



Be Warned, St. Louie – Chicago Is World Serious

By Dr. David Fletcher

ST. LOUIS – This off-season for Chicago baseball has gotten off to an explosive start. Cubs owner Tom Ricketts finally has his man in Theo Epstein to head an experienced operations team that is prepared to break the World Series drought. The prolonged dance between the Cubs and Boston Red Sox threatened to overshadow the Fall Classic until the St. Louis Cardinals' David Freese hit a walk-off home run to force a Game 7 showdown.

Not quite as dramatic but perhaps no less important is the news that the White Sox have hired Robin Ventura to replace Ozzie Guillen, who helped bring a World Series title to Chicago in the 2005 season.

With fresh optimism at both sides of town, I felt it important to attend Game 7 of the Fall Classic to scout what lies ahead for the local clubs in their pursuit of the biggest prize of all. This was my chance to make a statement about the state of Chicago baseball, to show that it would be a force to be reckoned with soon.

First, my son Jeffrey warned me not to dress up like Steve Bartman. He recounted how a Cardinal fan reportedly sucker-punched him in his Cubs jersey this summer. This was a matter of pride, not trouble. I dressed up as Ronnie “Woo Woo” Wickers in my authentic No. 19 Fletcher home blues.

The first indication that Jeffrey might be right came after I parked my car, when I walked down Broadway innocently to Busch Stadium III.

“You’re going to get shot,” a woman yelled out her car window.

Happy to report, only the looks could kill

There was some Texas Rangers blue in the crowd, but I guarantee you, I was the only one in a Cubs uniform. Many Cardinals fans I encountered wondered if this was a Halloween costume joke. I said, No, I was a scout for the Chicago teams.

Several vendors admired the fact that I showed my true colors at a World Series game of a longtime division rival.

"We got Theo, and this is the scene of the crime where he won in 2004 with the Red Sox," assured Ken Rade, a part-time worker at Wrigley Field during the season. "We are going to the World Series next."

My seat was right behind the Cardinals dugout at the first base side. Several players noticed me and smirked at the only person in a Cubs uniform amid the sea of Cardinals red. Ex-Cub Ryan Theriot was one of them.

A trip to the bathroom was no small challenge, as the rambunctious Cardinal fans were ready to celebrate a certain Game 7 victory. Their team ahead in the eighth inning, 6-2, they really hazed me. One young fan who couldn't have been more than 7 years old tugged at me and said, "Hey, Mister Cub, I wish we were at Wrigley Field because we would not be standing in line now because of those nice troughs."

A Game 7 evokes the kind of suspense that no other can offer. Only one Chicago team has ever played in a best-of-seven World Series that went the limit. In 1945, the Cubs dropped a 9-3 decision to the Detroit Tigers at Wrigley Field.

But after the heroics of Game 6, this one couldn't possibly measure up to what had taken place the previous night. Certainly, it didn't rank among the best Game 7's ever, a list that includes the 10-inning, 1-0 shutout that the Minnesota Twins' Jack Morris pitched in 1991. As Chicago Baseball Museum board member and then Atlanta Braves pitcher Marvin Freeman will tell you, grown men cried in the visitor's clubhouse that evening.

On this night, the only tears were those of joy. After the Cardinals clinched the championship – White Sox executive vice president Howard Pizer and board chairman Jerry Reinsdorf were part of group that presented the trophy – I encountered potential danger only once. That came after my exit from the stadium about an hour following the postgame celebration, when several young, inebriated Cardinal fans make obnoxious comments. "Go away, Cubs fan!" "We hate the Cubs!" "We are the world champs!"

(Congratulations to Brett Ballantini (Comcast SportsNet), Lou Canellis (WFLD-TV), Scot Gregor (Daily Herald), Dan Roan (WGN-TV) and Patrick Rose (Associated Press), who picked the Cardinals to win in seven games in our World Series poll.)

One kid even took a poke at me. I ducked, then he grabbed my hat. I ran after him and took it back. (I had anticipated hat-nabbing and packed a back-up, although I did not need it.)

Except for the fact the Chicago wasn't represented – no small detail, admittedly -- the trip was worth it despite the expected taunts. Now the baseball world knows that it can't escape Chicago, a city that is about ready to host a Fall Classic of its own, only with twice the drama.

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