

Toronto Blue Jays Seek to Defend - The Greatness of Dave Stewart

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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When the Toronto Blue Jays went on their pennant drive in September and quickly pulled away from the pretenders in the Eastern Division, it was apparent that they were ready to make a serious run at defending their World Championship, something that hasn't been done since the 1977-78 Yankees. They now have taken the next step in that process by eliminating the Chicago White Sox four games to two, winning all three games played in Chicago.

This is not the same Blue Jay team that won the 1992 World Series. They have lost ten players from that team including Tom Henke, David Cone, and Dave Winfield. To replace them the Jays management went out and signed Paul Molitor and Dave Stewart, and then in mid-season traded for Tony Fernandez. All three made major contributions to this second consecutive American League pennant.

The focus clearly is on Dave Stewart the ex-Dodger, ex-Ranger, ex-Phillie, ex-Oakland A, pitcher who has been a wonder in the post-season and down the stretch. In his last four starts of the regular season Stewart was undefeated and in the ALCS he extended his flawless record. In ten starts in ALCS play his team has won all ten games, and Stewart is 8-0. Four of those wins clinched the pennant, in 1988, '89, and '90 for Oakland and now this one. Stewart was named the MVP of the ALCS for the second time, something done by only one other player, Steve Garvey.

Dave Stewart's performance Tuesday night and last Wednesday afternoon were both vintage Stewart. Last Wednesday I was listening to the game on radio, the Sox loaded the bases in the sixth inning with no one out, and Stewart pitched out of it with no runs scored. I could see him glaring in with a level of concentration that could burn a hole through the hitter, and then hitting his spots. And of course when he did it, you just knew that the White Sox would not recover.

Tuesday night he again displayed tremendous concentration, pitching out of trouble several times. Even in the third inning when he walked Frank Thomas with the bases loaded, it was clear that Stewart had put the last pitch to Thomas right where he wanted it, and in fact nine times out of ten Thomas would have been called out.

Dave Stewart has established himself as one of the great clutch performers of recent years, and the temptation is to call him pitcher October. In addition he has established himself as one of the great people in the game, something that emerged out of the wreckage of the San Francisco earthquake and from Stewart's work in his Oakland neighborhood. On Monday Dave Stewart was still in Toronto serving the homeless on Canada's Thanksgiving Day, fulfilling a commitment he had made. On Tuesday all of Canada gave thanks again that Dave Stewart is a Toronto Blue Jay.

Over in the National League the Philadelphia Phillies have proven to be more than a match for the Atlanta Braves. Curt Schilling was a one man wrecking crew allowing the Braves one run over two games, but did not win either game, as Mitch Williams blew the save both times with the help of shakey fielding. Schilling pitched 16 innings, struck out 19, and had an ERA of 1.69. He is the first pitcher to win an MVP without ever winning a game, and clearly he deserved it.

Mitch Williams once said, "Mitch Williams pitches like his hair is on fire." Williams wound up with two wins and two saves and two blown saves. But he finished game six with flair taking out the Braves one, two, three in the ninth, striking out the last man he faced. He is indeed the Wild Thing.

Lenny Dykstra showed why he was a legitimate candidate for MVP in the National League this season and the Phillies are a wonderful group of characters, one more of those worst to first teams, going from last place to a pennant in a year.

In many games the TV people show the wives of players in the stands as their husbands perform on the field. In the case of the Phillies CBS kept showing the mothers of players. There are those who will conclude that this is a team that only a mother could love. It is in fact a team that is very entertaining and unpredictable.

As for the Braves they continued to be haunted by one run losses in post-season play with seven in a row. Although you could blame this on the weaknesses in the bullpen, it is primarily due to the inability of the Braves to hit with men in scoring position. In the final three games they were 4 for 26 in that situation. So the Braves won 106 games and will not be in the World Series. They raced past the Giants in September and then sputtered to the finish line. They never really got it going again.

It should be another outstanding World Series, eh!

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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