to pick nits with Ramirez's revisionist history. No question, though, that the Red Sox have an ignominious history when it comes to the way they've treated certain superstars, dating back to Babe Ruth. Still, it will be fascinating to see where Ramirez finds his "mental peace" next season and at what price. Having spectacularly eliminated a club with one of the highest payrolls in the league from the mix, this latest episode won't help Ramirez maximize his value no matter how the rest of the season turns out.

The Red Sox may be employing the old "addition by subtraction" spin to this mess, but there really are no winners in this situation. The Red Sox can talk about the new calm and the "team first" attitude that has re-emerged in the clubhouse. And certainly Jason Bay is a decent consolation prize. But the Red Sox are not a better team today than they were with Ramirez no matter how it's spun. Ramirez may feel like he pushed the Red Sox around pretty good and let them know that he won't be trifled with, but it comes at a permanent cost to his reputation. The ESPNdeportes quote and his tired antics-the mysterious refusals to play, the half-hearted runs to first base-will linger. The Dodgers, too, aren't going to come out of this unscathed. Ramirez brings baggage and unneeded attention for a team just trying to get in the playoffs. And the scruffy, unkempt Ramirez will, at some point, clash with Joe Torre, as old school of a manager as there is in the game.

The Ramirez situation provides some interesting parallels with the melodrama playing out in Green Bay with Brett Favre and the Packers. On the surface, there

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are similarities given the players involved. But one of the key differences is that Favre is unquestionably at the end of his career, Ramirez is not. However the Favre situation resolves, it won't last more than another season or so. Ramirez is going to be around for awhile. Though 36, Ramirez has plenty left in the tank. And as long as the American League keeps the designated hitter, with that swing Ramirez can probably hit .280 and drive in 80-90 runs a game until he's 50.

But whether he gets that chance depends on whether Ramirez returns to his more carefree ways or becomes permanently enamored with his new-found verbosity. Most any team can tolerate the old Manny being Manny. It's the new Manny being Manny that will wear thin long before his considerable skills finally abandon him.