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# If this were the playground, we'd totally be picking these guys last

No, seriously: how on earth do any of these guys possibly still have their jobs?



SPORTS  
STAFF

Group  
Commentary

No one here at the Gateway is particularly powerful or important; we're not superstars or captains of industry. That said, we're extremely attractive, clever, and competent individuals. As such, we know suck when we see it, and we can tell when someone in the world of sports does not deserve their job.

**Ben Carter**

Diehard pro-hockey fans have for the most part grown immune to the effect that Gary Bettman's disastrous reign has had on their league. But this week, Bettman delivered another slap in the face: Craig Leipold, owner of the Nashville Predators from their inception until late 2007, was allowed to purchase a majority share of the Minnesota Wild.

Attendance at Predators games had lagged near the bottom of the league even when they were one the best teams on the ice, but somehow Leipold was rewarded for his top-notch management skills with the ownership of one of the NHL's most profitable teams in one of its most loyal markets.

Leipold nearly sold the Predators to Canadian billionaire Jim Balsillie in 2007, but the NHL blocked the sale when it became clear that Balsillie intended to move the team to hockey-mad Southern Ontario. The league then facilitated the sale to a group of Nashville businessmen, ensuring that hockey will be enjoyed by at least 11 000 Nashvillians 41 times per year for years to come.

But it's not just incidents like this that demonstrate Bettman's incompetence. When he took office in the early '90s, the NHL—thanks to Gretzky, Lemieux and others—was more popular than ever. Nearly a decade and a half later, the NHL, despite having its best on-ice product in years and young stars throughout, ranks somewhere alongside tennis and lower than golf in terms of viewership in the US.

While Canadian teams rake in the cash, many teams in the United States play in half-empty buildings, with improvement nowhere in sight. It's unclear what the NHL hopes to achieve with this strategy, but it's obvious that Bettman cares more about the hypothetical fans that might one day fill arenas than he does about the actual ones that keep the NHL alive.

For this total disregard for his most loyal customers, Bettman should be fired immediately and replaced by someone who understands that attracting new fans and rewarding the old ones aren't mutually exclusive.

**Derek Bates**

When the Phoenix Coyotes cleaned house last year, they fired everyone from the general manager to the water boy, and if the coach had been anyone but the Great One, he would now be the Jobless One. After what was the team's worst season since moving to Phoenix from Winnipeg, the Coyotes cleared out their front office, leaving Wayne Gretzky at the helm for at least

another season.

This is despite the fact that Wayne was also caught up in a scandal involving his wife and his assistant coach betting on professional football games. Wayne Gretzky is admittedly one of the most talented athletes of all time, but even great athletes don't always make great coaches.

Nowadays, it usually seems like coach can't sneeze the wrong way if they don't want to be fired, and if almost any other bench boss were involved in a train-wreck of a season like the Coyotes were and had been marred in a betting scandal, they'd be fired no questions asked.

While it is true that the Coyotes have made some definite improvements this season, in the dog-eat-dog world that is professional sports, if you aren't producing now, you're out the door. While the Great One will always hold a special place in the hearts of Canadian sports fans, the only reason he's still coaching today is because of his name.

**Nick Frost**

The people of Detroit and I may not have much in common, but we do agree on at least one thing: it's about time Detroit Lions' President, CEO, and general manager Matt Millen got fired. How a former player and colour-commentator with zero experience in any front office managed to get such a prominent role within an NFL franchise in the first place is beyond me.

Don't get me wrong: the Lions aren't known for producing spectacular results—in fact, they haven't really done so since the early '90s—but since Millen took over in 2001, the team somehow managed to find a way to get worse.

For the past decade or so, the Lions under Millen's regime have been mired in mediocrity, posting record after record below .500 and drafting players in several key positions that have failed to live up to their hype. Added to that, the Lions have spent four of their last six first round-picks on wide receivers, all taken in the top ten.

This past season in particular should have spelled the end for Millen. After his team started the season 6–2 behind the bold play and even bolder ten-win prediction of quarterback Jon Kitna, Millen was being touted as a possible candidate for Executive of the Year. All that, however, just compounds how particularly embarrassing the last half of the season was: the Lions went on to lose seven of their last eight games and once again became the laughing stock of the NFL.

**Robin Collum**

Isaiah Thomas—Knicks head coach and director of “basketball operations”—is, without a doubt, the least popular man in basketball. Knicks fans cannot stand the man, and even those who would normally wish the New York team ill are put off by the man's arrogant attitude, off-court misogyny, and towering incompetence.

As a point guard for the Detroit Pistons, Thomas was an excellent player. He holds fourth place in NBA history in career assists—9061 total—and ninth in steals with 1861. Even then, he had a reputation of being a total jerk: though no one's ever admitted it, it's alleged that he led a freeze-out of Michael Jordan at the 1985 All-Star game out of pure jealousy.

As a coach and an executive—and, in my eyes, as a person—he's frankly terrible. In 1994 he became a part owner and Executive Vice President of the Raptors, but he left that organization four years later amid allegations of inappropriate conduct with staff (sound familiar?) and accusations that he gave tickets and merchandise to NCAA players.

In 2000, he took over from Larry Bird as coach of the Indiana Pacers, and he promptly put the brakes on that team's progress. When he was fired from that position in 2003, Thomas was quickly picked up by the Knicks, and that's where the trouble really started.

If Thomas had been unimpressive and, well, sort of sketchy before, it was nothing compared to the catastrophe that has been his tenure in New York. And really, it seems like he must have tenure because otherwise it's beyond me why they haven't kicked him to the curb.

He's been terrible for the Knicks organization both on and off the court. As a GM, Thomas has paid out exorbitant salaries to underperforming players, and gotten miserable records in return. As of Wednesday, the team was 44–75 since he took over.

Off the court, he's losing too. A senior Knicks executive, Anucha Browne Sanders, sued Madison Square Gardens (the Knicks' owners) for letting Thomas sexually harass her, and they were fined \$11.6 million.

And still, he kept his job. Absolutely inexplicable.

**Marc Affeld**

Perhaps of the greatest tragedies in professional sports occurs when fans are subjected to the seemingly never-ending tenure of a terrible owner. All one has to do to confirm this is ask a Boston Bruins fan his or her opinion of team owner Jeremy Jacobs.

The author of [www.pleasesellthebruins.com](http://www.pleasesellthebruins.com) sums up the shared sentiment of many of Boston's hockey fans: “Greed, failure, mismanagement, and mediocrity ‘highlight’ Jeremy Jacobs’ 33 years as owner of the Boston Bruins,” the site says. Jacobs, like many other owners of professional sports teams, has come to realize that it's not necessarily in his best interest to be the owner of a competitive or exciting team, as mediocrity is apparently profitable enough.

The problem for the die-hard fans—and the reason he's still around—is that Jacobs isn't exactly bad for the franchise. According to *Forbes* magazine, the Bruins were the seventh-most valuable NHL team during the 2006/07 season. Also, despite his infamous frugality, Jacobs has increased player expenses more than twofold in the past decade.

But what do statistics like this mean when one considers the fact that the Bruins have only made it to the second round of the playoffs twice in their past 15 seasons? It's a slap in the face of hockey fans who have to endure the fact that one of the “Original Six” has spent the past few decades operating like it was an expansion team. Jacobs needs to do the fans a favour and sell the Bruins to someone who is at least willing to pretend that there is more to the NHL than profits. Last time I checked, the League was still annually giving one lucky team a Stanley Cup, and it's not given to the accountants.