

Major league baseball Fox weathers first major decision as Twins president

By Jay Weiner
Staff Writer

Friday was the longest day of the year. For Howard Fox, it felt even longer.

Last night after the announcement that Ray Miller had replaced Billy Gardner as Twins manager, Fox answered questions about his biggest decision since being named team president Sept. 7, 1984.

Question: What did Baltimore General Manager Hank Peters tell you that told you on Ray Miller?

Answer: Let me go one step backward. For the past 10 days or two weeks, many people have been asking me, "What are you going to do about your manager?" To be honest with you, I'd never given much thought to getting rid of our manager. And I said, if we were going to get rid of him, who in the world

would you put in his place? Believe me, to save my life, I couldn't think of anybody I would trust over someone I would ask.

One bit of advice I got many years ago was when Lee MacPhail took over the Baltimore club. He told me, "I'll never ever be caught without somebody in my minor leagues who's capable of moving up and managing in the major leagues."

It wasn't until Wednesday, when it looked like we wouldn't be able to make any kind of deal to improve the club, that I started to realize that we were going to have to do something. Yes, just two days ago—Wednesday afternoon I called Hank Peters. And I said Hank, "You just went through a managerial change. I've got a list of candidates."

He said I was very short. He said he was Orioles coach(es) Ray Miller and Cal Ripken, Sr. I said tell me

about Ray. He was very complimentary. I said, "Can I talk with him?" He said, "I wouldn't want to lose a pitching coach. But he wouldn't stand in our way."

Q. This is your first major decision. If Ray Miller fails, if Ray Miller succeeds, do you as Twins president feel more vulnerable now than you did 24 hours ago?

A. This might seem corny, but I'm always reminded of Harry Truman's remark: "The buck stops here." I'm very conscious of the possibilities. I happen to have great confidence in this ballclub. I happen to feel that this ballclub has potential that really hasn't been developed.

Q. How much closer is the buck today? How much closer does it feel to you that if this club doesn't do well that Carl Pabel will be on top?

A. I don't believe that. I think that possibly some of the stories and some of the headlines had an effect on Billy. Starting about a week or ten days ago he was saying things about how throughout the history of base-

ball managers get fired. Somehow or other that puts the thought in your mind that this is getting to him. I certainly don't want to say anything derogatory about him. He's a terrific man. But I just felt, with the type of club we've got, they needed a different type of motivation. I think that this ballclub, when the season's over, is going to end up being competitive and exciting.

Q. How are you feeling now about the firing?

A. It's tough. It's traumatic. I didn't sleep at all last night. Nobody likes to make anybody unhappy.

Q. But there are a lot of people who are saying that Howard Fox let Billy Gardner twist in the wind because Howard Fox couldn't make the trade that could help the Twins. What do you say to that?

A. I can only say there are a lot of presidents and general managers out there who are twisting with me, who

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Miller: Well-spoken, smooth and superstitious

By Jay Weiner
Staff Writer

Raymond Roger Miller suddenly is on the scene.

It is 5 p.m. at the Metrodome and he is on time for the biggest promotion of his 23-year baseball career. He is neatly dressed in a tan sports jacket and blue pants, with a gigantic Orioles World Series ring on each hand.

He is well-spoken, firm, direct, but somewhat circuitous.

"I want to establish a 'we' attitude... The manager can only be as good as he is to work with... I would like to think that if I could develop a club I would like to develop a club that would be based on taking what's given to you and not giving away anything, and that goes back to simple fundamentals."

He is smooth, but there is fire in him. He is eager to move to the Twin Cities and settle in, although he has a home in New Athens, Ohio, his wife's hometown.

Minnesota winters?

"I don't mind snow. I bought a three-wheeler last year. First thing I ever bought for myself in my life. I had more fun in my life than I ever had. I wouldn't mind driving around in some Minnesota snow," Miller said.

He is 40, his hair is salt-and-peppery dark and he is sipping water as he speaks. He is tall — 6-foot-3 — and in good shape. After all, he's been running with the Baltimore pitchers he coached until Friday morning.

Ray (Rabbit) Miller, with three years of managing in the Puerto Rico winter league behind him, with instructional league managing experience, long with credit for developing a host of Orioles pitchers — Mike Flanagan, Scott McGregor, Dennis Martinez and Sammy Stewart — on his resume, is the first manager in Twins history, but the first one of the modern, post-Griffith era.

Is he a thoroughly modern Miller?

Or does he consider himself old-fashioned?

"I think I'm intelligent enough to deal with a situation when I have to," he said. He is flexible.

He writes. He writes down everything. He encourages others to write. He says he believes his note-taking helps his pitchers and helps his fielders to defend the opposition.

"I have my own managing book," said Miller, who speaks with a slight drawl. "Something happens in a ball game I want to remember. I write it down. I seem to retain things if I write them down. Usually, I throw a lot of notes away."

Raymond (Ray) Roger Miller



Born: Tallahassee, Fla., April 30, 1945.
Age: 40.
Residence: New Athens, Ohio.
Playing career: 7½ seasons pitched in the AAA level, the major leagues, and in the 1984 season, and managed with the Orioles in 1984. He pitched 244 1/3 innings in 1971. In 10 years, he allowed 848 hits in 1,071 2/3 innings, 102 runs, 101 earned runs, 102 ERA, and 1,065 strikeouts.

Coaching career: He was named pitching coach for the Baltimore Orioles in 1984. He was named minor league pitching instructor from 1981 until 1983. He was named assistant coach and became the Rangers' pitching coach in 1983. He was named pitching coach in 1978 when George Shuger left Baltimore. He was the first pitching coach in Baltimore history (1964-67) and manager (1968-77).

He's almost scientific, but he grew up in Forestville, Md., on a tobacco farm, while his father also was a carpenter. He has worked as a coal miner. He has been married for 20 years and had a 19-year-old son. He never played a game in the major leagues, but he learned the game under veteran players — Earl Weaver and Joe Aloubeki.

He is a former minor league pitcher — 6-6 1/2 with a 3.53 ERA in 10 years. He's trying to make it to the majors. And he has wanted a job as a big league manager for nearly five years now. He's wanted it bad.

"I've wanted to manage since the day I became a coach. I wanted to be a big league manager since right after the '79 World Series. When did I feel I was ready? I would say 1983 when myself, Joe Aloubeki and Cal Ripken Sr. ran for the Orioles job."

He's superstitious.

"When he wants a big inning he'll knock on the dugout wall two or three times," said Stewart. "And when he's coming out of the clubhouse for a game, he'll peck on the little four but in our clubhouse a couple times."

Miller had been Stewart's instructor of pitching coach throughout the reliever's 10-year professional career. Stewart said: "I think he's like an Earl Weaver-type manager. But I think Rabbit's younger and wilder. Hitting and running, burning and stealing. He likes that. He's liable to do a lot of things. He's a fiery guy. He'll stand up for his team and when it comes to fighting, we've had fights in the past and Ray Miller and Cal Ripken Sr. have been the first one out there."

Miller said he wants his players to be open and honest — that he would be too — but that he's also in the business of protecting his players.

"I think I have a pretty good working relationship with the media," said Miller. "I think a lot of times I use a young ballplayer to be subjected to the media before he's even got himself ready as to what to say. I think I have a responsibility to not only promote the Minnesota Twins but also to protect the young ballplayer in certain spots. I've never been afraid of any man or any person in my life. I've never been afraid to fight for what's right. I've also been here to protect the people that need to be protected."

He said his tendency to protect might not always extend to the inner sanctum of the Twins clubhouse.

"Motivation comes in the area where a guy makes one mistake and you sit down and you talk about it. I'm talking about a mental mistake and I'm talking about the reasons why," said Miller.

"If he goes back out there and does it again, you talk to him one more time. The third time, you talk to him in front of the ball club. That's motivation to me... In the area of protection, sometimes I might jump into the middle of that clubhouse and sit everybody out. But when (reporters) come in, they're not going to be there and I won't want the player to have to find out about it. I think that's the only thing in this world, in this society, that can't be corrected by the media outlet."

That from a man nicknamed "Rabbit"? Why Rabbit?

"I'll have to tell you that some other time," he said, smiling.

"Rabbit?"

"Really, it's a boring story," he said.

"You can never call him Rabbit until you win your first game," Stewart, the Baltimore relief pitcher, said yesterday from his Milwaukee hotel room. "Rabbit was the man who taught me to pitch. That was Bluefield, 1975. He knows I'm a country boy and he's kind of a country boy himself. He likes to tell country boy stories."

At 5:46 p.m., Miller walked through the door marked "L1234" in the basement of the Dome. That's the Twins clubhouse.

A team waited for him. A stranger was in their midst.

"Apprehensive a little bit," Miller said. "I'm not sure I might go out here and win a bunch in a row. I might go out here and lose a bunch in a row. I got to sell my ball club. On me and themselves."

Gardner's fault. The team was lousy. I'm not sure who Miller is, it's from a farm team?"

Natalia O'Reilly, Minneapolis, nurse: "I don't follow baseball much, but my boyfriend thinks it's a good thing, so maybe it is."

Reactions at the Dome range from sad to glad

By Roma Augustovics
Staff Writer

Baseball fans standing outside the Dome, strolling its corridors or putting mustard on their hot dogs inside were wondering, "Who is Ray Miller?"

Or, at least nearly all 20 asked about him Friday night were. Most also said they were sorry that Billy Gardner was fired as manager, but that the Twins had to do something.

Here's a sampling of opinions:

■ Hugh Pittenger, Mankato, Minn., a general manager for Coca-Cola: "That's life. I don't think it makes any difference who the manager is to the team... I'm a manager, too, and we're scapegoats. If my people do well, I get rewarded. If my sales are bad, I'm out. My people are doing very well, fortunately."

■ Bob Fischman, Apple Valley, movie rental store manager: "Twins president Howard Fox should have gone. What credentials does Miller have other than being a pitching coach? I

What fans said

liked Billy. He was likable and knowledgeable, a lot like Bud Grant."

■ Joel Hagberg, Apple Valley, sporting goods salesman: "Billy was the wrong guy to fire. Why couldn't they get that guy (Miller) as the pitching coach? I don't know if Billy Gardner was fired as manager, but that the Twins had to do something."

■ Harold Weinschenker, Winnepesaukee, social worker: "I don't think Billy was the guy to fire. They needed a new spark, revitalization. But I didn't know anything about Miller until this afternoon. How many people pay attention to pitching coaches?"

■ Joan Schomberg, Edina, housewife: "I'm sad for Billy. I don't know anything about Miller, but he sounded good when he was interviewed."

■ Craig Johnson, Bloomington, construction worker: "I have no idea who Ray Miller is and I'm kind of disappointed they got rid of Gardner."

But they had to do something and they always go for the manager. But maybe Miller — is that his name? — may be a disciplinarian and get the guys straightened out."

■ Becky Moon, St. Paul, lawyer: "I still don't know who Miller is, and I listened to the news."

■ Elmore Roundtree, Minneapolis, auditor for state of Minnesota: "He is children's 'don't know about what's his name.' I don't think Billy was the problem. It was the pitching and lack of hitting."

■ Jerome McCallion, Roseville, an auditor for state of Minnesota: "He is very disappointed. It was not the manager who was the problem. He might have had some relief problems, but we all loved Billy Gardner."

■ Tim Vincent, Robbinsdale, musician: "It's great. I like it. Gardner never went to relief pitchers in time."

■ Orin Paulsen, White Bear Lake, roofer and truck driver: "It wasn't

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