

Roeper Stays True to his Chicago Roots

By Paul Ladewski

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You will be an emcee at our 1972 White Sox tribute later this month. As a native South Sider, what do you remember most about that team?

From 1968, when I was old enough to play Little League baseball and read the box scores and really appreciate the game, until 1970, the White Sox weren't just bad. They were awful. The 1971 team was below average, but at least there was cause for hope. What I remember most about the 1972 team was that, for the first time in my young life as a White Sox fan, I realized they were actually eligible to contend for the post-season. Until then, I wasn't quite sure of that.



Who was your favorite player on that team?

Dick Allen. Not only was he my favorite player on that team, he remains one of my favorite players of all time. He was the Chicago baseball version of a Joe Namath or a Walt Frazier – a singular talent who also did things his way. To this day, he might be the only White Sox player who regularly received loud ovations after striking out. Even when he swung and missed, it was dramatic. And who can forget the Sports Illustrated cover with Allen in the dugout, cigarette dangling from his mouth as he juggled three baseballs?

You've attended more than 1,000 White Sox games in your lifetime. Which one(s) stands out most?

Game 2 of the 2005 World Series. I was there when the Sox lost postseason games to the Blue Jays in '93 and the Mariners in 2000. In 2005, even though the Sox had eliminated the (Boston) Red Sox and the (Los Angeles) Angels in impressive fashion and the (Houston) Astros weren't exactly a juggernaut, I didn't know a single Sox fan that was overconfident even after the Game 1 win.

In Game 2, the Sox were down 4-2 in the bottom of the seventh inning. They lose that game and go to Houston with the Series tied at 1-1, and who knows how things would have turned out. The Paul Konerko grand slam -- that was the moment I felt the Sox would win the Series. Even though the Astros would go on to tie it in the ninth and the Scott Podsenik homer would become the Sports Illustrated cover moment, I believe it was the Konerko grand slam that was the turning point in the series.

How did you celebrate after the final out of the series and how long did the party last?

I'm not sure the statute of limitations has run out on either one of those questions.

What has been your biggest thrill as a White Sox fan?

Being on the field just before the start of Game 1 of the 2005 World Series and seeing my father and brother in the stands. My dad was born on the South Side in 1929. He didn't get to go to the World Series in 1959 because my mother was nine months pregnant with me at the time. Game 1 of the 2005 Series was the one and only time he saw a World Series game in person.

It was also a huge thrill to throw out the first pitch at a White Sox game with Mark Buehrle as the honorary catcher.

And what's your biggest disappointment?

The 1994 debacle. It was bad enough that the millionaire players and the billionaire owners couldn't come to a labor agreement. Making matters worse, the Sox were in first place when the season ended. They had as much talent as any White Sox club of the last half-century.

What's the biggest difference between Cubs and White Sox fans?

I'm not sure the old stereotypes about Cubs and White Sox fans hold true any more. The biggest change I've seen in recent years is Cubs fans are sick of the "lovable losers" tag. They're much quicker to boo a home town player than in years past. And it's easier to get a ticket to a lot of Cubs game than it used to be. Granted, there are still thousands of fans who are content to have that "Wrigley Field experience," but since the Sox won the World Series, more and more Cubs fans seem to have the attitude of, "When is it our turn?" I think that's a good thing.

You write a movie about the history of the White Sox franchise. What do you name it?

The Other Guys.

Which actor plays Shoeless Joe Jackson?

An unknown. Better to find a baseball player and teach him to act than an actor who can't play baseball.

(Editor's note: Roeper is a Chicago Sun-Times columnist and WLS Radio host. The author of Sox and the City still makes his home in Chicago.)