



## ***2003 Cubs just keep on giving via CSN Chicago's longest-ever documentary***

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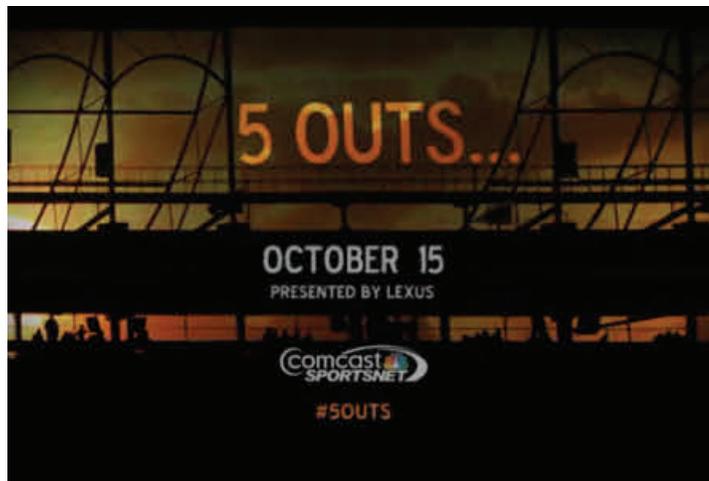
The 2003 Cubs are the one Chicago baseball team that just keeps on giving through the ages via shocks and surprises.

Latest is left fielder Moises Alou, one half of *L'Affair Bartman*, making a startling admission on a new 90-minute Comcast SportsNet Chicago documentary on the most hopeful, and in the end most frustrating, season-climax in post-1945 Cubs annals.

After alternately claiming he would have caught or did not have a realistic shot at the infamous Luis Castillo pop foul Steve Bartman deflected just out of his reach, Alou now said he and third baseman Aramis Ramirez quickly prepared to get out of Dodge after the you-know-what hit the fan in Game 6.

"I didn't really like our chances after what happened (in Game 6)," Alou said in an interview in "5 Outs...", the documentary airing at 9 p.m. (CT) Oct. 15 on CSN Chicago. The date is significant – the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Game 7 in which Alou and Kerry Wood homered, but also one in which the Cubs caved in during the middle innings to complete the greatest postseason collapse in team history.

"I had a gut feeling or a weird feeling," Alou continued. "They kept coming back...even in that game and the game before....series was 3-1 and tied up 3-3. I have the same feeling...I had a feeling they would win. I told Aramis (Ramirez) we should book a flight in case we left tomorrow (after Game 7) and we did and we left the next morning. I don't want to sound like a negative player or person, but we did it just in case we had to leave...and it happened...we had that gut feeling."



**"5 Outs..." is the longest original documentary production Comcast SportsNet Chicago has ever done.**

Ramirez, now with the Brewers, confirmed Alou's account:

"Me and Moises are close and he told (me) he had a reservation just in case we lose. We always do that. We go home right after, the first flight out. We know anything can happen and just in case we lose, we are going to leave the next day."

The story got stranger when ex-Cubs star Sammy Sosa, Alou's and Ramirez's 2003 teammate, was interviewed last weekend at his Miami-area office by CSN Chicago's David Kaplan. Sosa was informed for the first time about Alou's and Ramirez's travel contingencies. In response, he said he would have had a serious conflict with both players if he had known about it at the time.



**Sammy Sosa was livid when informed Moises Alou and Aramis Ramirez had booked flights home before the climactic Game 7 of the 2003 NLCS. Photo credit: [Sammy Sosa](#).**

The story, one of many on "5 Outs...", certainly besmirches Alou's and Ramirez's clutch reputations and supposed image as "winning" players. But the advance booking of a getaway flight confirms a palpable feeling, later expressed in the Cubs' jittery play and Lou Piniella's second-guessing of his team handling in the 2008 NL Division Series sweep by the Dodgers. The weight of the Cubs' century-long championship drought is nearly crushing to almost all involved. The manner in which panicked fans treated Bartman after his innocent deflection has certainly filtered down to the players over the decades.

### **'03 Cubs boosted team to all-time heights**

Greatly expanding on the Cubs' collapse from a 3-1 lead in the seven-game NL Championship Series against the Marlins, "5 Outs..." attempts to re-capture the flavor of a transformative season. Despite the ultimate downer ending, the memorable campaign boosted the Cubs to all-time heights of popularity. Such hype is only now receding after four straight horrible seasons and a Theo Epstein rebuilding plan that has no ETA date for a return to contention.

Every time the Cubs have made a playoff foray in the past three decades, the franchise rose higher in profile and appeal, and remained at that plateau until the next venture into October. The 1984 Cubs boosted attendance to 2 million for the first time. The Sammy Sosa-led wild-card team in 1998 lifted the gate to more than 2.6 million.

Finally, the 2003 Cubs made the franchise a 3 million-attendance outfit, meaning cramped Wrigley Field would play to more than 90 percent capacity on average for each game. Actually, the '03 team officially just missed 3 million because the last regular-season Friday game, with 40,000 already in the stands, was rained out. Eventually, the Cubs drew as much as 3.3 million in 2008 before the crowds began to drop in the orgy of losing starting in 2010.

The mania and hope of '03 in spite of the collapse led to Kerry Wood and Mark Prior becoming Sports Illustrated cover boys in March 2004 with the prediction the Cubs would finally reach the World Series this time. Wood's and Prior's subsequent injuries and a clubhouse dissension-riddled 2004 wild-card race collapse finally ended the momentum of the previous season.

On a personal note, the skyrocketing interest in the near-miss '03 team generated baseball speaking engagements for this writer that never existed previously. Libraries, community centers, senior centers and houses of worship all wanted baseball chat-sessions starting in the off-season of 2003-04. Eventually, that trend died as the Cubs never returned to the heights of Oct. 2003. Even the 97-victory campaign that ended in a thud at Dodger Stadium in '08 did not revive the speaking trail, with the recession making matters worse. Nothing could replicate '03 for baseball hype in Chicago.

### **Cubs got the anniversary treatment from CSN Chicago**

The decade ever since has zipped by with the Cubs as a franchise almost unrecognizable from '03. But 10 years' reflection is as good a time as ever to recap the unbelievable run. Comcast SportsNet Chicago picked the '03 Cubs for long-form treatment when producers desired an anniversary special this season. The '03 Cubs, due to controversies, dramatics and the short passage of time, obviously were considered more compelling than the 1993 and 1983 first-place White Sox, and the 1963 NFL champion Bears.

CSN Chicago rounded up the biggest-name Cubs of 2003 – Alou, Ramirez, Sosa, Wood, a bearded Prior and manager Dusty Baker (in another interesting twist of timing, just fired by the Cincinnati Reds). Producers Sarah Lauch and Ryan McGuffey carefully planned interviews for when the celebs – Cubs and Marlins -- were coming through



**There is more interesting timing with the airing of "5 Outs..." with Dusty Baker being fired for yet another playoff flop, from the Cincinnati Reds.**

town, above and beyond those who already lived here like Wood and 2003 general manager Jim Hendry. That left enough travel budget for some good "gets" – Sosa in Florida and Prior, apparently out of baseball comebacks, in San Diego.

The list of Marlins-turned-Chicago baseball figures interviews also is staggering. Then-Florida third-base coach Ozzie Guillen was easily accessible, living in Bucktown in his first year without a paying baseball job since he was a Venezuelan teen-ager. Derrek Lee,

Juan Pierre and CSN Chicago Cubs studio analyst Todd Hollandsworth became Cubs within two years after their World Series triumph.

Media mavens included Kaplan, who co-produced the show, along with 2003 Cubs-turned-Sox voice Steve Stone, Thom Brennaman (Fox play-by-play announcer during the NLCS) and Chicago Sun-Times columnist Rick Telander.

Even with 90 minutes – a monster amount of time in TV – with which to work, CSN Chicago news director Kevin Cross opted not to pursue every single 2003 Cub. He may have missed out on another “get.” Some dickering could have brought ’03 platoon first baseman Eric Karros’ home video of behind-the-scenes life with the team to the public for the first time. As of this summer, Karros, now a Fox baseball analyst, had decided to continue to keep the video private. He did not return a phone call for comment on the documentary.

### **Karros, home video don’t make the cut**

Cross, who directed coverage of the ’03 Cubs as a CLTV producer that fall, is aware of Karros and his footage.

“One of the things we wanted to do with this documentary was to hear the stories from the key players of that year,” he said. “I agree that Eric was a big part of the team and the video could have been something of a different angle.

“But to be honest to you, we wanted to tell stories. The video helps you tell the stories. We have video that allows us to tell the story. The only people who could tell the story are the people who lived it. Obviously Eric’s one of them. Once we got rolling with the interviews (with the big names)...reaching out to other folks than that, we would have had a four-hour documentary at that point.”



**Kerry Wood was a big part of the 2003 Cubs' triumphs and tragedies.**

CSN Chicago landed Sosa through Kaplan, one of Chicago’s most politically astute and connected media members, sports or news-side. Kaplan contacted Sosa’s representatives with the leverage other big ’03 names were already in the can. Thus Sosa hopped aboard after doing few interviews with Chicago media since retiring and still being under the cloud of possible performance enhancement drug use.

The biggest 2003 sideshow prior to Bartman was Sosa’s corked-bat incident on June 3 at Wrigley Field. As Sosa swung in the first inning against the Rays, his bat flew apart and exposed the cork. Plate ump Tim McClelland quickly inspected the goods and tossed Sosa from the game.

Kaplan said he did not ask Sosa about the corked bat, and the ex-slumber did not subsequently bring it up during his stream of consciousness about Alou-Ramirez and a desire to have a reconciliation with the Cubs.

Thus the story-within-the-story apparently won’t be included on “5 Outs...”. Rumors abounded, and later written up in a Fred Mitchell story in the Chicago Tribune, that the Cubs were notified Major League Baseball investigators would soon arrive at Wrigley Field. Apparently more “loaded” bats were present than the one batting-practice model

Sosa claimed he mistakenly used in the game. Supposedly, Cubs clubhouse attendants hurriedly stashed the offending war clubs in car trunks and out-of-the-way nooks and crannies of Wrigley Field. None of the parties involved ever has refuted such stories.

At the NLCS in Miami four months later, MLB disciplinarian Bob Watson told me Sosa actually mitigated the length of his subsequent suspension by immediately apologizing to Commissioner Bud Selig. But what if Selig's men had found a cache of corked bats? We'll never know the outcome of that scenario.

### **Bartman stays on the sidelines**

Cross also said CSN Chicago elected not to request an interview of Bartman, still living in the northern suburbs. He figured the channel would have had to do an entire separate documentary on the loyal Cubs fan, driven to near-anonymity by the firestorm of reaction over his deflection. Cross and Co. wanted to keep the focus on the entire season, not the craziness of one inning in Game 6.

That was a good decision to not include Bartman. He has earned his privacy. Wayne Drehs of ESPN.com likely went too far by virtually stalking Bartman at his car in the latter's company parking lot in 2005. Drehs waited until Bartman emerged to go home after a day's work. They engaged in a generally cordial conversation, but Bartman declined to do an interview. He is consistent about his silence to this day.

The Bartman-Alou encounter and its aftermath already have gotten the documentary treatment in 2011, reviewed almost minute-by-minute in ESPN's 30 for 30 documentary "Catching Hell." A female Wrigley Field security guard was portrayed as a hero for providing refuge for Bartman in her nearby apartment after the near-lynch-mob mentality of the crowd during and after Game 6.

The finished product of "5 Outs..." had not been completed as of this writing due to the just-arrived Sosa tape. So whether CSN got most of the angles of the season was not known yet.

I'd love tidbits such as Alou's pre-game anger before Game 7 at Sun-Times editor Michael Cooke, who led the frantic effort to reveal Bartman's identity as soon as possible after the incident. Or Baker's admission before Game 7 that he had shortened up the use of the somewhat-shaky bullpen assembled by Hendry. If Baker was intentionally using fewer



**Famed Chicago actor Bill Petersen, a diehard Cubs fan, narrates "5 Outs..."**

trusted relievers, that could explain why Prior was not pulled one batter too soon to stem the Marlins' eighth-inning tide in Game 6.

I would also appreciate someone in the show absolving Baker of guilt for burning out Wood and Prior, which is the mob's second most scathing '03 indictment after Bartman's ill-timed reach.

Both Wood and Prior, along with second-year starter Carlos Zambrano, had magical stuff in 2003. They ran up pitch counts through a combination of strikeouts and full counts. Hitters gave them extra work by fouling off a ton of pitches, not being able to square up the ball. In one game in St. Louis, Wood gave up just two runs while throwing 131 pitches. If Baker truly babied the mound wunderkinds the way the mass of fans desired, he'd have been required to pull the pitchers after five, no more than six innings and employ at least 15 pitchers.

No matter what narrative makes the cut or is left out, an hour and a half is most generous to relive one of the most memorable seasons in Chicago sports history, and certainly its craziest ending.