

By Mark E. Goebel

The Owners of New York's Teams are...

The Most Powerful Men in Sports

Whether you follow sports or not, almost everybody knows the name George Steinbrenner. Besides hiring and firing managers more often than Elizabeth Taylor changes husbands, the man threatening to move baseball's most famous franchise out of the Bronx is probably best summed up by a statement he once made about himself—"When you're a shipbuilder, nobody pays attention to you. But when you own the New York Yankees, they do and I love it."

As for the owners of New York's other eight professional sports franchises, some like Bob Tisch and Leon Hess—owners of the Giants and Jets, respectively—have managed to grab a few headlines, but for reasons unrelated to owning a team. Others, like Fred Wilpon of the Mets and Ralph Wilson, Jr. of the Bills, prefer to keep a low profile.

Unlike many other professional sports franchises, most New York-based teams have been under their current ownership for quite some time. The exceptions are the New York Islanders, sold in 1993 to a partnership of four Long Island financiers, and the Knicks and Rangers, purchased this year by ITT and Cablevision.

The owners of New York's professional sports teams are a diverse group. They have little in common, other than the fact that they are all very wealthy. Some inherited their wealth, others worked to attain it. Most of them wouldn't be recognized walking down Fifth Avenue, and while they don't wear numbers on their backs or have their statistics published in the papers, they are, without doubt, the most powerful men in New York sports.

Here's a rundown:

George Steinbrenner, *New York Yankees* ◀

In addition to being the principal owner of the Yankees, he is president and chairman of the board of American Shipbuilding Company and owns several hotels and a towing and barge operation in Tampa. A Cleveland native, Steinbrenner served on the U.S. Olympic Committee and was once an assistant football coach at Northwestern and Purdue. He purchased his share of the Yankees in 1973.



Bob Tisch, *New York Giants*

A Brooklyn native, Tisch bought 50 percent of the Giants for \$75 million in 1991. Of New York's owners, Tisch is the wealthiest, with an estimated worth of \$1.14

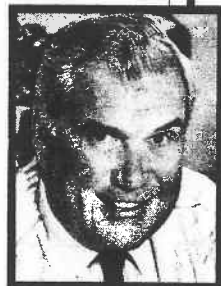
billion, according to Forbes. He and his brother, Larry, CEO of CBS, purchased 25 percent of the network in 1986. Over the years, the two have owned a chain of hotels, Loews theaters (sold in 1985), CNA insurance, Bulova watches and Lorillard tobacco. Bob Tisch served as Postmaster General for 20 months during the Reagan administration.

Wellington Mara, *New York Giants*

His father, Timothy J. Mara, the original owner of the team, bought the Giants in 1925 for \$500. Wellington owns 50 percent of the team. He has been involved with the Giants for seven decades and is currently a member of the NFL's Realignment, Hall of Fame and Player-Club Operations committees.

Nelson Doubleday, *New York Mets* ▶

The 61-year-old Florida resident is the great-nephew of Abner Doubleday, the inventor of baseball. He sold the family publishing business in 1986 for \$500 million, getting \$85 million for himself. He owns 50 percent of the Mets.



Fred Wilpon, *New York Mets* ◀

Wilpon, 58, is a Brooklyn native and played high school baseball with Sandy Koufax. He owns nearly 50 percent of the Mets.



Leon Hess, *New York Jets*

His net worth of \$745 million places him behind Tisch among New York's owners. Hess reorganized his father's small fuel delivery firm when it went broke in 1933 and eventually built it into one of the country's largest oil companies, Amerada Hess Corp. He acquired part of the Jets' franchise in 1963 and became sole owner in 1984. Hess is a

member of the NFL's Broadcasting committee.

Ralph Wilson, Jr., Buffalo Bills

Wilson is the only owner the Bills have had. He made his money in insurance and also owns two television stations. He was once part owner of the Lions. Wilson is a member of the NFL's Charities and Super Bowl Site Selection committees.

Seymour Knox III, Buffalo Sabres

Along with his younger brother, Northrup, he owns 27 percent of the Sabres. The Knox family has owned the team since the NHL granted Buffalo a franchise in 1969. Buffalo's world-famous art gallery is named after Seymour's father.

Robert Rosenthal, New York Islanders

At 46, Rosenthal is the youngest owner of a professional sports franchise in New York. Along with Stephen Walsh and two other partners, he purchased the Islanders in 1993. He co-founded First Long Island Investors, Inc. of Jericho in 1983.

Stephen Walsh, New York Islanders

Walsh is managing partner of Walsh, Greenwood & Co. a Long Island investment and trading firm. He serves as co-chairman and CEO, along with Rosenthal.

The Rangers and Knicks are the only New York teams owned by a corporation. The partnership of ITT Corp. and Cablevision Systems of Woodbury won the heated battle to purchase Madison Square Garden Properties, which includes the arena, Knicks, Rangers and MSG Network, for \$1.1 billion. The sale, which was recently finalized, marked the end of Paramount Communications' successful run as owners of the country's most famous arena and two of the most valuable franchises in professional sports.

The owners of other sports franchises include some of the wealthiest men in the country and the descendants of America's most famous corporate barons. Paul Allen co-founded Microsoft with Bill Gates in 1975 and has a net worth estimated by Forbes to be \$5.3 billion. He owns the Portland Trail Blazers. Richard DeVos, owner of the Orlando Magic and co-founder of Amway Corp., has a net worth estimated at \$4.1 billion. Other billionaires are among the ranks of professional sports owners—George and Gordon Gund, owners of the Cleveland Cavaliers and San Jose Sharks (\$2 billion) and Ted Turner, owner of the Atlanta Braves and Hawks (\$1.7 billion).

William Clay Ford, owner of the Detroit Lions, is the grandson of automaker Henry Ford. Eddie DeBartolo, Jr., owner of the San Francisco 49ers, is the son of the largest mall developer in the U.S.

The ownership ranks of professional sports, once the province of real estate developers and beer barons, has seen an influx of media and entertainment companies in recent years. The list includes the publishers of the Chicago Tribune (Chicago Cubs), Nintendo Video (Seattle Mariners), Blockbuster Entertainment (Florida Marlins and Miami Dolphins) and Disney (Anaheim Mighty Ducks and California Angels), as well as Turner Broadcasting and Cablevision. These companies are attracted by the potential ties between sports, broadcasting, marketing and merchandising. Turner has built his WTBS superstation into a valuable franchise by being able to offer a stable menu of sporting events, due to his ownership of the Braves and Hawks. The Tribune Co. has done much the same with its superstation, WGN, and the Chicago Cubs.

Some in professional sports are worried that this trend may tilt the competitive balance among franchises toward corporate owners able to afford top players and market their teams on cable superstations or through merchandising relationships. Nonetheless, industry insiders expect that corporate ownership of teams, given the cost of running and marketing them, will grow.

PSYCHOLOGY

Public's Fascination

Continued from page 19

ward someone? Actually, these events and feelings happen all the time in our daily lives and may even bring on feelings of guilt, hypocrisy and internal strife. As long as we deny that this case evokes these emotions, we can secretly experience them on our own terms.

Perhaps this is why we seem so eager to talk about the more comfortable aspects of the O.J. case with friends, colleagues and loved ones. Discussing who did it and other interesting circumstantial evidence makes for good gossip and social discourse. But don't be deceived—it really is an emotional cleansing for all and our way of attempting to cope.

The jury is still out on O.J., but many people continue to ask, "How could he do such a thing? He seems like such a good guy." Al Michaels and Bob Costas remarked that they never saw this side of O.J. Just because O.J. beat his wife and may have murdered her does not mean that he does not have charming aspects to his personality. In fact, many con men and nefarious world leaders have great charisma, charm and enhancing qualities. So do regular everyday men and women. Don't they commit crimes? However, this unidimensional view of personality does not allow for a more expansive discussion and debate of what has occurred.

Why is this the case? People, in general, like things to be neat, simple and clear, so as not to experience emotional discord or confusion. Research and clinical observation suggests that people are more comfortable with viewing things in a black or white manner. Many become distressed with the so-called gray area. The media has appealed to our desire for this psychologically neat package, as they sometimes tend to portray public figures in extremes, when this is rarely the case.

The media is certainly not at fault. A number of clever marketing strategies come to mind. Professional wrestling is a classic example of this appealing strategy. Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair and the Macho Man are either all good or all bad. Yes, they do, on occasion, become transformed, but only to their former polar opposites. Wrestling promotions and matches are presented as good versus evil. Wrestling is successful for a number of reasons. This is only one significant aspect of the success. This good-versus-evil appeal is not just seen in sports. Presidents appeal to the goodness of America as they seek support for their policies that will conquer an evil empire or purge a dictator. All are attempts, no matter how subtle or blatant, to sway and sell. And it sells. It really does. It's all out there for us to take, consume and digest. Just the way we like it.

People attempt to protect themselves against their most threatening emotions, feelings and thoughts. In fact, they are quite judgmental of them. Freud proposed the concepts of the Id, Ego and Super Ego, as well as those all-important defense mechanisms to help explain our behaviors and reactions. As the O.J. Simpson trial comes to a close, the media will continue to drown us in the daily happenings in this important case. Though sometimes it will be a bit distasteful to watch, I suppose we are all just attempting, as best we can, to deal with the daily emotional hurdles we face. Maybe this is all one can really ask.