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Cozy Sox-Globe ties called into question

By [Scott Van Voorhis](#)

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Cozy ownership ties between the Red Sox and The Boston Globe, touted by backers as corporate synergy, may now look more incestuous with Sox wonderkind Theo Epstein's stunning departure, media experts say.

Epstein yesterday walked away from the team he helped win its first World Series in 86 years, turning down a \$1.5 million-a-year offer to extend his general manager contract. The Herald reported that Epstein had misgivings over a Globe column Sunday that revealed too much inside information about his relationship with Sox CEO Larry Lucchino.

The Globe's owner, The New York Times Co., owns a 17 percent share of New England Sports Ventures – which owns the Red Sox, Fenway Park and 80 percent of the New England Sports Network. Globe publisher Richard Gilman sits on the venture's partner committee.

The Globe's reporting, including an apparently premature story yesterday that Epstein had reached a three-year deal, raises serious questions about the role those ownership ties may have played in the paper's reporting, media experts said.

"It is an inherent conflict of interest," said Andrew Schwartzman, chief executive of Media Access Project. "There is a tension between the demands to generate business synergy and the increasing pressure that media companies have to maintain public trust."

Epstein's departure raises the question of whether the Globe's close ties with the Sox may have backfired and cost the team a talented general manager, viewed in baseball circles as one of the game's rising stars.

The Globe's reporting on the team – and whether the paper benefited from its inside connections to get advances on some stories – has been an issue since Henry and the Times bought the team in early 2002. Those ties were further highlighted when it was revealed that Gilman and other Globe executives were given World Series rings.

Media experts say it's fitting that the paper should face questions given what some view as potential conflicts at the heart of their business alliance.

"Maybe they should stop wearing their World Series rings," quipped Bob Zelnick, chairman of Boston University's journalism department. "I think probably it is half a real conflict of interest and half a perceived conflict of interest, and there is little you can do about the latter."

Others say such crossownership scenarios leave reporters vulnerable to pressure to toe – and report – the corporate line.

"This is the problem with conglomerated media. When the ownership of media companies have separate interests . . . there is a tendency to compromise the reporting," said Timothy Karr of Washington, D.C. media watchdog group Free Press. "A lot of journalists will tell you there is a Chinese wall that separates the newsroom from the corporate side. We have found repeatedly over the past few years that that is not the case."

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