



## ***Boston fans don't dress the part, but their rooting interest is otherwise more intense than Chicago's***

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I kept looking around to see if Bostonians wore their hearts on their sleeves.

Apparently, they do so only when "on duty" with the World Series champion Red Sox – at games at Fenway Park or during a memorable, and particularly emotional, victory parade that mimicked part of the tragic Boston Marathon route.

But sports passion obviously manifests itself in other ways in a city that is intensely interested in its teams – probably far more so than supposed sports-crazy Chicago.



**Fans and police wait for the Red Sox parade of "duck boats" to arrive between the Courthouse and City Hall.**

A long weekend in Boston was scheduled long before the third World Series – and title – in nine years found its way to Beantown. I flew to Boston 13 hours after the clinching last out. One man in the waiting area at O'Hare Airport wore a Red Sox sweatshirt. He said he doesn't take sports all that seriously. A traveling American Airlines flight attendant also wore a BoSox shirt under her blue uniform. But otherwise there was no evidence of Red Sox passion on the full-flight to Logan International Airport.

And in walking around downtown and the North End in the 1 1/2 days before the victory parade, I was semi-stunned to see the lack of red in pedestrians' apparel along with few Red Sox banners and signs festooned on buildings and cars. Oh, sure, the obligatory banners were seen on City Hall, the entrance to the airliner cabin, behind the hotel front desk -- public places. But you'd think the Red Sox's success, now established after supposed decades of frustration, would permeate down to the average Bostonian's core, to the way he or she dresses and emotes.

I thought I saw as many Boston Bruins or Celtics shirts as Red Sox shirts in that interregnum between touchdown at Logan and the parade. Maybe I was using a different measuring stick from 800 miles west. After the Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup in June, it seemed every third person was wearing a red Hawks sweater, even in the gathering early-summer heat.



**Stacy Dimino of Brookline, Mass., hometown of Theo Epstein, and basset hound Eleanor Rose, named after Eleanor Roosevelt, stop for a second on their way to the Red Sox victory parade. A number of human-canine combos showed up to celebrate.**

In the end, outside appearances proved to be deceiving. The Red Sox are beloved, first among equals, in a sports-mad town. People don't wear Red Sox garb like in a culturally different Midwest -- they talk, watch, listen and read about it, devour every last bit of news, and of course packed both cozy Fenway Park and the parade route. I'm not sure if Chicago fans are as intense in their spectating or media-consumption quotient as their Boston counterparts.

Chicago can simply outnumber Boston in parade or championship rally attendees by its bigger population base, huge Grant Park area and squared-off downtown streets compared to scrunched-in central Boston, laid out as far back as the 17th Century.

For the Massachusetts' city's case, though, this celebration was the most impactful of all. It came 6 1/2 months after the cowardly bombing of the Marathon that ultimately cost four lives and maimed scores of others. As an emotional salve, the celebration helped in the recovery from the trauma.

All year, the Red Sox actively helped in the healing and recovery process, visiting the victims, never letting anybody forget. And as the "duck boats" – amphibious tourist vehicles similar to

the ones in Wisconsin Dells – carrying the players approached the Marathon finish line, Jonny Gomes paid the ultimate tribute by debarking his duck boat and placing the Commissioner's Trophy on the finish line. Moments later, all broke out in a chorus of "God Bless America." The moving moment was supplemented by World Series MVP David Ortiz also getting off the vehicle to jog across the finish line.

### **Stephen King leads post-title essayists**

All along, a lot was made by analysts about the healing process the Red Sox feats helped in the recovery process. That was a predominant theme among the intelligencia the Boston Globe recruited for essays in the Sunday edition. Leading the lineup was

horror-meister Stephen King, who works his native Maine into many of his books and TV shows.

“It restored balance to a city that was hurt and frightened (but not cowed, never that) by the vicious crime that occurred on April 15,” wrote King.

The Globe also snared Samantha Power, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; baseball/U.S. history documentarian Ken Burns; ninth U.S. poet laureate Robert Pinsky, and other authors and writers.

King, his fellow commentators and other media pundits have a point – but up to a point. Sports championships are the ultimate feel-good events we can experience in the course of the year, behind that of a birth of a child, a loving relationship and a new job after a long period of unemployment or underemployment. Still, we have to be careful in equating a championship and its aftermath in healing all wounds and acting as the ultimate emotional elixir.

A sports champion can't magically heal the wounded or restore life to pre-April 15. On the same day as the parade, the Globe ran a feature-section cover story on the entrance of Rescue, a black lab, into the life of nurse Jessica Kensky, who lost a leg in one of the blasts. Rescue was donated by NEADS/Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans, an organization that provides service animals. The Marathon's after-effects will continue for lifetimes and beyond.



**Architects 200 years apart provided the backdrop for fans at the Red Sox victory parade route as it turned toward the home stretch on Cambridge Street.**

A championship provides uplift for a community, but don't expect too much of it.

The world champion 1968 Detroit Tigers were said to heal a city burned up by the ghetto riots of the previous summer. And yet the decline of the once proud Motown only speeded up in succeeding decades – and through another Tigers' World Series victory in 1984 -- due to intractable urban poverty and the eclipse of the domestic auto industry.

### **It's up to each individual, not champion sports teams**

If the Cubs set off the projected biggest sports celebration in history by miraculously winning it all in an upcoming year, the massive soiree won't stop the massacre-level killing in the inner city. The only things that will would be a community's collective

shame on the criminals and well-placed calls to the police to head off more tragedies. This isn't the action of a "snitch," it's morality at its most basic. Similarly, someone with a sense of morality needed to have headed off the pair of disaffected brothers who



**No. 1 all-time Boston Celtic Bill Russell retired in 1969, but only the day before the Red Sox parade was his statue unveiled outside City Hall – not on the site of the old Boston Garden.**

set off the Marathon bombs. You wish the percentages had worked with even one of the 9/11 hijackers giving in to a latent conscience to throw a monkey wrench into mass murder.

Walking hand-in-hand with the will of the individual is the action of the community, business and now-fractious branches of government to restore full employment and alleviate poverty, homelessness and inadequate education. Now we add health coverage and how it's delivered as a nationwide dilemma. We were on the right track in the 1960s until a senseless war drained away the necessary resources, and we've never recovered.

These are issues that are well beyond the reach of sports. If only the euphoria the titles produced can then be transferred to positive actions

in daily routines, we'd be in good scoring position to win in life.

Just take a title for what it's worth and enjoy the little sidelights. I particularly liked the positive effects on two former Chicago pitchers who wanted to win in the worst way here, and finally had to go to Boston to collect their rings.

### **Peavy's duck boat, Dempster's nocturnal BP**

Ex-Sox Jake Peavy, who gave the Red Sox a late-season boost, never looked happier than when he posed in front of the green duck boat in which he had ridden – and had just purchased to bring home to Alabama. Former Cubs starter/reliever/stand-up comic Ryan Dempster was relegated to mop-up work in the postseason, yet soaked up his long-awaited title by pitching batting practice at Fenway Park to family and friends at 2:45 a.m., more than three hours after the final out. Good ol' Demp. He used to bring his two labs onto Wrigley Field as he played with his son after games. The pooches set a Cubs franchise record as the first to make their deposits on the infield at the Friendly Confines-turned-dog park.

Even former Sox Matt Thornton, left off the postseason roster and then let go as a free agent, finally got his jewelry. Part of Kenny Williams' beef-up attempt after the 2005 World Series, Thornton labored dutifully out of the White Sox bullpen for 7 1/2 seasons

with just one postseason trip. He's a Midwestern kid, from Three Rivers, Mich., south of Kalamazoo, and good things happen to good people.

Just as striking is the intensity and scope of sports coverage in Boston media compared to Chicago, where wall-to-wall Bears coverage on one end and mania over prep sports on the other squeeze the teams in the middle.

The Globe's Sunday sports section was 20 pages. The paper also featured a two-section, 40-page Red Sox retrospective that included full-page ads of tribute from TD Garden and the NHL Bruins, NBA Celtics and Major League Baseball. Bob Kraft and the NFL Patriots already ran their own full-page ad two days previously. Even the Boston College athletic department ran a smaller salute.

Boston hosts two regional sports networks – the Red Sox-backed NESN and Comcast



**The U.S.S. Constitution, the Navy's flagship, was launched in 1797 and is now docked in Boston Harbor. Nicknamed "Old Ironsides" after British cannonballs bounced harmlessly off its tough hull in the War of 1812, the frigate is considered an active-duty vessel with more than 100 seamen assigned to maintain her.**

Sports Network New England. Chicago has just one generalist operation with CSN Chicago, with the Big Ten Network and the fledgling Campus Insiders on-line outlet featuring college-only coverage. NESN has the upper hand with the Red Sox and Bruins rights, while CSN televises the Celtics. Both channels go head-to-head at 10 p.m. with half-hour sports news programs.

The Red Sox might have the largest traveling beat-writer contingent of every team. Sometimes the Globe and spunky tabloid Boston Herald double-staff the team on the road. The longtime sports-

talk station, WEEI-Radio, runs its own full-service web site with a traveling Red Sox writer. The Globe features humungous Sunday notes columns, taking up almost an entire page, for all four major sports, including hockey. Bruins home games will have a sidebar writer, with the latter able to focus on Carl Soderberg and his clutch goal in Boston's 3-2 victory at TD Garden on Oct. 31 that complemented the main game story and Bruins notebooks. Interestingly, it was the Blackhawks, not the Bruins, who won the Stanley Cup, yet only one writer per media outlet is typically at a United Center game.

College hockey is huge in Boston and gets good coverage. The city is not considered a college football mecca, yet outshines Chicago with stories on four local teams led by Boston College and Harvard on Saturdays. The Ivy League may be the Ivy League, but

it's still levels above the Division III tiny colleges that predominate around Chicago. Northwestern, not that big of a private school in enrollment, is what passes for a major program in the Windy City. BCS-wannabe Northern Illinois University is 65 miles west in DeKalb with alumni interest dampened down due to distance and the graduates' former status as weekend commuter students. Of course, the stumbling University of Illinois football program is a boring two-hour, 15-minute drive south.

WEEI practically invented sports talk radio three decades ago. In that spirit, the Boston Herald runs its own on-line talk station, [BostonHeraldRadio.com](http://BostonHeraldRadio.com). We have yet to see the Tribune and Sun-Times embark on a similar venture.

The conclusion is the smaller Eastern city has better, more involved sports consumers than Chicago, even if they don't always dress the part.

### **No more neurosis for Red Sox fans**

The one finality of the third Red Sox title of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is there will be no more excuses for Boston mass fan neurosis about losing and chokes and wait-'till-next-year wailing. Would they trade places with Cubs fans?

Since the Cubs reached the World Series in 1945 and the Red Sox played in the Fall Classic in 1946, the Red Sox have suffered through 17 seasons under .500. Their "dark ages" lasted only from 1959 to 1966, when they had a losing record every season. The Red Sox have played in six World Series since 1967.

Meanwhile, the Cubs have suffered through an astounding 47 seasons where they finished under .500 since 1947. They went from 1947 to 1966 with just one 82-80 season and another at .500. Another stretch between 1973 and 1984 featured a sole season of .500 (1977), in which the team was 12 games above break-even in mid-September before collapsing. And, of course, not one World Series in that entire time, the collapses of 1984 and 2003 providing such exquisite torture of being so close, and yet so far, from the Fall Classic in the end.

Perhaps now, the Red Sox fans can be magnanimous in repeated victory. A cop, standing by the parade route at Boston City Hall, said many Boston fans are now "secret Cubs fans." That's nice, but the only Red Sox rooster-turned-Cubs fan who really counts is Theo Epstein.

The Wrigley Field baseball boss surely knows by now that in so many ways, he's not in Boston anymore.