

## Claire Hoy ? A case of misleading statistics



It was Benjamin Disraeli who first uttered the oft-quoted observation, "There are three kinds of lies; lies, damn lies, and statistics." That famous quote came to mind recently when the Richard Lapchick's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports at the University of Central Florida released its annual report - usually received uncritically by the media - which purports to show that more than six decades after Jackie Robinson heroically broke the colour line in major league baseball, the game isn't attracting as many U.S.-born black players as it once did.

The inference, of course, is that an unspoken form of underground racism is still alive and well among MLB owners, general managers and coaches, as if somehow a baseball executive would turn away from a great ballplayer who happens to be black. The notion is totally absurd on the face of it. Worse, Lapchick uses "should we say abuses" statistics to make his annual case. To be sure, he derives tons of publicity out of it. Even normally critical sports analysts - and others - routinely fall for the predetermined thesis that says major league baseball is turning its collective back on U.S.-born black players.

Where to begin?

First of all, in case you're wondering, I'm a big-time baseball fan. All my life I've cheered for the New York Yankees, and still do. Baseball has always been - and remains - my favourite sport.

To be sure, it does have some problems, the undue length of games being the main one. But racial diversity is not one of their problems. Indeed, if you look at all the facts - rather than the selective "facts" offered by this annual report - you'll discover that when it comes to racial diversity, there isn't a sport in the world that even comes close to matching baseball.

The "fact" that garners all the headlines in this annual sham is Lapchick's observation that the number of U.S.-born black ballplayers is down from what it once was. This is true, although not as true as Lapchick claims. It's also irrelevant to the argument of diversity, but we'll get back to that in a moment.

His report claims that the current number of U.S.-born black players represents just 8.5 per cent of all players, down from a high of 27 per cent.

On first blush, that seems like a huge drop. And while it has dropped - and the reasons for that have nothing to do with racism and everything to do with inner-city black kids opting more for basketball and football - the truth is, the number of U.S.-born black players was NEVER at 27 per cent.

That number comes from earlier counts of all black players, not just U.S.-born players, which includes Latino players such as Rico Carty, a Dominican, whom you may remember as a Toronto Blue Jay back in the late 1970s.

Mark Amour, a member of the Society of American Baseball Research, has done extensive studies on blacks in baseball. He figures the number of U.S.-born blacks in baseball peaked at 19 percent in the 1980s, so there is no doubt that the current 8.5 percent is a big drop.

Then again, the number of white U.S.-born major league baseball players has also dropped considerably, a fact which rarely gets mentioned but is accounted for by many of the same reasons there are fewer U.S.-born black players. So what's the main reason, you ask? Simple, the number of players born outside the U.S. has skyrocketed in the past couple of decades - including the current pool of 17 Canadian-born players, a far cry from the days when Canada's only Hall of Fame player, Fergie Jenkins, pitched his heart out for the Phillies, Cubs, Rangers and Red Sox.

Early last month, MLB announced that there were 241 players on the 2013 opening day rosters - or 28.2 percent of the total - who

were born outside the U.S., the second highest total ever.

Lapchick, who frets about the decline of U.S.-born blacks in baseball, also issues numbers about other sports but seemingly has no problem with those. Indeed, he pointed out that in 2011 the National Basketball Association, which at one time was overwhelmingly white, is composed of 83 per cent non-white players and just 17 per cent white, a precipitous decline from earlier years. Same thing for NFL football, where the rosters are about 60 percent non-white. Compare that to the U.S. general population, which is just 34 percent non-white and, if you were so inclined, you could argue both basketball and football are discriminating against whites.

These numbers, of course, don't make a case for discrimination at all. But they do illustrate that Disraeli knew what he was talking about when he pointed out what those with an agenda can do with statistics.

It's just a pity that those reporting on them wouldn't be a tad more diligent.