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What I'll Miss and Will Not When I Miss the World Series

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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As we move toward the inevitability of an all-New York World Series, we are stalked by the prospect of having to listen to the incessant proclamations that New York is the center of the baseball universe, not to mention the regular universe. We will also be subjected to the claims that baseball fans in New York are more a) knowledgeable b) loyal c) intense d) all of the above, than those in other parts of the known baseball universe.

Luckily I will be spared this ordeal, as I am about to leave the country. I trust I will encounter few Mets or Yankee fans as I follow the World Series via the Internet from the Ural Region of Russia. In life timing is everything.

My only regret is that I may miss one of the potentially great moments in such a series. I would in fact love to see Roger Clemens pitch against the Mets in Shea Stadium where he would have to come to bat. "Roger at the Bat" could become an epic poem on the "what goes around comes around" theme. No one in Metsville has forgotten that Roger put a ball between the eyes of Mets catcher-hero-star Mike Piazza in a game at Yankee Stadium in July. If all this happens we will finally know the answer to the question: "Who let the Dogs Out?" the cliché that has come to dominate electronic baseball reporting in the post-season in the same way that "Walk Off Home Run" dominated the early season.

It has been in fact a very good year in some respects in baseball. A few teams with payrolls at the lower end of the spectrum made the playoffs, and teams that have not been in the playoff mix recently have resurfaced. The resurrection of the Oakland A's, the Chicago White Sox, and the Seattle Mariners in the American League is a positive development for fans looking for variety. In the National League where Houston and Cincinnati were picked to be the big news, the resurgence of both the Cardinals and the Giants were pleasant surprises.

The biggest news however may be that the road to the National League pennant did not go through Atlanta, except for a brief stop at a rest area. This may only be an aberration, but it is a startling one nonetheless. To see the Braves top two aces, Maddux and Glavine, get beat around in the early innings of the first two games in St. Louis did get your attention, although nothing got much attention from Atlanta fans.

On the other hand if you look at the Braves the big news is that they were in the playoffs at all. Before the season began they lost John Smoltz and his 300 innings of pitching; John Rocker was out for the first month and never really recovered from his off-season mouth problems; Quilvio Veras was lost at second base before mid-season and the problems that created were never solved; and finally the Braves never found a left-fielder.

In the other series, the Mets out-gritted the Giants, and Dusty Baker proved that as a field manager he was not yet in the genius category. In the NLCS Tony La Russa brought his genius title into question. In the end of course there are no baseball genius field managers as managers neither pitch nor hit. There are only genius managers of players in the clubhouse, the dugout, and in other places off the field. This is where managers like Joe Torre and Bobby Cox excel, as do Baker and La Russa. Where Bobby Valentine fits into this mix is anybody's guess.

The other interesting news that finally surfaced last week was the revelation in the New York Times that baseball is awash in steroids. The home run barrage, the line drives at the head of pitchers, and the chiseled frames of major league players all were early warning signs. The only question is why it took so long for this to hit the media. Last spring at the NASSH Conference during a baseball session Terry Todd expressed wonder that anyone in baseball would concern themselves with such issues as "andro" or "creatine" when it was well known that steroids were overrunning major league clubhouses.

So the Olympics are not the only place where drugs are in fashion. Indeed in this drug driven culture of sexual stimulants like Viagra and "Top Gun," not to mention a pill for every illness and an illness for every pill, why should we be surprised. As I have written here so many times it is futile to fight it. The litigious character of the society is the other reason not to try to suppress it. In my view the Major League Baseball Players Association should never give the right to the owners to test the players, although the Association has a moral obligation to educate the players so that they know what the price is for glory through chemistry.

One final thought on the playoffs. Someone pull the plug on Joe Buck and Tim McCarver and FOX. The recent contract signed by FOX with MLB grows more depressing with each game worked by this pair. Their constant jabbering, second-guessing, and the FOX

sound effects are transforming Bob Costas and Joe Morgan into first ballot Hall of Famers.

So as I fly off far away from Met and Yankee fever, I do want to say that the Minnesota Gophers were the ones who let the dogs out in Columbus, Ohio last Saturday winning there for the first time in 51 years. Woody is spinning in his grave.

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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