



Dallas Mavericks bar bloggers from locker room

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Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban has instituted a new policy banning full-time bloggers from the team's locker room, drawing an official protest from *The Dallas Morning News*, which employs the only writer so far banned.

In an e-mail sent to Cuban on Monday, Bob Yates, deputy managing editor/sports of *The Morning News*, wrote that the policy "is a veiled attempt at retribution" against *Morning News* reporter Tim MacMahon, who has been blogging about the Mavericks since 2006.

Cuban told MacMahon to leave the locker room on Feb. 29, the same day MacMahon wrote an item critical of Mavericks coach Avery Johnson.

Yates wrote that the policy, issued by the Mavericks over the weekend, contradicts language on the team's season media passes, allowing access to all media areas, including locker rooms.

In addition to writing items that appear only online in the dallasnews.com Mavericks blog, MacMahon gathers quotes from players for the beat writers who cover the team. Those quotes often appear in the newspaper.

MacMahon attempted to enter the Mavs' locker room before games Thursday and Saturday but was stopped both times.

"I can assure you that I am not singling out Tim MacMahon," Cuban wrote in an e-mail response to a reporter's questions. Cuban said he never read MacMahon's posts and had no idea MacMahon had been blogging so long. He said someone did bring the Johnson item to his attention, along with the fact that MacMahon was a blogger.

"I don't care what Tim writes, then or now," Cuban wrote. "What I do care about is being fair to all bloggers."

The Mavericks' new policy denies locker room access to writers whose "primary purpose is to blog." The policy states that the team does "not have enough room in the locker room, nor enough media passes to fairly accommodate everyone."

In an e-mail exchange with a reporter, Cuban acknowledged that MacMahon is the only writer who has been excluded from the locker room so far. He wrote that if he becomes aware of other writers whose primary purpose is blogging, he will prevent them from gathering material in the locker room, too.

The dispute has attracted the attention of the NBA, which has no policy on bloggers.

"We're looking into the whole issue of locker room access for bloggers," said Brian McIntyre, the NBA's senior vice president for basketball communications.

The heads of some press organizations were critical of Cuban's move.

"I can't imagine the NBA would want to make this a widespread phenomenon," said Gilbert Bailon, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Bailon said in a telephone interview that blogging is now part of the job description of newspaper reporters. He is

editorial page editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and a former executive editor of *The Morning News*.

Mike Fannin, president of the Associated Press Sports Editors, wrote in an e-mail that his group "takes issue with any major league sports franchise arbitrarily changing the rules" during a season.

"At a time when professional bloggers are gaining respect across the board, this seems to represent a leap backward for the NBA," wrote Fannin, managing editor for sports and features at *The Kansas City Star*. Earlier in his career, Fannin worked at *The Morning News* .

"We hope the commissioner will see the potential chaos involved and step in to stop this overt bullying," Fannin wrote.

Jonathan Dube, president of the Online News Association and director of digital media for the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., declined to comment on the specific case but said that, in general, it's unfair to treat professional journalists who blog differently from other professional journalists.

"It should be irrelevant from a credential standpoint whether journalists publish their text reports on the Web or in a newspaper," Dube said in a telephone interview.

Cuban, a popular blogger himself, responded to the criticism with some of his own.

"By taking on the branding, standards and posting habits of the blogosphere, newspapers have worked their way down to the least common denominator of publishing in what appears to be an effort to troll for page views," Cuban wrote in an e-mail.

Deadspin, a sports blog, noted the irony of Cuban's blogger ban, headlining its item on the Mavericks' new policy, "Mark Cuban dislikes bloggers who aren't him."