

What Happens if Nolan Ryan Leaves the Rangers?

Written by Maury Brown
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Which way is Nolan leaning?

Whether it happens, or not, the fact that there's conversation about Nolan Ryan leaving the Texas Rangers is big news. It is, after all, Nolan Ryan, a figure that looms large in the history of baseball as a Hall of Fame pitcher, and a man that's carved out a place as a front office man either through ownership in the minor leagues, or now as part of the Rangers. Whether the title has been President or CEO, the point is, he's got clout, and then some.

The reason [the story that broke Sunday](#) night has more than a whiff of some far flung rumor has been that Ryan hasn't responded. No denials. No confirmation. It's as if he's standing on the mound shaking off signs, and you don't really know what page he's on. It's clear that ownership wants him to stay, and that the man just promoted wants him to, as well.

"First of all, I don't want him to leave," new President of Baseball Operations, Jon Daniels told ESPN Dallas 103.3's Fitzsimmons and Durrett Show. "I don't think anybody wants him to leave, and I know I've expressed that to him. In my mind, (that pushing Ryan out) would not be the case."

[I said it](#) when Daniels was given the promotion of President of Baseball Operations/General Manager, but no one really caught the importance of it. That in moving Daniels up the chain, it

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assists in insulating him from being fired—that the promotion was by design and a means of setting direction for years to come. Daniels still would report to Ryan, but the move to President puts Daniels in a position where canning him isn't something that Ryan could easily push for—for one reason or another—as ownership made a statement that they like the direction that JD has in place, and plan to build around that long-term. Ask yourself when the last time a President of Baseball Operations was fired? With the exception of Tal Smith of the Astros (which was about a new owner coming in and putting his stamp on the club), you just don't see it.

So, this is about Ryan. About how he is feeling diminished. After all, this is the man largely responsible for pushing former owner Chuck Greenburg out the door. If it was going to come down to Greenburg or Ryan, it was obvious it was going to be Ryan. How ironic would it be for Ryan to depart just after the end of Spring Training, just as Greenburg did?

So, what if he leaves? What are the impacts?

First off, this notion that Ryan is just some figurehead is a bit overstated. I'm not saying that he's solely the one responsible for making the Rangers the success they are today on the field, but he's not just shaking hands and kissing babies, either. He's a great scouting mind, so you lose that. But, the reality is, if you lost Daniels, and not Ryan, it would be a harder hit. It's why majority owners Bob Simpson and Ray Davis gave Daniels the promotion in the first place, even if they didn't anticipate that Ryan might potentially walk.

So, would this be, as Randy Galloway put it in the story on Sunday, a "PR disaster?" Only if it's about not seeing what the impacts to Ryan would be before the promotion. Clearly, they should have gone to him and said, "If we do this, is going to madden you enough to walk?" No, if it's about Ryan leaving, I'm not sure "disaster" is the right word.

First off, while Ryan is an owner of the club, he's a minority owner, with aforementioned Simpson and Davis being the real money men that made the ability of Greenburg and Ryan to win the bankruptcy auction purchase of the club to begin with. They'd pay Ryan off if he wanted to sell, or Ryan could still retain ownership if he didn't sign on with someone else.

There will certainly be fans that will be upset to see him go. But then again, these are mostly the

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same people that see him as an iconic figurehead, and not the reality that the Rangers don't rise and fall by his decisions. That's been in Jon Daniels court, and as we've seen, JD has done more than any GM with the club prior to get them to rise in the standings.

Would it impact attendance? Marginally. Ryan leaving would be forgotten as soon as the team wound up at the top of the AL West. If they're sitting in as low as third come mid-June, then certainly the stories will start to surface that somehow letting Ryan walk had some kind of impact, but anyone worth their salt would poo-poo that as you're made or broken largely by what happens in the off-season and Ryan walking after the end of Spring Training would make him associated with that.

And while we're at this point talking about Ryan walking (and for the record, the silence right now could be as much about ensuring he doesn't walk just as much as him contemplating heading out), let's talk whether he'd be hired elsewhere.

For one, Ryan doesn't strike me as a man looking to retire, but lest you think that means he's headed over to the Houston Astros, I'm not so sure. I'm sure that Jim Crane would about froth at the mouth over the PR win bringing Ryan in would be, but about the second the press conference would be over, reality would set in. After all the whole direction of baseball ops right now is as sabermetrically inclined as any front office done before. General Manager Jeff Luhnow has offered up the "Google rule", hired Kevin Goldstein and Mike Fast away from *Baseball Prospectus*, stripped the roster down to its axels in a rebuild, and with it, the direction is anything but "Nolan Ryan." To hire him and fire current president George Postolos would be to say that the entire direction of the club would change. In other words, it doesn't make a heck of a lot of sense.

No, if Ryan doesn't stay with the Rangers, here's the possible next place of employment: Major League Baseball. Yes, like Joe Torre, or Frank Robinson, Ryan would fit in near perfect with the league. He has all the pedigree to make the jump and would add to helping get things done on the business side of the league.

But, then again, this is all about Nolan at this moment. He's holding the cards. He's the one to decide. He may want to be the one making the trades, running the Draft board, and making recommendations on who the club should sign. One thing is certain, he's not going to be the key man doing that work, if he ever was. The regular season is right around the corner. We'll all see which side of the rubber Ryan is on, soon enough.

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