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COMMENTARY

Bowa deserved better from Phils

By William C. Kashatus

Long before Lenny Dykstra or Pete Rose donned the red pinstripes, Larry Bowa was the heart and soul of the Phillies.

As a young player, he had his problems as a batter and he had to develop his fielding skills, but every time the Phillies won in their glory days — National League division titles in '76, '77 and '78 and the world championship of 1980 — there would be Bowa in the middle of it — stealing a base, forcing an overthrow or breaking up a double-play.

Not only did the scrappy shortstop's temper capture the heart of clockpunchers and bluebloods alike, he set the standard for the hard-nosed play we have come to expect of this town's baseball players. And his career stats were pretty impressive — 2,100 career hits, two Gold Gloves, and five All-Star Game appearances. As a Phillies coach, Bowa was committed to the organization, and to the community, volunteering his time to baseball day camps and charitable organizations.

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Altogether, not a bad resume for a manager candidate, especially one who must rebuild the club and seek to restore credibility with the fans.

So when the Phillies bypassed Bowa as the club's next manager in favor of Terry Francona, those who value his contributions to the team and the city felt he deserved better. One can only admire the reputation that Francona, a 10-year utility man, has gained for developing young players in the White Sox organization, for his skill as a third-base coach and his passion for the game. But in Bowa, the Phillies had a home-grown candidate who offered exactly those qualities — and more. His two-year tenure as manager of the San Diego Padres allowed him to mature as a *major league* manager in terms of understanding himself and his players.

As for Bowa, he has learned to turn the other cheek. This is not the first time the Phillies have rejected him. He was traded in 1982 to the Cubs for Ivan DeJesus, a trade in which Ryne Sandberg (!!) was a throw-in. Yet, he returned to the Phillies as a coach, and when he learned of Francona's choice, graciously wished him the best of luck.

Bowa will rebound — the surest way to guarantee his success is to tell him that he can't or shouldn't do something. The hair may be a little grayer now, the temper may have mellowed a bit, but the passion to achieve is still there. That's why Bowa will be an extremely successful manager some day soon. Sadly, he won't be managing for the Phillies.

William C. Kashatus, a Philadelphia writer, is the author of *Pete Gray, Wartime Baseball and the American Dream* (McFarland).