

2011 Season Was Double Dose of Frustration, Disappointment

By Paul Ladewski

The 2011 season began with hope and promise at both sides of Chicago, and the high hopes weren't without reason. The Cubs and White Sox came off active off-seasons in which several high-profile players were added to veteran-laden rosters.

Six months later, it was difficult to recall a season of more frustration and disappointment collectively. For the first time in the 21st Century, the Cubs (71-91) and the White Sox (79-83) failed to reach the .500 mark in the same season.

The turn of events was particularly hard on the White Sox and their fans. The pre-season favorites of many to capture the Central Division title, the South Siders dropped seven consecutive games in mid-April to fall a half-dozen games off the pace. They pulled no closer than three games the rest of the way in what would be the farewell appearance for Ozzie Guillen as manager.

Ten miles to the north, with manager Mike Quade at the controls on a full-time basis, the Cubs never got untracked from the start. It wasn't until Aug. 2 that they won more than two games in a row.

Nonetheless, there were stellar moments. Our picks for the best of the season:

Game: July 7, Cubs 10, Washington Nationals 9. In one their greatest comebacks in recent history, the visitors overcame an 8-0 deficit, as Darwin Barney plated the game-winner on a two-out double in the ninth inning. The turnaround began in a six-run sixth inning, which featured five consecutive two-out hits, the last of which was pinch-hitter Blake DeWitt's three-run home run off the fair pole. One inning later, Carlos Pena clubbed a two-run homer to tie the score.

Pitcher: Mark Buehrle, White Sox. The veteran left-hander was the model of consistency once again, as he totaled more victories (13) and innings pitched (205 1/3) than any pitcher in town. In one stretch of 18 consecutive starts, he did not allow more than three runs.

Play(s): Brent Lillibridge, White Sox. Not only did the supersub make sensational catches in consecutive at-bats, but they were game-savers against the New York Yankees in the ninth inning. First, he robbed Alex Rodriguez of extra bases against the right field fence, then he snared a Robinson Cano drive off the grasstops drive to preserve a 3-2 victory.

Position player: Starlin Castro, Cubs. At 21, he became the youngest All-Star in team history as well as the youngest player to lead the National League in hits (207). Not since Ernie Banks six decades earlier had a Cubs shortstop burst onto the scene quite like this.

White Sox veteran Paul Konerko was in the mix again, as the 2010 winner put up more solid numbers – .300 batting average, 31 homers, 105 RBI.

Rookie: Barney. As a regular, the second baseman hit .276, scored 66 runs and was dependable in the field.

White Sox reliever Chris Sale also rates a mention. In his first full season, the lefty posted a 2.79 earned run average in 78 appearances.