

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH MICHAEL RIZZO

SUBJECT: NATIONALS GENERAL MANAGER/VICE-PRESIDENT MICHAEL RIZZO WILL DISCUSS THE BASEBALL SEASON

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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THERESA WERNER: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105th president of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists, committed to our profession's future through our programming events, such as this, while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. To donate to programs offered to the public through the non-profit National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit www.press.org/institute.

[applause]

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are Club members. And, if you do hear applause in our audience, we would note that members of the general public are attending. So it's not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalism objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club, available on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using hashtag #NPCLunch. After our guest speech concludes, we'll have a question and answer segment. I will ask as many questions as time permits.

Now I'd like to introduce our head table guests. And I would ask each of you here to stand up briefly as your name is announced. From your right, Jim Seminara, grad student at Catholic University of America, and the third baseman for the National Press Club softball team. [laughter] John Donnelly, reporter at Congressional Quarterly, and a member of the National Press Club Board of Governors. He also claims to be the Nats' biggest fan. Joseph Garagiola, Jr., Senior Vice-President, Standards and On-Field Operations, Major League Baseball and guest of our speaker. Ed Barts, President of Barts Communications and a member of the National Press Club Board of Governors. Bob Tanenbaum, principal owner of the Washington Nationals and a guest of our speaker. Alison Fitzgerald, freelance journalist and Chair of our Speakers Committee.

I'm going to skip the speaker for just a moment. Next we have Mike Freedman, professor and executive director of George Washington University and Vice-Chair of the National Press Club Broadcast Committee. Alan Gottlieb, COO, Lerner Sports and guest of our speaker. John Doman, broadcast reporter for CBS Radio, WNEW, and coach of our award-winning National Press Club Softball Team. [laughter] Jonathan Salant, reporter for Bloomberg News and past National Press Club President.

Thank you all for joining us. And Kate Michael, who is today's organizer of the luncheon and founder of K Street Kate is joining us as well. Thank you.

[applause]

It's been written in the National Review that he seems to be like the kind of guy you want around your building when you're building an organization from the ground up as the general manager. As the general manager and Executive Vice-President of Baseball Operations for the Washington Nationals, Michael Rizzo has been doing exactly that as the team general manager in taking the field this season.

He is a former minor league player and third generation baseball scout, who started his scouting career with the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago White Sox. Prior to joining the Washington Nationals he spent seven years with the Arizona Diamondbacks, the 2001 World Series Winners. But, despite being considered as a frontrunner, was passed up when the team selected its new general manager.

Instead, Rizzo came to the Washington Nationals as assistant general manager under an appointment of Jim Bowden in July of 2006, when the team transferred ownership to Washington and under the Lerner family ownership. Mike has played a role in either bringing aboard or developing 21 of the 25 players on the 2012 opening day roster. He is responsible for drafting the likes of Stephen Strasburg, Bryce Harper, and Anthony Ridden, and using depth in the minor league level to trade for Gio Gonzalez.

Under his leadership, the minor league farm system has literally gone from worst to first. And this year's major league team is expected to be a contender in the toughest division, which is widely considered to be the hardest pitching rotation in baseball.

But I expect that today, we'll hear his insight into his strategy, which has been building a team of defensive players pitching and athleticism, and is ready to show results this year. So please welcome Mr. Michael Rizzo, who will tell us about creating a homerun season.

[applause]

MIKE RIZZO: Thank you Theresa. I appreciate the warm introduction. You did take about 20 minutes of my speech time though. I also wouldn't mind reminding the beat writers in the room of those accomplishments later on during the season, when I'll really need it.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, members of the National Press Club, friends, all those people who we paid for your tickets to eat lunch here. [laughter] Thank you for coming. I'd like to introduce the people on the dais that are guests of mine. First, Bob Tanenbaum, principal owner and member of the Lerner family. Thank you for coming. Alan Gottlieb, COO of Lerner Companies. Alan is an integral part of the daily business operations business and a great advocate of mine.

I'd especially like to thank Joe Garagiola, my former boss, and the former general manager of the 2001 World Champion Arizona Diamondbacks. Joe's been a great role model of mine, how to be an effective and successful general manager. And I use some of his skills very, very often in my daily work. Joe is presently the Senior Vice-President of Standards and Onfield Operation for MLB. So he's one of the big shots in the Commissioner's office. But don't think he cuts any slack to Mike Rizzo, because he certainly does not.

It's an honor to be here today. I am especially pleased to have the chance to learn a little bit more about how Washington works. As you know, I'm kind of an outsider. I'm a Chicago native. And so I'm kind of new to all this, the Press Corps and the Press Club and this Washingtonian stuff.

And speaking of Chicago, I was at the White House Correspondents Dinner last week. And I had a chance meeting with the mayor of Chicago, Illinois, Raum Emanuel at the Correspondents Dinner. So I'm sitting there. I know who he is. He makes a beeline towards me. Sticks out his hand. Shakes my hand and says, "It's a pleasure to meet you." So I say, "Well, it's a pleasure to meet you too, sir." And, as he walks away, I'm feeling pretty good about myself. I said, "Wow, I must be going pretty good. You know, the mayor of Chicago knows who I am." And, as I hear him walking away, I hear him talking to his buddy. He goes, "That was Billy Joel." [laughter] So I wasn't going as good as I thought I was. [laughter]

I am beginning to understand how the reason that so many sports figures go into the media world after they're done with their playing careers. You folks have a pretty darned good time. [laughter] To experience that Correspondents Dinner, with Jimmy Kimmel publicly insulting about 30 percent of the room, with them staring him right in

the face, now if that would have happened in the neighborhoods of Chicago, we'd have been brawling. [laughter] But they seemed to take it. They must have—you have a thick skin here in town. And they take it in good fun.

Well, I'm here to talk about, really, about my favorite subject, it's your Washington Nationals. It's a team near and dear to my heart. It's a team that I have great passion for. And we've really put a lot of time and energy into making this organization the best, one of the best organizations in all of baseball.

I'm here to try to give you a little insight on the construction of a franchise from the ground up. Some people will say it was from below ground up when we took over the ball club. But who am I to say? How we select a front office, some roster construction, and really, how we changed the culture of Washington, D.C. Also going to put into words some of my wild and often chaotic ride to the general manager's chair where I'm at today.

I'm beginning my third decade in professional baseball. I've got 30 years into this thing. I'm also a third generation baseball rat. And I say that with all due respect. I love the game. And the roots of my interest of the game go all the way back to my grandfather, Vito Rizzo, who spent his spare time, when he wasn't loading and unloading boxcars at the railroad yards in Chicago, and barnstorming the Midwest, playing semi-pro professional baseball.

Later in life, he did what they call bird-dogging scout for several major league clubs throughout his life. Funny thing about grandpa was, he and I—the rapport that he and I had together, he had a unique way of saying hello to me every time I met him. It wasn't your traditional hug or handshake. He literally—and this was until the day he died at 104 years old—would greet me with two left hooks to the body and one left hook to the head. [laughter] That's Vito. That was Vito. [laughter]

Then there's my dad, Phil Rizzo. He's still around. He's still active. Still working full-time. The only difference is, he works for me now. [laughter] Yeah. Yeah. It's pretty good. It's pretty good stuff. But he works extremely hard. He's called “the senior advisor to the general manager.” He calls me after every game, and I mean after every game. And coming up of two 100-loss seasons, some of the phone calls aren't so fun, if you can imagine.

He's been in professional baseball over 50 years. He's been a professional scout for 40. This guy has forgotten more about baseball than I'll ever know. He's right out of central casting. I mean this guy—you've seen a guy just like him if you've ever seen a *Godfather* movie, or an episode of *Sopranos*, that's Phil Rizzo. [laughter]

He was a long-time minor league player. He battled in the minor leagues in the 1950s, got up to the AAA level. After his playing career, he had a family to support. So he went to work as a truck driver for the City of Chicago for 35 years. And, for all the

politicos out here, since I am in Washington, D.C., he was a part of the daily regime back in the day.

He also moonlighted as a scout. He'd wake up at 4:30 in the morning for about 40 years to get to work. He taught me the merits of hard work, paying your dues, and, most importantly, toughness. He'd say, "Be honest," he would preach. "Tell it straight. Look 'em in the eye. Don't be scared," words that I live by today.

My professional career started as a 24th round pick by the California Angels in 1982, playing alongside such great major league players Devon White, Wally Joyner, being managed by the reigning AL Manager of the Year, Joe Madden. But, after three unspectacular minor league seasons, I was released as a player, which was a very difficult blow to my career path.

I really didn't have a plan B. I thought I was going to be a big leaguer for about 15 years. So plan B was in place. So, as I was searching to hook up with another minor league club, I was summoned to the kitchen by my dad. And, in an Italian household, the kitchen table, that's where all the big business is done. So that's where I was summoned to.

And he gave me a speech that I'll never forget. And, in typical Italian tough love manner that my dad would give me, he looked me in the eye and said, "You don't have the ability to play in the big leagues." It was a blow. It was tough to hear. He said, "Don't be a baseball bum like me. Use your intelligence. Be smart. Finish school. You can get into scouting, coaching, front office." He goes, "Get your degree. You could be a manager, a farm director," he goes, "and yes, maybe even a GM." He actually said that, back in 1985, he said, "You could possibly be a general manager." And here I am, 30 years later.

I began to develop my scouting and player development philosophies early on, philosophies that I still believe in today, time-tested, championship philosophies. Power pitchers with swing-and-miss stuff, athletes up the middle, big boppers on the corner, character guys, makeup, chemistry. It all wins games.

After my playing days, I started as an area scout for the Chicago White Sox. I got on the map and made a name for myself by drafting and signing the big, strong tight end out of Auburn University named Frank Thomas, two-time MVP, 500 homeruns, future Hall of Famer. Philosophy number one, big bopper in the corners, checked that box off.

Then, after six great seasons with the Chicago White Sox, I moved on to the Boston Red Sox. During my days there, we drafted a young, skinny athletic shortstop out of Georgia Tech named Nomar Garciaparra. Philosophy number two, athletes up the middle. Checked that one off.

Then I was given my first opportunity to run my own department. This man right here had the faith and trust in me to make me the director of scouting for the expansion

Arizona Diamondbacks in 2000. Together, we transformed the minor league system that was ranked 29th in 2001, to being the top organization of the year in 2006. All the while, Joe Garagiola was putting together a championship caliber club on the major league side. Pennants and a 2001 World Series. That was a great lesson in franchise construction. Build a base as you're winning on the top.

During our tenure in the desert, Joe's crew put more drafted players in the major leagues than any other organization in baseball. Impact players, like Cy Young Award winner Brandon Webb, All-Stars Justin Upton, Damian Miller, Carlos Gonzales, Carlos Quentin, Steven Drew. And our own first baseman, Chad Tracy was part of the Diamondbacks crew.

I gained a lot of my front office experience there. I was part of a tiny five-man front office crew we had, that worked to help Joe build the Diamondbacks from expansion, 100-loss team to World Champions.

Then, in the summer of 2006, President of the Nationals, Stan Kasten and GM Jim Bowden hired me to join the staff with the Washington Nationals. The assistant general manager, Vice-President of player personnel was the title. The job description was, "Get us some players, quick."

Soon after that, I assumed the general manager duties when Jim resigned. Stan Kasten put it this way. He goes, "The good, hey, you're a general manager in the major leagues. The bad part, you're going to inherit a less-than-adequate major league roster, the worst minor league system in baseball." Stan would always joke and say that we were ranked 30th because there was only 30 teams in baseball. [laughter] Four straight last-place finishes. A development program in Dominican Republic that was under investigation and close to being shut down.

So, of course I called my dad and asked him, "What do you think?" [laughter] "What do you think I should do, dad?" He said-- He told me, he goes, "Well, your team stinks." He goes, "It's going to take non-stop work, 24/7, and a whole heck of a lot of luck to fix it." He says, "But what the hell? There's only 30 of those jobs in the world. You might as well take it, run with it, and go get them." So I did.

Being the general manager of the Washington Nationals is the best thing that ever happened to me. To have the opportunity to build up, from the ground level, a franchise is something that can only be described as a euphoric thing for a baseball person. The most important part of the rebuilding structure came in the off season of 2009. To me, this is the watershed moment of the Washington Nationals. No major free agents were signed. No players-- No impact names were added to the roster.

But the Lerner family gave us the resources to hire 17 of the best and brightest baseball operations guys in all of baseball. Personnel like Roy Clark, Jay Robertson, Kasey McKeon, Johnny DiPuglia, Chuck Javier, Doug Harris, to name a few. The best and brightest in the game. They're now with the Washington Nationals.

As we speak right now, as we sit here, there are scouts scouring the country, scouring the world for talent to bring to the Washington Nationals ballpark. We also transformed the scouting and player development departments. We had a vision and a plan. We knew that we had a three-year window before the new collective bargaining agreement would change the landscape of the amateur draft.

We developed the strategy to take advantage of that window. And the results were tangible. Our farm system shot from dead last in 2007 to first in 2012, according to baseball prospectus. As Theresa said, our scouting and development people are responsible for 21 of the 25 current major league players on our roster. And let me tell you, this is a good bunch of players and a good bunch of people.

Everyone has their story. There is a reason we acquired every one of them. There is a background to all these guys. One person I have to discuss is one of our prime draft choices, is Jordan Zimmerman. This is a great story. Here is a small-town kid from a small-town college in Wisconsin. Town of about 700, and he went to University of Wisconsin at Steven's Point. Looked by as a high school pitcher, looked past everybody, couldn't even get a scholarship at the University of Wisconsin. And looked past everybody, until one of our good scouts did their job and made him our second round pick. Now this was a compensation pick, I must add, for not signing Alfonzo Soriano, a move that the Washington Nationals took a lot of heat for. But it was the right move in the end. And Jordan Zimmerman has become one of the best and brightest right-hand starting pitchers in the game.

We utilized the draft to fill our roster. You look at Ryan Zimmerman, Jordan Zimmerman, Danny Espinosa, Ian Desmond, Steve Lombardozzi, Tyler Moore, Ross Detwiler, Drew Storm. That's not to mention the Bryce Harpers and the Stephen Strasburgs of the world. That's how this roster is constructed. Hard work, good scouting, good decision-making by the guys off the field.

Our professional scouts made some great trades. Wilson Ramos, Michael Morse, Ryan Matthews, Tom Gorzelanny, Henry Rodriguez, Gio Gonzalez, Tyler Clipper. Wilson Ramos, I'll never forget the day. Trade deadline time. Got all the scouts in the war room, trying to fix the club, trying to get better, trying to beat other teams. And we came up with what we now describe as the "perfect storm." We found a team that we could expedite one of their top prospects for a player that wasn't going to fit with us long-term.

The Minnesota Twins were fighting for first place in the American League Central. They had lost their closer, Joe Nathan, to Tommy John surgery earlier in that season. We had recently signed Matt Capps(?), who was a non-tenured player the winter before. He went out and had a great first half, all-star first half. The Minnesota Twins had recently signed Joe Mauer to a long-term lucrative contract. They felt they didn't have a place for Wilson Ramos to play. So we pulled off the trade, Wilson Ramos for Matt Capps. Gave them their closer for a season, and gave us our backstop for the next ten.

Michael Morse, there'd be no Beast Mos if it wasn't for scouts. We traded a six foot, five-inch, 240 pound guy that was standing at shortstop in Tacoma, Washington, for a AAA left-handed hitting AAA outfielder. As they say, the rest is history, 300 average, 31 homeruns, 91 RBIs. And, like I said, Beast Mos was created.

And Gio Gonzalez, really the epitome of what scouting and player development can do to an organization. You package four late-round draft choices, scouted and developed by your ball club, and you go out and trade for one of the most electric left-handed power pitchers in baseball. And he's 26 years old, and already has played in an All-Star game. Not to mention he's got that infectious smile and the bubbly personality that you can't wipe the smile off his face.

Then there's the free-agents. Once you get your core, once you have your philosophy in place, you sprinkle in your free agents. They're usually veterans, the Edwin Jacksons of the world, the LaRoches, the Jayson Werths. But to me, the most intriguing free agent sign that we made last year was Brad Lidge. Here is a guy who pitched the last out of the last game of the World Series. Got the save in game 7, won the World Championship. And he picked the Washington Nationals over several other opportunities that he had to play in the major leagues. That tells a lot about where we've been and where we've come from and where we're going.

Probably the biggest and most important signing that we made was the hiring of Davy Johnson as our manager. This guy has done it all. A man that I love and respect, baseball acumen second to none. He's a mentor, a father figure. He inspires the players, young and old. He's been a terrific player, Gold Glove winner, 43 home runs, scratch golfer, trophy fisherman, a renaissance man. And this guy is unbelievable. He relates to the old and the new. And he's a big reason why the Washington Nationals are where they're at right now.

The long-term forecast, all positive. The philosophies are starting to come together. Power arms that have swing-and-miss stuff. We've got four major league starters under the age of 25. All are under control until 2017. They're the hardest throwing staff in Major League Baseball. That's a fact. They keep these records. They're the hardest throwing staff in Major League Baseball.

We've got more on the way, with the draft of Matt Perk and Alex Myers in 2011, that's the next wave of talent coming in. Alex Myers, he's a great story. Six foot-11 country boy from University of Kentucky. When he stands on the mound, he looks like he's 11 feet tall. [laughter] He towers over the hitters, and he seems to be throwing downhill at them. And then, when you add into the equation he's 95 to 99 mile an hour fastball, he's got nasty stuff. He'll be here soon.

Athletes up the middle. Not only do we have Ramos, Espinosa, Desmond, Lombardozzi are all 26 years and younger. We've got them wrapped up and under control for years to come. And they're only getting better. And then boppers on the

corner, the big power guys, Bryce Harpers, Ryan Zimmerman, Jayson Werth, All-Star caliber players, and All-Star caliber people, under control long-term.

The 2012 team, I'm often asked, "Wow you guys came out of the gate fast. And it's pretty unexpected, out of the gate fast, unexpected by everybody but the 25 guys in the club house. We're off to a fast start despite a lot of key injuries with the ball club. Ryan Zimmerman has been out. Of course Michael Morse has been out for throughout the season. Also, our closer from last year with 43 saves, Drew Storm. But our pitching rotation is the tops in major league baseball. They're historically good. Their 1.78 ERA in the first month of this season is the best first month ERA since the 1978 Oakland A's club.

We also have the top defense in baseball. We've made the fewest errors in the National League, with the highest fielding percentage. As you could tell, in closing, as you can tell, I'm proud of the franchise we're building. The support that I get from the Lerner family, the great front office people that we have in place right now, the family atmosphere that we bring from the business and the baseball side together.

We're building a philosophy that's built on talent and character. And we want to win. We're here to win. We want to win for our fan base. I personally want to win for the Lerner family, especially for Ted Lerner, because they've given so much of themselves for this ball club.

And I'd like to end on this. For too many years, we'd have to play the likes of the Phillies, the Mets, the Braves and the Marlins, undermanned and outgunned. It's like going to a gun fight with a knife. Not anymore. We're fully armed, extremely dangerous, and we're the talk of baseball. We're young, athletic and fast-moving.

If I were a baseball fan in Washington, D.C., I wouldn't miss a minute of what's going on this year. It's going to be the ticket to be. It's going to be the place to be and the ticket to have. So thanks for having me today. I expect to see you all at NAS Park very, very soon and very, very often. And I'll take any question you got.

[applause]

THERESA WERNER: Okay. You're ready? Okay. After all your regulars return to the lineup, what will keep you from sending Bryce Harper back to Syracuse?

MIKE RIZZO: Talent. We have a developmental plan for Bryce Harper. It's been well documented. I'm a scout and a player development guy at heart. But we're not dumb, either. This guy is performing admirably in the big leagues. We feel that he's got a chance to really impact the ball club. He's a special talent. So you have to throw ordinary developmentals of curves out the window if you have to. You have to be able to move-- to be light on your feet and utilize the assets that you have. And believe me, if Bryce Harper is performing like he's performing now, there's no way in hell that I can get Davy Johnson to get rid of him. [laughter]

THERESA WERNER: You brought Harper up to the majors sooner than expected. What makes this the right time? And how do you gauge team need versus an individual's readiness?

MIKE RIZZO: Well, I think it goes hand-in-hand. And, like I said, you know, Bryce Harper is a special case scenario. He's very, very unique. He's got a unique skill set, which made it a unique timetable for him. And you have to really balance what's best for the team and what's best for the individual. Because often, what's best for the individual is what's best for the team.

Now, in contrast, we shut down Jordan Zimmerman last year. He had 160 inning limit. He reached that limit. He was shut down. Now that was not for-- there was no enjoyment by the manager. There was very, very tough conversations with the player and the player's agent. But we explained to him, this is what's best for you. And what's best for you is what is best for us in the long term. So what's best for Bryce Harper, in the long run, is going to be what's best for the Washington Nationals. And we're going to be watching very, very carefully on how we develop this player so we don't make mistakes, and make sure that this guy is the player that we want him to be, and we expect him to be.

THERESA WERNER: Harper has captured a lot of attention and interest. How has he surprised you? And how do you ensure his expectations and demands don't get out of control?

MIKE RIZZO: Well I think his teammates will make sure his expectations doesn't get out of control. I think he certainly has fulfilled all the expectations that I've had so far for him. As many of you know, I went down and saw him play personally for three games before I made the decision to bring him to the big leagues. It was a tough decision to make. You know, we weren't positive that the player was ready, fully ready. But, as Joe can attest to, you never know when they're fully ready until you get them here and they prove that they're ready.

So Bryce is a very energetic player. [laughter] That's the political way of putting it, right? [laughter] Very energetic player. He's a terrific player. But he's a terrific-- he's a terrific young man. And he fits perfectly in that home office. And I have never talked to one of his teammates, high school, junior college, minor leagues, that has ever had anything negative to say about him. People on the other team have had some negative things to say about him. But none of the players that he plays with, because he plays the game the right way. And he's a terrific young man. And he's going to be one of the impact players for the Washington Nationals for a long time.

THERESA WERNER: The Nationals Farm System is now recognized as one of the best in baseball. What is your strategy for deciding what players to draft? And who are some of the players you are watching?

MIKE RIZZO: This one I can answer. Our philosophy is this. We like big power players, big power pitchers, big power hitters. And, if you're not big and powerful, you've got to play in the middle of the field. We like athletic players that are what I call two-way players. You have to be strong offensively and defensively. We play in the National League, so it's very, very difficult to just get a guy that just can bang the ball and be below-average defensively. The margins in the National League are way too small. You have to hold teams to only allow them 27 outs. When you start giving up 29, 30 outs per game, that's when you get in trouble.

So we like to have two-way players. They have to be athletes. They have to be talented players with good character, good makeup. Because they have to be good on the field, off the field, in the clubhouse, and in the community. And if that's not the case, we walk away from it. We've done it on the major league level. We've released players. We've gotten rid of players. We don't sign players that don't fit all those criteria.

THERESA WERNER: Team chemistry is an important factor in the success of a team. Can you talk a little about the Nationals' team chemistry?

MIKE RIZZO: Well I know Davy Johnson has mentioned that this is one of the best-- the best group of guys that he's ever been around. Team chemistry is outstanding. Now team chemistry often is dictated by the one-loss record. [laughter] So, with that being said, we have a terrific group of guys. The young guys that we have in place, they learn the Washington Nationals way. So, as they go through the minor leagues, they're beaten into them, that character matters. You want to get to the big leagues? You better be good on the field, off the field, and in your community. Because, if you're not, this guy is going to get rid of you. And that's beaten into them from the time we draft them until the time they get to the big leagues.

And then, when you go choose your veteran free agents, you have to really understand what the dynamic of this player, adding this player into the clubhouse does for the team as a whole. It's no accident that, when we go out and get the Mark DeRosas and the Brad Lidges, they have sustained success in other places. Winning-- The winning pedigree is very, very important for player development and for winning at the major league level. And all those characteristics go into our thought process in signing players. And it's an important aspect for us, the Washington Nationals, it's an important aspect for me.

THERESA WERNER: What is your strategy for deciding who to call up in September? And who might we see this September?

MIKE RIZZO: Well, there's some-- what we do, when we make our decision about calling up players, is they're usually players that we will have to protect at some time over the off season. They're often players that we want to see perform at the major league level for the next season. And it's a way that we can evaluate players at the highest level.

So there is a handful of guys that we brought up last year, for instance, that we wanted to see play this year. Steve Lombardozzi was a September call-up last year. We wanted to see if all the things he did at the minor league level could translate into the major league game. And, as you see, he's gone from September call up to our everyday third baseman in the big leagues this year.

Other players that we will see will be guys that we're thinking of putting on the roster next year. And hopefully, when we're playing meaningful games this September and beyond, they'll be players that can come in and help the manager in September win games.

THERESA WERNER: Why do you think your method for building the team is going to be better than Bowden's? [laughter]

MIKE RIZZO: I can only build the team the way I want to build the team. It's a tried-and-true way of doing things. It was time-tested with the Arizona Diamondbacks. It's been shown to work at just about every level of baseball that I've ever been in. And I'm not so sure that it's a whole lot different than Bowden's anyways.

THERESA WERNER: Has the press been positive or negative in the Nationals' building efforts thus far?

MIKE RIZZO: [laughter]

THERESA WERNER: Just remember where you are.

MIKE RIZZO: Exactly. You know, I've never had a problem with our media yet. It's-- They're an intelligent bunch that works extremely hard. They realize, if not about the playing portion of being in the big leagues, they at least recognize the grind that it is to travel in the major leagues. Because most of them are with us on a daily basis. They're on the road with us. They're schlepping their suitcases and getting on planes and getting to the next city. So it's very, very difficult.

I think when you deserve to be-- when you deserve to be wrapped, you should be wrapped. When you deserve to be praised, you should be praised. The only hang-up I have with the media is, get the facts before you write the story. Be right. Don't be first.

THERESA WERNER: This is in regards to your disabled list. And I like the way that this was phrased, is, we currently have four players, so I feel like I'm a part of this, we currently have four players-- Zimmerman, Lidge, DeRosa and Wang, who are eligible to return from DL within the next couple weeks. How are they doing? And do we expect to have them back when they are eligible?

MIKE RIZZO: The disabled list, it's a long list, by the way, and a painful list, because there's some really, really good players on that list. Ryan Zimmerman-- You know, these are all contingent on how they feel today, tomorrow, and the next day. But

Ryan Zimmerman feels pretty good. He was throwing the ball extremely well yesterday. He's going to begin hitting today, Friday, right-- today's Friday? Yeah. He's going to be hitting today. And we'll see where it takes us after that.

If he feels good and he's pain-free, he'll take some more swings on Saturday. And we'll ramp him up to the point where he can take some swings against live pitchers. And, for what it's worth, in my opinion, when Ryan Zimmerman is ready to swing the bat, he's going to be swinging it at the major league level. There'll be very little, if any, rehab at bats for Ryan.

THERESA WERNER: Morse and Storen were thought to be on the opening day roster. But we won't see them until mid season. How are they doing? And when might we see them back on the active roster?

MIKE RIZZO: Well you'll see them back the minute that they're ready to come back, you'll see them back on the club. Drew Storen is doing very, very well. We had good news on his elbow back about a month ago, when it was just a bone fragment that the surgeon took out. So that should be a rehab that's fairly comfortable for him. And he should be back to pre-injury form in the very near future.

We feel that we have very, very good depth in the bullpen. So we're going to take our time with Drew, because he's a 23 year old closer. He had 43 saves last year. And he's an integral part of the future going on. And he's a long-term asset for us. Henry Rodriguez has taken the closer's role and run with it. He's an extremely gifted player, too. So I think that that-- having Henry and Brad Lidge, when he gets back off the DL, gives us a little bit more leeway to be more patient with Drew.

Mike Morse, he's-- you look at the guy, and you say, "How is this guy hurt? He's as big as a mountain. He's as strong as an ox. And he's walking around the clubhouse like he's ready to tear something apart." So I think he's itching to get ready to go. But it's an injury that we have to be careful with and be calm, because we want him throughout the season. And it's an injury that it has to be 100 percent completely healed before we ramp him up to do any baseball work, because we don't want him re-aggravating and maybe be out for the entire season. But he's coming along good. And we're looking forward to his return in the not too distant future.

THERESA WERNER: The team is doing really well this year. As a general manager, what is your plan for future improvement?

MIKE RIZZO: Well, we're never satisfied. You know, whenever I mention the fast start that we have, I always qualify it by saying, "But it's early," because that's the superstitious-- superstition in me. We're playing extremely well. I like the team that we have. We have a great team. When we start hitting on all cylinders, we're going to be a tough, tough team to play.

Like I said, we have the top notch starting rotation that's seven pitchers deep. Don't forget, we've got our leading games winning starter is not even on the club. He's in AAA. So we've got great depth in our starting rotation. We've got a power bullpen with depth. We've got an exciting core of young players. And we've got more on the way. So we never stop trying to tinker and try and improve. But sometimes, when you tinker with the chemistry, and you tinker with success, you retard our progress instead of going forward. So we're-- we're very careful about any acquisitions that we make. But we're always on the lookout. Like I said, there's somebody-- I guarantee you, there's scouts at games right now, looking for ways that we can improve our ball club.

THERESA WERNER: In hindsight, is there any trade that you made that you'd like to take back?

MIKE RIZZO: Certainly. I think Joe can attest, too. We all have our skeletons. And I'll tell you, if you haven't made a bad sign or a bad trade, you haven't been doing it very long. Because this is a business that nobody hits 100 percent on. I would think that, if I had one to do over, probably Hanrahan. Joel Hanrahan is a guy that we probably gave up on too soon, I gave up on too soon.

But again, circumstances play into it. He was a guy that was struggling mightily on the mound, at that time. He had no options left to go down. So we packaged him in the Niger Morgan/Sean Burnett deal. And at least we got a really good mainstay for our bullpen in return for Joel. But I probably would think, if I had to put my finger on one and choose only one, that would be the one.

THERESA WERNER: What is your relationship like with Davy Johnson?

MIKE RIZZO: It's great. I mean he's a guy I have the utmost respect for. We get along very well together. We're both baseball guys, and we speak the same language, baseball. And we are in constant communication. We talk several times a day. I'm often in his office when he's in the ballpark. And, when we're on the road, we're always together. We kind of think alike. He's got a mind like a steel trap. He never forgets anything. And he's been doing this a long time. So he's got a wealth of knowledge.

He does-- I've been doing this for 30 years, as I said. And he teaches me something new almost on a daily basis. A way to tweak how the old regime does things, how it's been done in the past, he can tweak it and put a modern spin on it. And he does things in a way that really are eye-opening.

THERESA WERNER: What does Gio say in the dugout to keep everyone laughing?

MIKE RIZZO: He never shuts up. [laughter] He's constantly talking. And that's the funny part. I mean he's just-- And that's natural. It's not pretend. It's not fake. That's his personality. From the first time I met him, when he was a high school left-handed pitcher in Florida, he had that smile and that bounce in his step. He's one of those

guys, he's happy to be alive, happy to be in the big leagues, and happy to be playing baseball for a living.

He's a terrific teammate. He's a very giving teammate, giving of his time, giving of his advice, giving of his time with the fans. And, besides that, he's got a wicked curve ball, and he throws 94 to 96. And he's pretty damned good left-handed pitcher.

THERESA WERNER: If you spotted another Ty Cobb, a great all-around player but terrible personality, would you sign him?

MIKE RIZZO: Ty was a little bit before my time. [laughter] But, suffice it to say that character counts for me. And I think it begets winning baseball. It begets chemistry. It begets having a first-rate organization. So, you know, I never scouted Ty. But I heard he was pretty good. But I'm sure there was other players that were just as good with better makeup. And I'd probably go with the guy with the better makeup.

THERESA WERNER: As a general manager, what do you consider your toughest duty: overseeing movement with current roster? Or coordinating all of the major league scouting?

MIKE RIZZO: The media, for this general manager, is the toughest part for me. [laughter] Yeah. I think really, the totality of the job is the toughest part. It really is a 24/7, 365 day- a-year job. We signed Matt Capps on Christmas Day, I mean just to kind of put it in perspective. It never stops. It never ends.

I remember Joe Garagiola, when I was a scouting director with him at Arizona, said, "Be careful what you wish for. You want to be a GM? Be careful what you wish for." And I did wish for this, and I'm glad I've got it. And it is all-consuming. It is-- You know, I don't have-- You know, I've been criticized for having not much of a life other than baseball. But this is the life I've got. And this is the life I love.

THERESA WERNER: With the Nationals doing so well, are you now finding the demand for corporate suites and fundraisers to be greater?

MIKE RIZZO: Well that's a question, probably, for Andy Feffer. But it should be, I know that. We're playing great baseball. And this is the place to be. And if I was a corporation, I'd be having my clients out to the ballpark, because there's not a better place to be, and there's not a more entertaining group of athletes to watch. And I'm telling you, get your tickets now, because it's going to be a tough ticket to get in the future. And you want to be there when the train left the station, because this club is just going in the right direction. We're the talk of baseball. You turn on any sports section, and you've got the Washington Nationals, 24/7.

___: Taking checks today.

[laughter]

MIKE RIZZO: Taking checks today.

THERESA WERNER: You said you eat, breathe, sleep baseball. What is a typical day like for you when the team is at home?

MIKE RIZZO: At home it's much more demanding than on the road. At home, I usually get in the office nine or 9:30. You know, you often have a typical business day meetings on the phone, talking to agents. I talk to a lot of agents, way too often. But you're on the phone. You have your occasional meetings. You have your schedule. And then, as the business day were to end, really, that's when my day starts. Because at five o'clock, batting practice starts. I meet with the manager downstairs in his office for about an hour. Then we go to batting practice. Then we go to game time. And, come around midnight, I'm out the door, and we're back at nine o'clock the next morning.

THERESA WERNER: Do you have any concerns or advice you'd like to share with the coaches and trainers working with high school and middle school pitchers, that will aspire to pitch in college and beyond?

MIKE RIZZO: Yes. First of all, get an education. Get a good education. Make baseball work for you. I'm asked that question all the time. You know, Little Joey, he's the best player on the travel team. What can I do to make him a major league player? Leave him alone. Let him play. Let him have fun. Let baseball work for him. Aspire to get a scholarship. If you're one of the elite three percent in this world that plays in the major leagues, God bless you.

But high school players need to enjoy the game. Have a love and a passion for it. Obviously, it's a competitive environment, just like any other. Let them have fun. Let them go at it. Teach them the right way. And just let them play.

THERESA WERNER: What efforts have been made by the Nationals and MLB to promote and support diversity on the team and in the front office?

MIKE RIZZO: Well the Commissioner's office, Joe can attest to this, the Commissioner's office has a great, great policy and distinct parameters that, when you hire an upper level management position, there is a minority process that has to go through it that is monitored very, very closely by the Commissioner's office. It's a terrific program that Commissioner Selig has put in. And I think we're starting to see the diversity program starting to take effect by-- the case that I've noticed, that many, many more minorities are in the front offices and at field positions.

THERESA WERNER: How did the \$2 billion dollar price tag for the Dodgers change the business outlook for the Nationals?

MIKE RIZZO: I know Kasten paid it, so it was-- [laughter] I don't know how that worked out. But, you know, those are really big macro questions, more for ownership

than, really, for me. I would imagine that, you know, the price of the Dodgers increased, the price of poker increased for everybody. You know, it's kind of like real estate, I would imagine. But, you know, the Los Angeles Dodgers is a unique situation. It's a unique asset. And I think that'll have some type of positive impact on the rest of major league baseball.

THERESA WERNER: The *Washington Post* reported today that Nationals' attendance numbers are among the league's lowest. Is D.C. a baseball town? And, if not, how can you make it one?

MIKE RIZZO: Well you make it by winning. People love to be associated with winners. I think it's a baseball town already. The 22,000 people that are at the games on a daily basis, they are emphatic. They're loud. They're very smart baseball IQ people. They know when to clap. They know when to boo. They don't need the scoreboard to tell us when to clap and when to get loud and all that stuff. It's a very smart baseball crowd. They're very passionate, the people that are there. And, when we start winning, which is right around the corner, we're going to fill the place. And, like I said, it's time to jump onboard, because this is an exciting time to be a Washington National fan. And we're going in the right direction. And that park is going to be filled, because it's going to be the place to be.

THERESA WERNER: What do you think of other teams' fans who take over the stadium? [laughter]

MIKE RIZZO: I've got a simple remedy for that. Send Andy at them. [laughter] No. Even a simpler remedy than that, beat them. When you start beating them on a regular basis, be it the Philadelphia Phillies, the Atlanta Braves, the Miami Marlins,, when you start beating them and playing well on a regular basis, as Stan Kasten once put it, you will get the attendance that you deserve. And this team deserves a full house because we're playing the hell out of baseball. And we've got a great, exciting ball club and place. And, if people don't recognize it, it's great for the 22,000 people that are there and that are passionate about it. But the rest are missing out.

THERESA WERNER: Who were some of your favorite players growing up?

MIKE RIZZO: Well, I was a Cub fan, so a Cub fan my whole life. So Ron Santo was one of my favorite players. I was an infielder, so I loved infielders. George Brett was near and dear to my heart. Loved him. Loved the way he got after it, and loved the way he played. My dad's favorite player, when guys at his age, you ask that centerfield question, it was, you know, Mantle, Mays, DiMaggio. DiMaggio was his favorite guy. But I loved offensive players. I loved guys who could hit. I loved big mashers. So right now, my favorite player is Frank Thomas, because he's near and dear to my heart. And I love the guy.

THERESA WERNER: Can you be a fan as well as an executive?

MIKE RIZZO: I'm a fan of the Nats, that's for sure. Believe me, I live and die with every pitch. That ninth inning has become very, very traumatic in my life. [laughter] So yes, I'm a fan. I'm a huge fan. And I'm a fan of baseball in general. But I'm a definite fan of the Washington Nationals. And, by the way, I'm a huge fan of this city, Washington, D.C.

THERESA WERNER: In lieu of Rivera's terrible injury, could you speak to his stature and the game of baseball, and how you, as a general manager, account for the frequency of injuries that can plague a ball club?

MIKE RIZZO: Well you try and limit all-- You try and limit all injuries. And a freak accident like that is just-- it's just traumatic to a ball club. Mariano Rivera, his place in history is pretty clear. The best relief pitcher I've ever seen. And I've been around 30 years. Maybe Joe has a different take on it.

___: [00:55:28]

MIKE RIZZO: Good point. I like that. Yeah, we did get him once in 2001. So-- But he's the best reliever I've ever seen. And his place in baseball is pretty well set. He'll be in Cooperstown five years after he retires. And it was just a sad, sad time to see him laying on the warning track there, for any baseball fan. And I don't care if you're a Red Sox fan, or a Nationals fan, it just was not a pretty sight to see.

THERESA WERNER: Is it true that you refused to see the movie *Moneyball*? And why? [laughter]

MIKE RIZZO: Glad I got a hammer here. That's good. [laughter] Yes, it's true. I'm boycotting the movie, because I think it depicts baseball people as dummies that just sit in a room, spit tobacco, and say stupid things. So I did boycott the movie because, you know, scouting is my life. And it's near and dear to me. And I don't like to be depicted in that regard.

THERESA WERNER: I understand that-- Didn't Joe Garagiola give you a big fine from MLB last year? And are you still friends? I can't imagine where these questions are coming from. [laughter]

MIKE RIZZO: I love Joe Garagiola, Jr. [laughter] And yes, like I said before, he's very high up in the Commissioner's office. But actually, the fine was imposed to me by Joe Torre. And, speaking of Joe Torre, I said to him, I said, "Joe, okay. You give me a fine, the first fine ever for a front office executive, and the first suspension ever. But why so big? It's my first offense." He said, "Why so big? Because you better thank your buddy Joe Garagiola, because he got it cut in half." [laughter]

So, with your lunch, now we're even. [laughter]

[applause]

THERESA WERNER: Before I ask the last question-- we're almost out of time. But I have a few housekeeping issues that I would like to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you of our upcoming Luncheon speakers. On May 15th, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission Chairman Gary Gensler. May 30th, Anna Maria Chavez, Chief Executive Officer of the Girl Scouts. We'll talk about their 100th anniversary of Girl Scouting. On June the 4th we have the Gerald R. Ford Journalism Awards with guest speaker Chris Matthews.

And second, I would like to present our guest with our traditional NPC mug. And I am pretty sure that this will bring you good luck. But only if you drink your coffee out of it every morning. [laughter]

And, for the last question, one of the last questions here, will you ever allow Teddy to win the Running of the Presidents?

[applause]

MIKE RIZZO: That would be a strategy that we're going to have to discuss and talk about. Teddy needs to get faster. He needs to improve. [laughter] Like a lot of things with the Nationals, he needs to get better. And we expect him to be better. And come out to Nats Park, because the one day you don't show up, he will win.

[laughter]

[applause]

THERESA WERNER: Thank you very much for coming today. [applause] I would also like to thank our National Press Club staff, including its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center, for organizing today's event. And today I want to say a very special thank you to Javila Ross, our membership recruitment manager and assistant to the President. This is her last day here. And we wish her the best.

Finally, here is a reminder that you can find more information at the National Press Club on our website. Also, if you would like to get a copy of today's program, please check out our website at www.press.org. Thank you all very much for coming today. We are adjourned. (gavel)

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