



## ***Green energy boosts MLB exec Lewis in her '87 start with the Cubs***

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Wendy Lewis knew she was entering a brave new world when she walked into Dallas Green's Wrigley Field office in the early summer of 1987 to get his blessing as the team's first manager of human resources.

Lewis had the backing of parent Tribune Co., where she had worked for the Chicago Tribune. But she didn't know quite what to expect from volatile Cubs president-general manager Green, whose 50,000-watt booming voice could announce his presence before his expansive 6-foot-5 frame actually filled the room.



**Wendy Lewis (left) with granddaughter Samya Lewis-Kemp after the Civil Rights roundtable discussion at the Chicago Cultural Center.**

Here was a woman – a minority one, at that – entering the boys club of a baseball team. And Green, who had shaken the Cubs to the core in dragging them out of the moss-backed Wrigley family ownership, reeked of testosterone with a triple dose.

“One of the last organization changes (Tribune Co. mandated for the team) is they wanted the Cubs to develop a human resources department,” said Lewis, now senior vice president of diversity and strategic alliances for Major League Baseball.

“They didn't have one, nor did any other team. For Dallas, it was an interesting interview because it was a lot of what are you going to do? What was interesting about that interview with Dallas was not only (his asking) who are you, but what in the world can you do for this organization?”

“From his perspective, this sort of professional, an HR pro, didn't make sense at the



**Dallas Green was won over by Wendy Lewis and her human resources work after his interview with her in the early summer of 1987.**

the festivities surrounding the Aug. 24 Civil Rights Game at U.S. Cellular Field. One of the top-ranking African-American executives in baseball, Lewis participated along with Kenny Williams, the Sox executive vice president, in a pre-game roundtable discussion at Chicago's Cultural Center.

### **Donahue, Lewis faced challenges 60 years apart**

Given the events were in Chicago, the festivities ought to have had an honor for Lewis. She was a trailblazer in her own right, as both a woman and minority, in the Cubs front office. Lewis started with the team nearly three decades after the retirement of Margaret Donahue, baseball's first significant female executive, in the same Wrigley Field offices. In the process, she earned the same kind of respect as Donahue moving the ball forward in what was still a man's world.

It wasn't easy for either Donahue or Lewis at either end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Donahue achieved club secretary status only six years after women achieved the right to vote. Lewis started with the Cubs at a time when baseball had grudgingly, and under court order, had first allowed female reporters in the locker room. Also, 1987 was the same year when Dodgers GM Al Campanis clumsily misspoke on ABC's "Nightline" in stating African-Americans lacked the "some of the necessities" for managing and GM jobs.

time. To be quite honest, when Dallas walked in I was in his office patiently waiting. And when he walked in, I remember thinking, 'Oh, my goodness.' I was a little dry in the throat. By the time he had to smile and had to sit, I knew we were off to a good start. I really have great affection for him."

Green, now 79 and a senior advisor for the Philadelphia Phillies, doesn't remember the details of that interview. But Lewis had the chops to show him the benefits of her specialty. He won't soon forget the relatively short time they worked together.

"Obviously it was something baseball had started to get involved with – having a human resources (person)," Green said from his Maryland farm. "Wendy fit the perfect mold for me. I think she did a wonderful job for awhile with the Cubs, and obviously it was recognized because she's with Major League Baseball now. I'm proud of her."

Lewis recalled the start of her generation-long service to Major League Baseball in

“I do remember that era as being very challenging environment for women with executive positions in the game and tough to be part of the boys club,” said Sharon Panno- zzo, in 1987 the Cubs’ assistant director of media relations who now is vice president of East Coast publicity for NBC-TV.

“Women needed to be better than their male counterparts to survive in that culture, which could be hostile at times,” said Panno- zzo, who was the Cubs’ media relations di- rector from 1991 to 2006. “There were few women, but we stuck together and devel- oped friendships and support groups, which exist to this day. I include Katy Feeney and Phyllis Merhige (longtime MLB media relations and scheduling officials) as part of that. Wendy was one of a group of pioneering women in the business.”

Lewis started with the Cubs the same year Rob- in Monsky sued the Atlanta Braves for sex dis- crimination after being dismissed as media re- lations director. Monsky had repeatedly clashed with Braves manager Chuck Tanner, who sim- ply could not accept a woman in her role. She was not backed up by Braves general manager Bobby Cox or team president Stan Kasten.

In the 1988 Cubs media guide, Lewis was the only woman listed as at least a department manager. The only other woman listed above Lewis was Joyce F. Hutchinson as corporate secretary. Panno- zzo was the sole female assis- tant department director.

Lewis fortunately had a leg up on breaking through the barriers – the backing of corporate higher-ups.

“The great advantage I had was coming in with the obvious agenda to change things,” she said. “It wasn’t coming in a different capacity where all the guys were already running it, or where women just weren’t seen or included in that. I didn’t have to do that route (advance up the ranks from secretary).

“From my perspective, at my point in my pro- fessional life, I kind of knew I was going to be breaking ground probably anyplace I’d be going to. I knew I had the leverage from Tribune Co., from my work experience. That helped a lot be- fore.”



**Wendy Lewis and Hall of Famer Frank Robinson at the Civil Rights Game roundtable discussion at the Chicago Cultural Center (Photo courtesy of Major League Base- ball).**



Still, both Lewis and her colleagues went through a perceptible adjustment period.

“Just the very appearance of me represented change,” she said. “I was a constant reminder to everyone that things weren’t going to be like they’ve always been. That in itself was really challenging. But it also gives you a lot of motivation for being very, very persistent, being very innovative.

“Very often, you’d have to prove not only your own worth over why you were there, but also why they were better off for you being there. That challenge was there at that time. It was quite a while before I would not be the ‘only’ in the room, and that took some getting used to.”

### **Green forced out, but Lewis won over colleagues**

Lewis soon had an extra burden on top of being a groundbreaker. Green lost a power struggle with meddling Tribune Co. executives led by the steely-gray John Madigan. He was forced out after the '87 season. Baseball politics, always thick, could have shifted the sands under her feet. But Lewis' mission was firm. She exercised patience as she became a vital part of the front office.

“It took a season,” Lewis said. “I actually had a little time with Dallas. When he left, (team president Don) Grenesko came into place. We were actually well on our way. What I was establishing was more of a corporate component of establishing the best interests. I remember personally feeling a great loss when Dallas left the organization.”

Lewis won over the all-male collection of baseball front-office administrators, scouts and minor-league personnel with hard work and service.

“The baseball people were the toughest to crack,” she said. “However, they (eventually) realized I was actually there to be more resourceful and helpful, rather than getting in their way. For instance, creating a lot of simplicity and efficiency around their own benefit programs. When they saw they actually could help them and their family members, I became more friend than foe.”

Lewis ran such a good ship – as other teams began their own human resources offices – that she earned a promotion to the commissioner’s office in New York after eight years with the Cubs. She ran human resources on a baseball-wide basis, then shifted into baseball’s increasing efforts to promote diversity in his own workforce and among the game’s suppliers. Lewis evolved to running MLB’s Executive Development Program (EDP) and The Diverse Business Partners Program.

“One thing about going from a club to the commissioner’s office, you’re taking a much more global view,” she said. “There’s a lot more stakeholders involved. A giant foot-



**Commissioner Bud Selig hired Wendy Lewis for human resources work, but has shifted her to be in charge of baseball's diversity program.**

print compared to a step. Some people were very ready and very anxious to get some changes developed, and there were others who weren't interested in that at all."

The bottom line was the program would move forward with Commissioner Bud Selig as a strong philosophical backer.

"I remember my interview with the commissioner and it was fascinating how many things he told me he wanted to accomplish, and he has accomplished," Lewis said. "The man's been true to form through it all."

Selig picked as his point person a woman who defined a human resource.