

The Wizard that's Oz

☒ Well the 2012 baseball season has sprung upon us like a field full of daffodils.

With it, we have our first major controversy already just 1 week into the campaign.

The Florida Marlins after years of political wrangling and lawsuits finally completed their new \$360 Million ballpark on the site of the old Orange Bowl football stadium in the Little Havana neighborhood of downtown Miami.

Having played in north Broward County and sharing Dolphins Stadium since 1993 with the Miami Dolphins, this was a dream true. After nearly 20 years, they finally now have a place to call their own home.

With the move came a new name (they are now the Miami Marlins), new uniforms and a new manager; Ozzie Guillen.

Ozzie is a former major leaguer having played from 1985-2000 with most of those years spent in a Chicago White Sox uniform.

After retiring, he went on to become the manager of those same White Sox from 2004-2011, even winning a World Series title in 2005 (their first since 1917).

When the White Sox would not renew Guillen's contract last year, the Marlins decided to hire him thinking that this would be a perfect fit.

After all, Guillen has lived in Miami for 12 years, would naturally appeal to the large Latin fan base (having been born in Venezuela) and has proven himself to be a manager capable of winning a World Series.

What could possibly go wrong??

Two words.....Fidel Castro.

One risk Marlins owner Jeff Loria was willing to overlook was Ozzies off the cuff personality and sometimes controversial comments and it only took a week for this house of cards to implode.

While in Chicago, Ozzie used a homophobic slur towards a Sun-Times reporter in 2006. Then in 2010 he gave his opinion on Arizona's new illegal immigration laws as well as saying that Asian born baseball players receive preferential treatment over Hispanic born players by being provided translators to help them assimilate. The latter two coming and going with little notice.

Fast forward to the present and Guillen is interviewed by Time Magazine and during the interview, expounds on his "love" and "admiration" of Fidel Castro. Say what?

Like the Jim Croce song: "You don't tug on Superman's cape, you don't spit into the wind, you don't pull the mask off the ole Lone Ranger" and in South Florida, you certainly don't publically profess your love and admiration of Fidel Castro.

Those two words are still (and will always be) a flash point in the heavily Cuban American community that is both metro Miami and increasingly South Florida.

Castro's brutal regime has caused incredible pain, suffering and misery to countless numbers of individuals and families in the generations that fled Cuba under his iron handed rule to settle in the freedom of America.

Of course Ozzie claims he meant no harm in his words, he has gone as far as saying the meaning was "lost in translation" thinking one thing in Spanish and then saying another in English but that doesn't wash. He knows exactly what he said and said exactly what he meant. After all, that IS Ozzie.

So, the Marlins (and Major League Baseball) quickly began the damage control.

Ozzie has had several press conferences apologizing to all who will listen; he has been suspended for 5 games as manager of the club and still faces a fire storm of protest from the public.

Will Ozzie be able to out run this latest verbal miscue or will he be fired?

Who knows? From articles I have read, fans are pretty split down the middle on whether he should keep his job or not.

Personally, I don't think he should lose his job.

After all, this is America and liking what he says or not, he has the right (like all of us) to free speech. But with that freedom comes responsibility and repercussions.

The Marlins are his employer; it is their decision (which will of course be heavily influenced by their fans, community leaders and overall public perception).

I think Ozzie is sorry for what he said but based on his track record, it is likely to happen again at some point. It is just a matter of time.

Only time will tell though if the dust settles on this one. If it does, it may be awhile.

In the meantime though Ozzie must feel like the Wicked Witch of the West did when the tornado dropped Dorothy's house on her.

If only he was so lucky, he would be in the Land of Oz far, far away from this storm.