

SPORTS EYE

With Alvin A. Reid

Cards' ace Flaherty finds his voice in fight against racism, police brutality

I've met St. Louis Cardinals pitching ace Jack Flaherty all of one time in my life.

My first impression was that he is a courteous and bright young man – and that he is bi-racial.

You know what I mean. It was somewhat obvious to me that one of his parents – or a grandparent – is black.

While it did not do so in 2020, USA TODAY publishes an annual story around Jackie Robinson Day (April 15) on the number of African Americans on opening day rosters of Major League Baseball teams.

The number is based on "players who identify themselves as black or a minority group." The number for the Cardinals always was short, which led me to conclude that Flaherty did not ID himself as a minority player.

I wasn't insulted. In fact, I (kind of) conceded that I could have been incorrect about his ethnic background.

But Flaherty shed any doubt last week when he spoke boldly "as a mixed person of color" about his role in changing American society and working to eliminate racism in this nation.

George Floyd's death at the knee of a Minneapolis police officer and the video that emerged afterwards, "kind of struck a nerve," Flaherty told reporters in a virtual press session.

"It felt like, I don't know ... We have this platform, we have this opportunity to speak up, this opportunity to talk and to try to do anything we can to make change."

"It's just an issue that's gone on for far too long, and it just hit a nerve. You see everybody try to come together and force a call to action, and it was great. It was great to see everyone come together."

In 2017, Bruce Maxwell was the lone MLB player to kneel during the national anthem. Maxwell now finds himself in the Mexican League, no longer on an MLB roster.

Flaherty said, to the probable shock and dismay of a majority of Cardinals fans, that Maxwell would not be alone if his dignified protest happened this season.

"It's a special thing that he did, and it's really unfortunate for how it turned out," Flaherty said.

"I figured you'd ask if there was a possibility that baseball players don't stand for the anthem, I'd say absolutely. We kind of wish that we had been there for Bruce and had his back and been able to come together back then the way that we are now."

He did not say if he would kneel during that national anthem, but did admit considering opting out of playing the shortened 2020 season in support of social issues.

"To say (sitting out) didn't cross my mind ... it did," Flaherty told reporters.

"I think there's two ways to go about it. You can be in the sport, be in the game, and play the game and continue to grow and use the platform while playing, to advocate for these things."

Flaherty said it's past time for MLB to deal with its low number of black players and its relationship with the black community.

"If you want to have more conversations about what's going on and not feel uncomfortable to speak about anything, just have man-to-man conversations," he said.

"There's ways to educate yourself, there's ways to learn."

Flaherty is active on social media with his thoughts on Floyd's death and police miscarriages of justice that claimed the lives of Breonna Taylor and others.

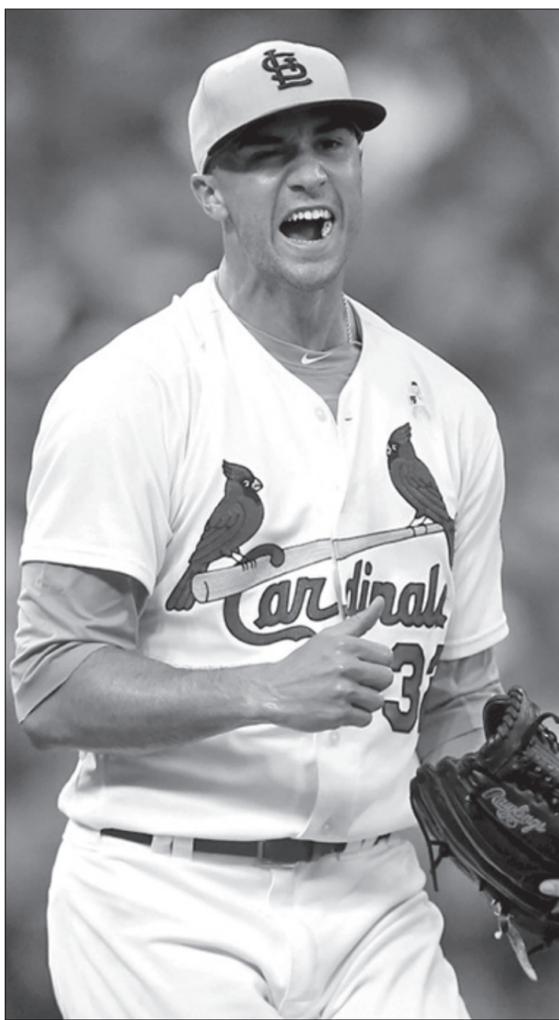
Cardinals manager Mike Shildt said Flaherty has "thought about it and he's thought through it."

"I'm confident he's being respectful in how he's doing it, but he's sincere about change. And I support that completely." I'm sure Flaherty has heard from many people who don't support him. And they've probably told him in very unfriendly ways via social media.

We'll see how he responds on and off the baseball diamond.

Maxwell smart

The aforementioned Bruce



Jack Flaherty did not say if he would kneel during that national anthem, but did admit considering opting out of playing the shortened 2020 season in support of social issues.

Maxwell told ESPN that MLB ushered him out baseball, just as the NFL did with Colin Kaepernick, after his peaceful demonstration during the national anthem in 2017. His protest was to draw attention to police brutality and show his disappointment in the white supremacist parade in Charlottesville, Virginia.

"Yes, I think I was blackballed out. I feel like I was pushed out of the game of baseball by everybody, not just by the A's. I definitely had a target on my back for kneeling," he said.

He felt betrayed that more black players didn't support

him, but he understands why.

"I feel like black players have a sense of fear of being who they truly are because they are afraid to lose their job, because somebody might not honestly like their perception," he said.

Former Atlanta Brave, Cardinal and current Chicago Cubs outfielder Jason Heyward said, "I hear [Maxwell] on feeling that way, but we were not empowered to speak up."

"We didn't know any better. Now we realize we can and we should do better. Now we know we have to do it because there is no other choice. That's what hits home. We have to act

now."

Maxwell said he wants a job back with a Major League franchise and honesty from the black players that turned their respective backs on him three years ago.

"You need to put everything out on the table, especially like in this situation we're talking about people of color," he said.

"You need to be real about it. We need to make sure that we're not doing it for us, but for the people who can't speak and can't be heard. We need to use that podium as positive and in a powerful moment for the people and not ourselves."

I invite you to read this article at <https://es.pn/2OpKnBO>. Houston manager Dusty Baker, L.A. Dodgers manager Dave Roberts and retired and current black stars share their thoughts on Maxwell's courage and how to address racial issues in MLB and throughout the nation.

Beal in A-Rod's deal

Bradley Beal's shoulder ailment caused him to opt out of the 2020 NBA season resumption, but he's staying busy.

Beal, a native St. Louisan and Washington Wizards guard, is a minority stakeholder in Alex Rodriguez's bid to buy the New York Mets.

Investment billionaire Steve Cohen is the front-runner to purchase the team from owner Jeff Wilpon.

Rodriguez's group includes his fiancée, Jennifer Lopez, NFL Hall of Famer Brian Urlacher and current Denver Nuggets player Mason Plumlee.

Beal, who is a big-time Cardinals fan, wasn't born when the Mets were "pond scum" in St. Louis during the 1980s. He certainly will be reminded if he becomes a minority owner of the franchise.

The Reid Roundup

Lewis Hamilton thrust his fist in the air with a black power salute after winning the Styrian Grand Prix Formula 1 race in Austria last Sunday. While a majority of drivers have knelt during the host nation's anthem before the opening two races of the season, Hamilton wants all his colleagues to do it. "I have made

it clear that I am not supporting the political side but the human rights' side of things."...

LeBron James, Patrick Beverley and other NBA stars are rallying to support suspended ESPN senior writer **Adrian Wojnarowski**. "Woj" replied to a press release sent by Sen. **Josh Hawley** attacking the NBA for its stance on slogans on jerseys by sending Hawley the simple message of "F--- you." He apologized but remains suspended...

Tiger Woods is scheduled to return to the PGA Tour this weekend at the Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio... The Ivy League put a halt to all fall sports and will play some football games in the spring semester. The Patriot League has followed suit. My guess is the Power 5 conferences will announce the same later this month... The Washington franchise of the NFL announced that it is dropping its current name and helmet logo. The new name and logo will have no Native American references...

Cam Newton said via social media that replacing New England Patriots six-time Super Bowl winner **Tom Brady** "is the elephant in the room." Go to any Boston media outlet and read the comments after a story on Newton is posted. A lot of folks ain't happy... **Dak Prescott** had not signed a long-term deal with the Dallas Cowboys as of Tuesday. If a deal was not reached by Wednesday afternoon, Prescott will be playing under the franchise tag during the 2020 season... As part of his \$500 million contract, Kansas City Chiefs quarterback **Patrick Mahomes** said that playing basketball, baseball and "pretty much every physical activity you can do," are forbidden. He also said his goal is to win as many Super Bowls (6) as Brady.

Alvin A. Reid was honored as the 2017 "Best Sports Columnist - Weeklies" in the Missouri Press Association's Better Newspaper Contest and is a New York Times contributor. He is a panelist on the Nine Network program, Donnybrook, a weekly contributor to "The Charlie Tuna Show" on KFNS and appears monthly on "The Dave Glover Show" on 97.1 Talk." His Twitter handle is @aareid1.

INSIDE SPORTS

With Earl Austin Jr.

Metro girls' basketball is full of star power

The St. Louis metro area has been blessed to have some tremendous girls' basketball players on the scene.

In recent months, we have chronicled exploits of former Incarnate Word Academy star Napheesa Collier, who was named the Rookie of the Year in the WNBA. Also, there is former Parkway North star Alecia "Sug" Sutton, who was drafted by the WNBA champion Washington Mystics.

The next wave of talented young ladies in St. Louis are already starting to make their mark on the basketball court.

Last week, the Lady Brad Beal Elite 2021 team brought home a championship from

the first session of the Nike Tournament of Champions, which was held in Indianapolis.

Led by Vashon High girls coach John Albert, Lady BBE finished 5-1 in the tournament. They defeated Always Elite in the semifinals, then won the championship with a 61-53 victory over Ohio Futures Black.

The team consists of talented area players who will be entering their junior and senior years of high school. All of them are on the radar of collegiate programs that

are looking for new talent.

Saniah Tyler and Jaiden Bryant are a dynamic duo of juniors from perennial state powerhouse Incarnate Word. The 5'6" Tyler is an elite level point guard who is one of the



best in the country. The 5'10" Bryant is a versatile wing player who makes 3-pointers or scores in the low post. She received a scholarship offer from Missouri State University after the tournament.

Gateway STEM senior standout Marshaun Bostic is a 5'9" point guard with tremendous speed in the open court. The All-Public High League performer is one of the fastest kids I've seen going end time

end with the basketball in my 35 years of covering the sport.

Seniors Jaliyah Green of Wentzville Holt and Samya Johnson of McCluer North are a pair of 5'11" forwards who could make it happen with

their versatility. Green has an incredible knack for scoring baskets in the lane in heavy traffic while Johnson can score, rebound and block shots.

Holding down the middle for Lady BBE is 6'4" junior Kiyah Brodie, who plays for Mid-Missouri powerhouse Rock Bridge in Columbia. She is a very talented shot blocker who also has a nice shooting touch from the high post.

Senior Sofia Tweedie is a 5'10" guard from Francis Howell Central who can knock down 3-pointers while playing a good complimentary role in several areas to help the team.

Rounding out Lady BBE's group in Indy were guard Kiyah Cooper from Vashon and forward Tyler Butler from Belleville East. Cooper is a solid guard while Butler provides good inside play.