YES!!!

Red Sox complete sweep, win first Series since 1918

By Dan Shaughnessy, Globe Staff | October 28, 2004

ST. LOUIS -- They did it for the old folks in Presque Isle, Maine, and White River Junction, Vt. They did it for the baby boomers in North Conway, N.H., and Groton, Mass. They did it for the kids in Central Falls, R.I., and Putnam, Conn.

While church bells rang in small New England towns and horns honked on the crowded streets of the Hub, the 2004 Red Sox last night won the 100th World Series, completing a four-game sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals with a 3-0 victory on the strength of seven innings of three-hit pitching by Derek Lowe. Playing 1,042 miles from Fenway Park, the Sox won it all for the first time in 86 long and frustrating seasons.

"This is like an alternate reality," said Sox owner John W. Henry, soaked in champagne (Mount Pleasant, 2003 Brut Imperial). "All of our fans waited their entire lives for this."

True. New England and a sprawling Nation of Sox fans can finally exhale. The Red Sox are World Champs. No more Curse of the...
Bambino. No more taunts of "1918." The suffering souls of Bill Buckner, Grady Little, Mike Torrez, Johnny Pesky, and Denny Galehouse are released from Boston Baseball's Hall of Pain. The Red Sox are champions because they engineered the greatest comeback in baseball history when they won four straight games against the hated Yankees in the American League Championship Series. It was a baseball epic, an event for the ages putting the Sox into a World Series that was profoundly anticlimactic.

En route to eight consecutive postseason wins, the Sons of Tito Francona simply destroyed a Cardinal team that won a major league-high 105 games in 2004. The Sox did not trail for a single inning of the four-game sweep. No Cardinal pitcher lasted more than six innings and St. Louis' vaunted row of sluggers was smothered by the likes of Curt Schilling, Pedro Martinez, closer Keith Foulke, and Lowe. The Cards batted .190 in the Series with cleanup man Scott Rolen going 0 for 15.

In the finale, a game played under a full moon/lunar eclipse on the date of Boston's Game 7 loss in the excruciating 1986 World Series, Johnny Damon led off with a home run and the Sox were never threatened. Trot Nixon added a pair of runs with a bases-loaded double in the third. Lowe mowed down the Cardinals for seven innings, then let relievers Bronson Arroyo, Alan Embree, and Foulke finish the job.

It ended at 11:40 p.m. EDT when Edgar Renteria went out on an easy grounder to Foulke. Foulke ran toward first and underhanded the ball to first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz. A half hour later, the historic ball was locked in the grasp of Mientkiewicz's right hand.

Statues -- to be placed near those of Samuel Adams and James Michael Curley -- are already on order for Messrs. Schilling, Martinez, Lowe, Foulke, Damon, Manny Ramirez, David Ortiz, Mark Bellhorn, Jason Varitek, Orlando Cabrera, and the rest of the 2004 Red Sox. They did something that had not been done in 86 years.

Ramirez, who hit .412 with a homer and four RBIs against the Cardinals, was named World Series MVP, almost exactly one year after the Sox put him on waivers. The Boston brass spent most of last winter trying to trade Ramirez for Alex Rodriguez. Now they are World Champs and Manny is the MVP. Alternate reality, indeed.

"I think we learned a lot when we played against the Yankees," said Ramirez, "because we lost the first three games. And today I was talking to some of the guys and I said, 'Hey, let's go. Don't let these guys breathe.' We know what happened against New York. We came back . . . So we came back and won."

And now it's time to toast to Ted Williams, Tom Yawkey, Sherm Feller, Dick O'Connell, Haywood Sullivan, Joe Cronin, Eddie Collins, Tony Conigliaro, Ned Martin, Helen Robinson, Jack Rogers, and thousands of others who toiled for the team, but died before seeing their Sox win a World Series.

It's time for smiles on the faces of Carl Yastrzemski, Bobby Doerr, Dominic DiMaggio, Charlie Wagner, Gene Conley, Bill Monbouquette, Chuck Schilling, John McNamara, Joe Morgan, Earl Wilson, Mike Andrews, Reggie Smith, and hundreds of other men who wore the Red Sox uniform, but never won in October. And don't forget Curt Gowdy, Lou Gorman, Dick Bresciani, Joe Mooney, and all the ushers and Sox employees who are as much a part of Fenway Park as the Green Monster and Pesky's Pole.

Time for the Nation to rejoice. Time to dance. Time to go to your window, open it wide, stick your head out and scream, "The Red Sox won the World Series." No one's been able to do that in Boston since Woodrow Wilson was president.

"It's a thrill to be able to write a page in the Red Sox history book," said exhausted club CEO Larry Lucchino.

There was an air of inevitability about the Sox' prospects before the final game of the Fall Classic. The Sox knew they had the Cardinals on the mat and they knew that no team in hardball history ever came back from a 3-0 World Series deficit.

Busch Stadium was a friendly venue for swelling ranks of road-tripping Sox fans. Cardinal loyalists love their team, but hold no hatred for the Bostonians and one got the feeling that some St. Louis fans might have bailed and sold their tickets after the disheartening loss to the Sox in Game 3. There were a lot of Sox fans in the stands last night who lingered long after the final out.
Veteran Tim Wakefield was given the honor of carrying the World Series trophy out of the clubhouse and onto the field where the Sox celebrated with their families and acknowledged fans who remained in the stands cheering well over an hour after Foulke fielded the last grounder.

For the record, it took precisely six minutes for the first "Yankees Suck" chant to break out after the Red Sox finally won the World Series.

Lowe gave up a leadoff single in the first, then retired the next 13 Cardinals in order. St. Louis sluggers took a lot of ugly swings. The Cardinals did not put up much of a fight. After just three innings, it felt like it was already over.

This is what it must have felt like in 1918.

"I thought we had a great scouting report," said Terry Francona, the first man to manage the Red Sox to a World Series win since Ed Barrow. "But what it comes down to is having really, really good pitchers."

While Lowe mowed down the Cards, fans back home in New England chilled champagne, slipped tapes into VCRs, and prepared to wake infants so they could someday tell them they'd witnessed a historic event.

After celebrating on the field and in the visitors clubhouse, the World Champion Red Sox went back to their hotel, packed, and bused to the airport for a charter back to Boston.

"We'll be be arriving by dawn's early light," predicted club vice president Dr. Charles Steinberg.

"We won't even need the airplane to fly home," added Henry.

The largest celebration in Boston's 374-year history is expected tomorrow when the team is honored with a parade and championship ceremony.

If form holds, the Red Sox' gaudy, well-earned rings will be handed out in a ceremony April 11 when the 2004 World Series championship flag is raised above Fenway Park for the home opener.

The team in the third-base dugout for that historic event? The New York Yankees.

Sweet. ■

© Copyright 2004 Globe Newspaper Company.