Roy Mlakar was 19 years old and in college when he screwed up the sort of courage that is the province of 19-year-olds, sneaking up the back stairs and into the administrative offices of the local minor league hockey team, where he cornered the owner with a business proposal.

Mlakar boldly promised Nick Mileti that he could bring hundreds of students like himself streaming through the turnstiles if the team, the Cleveland Barons, would sell him the tickets for a Saturday night game at half price. When Mileti agreed, Mlakar rented a few yellow school buses, lined up food from Buddy’s pizzeria and posted fliers at 17 area junior colleges.

He sold almost 2,000 tickets.
And so, a career was born.

Thirty-eight years later, Mlakar is on his fourth stint as president of a hockey team, and third running an NHL team.

He has been to heaven and through hell.

He would trade the heartaches in a minute, and there have been plenty of them. The crash that followed the glorious Gretzky years with the Los Angeles Kings, which ended with owner and friend Bruce McNall in prison. The bankruptcy of the Pittsburgh Penguins. That’s when the man who was taking control of the Senators, Rod Bryden, invited him back into the game.

“I really wasn’t excited about moving from Manhattan Beach to Ottawa,” Mlakar said. “But when I reflected on the challenge, and the fact that there were only, I think, 24 teams at the time in the NHL — you don’t look at a North American map and throw a dart and say, ‘I wanna run’…”

Mlakar aimed at an imaginary board across the room and pantomimes a toss, letting out a “Boom!” on impact.

“Things happen,” he said. “And opportunities come in funny ways.”

Some climb the ladder. Others parachute in at the top rung. Some make the right friends. Some choose the right parents.

Rita Benson LeBlanc, granddaughter of New Orleans Saints owner Tom Benson, likes to say she has “grown up on the floor of the league meetings.” She took over day-to-day operation of the franchise in 2006, completing a sequence that began when she showed an interest as a teenager and accelerated when she proved an acumen after college.

Hers is among the more typical of career paths taken by those who run major sports franchises, and particularly those who run NFL franchises.

A review of the backgrounds of the executives who head the 122 franchises in the NFL, NBA, NHL and Major League Baseball revealed that one of the more likely routes to the top starts at either conception or reception. Almost 16 percent of ranking team executives — and nearly one-third of top executives at NFL teams — are related to a major stakeholder in the ownership group, most often by birth but a
few times through marriage.

This won’t surprise anyone who works in team sports.

While they carry high profiles, sports franchises are, by most definitions, small to midsized businesses, with fewer than 250 employees and annual revenue ranging from $100 million to $300 million. Many are, in fact, family businesses.

The NFL has the Rooneys and Hunts, Maras and Bisciottis, Joneses and Krafts and Bensons and Glazers. Four MLB presidents and one COO are sons of team owners. Family connections are less common in the NBA (two) and NHL (one), but a next generation is rising at several franchises in both those leagues.

Some sports jobs do grow on trees. Family trees.

But what of those who were not born or wed into the business?

While trying to sort the infinite variables of a ranking executive’s career path would be folly, most can be placed, bent or wedged into one of seven categories:

• Those who worked their way up at a franchise (36 percent)
• Those who were hired to run a team based on a prior business relationship with the owner (11 percent)
• Those who came in from outside of team sports, often through the work of a search firm (9 percent)
• Those who were brought in from a league office (7 percent)
• General managers who took on the additional title, sometimes with added responsibilities but sometimes without (12 percent)
• Former players who got the job primarily because of that connection (3 percent)
• Family members (16 percent)

Again, not every story fits neatly into a category. Some fit more than one. Consider the paths of two of the more accomplished executives in sports, Rick Welts and Sandy Alderson.

We chose to count Welts among those who rose with the Suns in the role he holds now. Ask Welts about his path and he’ll launch into the story of ballboy made good, explaining that he is, in his soul, a marketer of teams. “That’s where I first found my place,” he said. But he’s quick to concede that it was exposure at the league level that got him the chance to run a franchise.

We chose to count Welts among those who rose from a league office, but you certainly could place him with those who came up with a team.

Alderson graduated from Dartmouth, served as an officer in the Marine Corps in Vietnam, got his law degree from Harvard and was working for a San Francisco firm when a partner there, Roy Eisenhart, chased his dream. At 29, he became the young sports’ youngest team president. Silverman left Goldman Sachs to become sports’ youngest team president. Silverman followed his dream to Rays

When Matt Silverman polled his family on whether he should follow his heart, walk away from a promising investment banking career, and take off to St. Petersburg to learn to run a baseball team, their support was nearly unanimous.

Only one voice dissented. But it was a powerful one. His grandfather, who took him to his first baseball game in Arlington, Texas, when he was 4 years old, didn’t think he should mix vocation with avocation.

“He thought that there was more security with the job at Goldman Sachs,” said Silverman, now in his third full season as president of the Tampa Bay Rays. “And then there was the pension you might earn at Goldman Sachs.”

The rest of the family won out. Silverman chased his dream. At 29, he became the youngest team president in sports when Rays owner Stuart Sternberg, a friend who took a shine to him when both were at Goldman Sachs, tapped him to run the team in September 2005.

Silverman’s grandfather didn’t get to see him fill the role. He died in 2004. But he knew where his grandson was headed, and he approved.

“He thought it through enough to be supportive of it,” Silverman said. “And he’s a huge baseball fan, so he’d certainly be happy with the way the team is playing today.”

At press time, the Rays were headed to the All-Star break with the best record in baseball, the surprise of the season.

— Bill King
was tapped to run the Oakland A’s — in large part because it was his father-in-law who bought the team. Eisenhart, who also is a Dartmouth grad and former Marine, invited Alderson to join the front office as general counsel in 1981.

Alderson soon migrated to the baseball side as general manager, then back to the business side when he was promoted to president. He answered the call of the commissioner and joined the league office as an executive vice president in 1998. He returned to a team job as CEO of the Padres three years ago.

We classified Alderson as someone who rose through a franchise, but he could fit comfortably into almost all of our boxes.

“When you consider my path, what is most important is the judgment. That’s how I got my job,” Alderson said. “Not because of expertise or background. It was a faith in my judgment. That’s where it started for me.”

Classifying the career paths of the ultrasuccessful is educational.

But the more valuable lessons can be found within the fiber of their stories.

‘Elevators in a hotel’

The president of the Dallas Stars nods patiently, glancing down occasionally to the cup of coffee he is stirring, then back up, as I explain my theory on career paths. I’ve always viewed them as roads crisscrossing the countryside. You take one west, then you come to a fork. You can choose to go left or right, but the choice needn’t be permanent, because roads wind, and they crisscross, and a mind-swirling combination of choices can all land you in the same place.

“I agree with your premise to a point,” says Jeff Cogen, putting down his spoon to free his hands for a demonstration. “But I think it’s more like the elevators in a hotel.”

At the lobby level in Cogen’s analogy, there are four elevators. They all go to the 15th floor. You can take any of them, get off at the seventh floor, get on another elevator, and still end up at 15.

Thing is, there are 18 floors.

“And from the 15th floor to the 18th floor,” Cogen says, “some of those elevators probably stop.”

When you look at how the eventual leaders of sports have gotten their starts, inspiring stories abound.

Washington Nationals President Stan Kasten was off on a tour of major league ballparks after finishing law school, a job offer from an antitrust firm in hand, when he came upon Ted Turner leaving Busch Stadium after a Braves-Cardinals game and asked for a job. Turner invited him to Atlanta for an interview and hired him as in-house counsel. By the time he turned 27, Kasten was general manager of Turner’s NBA team, the Hawks. By 35, he was president of both the Hawks and Braves.

John Allen, chief operating officer of the Cincinnati Reds until this year, when he handed the job over to owner Bob Castellini’s son, left a successful accounting career to get a master’s degree in sports administration and then spent the summer interning with a minor league baseball team.

Andy Dolich jokingly introduces himself as “Unit ed Van Lines poster child.” One of the early master’s graduates from the sports management program at Ohio University, he landed his first sports job with the record-settingly inept Philadelphia 76ers and went on to work for teams in all four major sports leagues, as well as the now-defunct North American Soccer League and the National Lacrosse League.

“To me, getting into this business is hard but not impossible,” said Dolich, who last year left the top spot at the Memphis Grizzlies to become chief operating officer of the San Francisco 49ers. “If you have a burning desire, if you have a stick-to-itiveness, if you’re willing to be beaten up and kicked around and move around, you’ll get in.”

“But then, when you’re in this industry, how do you get up? Much tougher, and I suspect no two stories are quite the same.”

Bailey’s four ‘key screens’ for job seekers

Before taking the job as CEO of the Miami Dolphins, Joe Bailey spent 11 years heading the entertainment, media and sports practice for a global executive search firm, Russell Reynolds Associates. He advises candidates to run four “key screens” when considering a new job.

• Will you like the people you work with?
• Will you like the content of the work?
• Will you be fairly compensated?
• Is there room for growth?

“If you can say yes to all four, you should really consider that place,” said Bailey, who worked for the Cowboys, the NFL and the NTRA before entering the search world. “If you can say yes to three of those four, you’ll be there, but after a period of time you will leave. You may love the work, be fairly compensated and have room to grow, but if you don’t like the people you’ll get the hell out of there. If you’re not fairly compensated, at some point in time you’ll say this is not fair. People like to grow and expand, so if you’re blocked you need to leave.

‘Title, geography, spousal work, close to your parents, all that other stuff is OK. But those are the four key questions you have to ask yourself.’

— Bill King
Cogen's story starts off like a little boy's fantasy. He ran off to join the circus.

He was working in marketing with Ringling Bros. when he met Jim Lites, a young attorney who had found his way into the sports business the old-fashioned way, meeting and marrying a fellow lawyer who also happened to be the daughter of pizzachain king Mike Ilitch.

Ilitch bought the Detroit Red Wings, and soon after hired his son-in-law as the team's general counsel. When Cogen met him, Lites had risen to executive vice president.

Lites and Cogen hit it off from the start. They found that the sports business and the circus business mirrored each other. Both sold tickets, concessions, souvenirs and sponsorships. Both did TV deals. Both traveled with large groups and paid the highest sums to their stars.

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One team's CEO is another team's COO is another team's president is another team's executive vice president. Some owners hold one or more of those titles, even though they typically fill more the role of a traditional chairman, leaving the day-to-day management to others whose titles can vary. Over the years, some franchises have used the president's title as a sweeterener to attract a highly regarded general manager, even though the job's responsibilities were limited to the already mountainous task of running operations on the field or court.

A more transparent franchises have a clearly defined working president, but not all are that easy to dissect.

Buffalo Bills owner Ralph Wilson kept the title of president for himself from the time he founded the team in 1960 until 2001, when he used it as a carrot to attract general manager Tom Donahoe away from the Pittsburgh Steelers. It didn't go well. Wilson fired Donahoe after five seasons. And when he did, he took back the president's title.

Earlier this year, Wilson promoted highly regarded executive vice president Russ Brandon to oversee both the business and football sides of the operation, a job that mirrors that of many presidents. The increase in responsibility brought Brandon the new title of chief operating officer and, one would assume, a healthy pay raise.

But Wilson kept the president's title this time.

Once bitten, twice shy.

Several executives who have run teams for years, and are widely acknowledged as the day-to-day boss, hold executive vice president titles. Howard Pizer has run the Chicago White Sox since 1981, when Jerry Reinsdorf tapped him after he did the legal work on the purchase. He was executive vice president then. He is executive vice president today. So is Steve Schanwald, the ranking business-side executive with Reinsdorf’s Bulls.

A few franchises have no one higher than a senior vice president on the rung beneath the owner.

“Title means different things in different places,” said Moss, who took the job in spite of the deflated moniker. “So I didn’t really get hung up on that. To me it was a challenge with a team, in the NHL, in Southern California. Let’s not get hung up on semantics here.”

Moss says he was happy in the role. Still, he left after nine months, lured by an offer to become president and chief operating officer of the Phoenix Coyotes, the job he still holds five years later. His responsibilities and reporting lines are the same as those he had when he was running the Ducks, but the title is loftier.

Moss has seen varied pairings of responsibility and title. The last time he was a team president, in Pittsburgh, he had responsibility for both business and hockey. When he was with the Rangers, general manager Neil Smith had the president's title, yet he had no responsibilities outside of hockey.

“The president of one team may have the same responsibilities as an EVP of another,” Moss said. “It depends on the structure, and there are many. There’s only one rule, and that is that there is no rule.”
Dolich listened. The Warriors offered something spectacular run, and was known across baseball as his No. 2.

Cogen had been with Lites for 15 years when he was offered the chance to run his own shop. The Florida Panthers were looking for a chief operating officer who would be the ranking business executive. Cogen explained to his friend, Lites, that he had to give it a shot.

“It’s not an uncommon dynamic. With relatively few franchises, and many of them operated by families, an executive often must move in order to land the top slot.”

“People like to grow and expand,” said Joe Bailey, CEO of Miami Dolphins Enterprises, who ran the sports practice for an international headhunting firm before taking his current job. “If you’re blocked, you need to leave.”

Dolich was executive vice president of the Oakland A’s, working for Alderson, when he got his first chance to run a team. He was coming off a spectacular run, and was known across baseball as the marketing mind behind the famed “BillyBall” campaign. He knew he had it good with the A’s.

And yet when he was courted by the Golden State Warriors, a feeble franchise in the midst of a power struggle in which one owner had sued the others, Dolich listened. The Warriors offered something the A’s had not.

“The attraction was walking across the hallway from the Coliseum to the Arena to be president,” Dolich said. “What? A little kid from Long Island who loved basketball, president of an NBA team? … Somebody offers you that, and you just kind of pinch yourself.”

Dolich took the job. He lasted only nine months before his relationship with the owner who had prevailed crumbled. Dolich hung a shingle out on a consultancy, then joined the dot-com rage for a time before returning to team sports as president of business operations with the soon-to-be-relocated Vancouver Grizzlies in 2000. Last year, he left the Grizzlies to return to the Bay Area with the 49ers.

All these years, and stops, later, Dolich is thankful that he took that hellish job with the Warriors because, briefly though it was, it represented first passage onto exclusive ground. He remembers that while he was slogging his way up in baseball, a friend told him that you couldn’t be a team president until you were a team president.

“Back then, I thought that was the stupidest thing I’d ever heard of in my life,” Dolich said. “But it makes sense now. You need to be thought of as presidential by somebody else before you can be president.”

As executive vice president of sales and marketing for both the Texas Rangers and Dallas Stars, Cogen oversaw about half the employees in a 150-person organization, with responsibility for most of the franchise’s revenue. He figured the move to the top slot with the Florida Panthers couldn’t entail much more.

He realizes now that he underestimated what awaited him. He wasn’t as well-prepared as he thought, particularly when it came to leadership. After two years Cogen returned to Dallas and to Hicks, this time as COO of the Rangers. Within a year, he was promoted to team president.

How did he pull that off, considering the fact that Jim Lites, his old boss and mentor, remained in the picture?

It was complicated. And unpredictable. Soon after Cogen left for Miami, Lites, who had been president of both the Rangers and Stars, left for a job running the Phoenix Coyotes. That lasted only eight months. Lites came back to Dallas, but only to run the hockey team. Hicks restructured his sports holdings. Cogen returned. Eventually, the shake-

The Miami Heat’s president of business operations, Eric Woolworth, was skiing with his family in Aspen when his predecessor and then-boss, Jay Cross, called to tell him that he was leaving to become president of the New York Jets.


Woolworth chuckles as he tells the story.

“I was standing up, and I had to sit down,” Woolworth said. “My head started to spin.”

About 30 seconds later, Heat owner Micky Arison called from Europe. It was another surprisingly brief conversation. “Go get it done,” said Arison, who long had shown confidence in Woolworth, the son-in-law of his vice chairman at Carnival Cruise Lines. Woolworth caught the next flight back to Miami.

“It was, in retrospect, pretty hysterical,” Woolworth said. “But at the time, it was, ‘Ohmygod, what just happened?’”

Woolworth realized that as Cross’ No. 2, he was never more than that one phone call away from running the franchise.

“But while you may think about it,” Woolworth said, “that doesn’t mean you think it’s going to happen tomorrow.”

— Bill King
out created the opportunity for Cogen to ascend as president of the Rangers.

He remained in that role through three seasons, and then Hicks shuffled the cards again. He moved Lites out of hockey to oversee development of a $700 million stadium for the soccer team he owns in England. He made Cogen president of the Stars. And he hired Nolan Ryan to replace Cogen with the Rangers.

Cogen had to leave to get his first chance to run a team. “When I was No. 2, I said I was perfectly happy being Jimmy’s No. 2 forever,” Cogen said. “But you know, as I’ve gotten a taste of it, I like the first-class upgrades. I like the Ritz-Carlton. And I never thought I’d be like this.”

Cogen offers this advice, tracking back to the elevator analogy:

“Pick a specialty and be great at it,” Cogen said. “And play the game. Coordinators become managers. Managers become directors. Directors become vice presidents. Vice presidents become EVPs.

“Now you’re at the 15th floor. Good luck.”

Finding a right candidate

Joe Bailey, executive recruiter, had spent three hours with Miami Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga, interviewing an A-level candidate for a position that Huizenga was creating. He wanted someone to oversee both the team and Dolphin Stadium, along with the development of property around it.

Bailey introduced Huizenga to six or seven candidates over the course of five weeks. After this latest one left, Bailey shut the door and asked Huizenga what he thought.


“But when are you going to take this job?” Bailey said Huizenga’s question floored him. He’d spent most of his adult life around the NFL, starting with 19 seasons with the Dallas Cowboys, where he worked his way up from the equipment room to scouting and then the front office as a senior vice president. He did five years at the league office, working on what was then the World League. He had a short stint as deputy commissioner of the NTRA. His experience fit the profile of what Huizenga wanted in a CEO.

But now Bailey was in another stage of his career, running the sports and entertainment practice at an international executive search firm, Russell Reynolds Associates.

“I’m flattered,” Bailey told Huizenga. “But I think you can do better.”

He convinced Huizenga to speak to two more candidates. After he did, the owner came back at Bailey, this time even harder.

“I had no scintilla of interest in this job at all,” Bailey says now, three years after taking it. “He ended up convincing me that for a variety of reasons this would be an interesting challenge.

“People say I’m like Dick Cheney. You do the search and then the next thing you’re vice president of the United States. Nothing could be further from the truth. I had no inkling it would turn out this way. But it’s a moment in time. At that moment, you believe an individual is the right person for the situation, and it all comes together.”

The moment and situation dictate the person.

“I used to think there was a best candidate,” said Buffy Filippelli, who in 1987 launched the nation’s first sports-focused search firm, TeamWork Consulting. “There actually is a right candidate instead of a best candidate.

The right candidate varies based upon what is important to ownership at that moment. It might include success running another franchise. Or a strong marketing bent. Or experience managing a brand. Or charismatic leadership. Or any combination of the above.

When Bailey lined up a list of candidates for the Dolphins job, he believed every one of them could do the job.

“They all fit from a competency standpoint,” Bailey said. “Now, how do they get along with Wayne? Do they have a shared vision? And can they buy into what Wayne would like to do? There’s competency, and then there’s chemistry. And you have to have both.”

When Edmonton businessman Cal Nichols was putting together a group to buy the Edmonton Oilers from Peter Pocklington in the late 1990s, he hired Patrick LaForge as a consultant. LaForge was a former Molson executive who managed the brewery’s relationships with several NHL franchises and served as vice president of international marketing.

After about 18 months, when the ownership group finally was assembled and the deal closed, Nichols asked LaForge to come run the team. LaForge agreed to do it, in large part because he trusted Nichols, who had promised him the resources and authority to make over the operation. LaForge secured a guaranteed contract that assured that, even if it all went to hell, he’d get his money.

“If you want to have any history in this business, you have to recruit the owner, same as he’s recruiting you,” LaForge said. “Interview the owner. What’s his character? How big is his wallet? Can you trust one another? It sounds like dating. But it becomes very intimate.

“If you don’t share dreams, it’s not going to happen.”

Some owners find that the best way to assure that sort of chemistry is to hire a president with whom they’ve shared Bunsen burners for years, or even decades.

Such is the story of Arte Moreno and Dennis Kuhl.

Los Angeles traffic being what it is, Kuhl was not surprised that he was running late for his alma mater’s basketball game on a Saturday night in March 2003. Arizona trailed Kansas 38-35 at halftime when Kuhl finally made it through the doors of Arrowhead Pond in Anaheim and hooked up with his old Alpha Tau Omega fraternity brother, Moreno.

They were hustling to their seats when Moreno grabbed Kuhl by the arm, pointed to a passer-by sporting an Angels cap, and asked, “What do you think of that hat?”

“I like it,” Kuhl said, perplexed.

“Yeah?” Moreno said.

“Yeah, I like the new colors and everything.” Kuhl said, wondering why they were reviewing baseball fashion in the concourse while their Wildcats were playing with a Final Four berth on the line. Moreno ducked in closer and grinned. “I think I just bought
The phone call that accelerated Jamey Rootes’ already rapid ascendency in the sports business came shortly after he was married. It was late in 1999, and Rootes was beginning to make a name for himself as a former Procter & Gamble MBA who had built one of Lamar Hunt’s MLS franchises, the Columbus Crew, from scratch.

An executive recruiter, Buffy Filippell, phoned to ask if he’d be interested in a job with the NFL expansion franchise in Houston.

“You’ve done this startup thing in soccer and done great,” Filippell told him. “Big fish, small pond. Now, why don’t you dive into a big pond and help us start up this new NFL team?”

Rootes thanked Filippell for the interest and explained that he was newly married and needed to discuss the move with his wife. Within minutes of hanging up, he caught himself. “Wait a minute,” Rootes said. “What am I doing?” He called Filippell back.

“I don’t know if I can take it or not, Buffy,” he told her. “But I’m absolutely interested in this job.”

As president and general manager of the Crew, Rootes ran the entire franchise, including the stadium. With the Texans, he would be vice president of sales and marketing, responsible for fleshing out revenue production for the expansion franchise.

“It was a step backwards in scope of responsibility, but size was a 40-fold increase,” Rootes said. “So that’s OK. I’m 34 years old at the time. I’ve got plenty of time to catch up.”

It didn’t take him long. Rootes was promoted to senior vice president three months after he was hired. In October 2005, he was named president of business operations. Last year, owner Bob McNair shortened his title.

“We took the biz ops off the end of president,” Rootes said, smiling, “because we don’t have another one.”

— Bill King

Rootes found room to grow in big pond

“Wherever you are on the food chain, do great work. So much of what I see now is a sense of entitlement. For those of us that have been in it for a while, these opportunities are few and far between. So when someone comes in thinking that because they have a certain pedigree — an Ivy League MBA, for example — they deserve this, that’s not particularly appealing.”

— TERDEMA USSERT, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DALLAS MAVERICKS
Making the right move

When Larry Miller was coming out of Temple University with an accounting degree, he prepped for job interviews the way most students do, anticipating questions and preparing answers. He knew the recruiters would ask where he envisioned himself in five years. He knew most of his classmates would say they hoped to be controllers or CFOs. Miller told them he wanted to be a decision-maker.

Well aware of the scarcity of the type of job Davidson was offering, Campbell took the assignment. His family moved to Tampa and settled in comfortably. In 2004, the Lightning won the Stanley Cup.

When Bailey tried to find someone to run the Dolphins, but the owner chose him instead.

“Even then, I was willing to take the responsibility of helping to make those decisions, and to reap the rewards if it was a good decision and deal with the consequences if it was a bad decision,” said Miller, who last year moved from one of the top jobs at Nike to run the Portland Trail Blazers. “That was what motivated me. So I always looked to move into more decision-making roles.”

Miller was in one of those roles, running Nike’s global basketball business, including Brand Jordan, when a friend with the Trail Blazers told him that he thought Miller would be the perfect person to run the franchise, and asked if he could pass Miller’s name to Tod Leiweke, who oversees billionaire Paul Allen’s sports holdings. Miller agreed, but didn’t think of it as any more than a feeling out.

Leiweke and Miller met for drinks at a Portland steakhouse, hit it off, and ended up staying for dinner and trading ideas for more than three hours. Then they agreed to meet again. And again. After those informal sessions, Leiweke asked Miller to consider the job more seriously, and get back to him if he wanted to be a candidate. Two days later, Miller phoned to say he wanted in.

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“The more I got into it,” Miller said, “the more it felt like it was the right move for me at this point.”

Leiweke’s hiring of Miller is particularly instructive, in the context of this story. While he oversees all of Allen’s sports holdings as CEO of Vulcan Sports and Entertainment, most of Leiweke’s time is spent running the Seattle Seahawks. And he’s got a well-grounded, well-traveled, sports marketing background.

Before going to work for Allen, Leiweke was president of the expansion Minnesota Wild. He also had stints as executive vice president of Orca Bay, which owned the Vancouver Canucks and Grizzlies, president of the Houston Rockets and vice president of marketing for the Golden State Warriors. He got his start in the sports business when he and his brothers launched an indoor soccer team in Kansas City.

Debriefing Leiweke offers a window into what an experienced team president might look for in a team president.

Turns out he went outside of what he might have looked for elsewhere, because he felt comfortable that he had a handle on the traditional core skills — selling tickets, in particular. He was looking for a leader who could energize a staff and rebuild a brand, and do it in a quirky market that might puzzle an outsider.

“They had good people there who were ready to be liberated out of crisis and into a proactive mode,” Leiweke said. “Larry’s expertise, his reputation at Nike, was that he was this guy that everybody liked. He was a problem solver. His door was always open. A lot of people confided in him. And he was very relevant in basketball.”

Because of all that, Leiweke didn’t so much care that Miller had not run a team. Miller’s inexperience was trumped soundly by his standing in Portland, where he’d spent the previous 16 years in the starting lineup at an iconic brand. Boston Celtics owner Wyc Grousbeck made a similar choice when he hired Rich Gotham to run his franchise.

The most recent NBA team president to add a championship ring to his jewelry case was coming off a dot-com option payday that allowed him to take a year off, play with his three children, and plan his career path.
That’s when his sports ship came in.

Gotham was tapping at his computer on a Friday afternoon when the phone rang.

“I’m Wyc Grousbeck, owner of the Celtics,” said the voice on the other end.

“Yeah, I’ve been following that you bought the team,” said Gotham, who shared season tickets with some friends. “I’m a huge Celtics fan.”

Grousbeck was searching for someone to run the Celtics business side. Gotham’s name had come up several times. This wasn’t a surprise to Gotham. His previous job was as vice president of U.S. sales for TerraLycos. The former CEO and COO of Lycos both had ties to the venture capital firm at which Grousbeck was a partner. Grousbeck suggested that Gotham look at the operation. If they clicked, they could talk about employment. If not, Gotham could at least pass along a few marketing ideas and Grousbeck would toss him some choice playoff tickets.

It sounded like a no-lose proposition. It got even better for Gotham when the two men hit it off over lunch.

“From that point on, it was just a question of trying to figure out a way that I could say yes to it,” Gotham said, “because it’s really what I wanted to do in my heart.”

In his head, there were hurdles to clear. He’d made a name in the dot-com world and, at 39, he wasn’t ready to leave it.

“I don’t really want to be part of someone’s hobby,” Gotham said. “I take my career seriously and I want to know that the guys I’m working for take the business part of it seriously.”

Grousbeck assured him that he did. He wanted to drag the Celtics business model into the 21st century while keeping intact the rich traditions of a storied brand. That challenge intrigued Gotham.

He also came away confident that, even if the marriage with sports didn’t work, he could build enough connections through the Celtics ownership group, which is loaded with venture capital players, that he could find his way back to a familiar world.

In his mind, Gotham was working with a net. He didn’t need it. He started five years ago as executive vice president, added the title of chief operating officer in 2006 and was named president at the end of last season — just in time for a championship.

“People always ask me if this was my dream job,” Gotham said. “Well, I never really dreamt about it, because it was never something that I thought was within my wherewithal.”

Why do this to yourself?

A bit more than a year ago, Roy Mlakar’s 32-year-old daughter, Tracy, greeted him with word that she was starting work on a master’s in sports administration, which would mean driving about 45 minutes to Long Beach four days a week for classes and projects. This on top of a full-time job in the development office at UCLA, and a commitment to run a church youth group on Sunday nights.

“She told me this, and I said, ‘Why?’” said Mlakar. “‘Don’t you remember the struggles we went through, Tracy? When you were born, I made $15,000. It’s too difficult. Too hard a road. Why the hell would you do this to yourself?’

Tracy Mlakar volleyed with an answer all too familiar.

“Because,” she said, “I really want to get into sports.”
and his Montreal roots, he felt certain he was the man to engineer the necessary change.

“Being a Montrealer all my life and having followed the franchise, you always feel like you know as much if not more than the people managing it,” Boivin said. “So I felt I came on board with an awful lot of knowledge, only to quickly realize I didn’t know a damned thing.”

Boivin chuckled. It wasn’t that he was clueless, so much as that he kept reading and hearing that he was clueless. In fact, once he got into the job he found that his prior management experience was even more applicable than he’d expected.

The piece that was unlike the other businesses — and different from anything he anticipated — was the public side of it. For the first time in his career, there were pundits to blister decisions. Were he not so confident in his plan, the criticism would have tested his resolve.

“Wilson concedes that this shouldn’t come as a surprise. Sports is, after all, a visible business about which people care deeply. Anyone with the smarts and skills to land a job running a team should anticipate the repercussions.

“You may think you understand it,” Wilson said, “but until you turn on that radio and start hearing your name, it’s something you’re just not prepared for.”

Almost all of the nearly 30 ranking executives interviewed for this story pointed to the public nature of their job as a factor that distinguishes them from their counterparts outside of sports.

“Newspapers dedicate an entire section to your industry, and we’re small businesses,” said Jay Cross, the outgoing president of the New York Jets who also headed the Miami Heat. “We’re not big businesses. And yet we have these incredible klieg lights turned on us all the time. That is unique. Dealing with the exposure is entirely unique.”

Some put up with it. Others are attracted to it.

When Ussery was recruited to run the Mavericks, he was drawn in by the chance to see how he’d hold up on a grand stage.

“I just wanted to experience what it’s like to day in and day out experience extreme success and phe-

LaForge quickly learned how sports can make execs the center of attention.

The president and COO for the Phoenix Coyotes, Doug Moss, landed his first chance to run a team after making his bones as head of MSG Network. The Buffalo Sabres hired him as president in 1994.

It was at the tail end of five-and-dime magnate Seymour Knox’s ownership of the team, and the Sabres were under the gun financially. Moss inherited a payroll budget that wasn’t enough to allow for a competitive team. During his first meeting with the bankers who financed Knox, he asked how much room there was to expand his budget, based on the existing loan covenants.

None.

He asked whether they might change the terms to allow for it.

No.

Having come from MSG, which then was a unit of Paramount, Moss felt like he had walked into the wrong meeting room. When he wanted to go outside his budget with the network to make an acquisition, he didn’t deal with bankers. He went to Stanley Jaffe, the president of Paramount. Maybe his mistake here was in dealing with the bank all at once.

So he went back to the Knox family and explained he couldn’t achieve what they had hired him to do if they didn’t infuse the franchise with more cash.

Nope, they said. You have what you have. Make do with it.

“It was a stark change from the Garden, which could do anything,” Moss said. “Whether they wanted to was another thing. But they could. It was a whole different world. I gained a lot of perspective from that.”

— Bill King
nomenal failure,” Ussery said. “A team is unique in that sense. You’re graded every day, in a very public way, and you live with that. You’re in line at the movie theater and people tell you you’re a jerk because your team lost a game. Or everyone wants to shake your hand and buy you a drink. The emotional highs and lows — there’s nothing like it.”

When he was contemplating an offer to leave his post as MLB’s chief labor counsel to take over the presidency of the Pittsburgh Pirates, Frank Coonelly fretted about whether he could handle the emotional drain.

A lifelong Philadelphia Phillies fan, he made it a nightly routine to check his BlackBerry for an early-inning Phillies score before boarding the train each evening for a lengthy commute home. He typically got in his car by around 9:30 and would tune the game in on the radio. He could usually count on being home in time to watch at least the ninth.

“On those nights when the Phillies blew the game late, I’d be so miserable that for that little bit of time that I was home with my wife and kids I’d barely talk to them,” Coonelly said. “And I wasn’t even involved with that team, other than as a fan. What was I going to be like when it was my job?”

Coonelly decided to find out. He hasn’t disappointed himself. The losses sting every bit as much as he feared when he was a fan. Still, he said he’s been able to balance it, because he knows that part of his role is to lead, and he doesn’t want to drag his staff down.

“There’s no chance I can act as if I don’t care,” Coonelly said. “But you can’t take the losses into work the next day.”

As for taking them home … he’s working on it.

The president and CEO of the Edmonton Oilers, Patrick LaForge, began his career in the marketing department at Molson Breweries in 1979, rising to vice president of international marketing and overseeing most of the brand’s sports sponsorships, including those with the Oilers, Canadiens, Toronto Maple Leafs and Calgary Flames.

He chuckles when he compares the attention paid to a public company like Molson to that paid to a sports franchise.

“People generally don’t blog about your public company,” LaForge said. “They don’t give your employees shit when they’re at the Safeway. They don’t cheer you or boo you. They don’t take their shirts off and wave them in the air for Google or IBM or anyone else. It’s all emotion.

“My mother is 87 years old. We win a Stanley Cup game and she’s up dancing. What the hell is that?”

Managing the transition

When management works speak of the “on-boarding process,” they typically mean it to describe the orientation that employees receive when they take a new job.

Joe Bailey spins it around. The Miami Dolphins CEO, who formerly headed the sports practice for a headhunting firm, uses it to describe the early days of a senior executive — and particularly a CEO or president — who has come to a team from another franchise, or especially another line of work.

This is when the new boss marshals the employees, lays out a vision and a plan, and asks them to climb aboard.

For the known quantity who rose from within an organization’s sales force or provided its legal advice, this is a graduation. For the outsider, it’s a baptism.

There’s a reason that soldiers call their first taste of battle “baptism by fire.”

When he was a headhunter, Bailey often reminded C-level executives who were changing jobs that 60 percent of CEOs who failed cast their own lots in their first six to nine months. They mismanaged the transition and never recovered from their missteps.

His advice on avoiding derailment: Find an ally within the incumbent senior staff and ask them to help you understand the culture of the organization and the history of the people.

Bailey tells the story of one senior executive at a league who came into the job amid great fanfare, only to implode almost immediately because on his first conference call with owners he suggested a path that they’d rejected three previous times. By the end of that first call, he had lost credibility with half his constituents.

“If there had been someone there to tell him ‘Don’t say that; not today,’ he might still be there today,” Bailey said.

Those who have parachuted into organizations with no previous team experience say that admitting as much to yourself is crucial. Often, one or more executives who remain from the previous administration see themselves as candidates who were passed over.

That’s touchy ground.

So is the fear that someone who hasn’t worked at a team will come in with ideas that sound good to the owner, but in reality are difficult to implement.

“If you’re an outsider, you need to come in and listen first and speak later,” said Vancouver Canucks President and CEO Chris Zimmerman, who, like Boivin, came from the top job at Nike Bauer hockey to take over an NHL team. “I think that’s really critical. I had the advantage of some really strong brand credentials and also having credibility with regard to the sport. Those help. But, you know, I’d never worked with a hockey team before.”

Luc Robitaille certainly had worked for one before. But never out of skates. Robitaille played 19 seasons in the NHL, 14 of them with the Los Angeles Kings. When he retired at the end of the 2005-06 season, he was the highest scoring left winger ever in the NHL. In May 2007, the Kings named Robitaille president of business operations.

Robitaille wasn’t sure what he wanted to do after he finished playing, but he knew he wasn’t cut out to
split his time between the sofa and the links. So he approached the president of Kings owner AEG, Tim Leiweke, about where in the organization he might fit. Robitaille told Leiweke that he was leaning toward the business side.

They agreed that Robitaille should spend a year around AEG, learning the organization and attending owners meetings. He asked for an office in the building, which surprised Leiweke. Robitaille intended to learn by watching.

“I went to regular meetings with every department for a year,” Robitaille said. “And I didn’t say a word for a long time. I think that was important. Nobody told me that, but I just knew that. I had to learn before I could expect them to listen to me.”

Jamey Rootes had never worked in sports when Lamar Hunt hired him to launch an MLS franchise in the nation’s first soccer-specific stadium in Columbus.

As team owners’ offspring come aboard, some presidents get to train their new bosses

By Bill King  Senior Writer

Soon after he bought the Montreal Canadiens in 2001, George Gillett approached the team’s incumbent president about the role that his 25-year-old son, Foster, would play in the management of the team.

Behind a poker-faced nod of intrigue, Pierre Boivin cringed.

“I’ve had some tough situations in that regard, and I didn’t know how this one would go,” said Boivin, the former Nike Bauer Hockey CEO who was recruited to head the Canadiens’ front office in 1999, after 22 years in the sporting goods business. “Really, it depends on how the son is, and how the relationship between the son and father is.

“Foster has been outstanding. But, you never know.”

While most owners hand day-to-day management of the franchise over to a seasoned executive, almost all teams are, at their core, small to midsized family-owned businesses. When the next generation of that family comes along, taking over day-to-day management of the franchise may be on their to-do list.

Some CEOs, presidents and executive vice presidents end up training their eventual replacements. Others are training their eventual bosses.

Jeff Cogen has run both of the major U.S. sports franchises owned by Texas billionaire Tom Hicks. Now president of the Dallas Stars, he filled the same role with the Texas Rangers for three years.

Early in his tenure running the baseball franchise, he began working closely with Hicks’ oldest son, Tommy. One afternoon, during a chat about other matters, it occurred to Cogen that it was time to let his boss know he was comfortable playing the role of teacher, even if it meant training the person who one day would take his job.

“Boss, we’ve never talked about this, but I consider it one of my responsibilities to train Tommy,” Cogen told Hicks, “and to make sure that he’s ready to take these reins.”

Hicks waved a hand.

“Ahhhh, don’t make a bigger deal out of that than it is,” Hicks told him. “He’s got a better job than you’ve got.”

Cogen realized he’d been naïve. Tommy Hicks wasn’t training to be the president. He was training to be the owner.

“If that other phenomenon does occur, and he does replace me as president one day, that’s not a reflection on my capabilities,” Cogen said. “He’s the owner. We all understand that.”

Such is the nature of a family business.

Seven years into Gillett’s ownership of the Canadiens, Boivin has navigated the generational relationship deftly. When the time came to discuss Foster Gillett’s role, he suggested that they keep it loose. “Let’s not give Foster a position,” Boivin said. “It wouldn’t be fair to him. He doesn’t have a lot of experience.”

Boivin explained that, instead, he wanted Foster Gillett to take the title “assistant to the president,” working at his side and joining in the debate as they made decisions. Both father and son agreed. After five years in that role, the son ascended to managing partner, the role he holds today.

“He learned immensely during that five-year period because he had access,” Boivin said. “The right individual will respect that privilege, will cherish it, will learn from it and will contribute always because he realizes that he’s part of things. The wrong kind of individual will cause an awful lot of tension.”

While that model worked for Gillett, it’s a matter of individual choice.

Rita Benson LeBlanc, granddaughter of New Orleans Saints owner Tom Benson, worked summers at the team’s offices and later interned at the NFL office and at NFL Films. She joined the team full time when she graduated from Texas A&M in 2001.

Throughout her time at the franchise, Benson LeBlanc has held dual roles. She attended owners meetings, but also took on projects in each department. The tasks were sometimes menial and tedious. She entered data for the coaching staff. She worked in media relations. She went on sponsor sales calls. The idea was to get a breadth of experience and then allow her to assume management responsibilities.

“I don’t think it’s a good thing to sit there with a vague title or to not have responsibility for a task,” said Benson LeBlanc, who took over day-to-day operation of the franchise in 2006.

“There are perception issues there. If you don’t have a structured program, people always think you’re just floating in nebulous land.

“It’s an interesting role to play. It’s never perfect and it’s never easy for family members. Fortunately, most people here saw me coming back every year and working, and they knew that I actually did work. … People who know my grandfather know that he has a tremendous work ethic, and that anything less than that (from me) just wouldn’t fly with him.”

Of course, if it did, there wouldn’t be much anyone could do about it. There are distinctions between running a business that someone else owns and running one that you will someday own.

Think about this. When the big four leagues gather to chart strategy and vote on issues, they don’t call those franchise meetings, or CEO meetings. They call them owners meetings.

“When you get into those meetings, there are owners, there are owners’ sons, and then there are guys like me,” Cogen said. “I’ve spoken once in 25 meetings.

“It was to push the button on the microphone during roll call and go, ‘Hicks, Hicks, Cogen.’”
“I think the biggest challenge people have when they come from the outside is that they come in thinking, ‘I know how this thing should work and I’m going to save these people from themselves,’” said Rootes, the Texans’ president. “If that’s your approach, that you’re going to come down with the tablets to explain to everyone how business works, you’re probably going to have a challenge.”

Acceptance by the incumbent staff is one half of the equation. Finding which of them fit your philosophy is another.

With the Mavericks, Ussery has been through a pair of front-office transitions. The first was his own arrival, again, as an executive who never had worked for a team. Then, less than four years later, the team was sold to Mark Cuban, the hard-charging entrepreneur who would install an entirely different culture.

“The first thing any successful CEO needs to do is shut up, sit down, and listen,” Ussery said. “You come in and take stock of the landscape. You listen to people and what their concerns are. And then you come up with your agenda of how to turn the ship. Then it’s a question of getting buy-in from all those folks who have been here and giving them a fair opportunity to get on board with the new program. A lot of people are able to, but some are not.”

Executives who have been with a franchise for 10 or 20 years, through multiple administrations, and believe that they’ve been successful may be resistant to change. Ussery ran into that when he took over the front office, and again when Cuban bought the team. “The key is, when you run into those folks, you’ve got to give them a fair shot to get on board,” he said. “And then, if they don’t, you gotta let ‘em go.”

**Who reports to whom?**

The president and CEO of the Ottawa Senators chooses his words carefully as he outlines the reporting structure at the franchise he has run since 1996.

“The hockey end currently reports to owner—

ship,” said Roy Mlakar, who spent 17 years in the minors and has run three NHL teams. “That is not the way it has always been in my career. If you look at 30 teams, you’re going to find different reporting lines with a lot of them.

“When it comes to that, I have referred to it as OP: Owner’s prerogative. It’s very simple. That’s what I believe it is. And you adjust accordingly, whether it’s one way or another. I’m not saying there’s a right or wrong way. Just two ways.”

This may be the most significant of the ways in which sports franchises depart from the structure of many businesses. Most team presidents and CEOs feel they are responsible for the bottom line financial results of the franchise, as are the CEOs at General Motors, Bank Of America and AT&T. But, in many cases, the CEOs of sports franchises don’t control what is overwhelmingly the largest expense, player payroll.

Some shrug their shoulders when asked how they manage that, as if it’s as simple as balancing a checkbook when someone else writes many of the checks.

Some teams, and particularly those in the NBA, have moved to clarify the reporting structure by splitting the presidency into business operations and sports operations. But most still operate with a president and a general manager, with the general manager reporting to the owner.

If the general manager wants to add $5 million to the payroll at the trade deadline, he typically goes straight to ownership. The president may lend advice, but the call is often made outside his authority.

“It’s not lost on anybody in the room that if the payroll number fluctuates by 10 percent from budget, it’s going to have a material impact on the bottom line,” said Jeff Cogen, president of the Dallas Stars. “But that’s a decision that’s made by the boss (owner Tom Hicks). He can set my goals and alter them based on market conditions.”

Rootes said he’s comfortable with that split of the business with the Houston Texans. Though the Texans recently adjusted his title to make him president, rather than president of business operations, the club’s general

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**Corporate vets find sports more fluid**

Like most businesses, sports comes with its quirks.

Before he came to hockey, Columbus Blue Jackets President Mike Priest was used to the sort of payback analysis he would do on a manufacturing or distribution business that the John McConnell family owned or invested in.

If a new piece of equipment cost $2 million, but it would produce an additional 1,000 pieces an hour, he could calculate the savings and assess how long it would take for the machine to pay for itself. If the numbers added up, he made the purchase.

A CPA by trade, Priest found that no such reasoned approach existed when the late Blue Jackets owner asked him to take over management of the hockey club.

“What you cannot do very well is decide that this 24-year-old defenseman who is going to require a commitment of five years at $4 million a year is going to play well enough to justify what it costs to sign him,” Priest said. “Getting used to allowing your organization to make decisions like that without the ability to see concrete evidence that it’s going to work is difficult. It’s more artful than it is a science.

“For someone with my background, that’s certainly been something to swallow.”

Long before he landed the controller’s job at a swimwear company, parlayed it into a far bigger one running Brand Jordan for Nike, and then crossed over into the team sports world as president of the Portland Trail Blazers, Larry Miller worked as an accountant for Campbell Soup Co.

It was his first job out of college. “You know, tomato soup is tomato soup,” Miller said. “You produce X number of cans and sell X number of cans of the tomato soup. Here, every day it’s a new game. Every day it’s something different. It’s dynamic. If you don’t enjoy that kind of dynamic situation, then this is not the kind of business for you to get into.”

— Bill King
manager still reports to owner Bob McNair. Rootes’ performance is gauged based on the profit he shows after deducting business expenses from revenue.

Some chief executives say they could never accept that sort of division of authority and accountability, where a general manager dealt directly with an owner.

“What the owner gets is a plate on the door and a parking spot and all the things he should get in a successful business,” said the Oilers’ LaForge. “But he shouldn’t be day-to-day hands on. The owner makes emotional decisions about things that need rational and logical digestion. You can’t do that in business.”

Another hockey executive, Boivin, compares the Canadiens hierarchy to that of a corporation in which he is the CEO and the general manager oversees a division. He says the hockey department runs through him. Still, he acknowledges that, in sports, there must be leeway to that structure.

“There have to be clear reporting relationships with a hierarchy,” Boivin said. “But in this business, because the owners are passionate, because these are small businesses in scale, and because there’s an emotional roller coaster called winning and losing, the owners have to have access to the people who run the sports side of the business.

“You can’t deny that to them. It’s why most of them got into this.”

Though Mlakar won’t voice a preference, the animation he shows when sharing war stories leaves the impression that he was, at the very least, having more fun when he was running both business and hockey. One of his favored yarns shows the connection between the two.

Late in the 1999-2000 season, the Senators had the look of a team that could go deep in the playoffs, if only they could add an experienced goaltender. One afternoon, his general manager, Marshall Johnston, came to his office with word that he could land Penguins veteran Tom Barrasso in a trade, but there was a catch. They’d have to kick in $350,000 in cash.

The club was already at its player budget of about $25 million for the season. But rather than shooting the deal down, Mlakar made the rounds of the building to see if he could find the money. The marketing department said it could do without giveaways for the first round of the playoffs, a savings of about $50,000. Corporate sales figured the extra playoff games would be worth at least $75,000 more. Mlakar got two players to take deferrals on their contracts, and, in a matter of hours, he’d come up with the $350,000.

He went to the office of owner Rod Bryden with the news of the money he’d found.

“Good job,” Bryden told him through a thick Canadian brogue that Mlakar parrots with aplomb. “And your player budget is?”

“We’re at it Mr. Bryden,” Mlakar said.

“I know that,” Bryden said. “And you found $350,000? Why didn’t you find that last June?”

“Well, I …” Mlakar stuttered.

“Give it to me,” the owner said. “It goes in my jeans.”

As he recounted the story, Mlakar’s jaw dropped in shock. Then, a look of recognition replaced it.

“When you think about it, he’s absolutely right,” Mlakar said. “That’s the job. How do you maximize revenue? You’ve got to hit these targets. Here’s your player budget, Marshall, and that’s it. We were taught never come back and ask. It is what it is. I approve it, you go run it.”

“Rod Bryden was a very smart guy.”

Smart enough to know when to take his president over the hurdles to make a point, and when to give ground to make the most of an opportunity.

He called Mlakar back into his office. They made the Barrasso deal.

From P&L to W’s and L’s

Boivin became accustomed to the rhythms of reporting to a board of directors in what sometimes seems like a lifetime ago.

He has found that reporting to a single owner can be a liberating experience.

And that reporting to a team owner can create a tension unlike anything else.

“It’s different from other businesses,” Boivin said.

“You don’t have quarterly results to report to ownership. You have three results a week.

“That’s an awful lot of explaining to do.”

Losses always brought Coonelly down as a fan, and running a club has only made it worse.

Outsiders should listen first and speak later, former Nike Bauer chief Zimmerman says.
By Bill King  

Senior Writer

When former Tampa Bay Lightning owner Bill Davidson reached agreement to sell the team last August, its president, Ron Campbell, thought it meant he was out of a job. Or at least that job.

Campbell represented Davidson throughout the negotiations with a group that included Hollywood producer Oren Koules, former hockey coach and executive Doug MacLean and South Florida real estate investor Jeff Sherrin.

The talks started smoothly and moved quickly.

Only two months after the sides first met, they announced a deal. But then they hit several snags. The application process for ownership took longer than expected. The financing hiccuped.

Through it, Campbell impressed the new owners, helping them work through the hurdles. Still, they made it clear to him that while his work was appreciated, it wasn’t going to lead to a lasting relationship.

“I was told we think the world of you, we think you’re awesome, but we’re bringing a president with us,” said Campbell. “We don’t need two. Nothing personal.”

When former Tampa Bay Lightning owner Bill Davidson made a bid for the Lightning, he sent Campbell to Tampa to negotiate the deal. Then, he asked him to stay there and run it.

Campbell had mixed feelings. His wife hated the job. She had moved twice before, and now he was about to move again. It’s tough. But it goes on. And it’s true of others. I always think of Dave Checketts as a media guy. You end up with a certain profile based on your background."

By Bill King  

Senior Writer

Reputation as ‘building guy’ opens doors but carries limits

Miami Heat owner Micky Arison was out to hire a specialist who could land the franchise the new arena that it desperately needed when he came upon his next team president.

The architect who pulled off a similar trick for the Toronto Raptors was married to an American wife who wanted to move back to the States.

The pairing seemed ideal. But there was one hitch.

“As I thought about my career going forward, I did not want to be a building guy who came and went from team to team, even though that was my skill set,” said Jay Cross, an architect with a knack for political maneuvering who has parlayed those skills into a pair of sports presidencies, first with the Heat and then with the New York Jets.

“I wanted to move into managing people. I like managing organizations.

Fortunately for me, they said, ‘That’s OK, we need that, too.’”

Cross moved to Miami in the summer of ’96, ostensibly as a consultant on the arena project. He was named president of business operations by year’s end.

Five years later, when Robert “Woody” Johnson bought the Jets and began assembling the pieces for a stadium drive, one of his attorneys recommended he bring in Cross. It was a chance to spearhead what then was the most ambitious stadium ever in the U.S. Again, Cross took the job nominally as the president of stadium development, but his contract called for an elevation to president of the franchise when his predecessor retired.

For the second time in his career, Cross was able to parlay a valuable specialty into a pearl of a job.

“And you can’t take it personal.”

Telling the story in the restaurant of an Atlanta hotel on the eve of the NHL All-Star Game, Campbell seemed resigned to the tenuous nature of a perch atop a major sports franchise. Next to him, the president and CEO of the San Jose Sharks, Greg Jamison, nodded his head in empathy.

“Nature of the beast,” said Jamison, who has headed the Sharks since 1996 and managed to survive the team’s sale six years ago by assembling the group that bought it. “I’ve seen people in sports move and leave their family behind, then have them come join them, only to have to move again. It’s tough. But it goes with the territory.”

Campbell never planned to run a hockey team, or to run anything in Florida, for that matter. Born, raised and educated in and near Detroit, he met his wife in high school and they had three children. When Davidson made a bid for the Lightning, he sent Campbell to Tampa to negotiate the deal. Then, he asked him to stay there and run it.

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idea. But, ever the good soldiers, they went.

Now, nine years later, the Campbells do not want to leave. The older of their two daughters went to law school at the University of Florida and has made Tampa home. The couple also has a son entering his senior year of high school.

Once told that there wouldn’t be a place for him in the new administration, Campbell got a reprieve in November, when the group buying the team came apart. MacLean and Sherrin sued Koules. Koules settled by buying out his former partners. With MacLean out of the group, there once again was the chance that Campbell could remain as president.

He continued to work with Koules on the sale.

“Do I want to stay? Sure,” Campbell said at the All-Star Game. “I love Tampa. I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished. But I don’t know where this all will leave me. … All you can do is what you can do. You go to work every day, show your work ethic, the assets that you bring, your relationships in the community. And you know what? It’s up to them.”

Koules’ long path to purchase the team finally concluded last month. When he took control, he will be far more hands-on than his predecessor, Davidson, who rarely visited Tampa. Campbell’s role most certainly will change.

But at least it appears he’ll have one.

A perusal of the tenure of ranking sports executives at 120 teams in the four major leagues (two teams were omitted because of unclear structures) showed one-third have held their current title for less than two years. Barely 40 percent (49 of 120) have held their title for more than five years. Only 18 have held their current title for more than 10 years. The median tenures: Five years in MLB and the NHL, four in the NFL and two in the NBA.

It’s worth noting that this only takes into account what people are called, not what they do. Some were running their teams as EVPs or COOs for several years and recently got better titles. Even with that, the numbers are jarring.

“It’s the most vulnerable of positions,” said Tom Wilson, longtime CEO of the Detroit Pistons and Davidson’s sports and entertainment company, Palace Sports & Entertainment. “We are among the very first to go. You sort of understand that when you come here.”

Not holding the cards

The president and CEO of the Edmonton Oilers, Patrick LaForge, is a former Molson Brewery marketing executive who took charge of the franchise eight years ago, brought in by a cadre of local investors who put up the money to keep the team in town but had no clue how to right it.

That sale created an opportunity for him. Earlier this year, it appeared that another might cost him his job.

Like his colleague, Campbell, LaForge went to the All-Star Game in January with his future in the wind. Days before the game, billionaire drug store chain owner Daryl Katz wrapped up the last round of a protracted negotiation to purchase the team.

LaForge suspected the deal would be approved, but had no way of knowing whether the new owner would require his services.

“I think about it a lot,” LaForge said over coffee on the morning of the game. “His relationship with me is going to matter a hell of a lot to him and even more to me. If it’s good it might last a couple of years. And if it isn’t — that’s the way it is. I don’t really stay awake nights thinking about it. Not that I’m independently wealthy, but I understand the rules of the game. That’s the way it is.”

LaForge thought it likely that Katz would bring in someone he was familiar with to take his job. Katz might employ him for “a year or so” but then would likely thank LaForge for his trouble and send him along.

“I’m not OK with that, but I don’t know anything that I can do about it,” LaForge said. “The cards are on the table. They’re all face down. I can’t see them. But I’ve got my cards. There’s a fatalism in that, but there’s not any other way to deal with it.”

As it turns out, LaForge held a better hand than he expected. Soon after the $201 million sale was approved by NHL owners last month, Katz met with LaForge and asked him to stay on.

“He said he likes what I do,” LaForge said two weeks ago. “Keep it up.”

It doesn’t always play out that way.

In October 1999, Rick Welts still was relatively new to Los Angeles. He was energized. Excited. He faced a massive mess of a job.

Four months earlier, Welts had left the No. 3 spot at the NBA to become president of Fox Sports Enterprises, a newly created role. There, he was to assess the place of the Los Angeles Dodgers in the News Corp. portfolio, and then take over operation of the franchise.

The president of the St. Louis Cardinals began to think about the job that might follow his dream job a couple of years ago, after the club concluded the arduous task of building and opening a new ballpark.

Born and raised in St. Louis, a Cardinals cap fixed atop his head from boyhood, Lamping often told friends that the position he landed 13 years ago when he was only 36 was well beyond anything he would have dared aspire to.

And yet here he was, contemplating an exit, just as things were getting really good.

“I could not have had a better situation,” said Lamping, who left the Cardinals in April to head the joint stadium venture between the New York Giants and Jets. “I had an unbelievable boss. I was in my hometown. The franchise was in great shape. It would have been very easy to say I can just ride this out for the last 15 years. And that scared me, to be honest.

“When the thought came to me that everything is going OK and we can ride it out — I didn’t want to be in a job at 49 where I’m just riding it out.”

The timing was right for Lamping to make a move. His youngest child is off to college. His wife of 28 years would have steadfastly opposed a move while they were raising a family, but with the children out of the house and no grandchildren on the way, they agreed that an empty-nest stint in New York City could be energizing.

So it was that Lamping found himself approaching Cardinals owner Bill DeWitt with the news that he was moving on.

“I just don’t see myself being president of the Cardinals when I’m 65,” Lamping told DeWitt, to which the owner responded, “Why not?”

“I got the job when I was 36,” Lamping reminded him. “I asked myself, would I be satisfied with this being the last job I had? And the answer was no.”

Lamping isn’t sure whether the call to run a team will beckon him back one day, as it has many before him. He has committed to the stadium project for five years. So far, he likes it fine.

“There clearly is life,” Lamping said, “after working for a team.”

— Bill King
A former Seattle SuperSonics ballboy who went on to become the team’s public relations director, Welts long had missed the unpredictable peaks and valleys that went with a job at a sports franchise. He’d been approached four or five times to return to NBA teams in his 17 years at the league office, but none seemed like the right fit. The Dodgers were an iconic franchise. The job offered him a chance to return to the West. It sounded perfect.

On this night, Welts was having the sort of splendid time you can have when you’re a major player in the nation’s largest market. He was seated at a table at the grand opening of the glitzy Staples Center, sharing dinner with the top two executives from Fox, Chase Carey and Peter Chernin. A bit into the evening, Carey and Chernin asked Welts to join them upstairs in a suite to talk business.

They brought news that floored him.

Bob Daly, the outgoing CEO of Warner Bros., wanted to buy a piece of the Dodgers. But he would do it only if News Corp. turned over day-to-day control.

Welts laughed.

Carey and Chernin didn’t.

“They might really do this,” Carey said.

“But,” Welts said, digesting the implications, “that’s what I came here to do.”

Markets shift. Plans change. At the end of that month, Fox transferred operational control of the Dodgers to Daly, who hired his own team president, Bob Graziano, an old friend and former Dodgers officer. The job offered Welts the job as president and chief operating officer of the Suns.

“It was like, bingo,” Welts said. “If I was ever going to try this again, this was it. … The stars just lined up for me.”

For a while, anyway. Remember, this is sports.

Welts made it through a year before Colangelo announced he was selling the team. This time, it wasn’t a complete surprise. Welts knew Colangelo was looking for a buyer when he took the job. But he also knew that the sale likely would be staged, with Colangelo giving up his shares, and control, a bit at a time.

The transaction called for the new owner, banking wunderkind Robert Sarver, to keep Welts and the rest of the Suns management in place through a three-year transition.

“The new ownership was kind of stuck with us for a while,” Welts said. “Lo and behold, by the time that was completed, they decided they kind of liked what we did here. … But this is unusual. I don’t know, had we not staged the transaction the way we did, if it would have turned out this way.”

**It just happens**

Andy Dolich was six years into his stint as president of business operations with the Memphis Grizzlies when it became apparent to him that the franchise was heading down a bumpy road he’d traveled before.

After moving the franchise from Vancouver, getting an arena up and running, and building interest in a team that never quite got there, Grizzlies owner Michael Heisley was planning to blow up the roster and start over.

Dolich hadn’t the stomach for it. At the end of the 2006-07 season, he made up his mind that he was done with Memphis, if not with sports. It took his wife, Ellen, to remind him of the realities of his chosen profession.

“She said, ‘Hey, idiot, you’re the president of an NBA team,’” Dolich said. “‘There are not a lot of those around. You don’t just pick up the yellow pages.’”

Dolich chuckled.

“So,” he said, “I hung in there.”

Shortly before this past season started, Dolich got a call from Buffy Filippell, the headhunter whom he’d known for years. The San Francisco 49ers were in the market for a chief operating officer.

Dolich, who had worked for franchises in MLB, the NBA, the NHL, professional soccer and lacrosse, spent the longest stretch of his career in the Bay Area with the Oakland As and Golden State Warriors and as a consultant. He and his family loved it. The chance to run an NFL team there seemed too good to be true.

“A lot of people say, how did you manage that?” Dolich said. “I didn’t manage it. It just happened. It’s absolutely incredible.”

Jamison was in his fifth year as the San Jose Sharks president and CEO — an unexpected promotion that he gladly accepted at the All-Star Game in Boston in 1996 — when owner George Gund came to him with a revelation that every team president dreads.

“I’m going to get out,” Gund said.

The good news was that Gund wanted to see Jamison succeed him. He encouraged him to put together a group of local investors to buy the team. That was in June 2001. Jamison began working with former Mayor Tom McEnery to round up the money.

In September, they landed two major stakeholders. By the time they were ready to announce a deal the
following February, the partnership had grown to 11 people, including Jamison and McEnery.

Most importantly for Jamison, the group agreed he should remain as its leader. “I certainly felt pressure from the time George came to me, partly because I knew that if he sold to someone else, there might not be a place for me,” Jamison said. “And I was happy and I really didn’t want to leave. Luckily it worked. But I’m convinced that if I had not put the group together, they’d have gone another direction with the sale. And had that happened, there was absolutely no assurance for me.”

The president of the Montreal Canadiens, Pierre Boivin, has headed businesses that were sold three times in his career, the latest being the sale of the Canadiens from Molson to George Gillett. He has managed to keep his job each time.

“I’ve defied the odds, really,” Boivin said. “If you’re going to go through it four times, the odds are you’re going to be the odd man out two or three of them.”

Ranking executives across sports understand the volatility, and generally accept it. They might not have thought of it all on the way up, but it takes no more than a few days at the top to realize that it’s a fact of life.

On the afternoon that the Texas Rangers promoted Jeff Cogen from chief operating officer to president, one of the first calls to his office was from Buck Showalter, the manager of the ballclub. “Congratulations, Cogy,” Showalter said. “But I just want you to know, guys like us don’t get promoted anymore. We get fired.”

Cogen laughed that day with Showalter, a two-time Manager of the Year winner who was fired three times, just as he laughs now as he contemplates the end that awaits most who end up with the vast, well-appointed office to which so many aspire.

“It’s risk-reward, like anything else,” Cogen said. “It’s volatile. I’m a day-to-day guy.”

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**Pathways for NBA teams’ top execs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAM</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>HOW THEY GOT THERE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawks</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Former CEO Bernie Mullin resigned in January.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celtics</td>
<td>Rich Gotham</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>After a run with TerroLycos, an acquaintance recommended Gotham to owner Wyc Grousbeck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobcats</td>
<td>Fred Whitfield</td>
<td>Pres./COO</td>
<td>Worked up the marketing side to EVP job that parallels basketball EVP John Paxson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulls</td>
<td>Steve Schanwald</td>
<td>EVP/Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Former COO of Cleveland hockey team returned to town after stint at SVP with NHL Eagles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavaliers</td>
<td>Len Komoroski</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Platinum education at Princeton, Harvard and Cal led to law firm, then commish of CBA, then Nike, where headhunter for Mavs owner Ross Perot Jr found him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mavericks</td>
<td>Terdema Ussery</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Started as a Nuggets account exec and climbed rung by rung through marketing department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuggets</td>
<td>Paul Andrews</td>
<td>EVP/CMO</td>
<td>Worked in league office and was recruited away to run Dodgers for News Corp. Left when ownership changed, but was back in team sports before long as Suns president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pistons</td>
<td>Tom Wilson</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Prior business relationship with owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warriors</td>
<td>Robert Rowell</td>
<td>Pres.</td>
<td>Worked up in marketing, operations, finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockets</td>
<td>Thaddeus Brown</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Worked up in marketing, operations, finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacers</td>
<td>Jim Morris</td>
<td>Pres./Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Worked up in marketing, operations, finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakers</td>
<td>Jeanie Buss</td>
<td>EVP/Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Owner’s daughter is boss on business matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grizzlies</td>
<td>Greg Campbell</td>
<td>Pres./ Alt. Gov.</td>
<td>Elected to NBA as its leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Dick Mabry</td>
<td>Pres./Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Elected to NBA as its leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks</td>
<td>John Steinmiller</td>
<td>VP/Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Elected to NBA as its leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timberwolves</td>
<td>Rob Moor</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Elected to NBA as its leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hornets</td>
<td>Hugh Weber</td>
<td>Pres.</td>
<td>Worked in league office and was recruited away to run Dodgers for News Corp. Left when ownership changed, but was back in team sports before long as Suns president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knicks</td>
<td>Steve Mills</td>
<td>Pres./COO, MSG Sports</td>
<td>Worked in league office and was recruited away to run Dodgers for News Corp. Left when ownership changed, but was back in team sports before long as Suns president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nets</td>
<td>Brett Bynum</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Worked in league office and was recruited away to run Dodgers for News Corp. Left when ownership changed, but was back in team sports before long as Suns president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>Alex Martin</td>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Worked in league office and was recruited away to run Dodgers for News Corp. Left when ownership changed, but was back in team sports before long as Suns president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76ers</td>
<td>Ed Stefanski</td>
<td>Pres./GM</td>
<td>Worked in league office and was recruited away to run Dodgers for News Corp. Left when ownership changed, but was back in team sports before long as Suns president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suns</td>
<td>Rick Welts</td>
<td>Pres./COO</td>
<td>Worked in league office and was recruited away to run Dodgers for News Corp. Left when ownership changed, but was back in team sports before long as Suns president.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Pathways for NBA teams’ top execs (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAM</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>HOW THEY GOT HERE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blazers</td>
<td>Larry Miller</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>MBA with accounting background built Brand Jordan for Nike and was recruited by Blazers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>John Thomas</td>
<td>Pres./Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Former Rockets EVP was tapped by Maloofs when they bought the Kings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spurs</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spur owner Peter Holt considering reorganization after longtime EVP stepped down in June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SuperSonics</td>
<td>Danny Barth</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Six years as CFO put him in position when Clay Bennett bought team and Wally Walker resigned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raptors</td>
<td>Bryan Colangelo</td>
<td>Pres./GM</td>
<td>Son of former Suns owner worked in both business and basketball before earning president’s title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>Randy Rigby</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Elevated after 20 years in the organization, most recently as SVP of sales and broadcasting and CMQ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wizards</td>
<td>Peter Biche</td>
<td>Pres./Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Finance guy got biggest piece of promotion when long-time team boss Susan O’Malley stepped down.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pathways for NHL teams’ top execs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAM</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>HOW THEY GOT HERE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ducks</td>
<td>Michael Schulman</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Managing director of Samueli family’s charity and investment arm led negotiation to buy team from Disney and was then put in charge of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrashers</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td></td>
<td>Former CEO Bernie Mullen resigned in January.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruins</td>
<td>Charlie Jacobs</td>
<td>EVP</td>
<td>BC grad is son of owner Jeremy Jacobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabres</td>
<td>Larry Quinlin</td>
<td>Managing Partner</td>
<td>Successful developer landed an arena for former owner Seymour Knox, left when Knox sold the team, then came back five years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flames</td>
<td>Ken King</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Former newspaper publisher, active in campaign to keep team in Calgary, tapped to run it in 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricanes</td>
<td>Jim Rutherford</td>
<td>Pres./GM</td>
<td>Former Red Wings goaltender was running owner Peter Karmanos’ youth and juniors programs when the Compuware boss bought the Canes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackhawks</td>
<td>John McDonough</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Popular marketing guy hired last year from Cubs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avalanche</td>
<td>Pierre LaCroix</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Former player agent spent 11 seasons as GM before relinquishing that job last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jackets</td>
<td>Mike Priest</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Trusted family financial guy brought in after firing of founding president GM Doug MacLean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stars</td>
<td>Jeff Cogen</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Former Ringling Bros. marketing director calls himself “a salesman with a fancy title.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Wings</td>
<td>Ken Holland</td>
<td>EVP/GM</td>
<td>Team added SVP of business affairs last year, but NHL’s winningest GM has higher title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oilers</td>
<td>Patrick LaForge</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Former VP of international marketing for Molson was running Canadian Olympic ski organization when new Oilers owners asked for his help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthers</td>
<td>Michael Yormark</td>
<td>Pres./COO</td>
<td>Rainmaker was the first active employee to hold the title in six years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>Luc Robitaille</td>
<td>Pres./Bus. Ops</td>
<td>Team’s all-time leading goal scorer learned the business at AEG before taking over the Kings helm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild</td>
<td>Doug Risebrough</td>
<td>Pres./GM</td>
<td>Former Canadien went from ice to bench to assistant GM to GM, added president’s title in 2003.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadians</td>
<td>Pierre Boivin</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Team owner Molson in direction of the CEO of Nike Bauer Hockey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predators</td>
<td>Ed Lang</td>
<td>Pres./Bus. Ops</td>
<td>New owner David Freeman elevated finance guy from previous owner’s troika of EVPs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devils</td>
<td>Lou Lamoriello</td>
<td>CEO/Pres./GM</td>
<td>Providence AD was hired to be president and GM of the Devils 20 years ago, and since then has worn almost every hat with franchise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islanders</td>
<td>Charles Wang</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Supported by a pair of SVPs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangers</td>
<td>Steve Mills</td>
<td>Pres./COO</td>
<td>Basketball guy added hockey responsibilities when MSG restructured executive chain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senators</td>
<td>Roy Moktar</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Search firm pointed team owner Molson in direction of the CEO of Nike Bauer Hockey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyers</td>
<td>Peter Luukko</td>
<td>Pres./COO</td>
<td>Noted arena manager added team responsibilities when Comcast-Spectacor Chairman Ed Snider promoted him to COO in 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coyotes</td>
<td>Doug Moss</td>
<td>Pres./COO</td>
<td>Former president of MSG Network landed first team president job with Sabres in 1994 and ran the IHL and Ducks before taking this job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penguins</td>
<td>Ken Sawyer</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Spent 14 years as the NHL’s CFO before taking job running Pens for Super Mario in 1999.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharks</td>
<td>Greg Jamison</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Hired as EVP and COO by the Sharks in ’93 after running business operations with the Pacers, he now holds a stake in the team as managing partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blues</td>
<td>Peter McLoughlin</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Spent 21 years at Anheuser-Busch before joining Blues two years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightning</td>
<td>Ron Campbell</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Accountant from Bill Davidson’s glass company became Pistons CFO, then led purchase of the Lightning and was tapped as president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Leafs</td>
<td>Richard Peddie</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Former packaged goods exec was first CEO of Sky Dome, became president of the NBA Raptors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canucks</td>
<td>Chris Zimmerman</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Join NFL in ’06 after three years as CEO of Nike Bauer Hockey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitals</td>
<td>Dick Patrick</td>
<td>Pres./Owner</td>
<td>Joined Abe Pollin’s ownership group, found buyer for Pollin and took a 5 percent stake himself.</td>
</tr>
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### Pathways for MLB teams’ top execs

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D’backs</td>
<td>Derrick Hall</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Interned with Dodgers, then worked for team in Vero Beach before returning to Los Angeles to run communications department. Took same job in Arizona, then rose to president when boss Rich Dozier left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braves</td>
<td>John Schuerholz</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Moved into role in October after 26 years as a GM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orioles</td>
<td>Andy MacPhail</td>
<td>Pres./Baseball Ops</td>
<td>Former Twins GM got president’s title and seat at owners meetings when he moved to the Cubs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Sox</td>
<td>Larry Lucchino</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>First job as lawyer at Williams &amp; Connolly led to relationship with Skins and O’s owner Edward Bennett Williams, who moved him over to teams as general counsel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubs</td>
<td>vacant</td>
<td></td>
<td>Longtime marketer John McDonough left last year and hasn’t been replaced with team for sale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Sox</td>
<td>Howard Pitzer</td>
<td>EVP</td>
<td>Lawyer worked with owner Jerry Reinsdorf on team purchase and has been EVP ever since.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reds</td>
<td>Phil Castellini</td>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Owner’s son replaced departing COO John Allen after a stint as SVP of business operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>Paul Dolan</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Owner’s son assumed title in 2004, after three years in the front office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockies</td>
<td>Keli McGregor</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>College roommate of owner’s son worked his way up with Rockies after brief NFL playing career and four years as assistant AD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigers</td>
<td>Dave Dombrowski</td>
<td>Pres./GM</td>
<td>Highly sought-after GM parlayed success into bigger title in Florida and then Detroit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlins</td>
<td>David Samson</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Owner’s stepson is attorney who ran Expos, then navigated Marlins swap with MLB.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pathways for MLB teams’ top execs (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAM</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>HOW THEY GOT HERE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ducks</td>
<td>Howard Lincoln</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Nintendo of America boss migrated to M’s when Nintendo chair bought the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padres</td>
<td>Sandy Alderson</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Harvard law grad was working as attorney for fellow Dartmouth grad and Marine officer Roy Eisenhart when he bought the A’s. Started as team’s legal counsel, then rose to GM and president. Joined Padres from MLB office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giants</td>
<td>Larry Baer</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Team marketing director left to get Harvard MBA, then was key player in keeping team in SF. Promoted from COO to president when Peter Magowan retired in May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariners</td>
<td>Howard Lincoln</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Nintendo of America boss migrated to M’s when Nintendo chair bought the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinals</td>
<td>Bill DeWitt III</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Owner's son followed dad's path through Yale undergrad and Harvard B-school and spent last 12 years learning the front office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rays</td>
<td>Matt Silverman</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Harvard economics grad met owner Stuart Sternberg when both were with Goldman Sachs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangers</td>
<td>Nolan Ryan</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Ryan is first Rangers president to have authority over both business and baseball.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jays</td>
<td>Paul Godfrey</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Toronto politician led quest to bring baseball to town, then was newspaper publisher when billionaire boss bought team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationals</td>
<td>Stan Kasten</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Ran into Ted Turner outside Busch Stadium and asked for a job. Started as Braves in-house counsel and was Hawks GM at 27.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pathways for NFL teams’ top execs

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<th>TEAM</th>
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<th>HOW THEY GOT HERE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cards</td>
<td>Michael Bidwill</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Owner’s son is third-generation NFL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falcons</td>
<td>Rich McKay</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>One-time ballboy went against father's advice and jumped from general counsel to GM in ’94; landed president title, but stripped of GM duties last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravens</td>
<td>Dick Cass</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Attorney who represented Jerry Jones in Cowboys purchase did same for Steve Bisciotti with Ravens. Put in charge when Bisciotti took over control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills</td>
<td>Russ Brandon</td>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Local boy rose through the ranks to EVP and added COO title in January, adding oversight of football side to his responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panthers</td>
<td>Mark Richardson</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Owner’s son is president of team; Mark’s brother, Jon, is president of family-owned stadium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bears</td>
<td>Ted Phillips</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>First non-family member to hold the job was a low-rung accountant who worked on the Bears tax return. Hired as controller and worked up from there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengals</td>
<td>Mike Brown</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Owner’s son took over the office when his father, a football legend, died in 1991.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browns</td>
<td>Mike Keenan</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Hired out of league office to be CFO in 2005, and then elevated earlier this year to fill the vacant position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboys</td>
<td>Stephen Jones</td>
<td>EVP/COO</td>
<td>Owner’s son has 18 years in league under his belt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broncos</td>
<td>Joe Ellis</td>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Left as Broncos marketing director to get MBA, went to league office before taking EVP job in ’98.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lions</td>
<td>Matt Millen</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Redbirds All-Pro safety got MBA while playing and law degree soon after, and ended up as AD at Northwestern, where search firm plucked him for this job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packers</td>
<td>Mark Murphy</td>
<td>Pres./CEO</td>
<td>Work building MLF franchise caught eye of NFL expansion franchise, which hired him as top marketer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texans</td>
<td>Jamey Rootes</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Highly regarded GM got the title when Jim Irsay hired him away from Carolina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colts</td>
<td>Bill Polian</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Owner is flanked by a trio of SVPs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaguars</td>
<td>Wayne Weaver</td>
<td>Chairman/CEO</td>
<td>Owner is flanked by a trio of SVPs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphins</td>
<td>Joe Bailey</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Hulzena hired Bailey's search firm to find coach and CEO. Hulzena landed on Bailey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiefs</td>
<td>Carl Peterson</td>
<td>Pres./GM/CEO</td>
<td>Former UCLA coach broke into NFL as Eagles director of player personnel, then jumped to USFL. When league folded, Chiefs owner offered him total authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vikings</td>
<td>Mark Wilf</td>
<td>Owner/Pres.</td>
<td>Younger brother of chairman Zygi Wilf is responsible for daily management of the family football business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriots</td>
<td>Jonathan Kraft</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Has been at father Robert’s side since he bought the team 20 years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saints</td>
<td>Rita Benson LeBlanc</td>
<td>Owner/EVP</td>
<td>Owner’s granddaughter spent summers with team while in college, emerged as boss after Katrina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giants</td>
<td>John Mara</td>
<td>President/CEO</td>
<td>Oldest son of fabled owner Wellington Mara.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jets</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joy Cross resigned to head real estate project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raiders</td>
<td>Amy Trask</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Berkeley grad interned with team while getting law degree at Southern Cal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagles</td>
<td>Joe Banner</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Former clothing store owner has been friend of owner Jeffrey Lurie since both were teens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steelers</td>
<td>Art Rooney II</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Third-generation NFLer took title from father in ’03.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rams</td>
<td>John Shaw</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>By a year after inheriting the team, Georgia FRONTIERE hired the 30-year-old CPA on advice of a board member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chargers</td>
<td>Dean Spanos</td>
<td>President/CEO</td>
<td>Owner Alex Spanos appointed his son CEO in 1994, 10 years after buying the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49ers</td>
<td>Andy Dolich</td>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Marketer behind “BillyBall” campaign for 49ers ran two NFL teams, worked in every major team sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seahawks</td>
<td>Tom Leiweke</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Paul Allen hired savvy marketer who headed Minnesota Wild, Houston Rockets and Golden State Warriors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buccaneers</td>
<td>Joel Glazer</td>
<td>EVP</td>
<td>Owner’s son shares EVP title with his two brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titans</td>
<td>Steve Underwood</td>
<td>Sr. EVP/COO</td>
<td>Owner Bud Adams holds most titles, but his trusted attorney since Oilers days runs the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redskins</td>
<td>Mitch Gersham</td>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Former exec from owner Dan Snyder’s company moved to Redskins when Snyder bought the team.</td>
</tr>
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</table>