

ART OF THE PALE HOSE:

Ozzie, the Chairman and Optimism Highlight SoxFest

By Art Berke

White Sox fans gathered at the Palmer House this past weekend for the annual three-day SoxFest celebration. Here's a recap:

Day 1 (Friday):

The first day of the annual SoxFest celebration turned out to be quite a day for the Sox skipper.

A group of fans broke out into a rendition of "Happy Birthday" in honor of **Ozzie's** 47th (celebrated on Thursday), a brand new website, ozzieguillen.com, was launched and, most significantly, the Sox picked up Guillen's option for 2012.

The extension wasn't a sure thing as we all know. After a hellish (Ozzie's sentiments, not mine) summer where he bickered with GM **Kenny Williams**, dealt with his son **Oney's** annoying tweeting (my view, not Ozzie's) and was on the verge of being traded to the Marlins, Guillen's future was certainly in doubt. But when all was said and done, Williams had his back.

*"I've never doubted the man's managerial ability and the ability to pull people together," Williams said at SoxFest, according to **Mark Gonzales** of the Tribune. "Listen, we all can get off track a little bit, and we (did) last year. All I want us to do is to get back on track and focus on the baseball team and the fans. They're hand in hand. Everything else, I want out of the equation.*

"And I wanted to get that (option) thing behind and move on and enjoy the game. I always enjoy the game. Go about my business the way I always do. We know it was a tough season last year. We just put everything behind, and everything goes well."

More News & Notes...

* It was apparent that the GM was unhappy with his pitching coach **Don Cooper's** comment that he would prefer that **Chris Sale** prepare for a single role as opposed to preparing to be a starter and reliever. Here's Williams' view: *"...to have Sale prepare as a reliever and take away one or*

two of his pitches, because that's what guys tend to do, I don't think it's wise. My pitching coach will ultimately fall in line with his general manager and his manager. Coop should probably speak to us before he speaks to you guys."

* Sale's immediate future, of course, will depend largely on **Jake Peavy's** progress. Reports range from he'll be ready on Opening Day to him stepping into the rotation by May 1.

* **Mark Buehrle** is the latest Sox star to be headed into his "walk" year. Where does he stand? *"If I have a good year and something happens, there's an opportunity out there to sign and I'm open to it. I'll talk with the wife and play for a couple more years, possibly. So we'll see. It's a long year. If I decide to retire at the end, I'll retire. If not, I'll sign somewhere."*

* With third base (**Brent Morel, Mark Teahen, Omar Vizquel**) and first base (**Paul Konerko, Adam Dunn**) spoken for, Williams indicated that **Dayan Viciedo** is spending time learning how to play outfield to give him a shot at the Opening Day roster. The GM says Viciedo has done well so far.

Day 2 (Saturday)

The most fascinating news item coming out of the second day of SoxFest was Chairman **Jerry Reinsdorf's** explanation of why the Sox took the "All In" route in 2011 as opposed to entering the season with a younger, less expensive product.

Reinsdorf, who has been given a bad rap over the years for NOT spending, went above and beyond this offseason by increasing the payroll by more than \$20 million.

Here are some of the comments from the man who has won seven titles--six with the Bulls and in 2005 with the White Sox--courtesy of MLB.com's **Scott Merkin**:

"Last year was a difficult year. We weren't as good as we thought we could be. Our attendance was down. Financially, it came out OK.

"Thinking about this year, we had to make a decision for the long term: Were we better off to try to get better or were we better off to use this as a rebuilding year? That's the thing that took us a long time to make up our mind.

*"Finally, I just decided like two days before the Adam Dunn signing, 'Let's go for it.' Let's hope if we spend the money, the attendance will pick up and once we committed to **Adam Dunn**, then we had to be all in. Then it had to be (**Paul Konerko**) and we had to bring **A.J.** back."*

More News & Notes...

* Another inside tidbit that was revealed yesterday involved Pierzynski. Apparently he was a phone call away from signing with the Dodgers, but because LA ownership was unavailable to approve some of the language, A.J. changed course and accepted the Sox offer through his agent. Because of the delicate nature of the circumstances, Pierzynski even called Reinsdorf to make sure the offer was real.

* In addition to relating the story behind his signing, A.J. endorsed another Sox offseason signing (via Merkin): *"I told (**Don Cooper**), 'We need another lefty. We need another lefty. We need another lefty.'* Going out and getting **Will Ohman** was huge. He can get lefties out. Look at our division with **Mauer, Morneau, Choo, Sizemore...** You have to have more than one lefty available to go through a lineup three times. People look at the eighth inning, but what about the sixth inning when you have the bases loaded with two out and Joe Mauer up and you have an extra lefty. Will Ohman is that guy."

* **Kenny Williams** indicated that outfielder **Alejandro De Aza**, infielder/outfielder **Brent Lillibridge** and **Dayan Viciedo**, who is now learning how to play the outfield in addition to his previous experience at the two infield corner positions, will be fighting it out for the final utility spot on the roster. Williams also said that De Aza is better than people think.

* Ozzie predicted that **Carlos Quentin** will revert back to his 2008 form when he was vying for the league MVP award before an injury cut his season short with a month to go. CQ slugged 36 homers, drove in 100 runs, batted .288 with a .965 OPS in '08.

* Sox captain Konerko sees good things ahead for the 2011 Sox, as reported by **Mark Gonzales** in today's *Tribune*: *"Everyone has their opinions on who is good and who isn't in baseball, and people have their advice and thoughts. But you'd be hard-pressed to say, 'there's a gaping hole there' or 'this is a real problem that is going to affect them.'* We're pretty solid everywhere you look with everything you need."

Day 3 (Sunday)

It was a weekend Lovefest at SoxFest.

Optimism reigned as it was obvious that the "All In" approach to the 2011 season has made a huge impact on Sox fans.

The annual Pale Hose celebration ended Sunday just in time for fans to get home or go to the nearest watering hole to watch the Bears-Packers title game. But regardless of the football fever in Chicago, thoughts were also focused on February 17 when the Sox pitchers and catchers report.

More News & Notes...

* The most interesting tidbit to come out of Sunday's sessions was **Ozzie** revealing that he chose to audition **Chris Sale** as the club closer at the end of the season even though **Bobby Jenks** was healthy enough to pitch.

* It was obvious from those fans in attendance over the weekend that the White Sox faithful is sick and tired of losing to the Twins. The consensus from the Sox, whether it was the Chairman or the players, is that tighter defense and being more fundamentally sound in all phases of the game are the keys to dethroning Minnesota in the A.L. Central.