

NBA Comes Down Hard On Billionaire

By Adam Gauthier

It is no doubt the dream of many sports fans to own a professional sports franchise. To be able to draw millions of people into your stadium every year to watch your million dollar athletes do what they do best: entertain the crowd and hopefully win a championship.

If a person had ownership of a team they would likely use their luxury box seats to enjoy the game with their guests. If so desired, the owner could sit in the reserved seats behind the player's bench.

The picture that many of us perceive to be the consummate owner is the person dressed in a business suit watching carefully over their investment. Owners seem to control their outward exuberance when the game is going on especially in the regular season.

Wouldn't it be more interesting to see an owner who let himself go and was just like the common fan? A person who would taunt the opposing team's players, yell at the referees and jump up in excitement when his team would score like a true fan?

There is such an owner in professional sports and his name is

Mark Cuban. He is the co-founder of Broadcast.com which was bought by Yahoo! in 1999. Cuban took some of his billion dollar fortune and bought the Dallas Mavericks of the NBA.

Cuban is very involved with his team which includes working out with the team and traveling with them on away games. He has lavished players with electronic-filled lockers, ultra-soft towels and even custom-made courtside chairs.

His energy and enthusiasm have helped revive one of the league's most dreadful teams and made him a local celebrity. He has given the fans a break by paying for service charges on tickets, and buying tickets for fans who travel to the road games and wear the team's colors of green and white.

If there was an award for ownership, Cuban would likely get the most votes by fans but not NBA officials. In fact, Mark Cuban has been fined \$395,000 for five separate offenses this season. The majority of the fines have come from doing what many fans do: criticizing officials. Except Cuban took it to a higher level.

On January 4, Cuban was fined \$250,000 when he criticized officials and then showed replays on a scoreboard of a disputed call that went against the Mavericks. Cuban has stated that his team has been on the losing end of many calls this season because of careless officiating.

"I have no problem if it's a good game, but if a ref steals a game from us, how am I going to be quiet?" he said. "I'm not criticizing the refs, really I'm not. But hopefully the averages will start turning out in our favor."

Cuban has even been fined when he wasn't disputing a refer-

ee's call. On January 12, he was fined \$100,000 for sitting on the baseline with the reserve players and trainers during a January 10 game in Minnesota. Cuban who was dressed with a sweatshirt and warm-up pants bearing the teams colors and logo said in his defense that their was no open seats behind the bench and he did not want to take one of the coach's seats.

To put it in perspective as to how hard the NBA has been on Cuban, the retired/unretired Dennis Rodman, who has had many run-ins with league officials, was fined a total of \$193,000 over his entire career.

Cuban has let it be known to the media and the league that his criticisms have come to an end but

he also said that after his third fine of November for \$25,000.

Although the league has made a lot of money off of Mark Cuban this year, and are anticipating the day when he sells the team, they should also be appreciative. Cuban has the leverage to have his voice heard on some of the bad officiating which exists in the game. The league may ignore Cuban or they may look at the complaints which he has instituted at the next league meeting.

Whatever happens between the two it is likely to be interesting and very entertaining if Cuban continues to have his say.

With files from CNN SI.

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