

Union director supports Wilpons

Written by DAVID LENNON
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New York Mets owner Fred Wilpon gets in a golf cart as he watches his team during a spring training workout on Feb. 27, 2012. (AP photo)

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. -- Michael Weiner, the executive director of the Players Association, made his annual stop at Mets camp Thursday and provided some vocal support for the team's embattled ownership.

Despite the Mets' slashing of their payroll by \$50 million, and the team's unwillingness to participate in the bidding for top free agents, Weiner said Fred Wilpon has "some goodwill in the bank."

"The Wilpons want to win," said Weiner, who held a players-only meeting for roughly 90 minutes.

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"I don't know much about the legal circumstances. But the Wilpons have been strong owners, and whatever's happening outside with respect to them is happening outside. The way they've conducted themselves throughout their tenure is what I'm relying on."

When asked if the payroll cut was a "red flag" for the union, which could be worried about the ripple effect through the free-agent market, Weiner was diplomatic about a topic that could have big ramifications on the players' salaries overall.

"Nobody is happy," Weiner said.

"I'm sure nobody in the Mets' front office and ownership is happy with the drop in their payroll because they understand that has to have some effect on their competitiveness."

That includes the Players Association.

When asked about Scott Boras' recent comments, which suggested that owners should be "replaced" if they don't "perform at certain levels," Weiner hedged some before acknowledging what would be in the best interest of his clientele.

"Scott's entitled to his view," Weiner said.

"I think the Wilpons are doing everything they can to try to put a competitive team on the field."

But Weiner did add, "I think it should be a concern of anybody in baseball if a flagship franchise -- whether that's the New York Mets, the Los Angeles Dodgers or anybody else -- is hampered in their ability to do their business. We look forward to a time when the Mets can again, without any restriction, be the flagship franchise that they have been."

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The Mets declined to comment on Weiner's remarks regarding ownership.

Weiner also fielded questions from players regarding the new blood-testing procedures for HGH, which the Mets were subjected to for the first time last week.

Although the CBA allows for testing only during the offseason and spring training, Weiner said there is language that could expand it to the regular season as early as 2013.

"It clearly can change," Weiner said.

"There's no contractual commitment where it has to happen. But built into the drug program is a provision that says we will meet on an annual basis to discuss improvements, and on top of that, the agreement with respect to blood testing contemplates that after the players have their experiences of this year, we will expressly consider whether or not to move it to 2013."

Weiner also was asked about the future of the designated hitter, especially with MLB having two 15-team leagues next season.

He said there has been no discussion of removing the DH and that the even number of teams will allow for a "much fairer" interleague schedule.