

From *“Undisputed Champions, or Stop Whining about Crapshoots, Billy Beane”*

Futility Streaks of Phils, Red Sox Continue!

O that great 2008! The final image--those Philadelphia Phillies celebrating wildly into the night as their 5th game World Series victory over the Tampa Bay (cast out Devil!) Rays ensured their overcoming the Boston Red Sox for the 4th best overall (regular plus post-season) record of the year. How reminiscent of the 2006 Cardinals rolling in the mud upon wresting their 11th place major league standing after winning game five of the World Series!

The close triumph in this classic “Battle for Fourth” (Phils, W103, L73, .585 pct.; Red Sox, W101, L72, .584 pct.) evidently drove Phillie fans into apoplexy—“The drought is over, the drought is over!” screamed one unconstrained fan, fully chirping the sentiments of the jubilant crowd, the “interminable wait” (since 1980) finally finished.

Given the thrilling win successfully ending their post-season trip, making them, of course, “World Champions,” it might be edifying (and sobering) to take a close look at the last ten “World Champions” to perhaps reiterate what would truly constitute a “most successful” major league season. And since the 30 teams have played full campaigns for those 10 years, totaling 300 seasons, it may foment this perfect moment to duly deduce which team had the best year of the 300!

First we must agree, setting solely the highest of standards, to eliminate any season not ending in a World Series success as a successful season--so, sadly, a quick exit to 290 of the cumulative years, including this year’s 101-65 playoff-losing Angels. Now, almost as quickly, we can dismiss any pretender to the true throne by listing a decade’s worth of World Champs, and finding the best record among them (to guess right, be sure to finish this article!).

By precedent defined (and love possessed!), an undisputed champion of a baseball year originally was composed strictly, and declared thusly: a) winning more games than any team in its league during the regular season, and b) winning more games than any team in both leagues during the post-season.

Fulfillment of the first axiom comprised a true pennant winner; completion of the second, a true World Champion. Could anything be simpler than these unbending rules that distinguish all major league baseball rulers since the first World Series of 1903?

Of course, with the advent of expansion, things became warmly fuzzier, with champions undeserving galore! Whereby the first 65 years of World Series champions produced 65 undisputed champs, the next 39 years of Series play have unveiled but 20 undisputed kings, with 19 false claimants! The increased difficulty of fully succeeding brings great credit to the winners. Sole repeaters since 1969? Reds--’75, ’76 (one-tier playoff), Blue Jays--’92, ’93 (two-tier playoff), and Yanks--’98, ’99 (three-tier playoff). Hail to them all, all survivors of these modern, grueling campaigns, indeed to all 85 of history’s true World Champs!

And how about those historic Non-Champs? Speaking of this year's 4th place battlers, the Phils and the Red Sox lead their respective leagues in continuing futility. The fact of the matter, as a matter of fact, is that the Phillies have *never* been the undisputed champions of baseball in the 104 years of World Series play, and the Red Sox, haven't so been since 1916 (an A.L. best 91 seasons, still running strong--call it, let us say, the "Curse of the Bambino")! The Cubs? A mere 99 year (thanks to the World Series cancellation of '94) run! More despair for Red Sox Nation, renewed hope for Cub Nation? It's all how we look at it--rightly or wrongly.

And that top team of the last 300? Kudos to that little (pre-Obama) White Sox Nation! The 2005 Sox's overall 110-64 record is the best of any champion in the last 10 years. Their success is yet unmatched in this century as the only team so far to win an undisputed championship. Who knew? We did--at the Barry Code!

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