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## Lynn Swann's Opponent Fumbles

A televised racial gaffe may mark a turning point in the race for governor of Pennsylvania

By [SEAN SCULLY/PHILADELPHIA](#)

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As a star receiver for the Superbowl champion Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1970s, Lynn Swann was used to making his own winning plays. But in his race for the GOP gubernatorial nomination in his home state of Pennsylvania, Swann may have just been handed the game, thanks to an ill-advised comment by his chief opponent's campaign manager. James Seif, a widely respected and seasoned political operative, was on the Pennsylvania Cable Network Wednesday night discussing the campaign of former Lt. Gov. Bill Scranton when he derided Swann as "the rich white guy in this race." Even though Seif seemed to be trying to paint Swann as a well-connected insider in contrast with Scranton—despite the fact that Scranton (as in the city) comes from a distinguished Pennsylvania

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family—it was an odd, unfortunate choice of words, since Swann, well, happens to be black.

Not surprisingly, the comment came off as offensive and insensitive. Scranton almost immediately fired Seif, who ironically had been brought in only weeks before to shake up the flaccid Scranton campaign and initially gotten high marks for giving his candidate a new identity as a reformer in a state where anti-incumbent feeling is running particularly high this year. Seif's comments "in no way whatsoever reflect my views or those of my campaign," Scranton said in a hastily released official statement, while Swann said "it is important this campaign be waged on a higher level of dignity and character." The gaffe couldn't have come at a worse time, either, just two weeks before a state party meeting that will decide which candidate will gain the crucial endorsement in the May 11 primary. Swann, a political neophyte, had already been running ahead Scranton, and political observers say this affair ended any chance Scranton had of securing the party's official backing—without which no Republican gubernatorial candidate has won the primary since 1978.

No governor has ever lost a bid for reelection in Pennsylvania, but Republicans sense an opportunity this year. Polls already show that the popularity of Gov. Ed Rendell, the incumbent Democrat and former Mayor of Philadelphia, is sagging in the Western and Central part of the state. Rendell has so far failed to make good on his promise of property tax reform, and many social conservatives object to his support of slot machine gambling. Although Swann is still making some rookie mistakes—making attendees at one North Philadelphia rally wait over an hour in a cold, unheated warehouse, and then failing to acknowledge the officials in attendance during his remarks — he is already a household name in the western end of the state thanks to his Hall of Fame playing career. A Rasmussen poll released Jan. 19 shows Swann leading Rendell by 45-43 percent, but Scranton losing to Rendell badly, 46-36 percent. "Rendell can't change the perception that he is the governor of Philadelphia and that he's helping Philadelphia too much," said Terry Madonna, professor of public affairs at Franklin and Marshall College and director of the widely respected Keystone Poll, which will be looking at the race next month.

As Philadelphia Daily News columnist John M. Baer, one of the state's veteran political observers, noted Friday, Pennsylvania actually has a rich tradition of politicians and their handlers putting their foot in their mouths during a crucial moment of a political campaign. In 1990 gubernatorial challenger Barbara Hafer called incumbent Bob

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Casey "A redneck Irishman," propelling him to a second term, and Dick Thornburgh's aide once called his boss "The salvation of this sorry-ass state," pretty much assuring that Harris Wofford would become the state's next U.S. senator in 1991. So it seems that, thanks to Seif's gaffe, both Swann and Scranton will get in the record books, just for very different reasons.

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