

From the Jump to The AL to Stripping Payroll and More: Why the Astros Need to Slow Down

Written by Maury Brown
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Houston Astros owner Jim Crane is a smart man. One doesn't get rich and build global business without being as such. But there's some advice that he needs when it comes to owning and running an MLB club, and it's this:

Slow down.

I get that you saw the need to fix aspects of the organization. You might even have wanted to put your own stamp on it, but since before you purchased the club actions—some not all of your doing—have transpired that when taken in total are scaring fans off now, and possibly in the future.

McLane Dumps Salary to Make the Sale

To make the sale happen, Crane worked with former owner Drayton McLane. For the better part of two seasons, McLane shed player payroll. This helped not only with the sale, but played into a strategy that Crane is deploying now: strip out most everyone but prospects and rebuild.

The Move to the American League

I said not everything is of Crane's doing, and this is one of them. As part of the sale the league pushed the Astros into the American League. It is the first time in the history of MLB that a team has moved from the NL to the AL.

The Complete Gutting of the Front Office

When McLane left, pretty much everyone else in the front office went, as well. Be it Tal Smith, or Ed Wade as examples, "out with the old, in with the new" came with the sale. This isn't uncommon. In fact, those that watch the comings and goings in sports business expect it. It's change that comes with change.

Rebranding

This is actually a smart move, and makes sense, but it's (again) just one more thing. With the move to the American League, the club rebranded itself based on the old Houston Astros logos. New colors... new logos... something else that is new for fans to try and absorb.

Pain for Gain

While there are some that see the method upon which the Astros are rebuilding as a bit radical (this author included), it's always difficult to say to your fan base that you're rebuilding. Given how drastic the plan is, it could be several seasons before the Astros are competitive, and that banks on decisions that are being made pan out. Fans don't like it, but if the pains are short, they might live with it. Several seasons can rot a fan base. Don't believe me? Ask the Pittsburgh Pirates.

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The Launch of CSN Houston

As part of the grand design, getting into a regional sports network was in the works at the purchase. This was a smart move in the overall, but adds to the mountain of change. To date, the RSN isn't being carried by any of the major carriers such as DirecTV or Time Warner Cable. That's hurt the club as many fans simply can't watch Astros games.

George Postolos Resigns as President and CEO

Maybe it was not being able to get CSN Houston those needed carriage deals. Maybe it was something else. But yesterday, [George Postolos, the President and CEO of the Astros resigned](#). In speaking with sources close to the matter, the club currently has no one to replace him, nor are they done in searching for one. It's been just over a year since Crane purchased the club, and the highest-placed exec below Crane has left the building. Yet more instability.

Astros Cancel Annual Fundraiser for Houston Area Women's Center

On the same day that Postolos resigned, the Astros made a move with a charitable foundation. This latest move is not only another change, it's very bad PR. [The Astros canceled The Black Ties and Baseball Caps gala](#) that was an annual event at Minute Maid Park put on by the Astros Wives Organization. According to the club, the team's charitable foundation is changing directions and will focus on at-risk youth and youth baseball programs and the Astros Wives Organization has been officially disbanded. Women's center CEO Rebecca White said losing the money is a huge setback.

"I don't know if we will cut anything because we can't. We have to serve the people who come to our doors," White said. "The alternatives are too horrible to imagine."

Add it All Up, and You Need to Slow Down

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To Mr. Crane, one needs to treat the ownership of sports clubs differently than other businesses. If you don't think that applying business methods that work in other industry fails when it comes to sports ownership, take some time and sit down with Kansas City Royals owner David Glass. The herky-jerky, all-too-fast changes that you are making not only are doing damage to your short-term fan loss, you're likely setting up losses far into your tenure. Remember, you're only a steward of the Astros for a relatively short time. The Astros will be around a lot longer than you or I. What you're doing now could have broad reaching effects on the Houston fan base. Before you do more, why don't you let fans try to acclimate to everything that's been thrust upon them. They're probably woozy just reading this, let alone living through it.



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