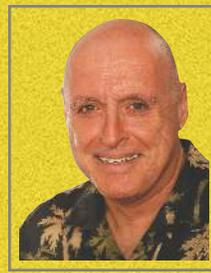


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



869 How Would You Have Handled These Situations?

If you follow sports on a national level, a couple of broadcasters have been accused of making racially-charged comments in the past couple of weeks. Today, a little analysis from strictly a workplace point of view. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that's next, on The Extra Point.

In July of 2020, news and sports reporters and commentators were filing most of their reports from home, via video conferencing. Rachel Nichols, a long-time talent at ESPN, had just done so, then engaged another employee in a conversation, which strayed into why Maria Taylor, another ESPN talent, who is Black, was getting a fair amount of work.

Quoting Nichols, who is White: "I wish Maria Taylor all the success in the world. She covers football, she covers basketball...If you need to give her more things to do because you are feeling pressure about your crappy longtime record on diversity — which, by the way, I know personally from the female side of it — like, go for it. Just find it somewhere else. You are not going to find it from me or taking my thing away."

Unknown to Nichols, the call was recorded. It was later discovered by a video producer, also a Black woman, who sent it to other employees, who then sent it to more. Eventually, it got leaked to other media. Nichols apologized for the incident.

If you read what Nichols said, she wasn't coming out against Taylor, she was ripping ESPN. In the aftermath, Nichols lost her sideline reporting job in the recently completed NBA Finals, which went to Taylor, who has refused to talk to Nichols since her comments were made public.

Taylor accepted the assignment on the condition that Nichols would have no involvement. ESPN agreed to that, then presented recorded pieces by Nichols on the broadcasts. This reportedly

infuriated Taylor.

The damages? Nichols lost a prime assignment, no doubt because ESPN caved in to public opinion that Nichols' comments were racist. This was wrong in my opinion. Private thoughts, even if you don't like them, should not result in a lost job for someone. ESPN should have made a statement, saying they disagreed with her opinion, but then stand behind her and her right to those feelings.

The ESPN employee who originally spread Nichols' comments was suspended for two weeks without pay. ESPN got this part of it right. This was disloyalty and airing dirty laundry in public. You don't do that. Discipline, in this case, was warranted.

ESPN will likely lose Taylor. NBC, seeing an opportunity to pluck a rising talent away from them, is reportedly close to a deal with Taylor to join their network. For Taylor, it will likely be a huge win, as the rumored salary being discussed would triple her current paycheck.

Second item. A few days later, ESPN's biggest star, controversial commentator Stephen A. Smith, came out and criticized Major League Baseball for promoting Japanese phenom Shohei Ohtani, the unique star who excels at both hitting and pitching. Smith said that the so-called "face of baseball" should be able to speak English, and not need to communicate through an interpreter.

Again, the media blew up. Smith later apologized for his comments, saying he, a Black man, should have known better. He was not suspended. He lost no assignment. ESPN seemingly just moved on from it.

The situations aren't exactly alike. Nichols comments should never have been made public. Smith's comments were on a broadcast and intentional. (Con't.)

Nichols was critical of her employer, but privately. Smith was critical of baseball officials.

Were either really racist? You have to be the judge. Neither Nichols or Smith attacked the individual they were discussing. Quite the contrary, they both described Taylor and Ohtani, respectively, in positive terms.

Did Smith get off totally free because in today's climate, a Black person will not suffer consequences for making racial remarks, especially against an Asian? Or was it because he is simply a bigger star than Nichols, and they wouldn't want to anger him and set the stage for another network to pull him away at some point? Many people called for Smith to be disciplined.

So, the question is...how would you have handled these situations? Feel free to chime in on the Facebook feed.

My opinion. ESPN actually got it right two of three times here.

They were wrong to take Nichols' NBA assignment away. They bowed to public opinion, which included screams from players to fire her. They should have left her in the job and backed her up. Private feelings are private. Once aired, you bring parties together and discuss them.

As discussed, they were right to suspend the video producer. Her breach of trust caused the issue to flare up.

Finally, they were right to not suspend Smith. Why? Because if they were wrong to pull Nichols from an assignment over her opinions, they would be wrong to discipline Smith over his. Two wrongs never make a right.

People will disagree with each other — and sometimes with how the organization handles things. The public may not like things, either.

Even so, we can still work together for the common benefit of all. Even so, we keep our company affairs within the company. We always maintain our trust with each other, even when we don't like certain thoughts and

opinions. We work it out. That's what a team does. That's what teammates do.

There are often lessons we can learn from stories in the news. Understanding the missteps of others can help us do better.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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